

American Anti-War Activists Cheer for Iran's War

By Olivia Reingold

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At a left-wing conference in Chicago, activists believe Iran is 'part of the arc of resistance because the enemies are Israel and the USA.'

About 300 anti-war activists crowded into the basement of the Teamsters Union's headquarters on Saturday to hear organizers from all over the country describe their plans to disrupt the Democratic National Convention this August. Joe Biden's backing of Israel since Hamas's October 7 attack has turned these left-wing radicals against their own party.

"It's really inspiring to see that people are just as enthusiastic, and maybe even more enthusiastic, to march on the DNC as they are to march on the RNC," says Omar Florez, a Milwaukee-based activist. "We can thank Genocide Joe and our movement for that."

But then a man stumbles to the podium, wiping sweat from his forehead. He grabs the microphone to announce that the Islamic regime of Iran has launched missiles and drones heading straight toward Israel.

"They believe that they will be in Palestinian—I don't call it Israeli—airspace between two and four a.m., which means about two to four hours from now," he says. "In addition, there are reports of drones having been fired on Israel from Yemen and Iraq."

The crowd, all wearing black N95s, erupts into applause. Someone in the back lowers their mask to send a celebratory whistle soaring throughout the room.

The man at the podium, Hatem Abudayyeh, heads the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, "a purported community group which, on information and belief, is an affiliate of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a designated terror organization based in Gaza," according to a lawsuit over the alleged relations between U.S. advocacy groups and Hamas.

"This is when this country and the world needs us because the United States is going to, quote unquote, defend the criminal Israeli state," says Abudayyeh, whose home was raided by the FBI in 2010 as part of an investigation "concerning the material support of terrorism."

"We have to assume that the United States is going to try to retaliate against Iran."

After the boos and calls of "shame" subside, Abudayyeh says it is "incumbent" upon Americans to "stop the United States from expanding this war and hitting Iran."

"We've got to be the strong, powerful anti-war movement that we are," he says, placing the microphone down and exiting the stage.

The crowd immediately began chanting, "Hands off Iran."

A woman in a hot pink gas mask, wielding a matching neon cane and dressed in a "Protect Trans Kids" t-shirt, throws her fist in the air. Nearby, a service poodle is taking a nap under the chair of his owner, who is wearing a leather harness over his t-shirt. Then the group that has joined here from cities across America—Seattle, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles—cheers and claps in celebration.

Joe Iosbaker, an organizer with the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, which called October 7 a "good turn of events" in its press release about the terrorist attacks, tells me he supports Iran. His organization has since released a statement backing Iran, where citizens gathered to shout "Death to America" during their nation's strike against Israel Saturday night.

"We demand hands off Iran," the statement says. "The people have power, and we will exercise it in the streets."

Earlier that day, before news of the attack broke, at a "breakout session" on "the anti-war movement," Shabbir Rizvi, an organizer with Anti-War Committee Chicago, taught participants how to chant "death to Israel" and "death to America" in Farsi.

"Marg bar Israel," he chanted, leading a group of about 80 attendees along with him. A man draped in a Soviet flag bearing a gold hammer and sickle clapped his hands.

A man in a full black denim outfit shouted out behind his N95—"Can we get a 'marg bar America?'"

"We can get a 'marg bar America,'" Rizvi replied.

Then Rizvi raised his hand in the air, leading the crowd like a conductor.

"Marg bar America," they cheered.

On my way out of the event, I ask a woman smoking a cigarette to fill me in on the latest news regarding Iran's lobbing of missiles and drones, which were later intercepted with help from forces from France, the U.S., and the UK. Iran said its strike was retaliation for Israel's hit on the Iranian embassy in Syria earlier this month, which destroyed the consulate building next to the embassy and killed two of Tehran's top commanders, and that the matter is "concluded"—unless Israel hits back.

"Iran is part of the resistance," said the woman, who flew in that morning from New Orleans, where she's been part of an effort to disrupt Israel-bound shipments in her hometown. "Yemen and Iran and Hezbollah, who are also a militant group in Lebanon, and the Syrian government

are all parts of the arc of resistance.”

A smile creeps across her face as she tells me:
“They’re

part of the arc of resistance because the enemies are Israel and the USA.”

Why Saturday Was a Resounding Defeat for Iran By Yaakov Lappin

jns.org

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And a look at the technologies that will be used next time.

The combined Iranian attack on Israel in the early hours of April 14, comprising 170 UAVs, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles—more than 300 aerial threats in total—was successfully intercepted by Israel and partner militaries.

The fact that 99% of the threats were intercepted means that a central pillar of Iranian force projection—its missile and UAV arsenals—has been proven to be no match for Israel’s Air Force, its multi-layered air defense system, or for regional cooperation with allies.

For decades, Iranian military industries have been developing and producing missiles and UAV capabilities. These capabilities were used to arm Iran’s elite military force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Iran’s proxies.

While Iran often activates its proxies to attack its enemies, it has, until now, kept its own powder dry, based on the idea that the firepower Iran amassed on its own soil would keep Israel, Sunni Arab countries, and the United States deterred, and would stop Israel from acting too fiercely to disrupt Iran’s hegemonic plans.

Iran plans to surround Israel with a network of terror armies, break through to nuclear weapons and use the combination of its proxies, conventional weapons and nuclear umbrella to cause Israel to collapse by 2040—according to the clerical regime’s own statements and officials. As such, its decision to directly attack Israel on Sunday represents a major departure from this long-term strategy.

After the April 1 strike on Damascus that killed the IRGC Quds Force commander for Syria and Iraq, Mohammad Reza Zahedi, his deputy and five other IRGC officers, Iran decided that the time was ripe to break with its pattern of using proxies to weaken Israel and keep it bogged down in conflict, and to directly “teach Israel a lesson.”

But it is Iran that has now learned that Israel’s multi-layered shield, fighter jets and partners can collectively neutralize its flagship conventional weapons program.

Israel’s multi-layered air defense system relies on the Arrow 3, which intercepts ballistic missiles in space, Arrow 2, which operates in the upper atmosphere against ballistic missiles, David’s Sling intermediate-range system, which intercepts heavy rockets and short-range ballistic missiles (of the type Iran and Syria have supplied to Hezbollah) as well as cruise missiles and drones, and Iron Dome, which shoots down rockets, cruise missiles and drones.

Israel is expecting its Iron Beam laser interception system, which can shoot down rockets, mortars and

UAVs, to become operational soon, and is developing an interceptor (Sky Sonic) for Iran’s future hypersonic missile (Fattah), which is in development.

The Israeli Navy is also equipped with the advanced Barak 8 surface-to-air protection system, which can be activated from the sea.

Iran must now await Israel’s retaliation, and unlike Israel, Iranian air defenses are by comparison limited in scope.

After its own failure on Sunday, Iran now relies almost exclusively on Hezbollah for an ability to threaten Israel.

According to the IDF’s data, around 170 Iranian UAVs—a massive swarm—failed to cross into Israeli air space. Dozens were intercepted by IAF jets, Israel’s ground-based interceptors, and partner aircraft and air defense systems.

According to international media reports, American and British jets took part in interceptions, along with the Jordanian and Saudi air defense systems.

In addition, of the more than 30 cruise missiles Iran launched on Sunday, none crossed into Israeli territory.

Twenty-five of them were intercepted by IAF fighter jets outside the country’s borders, the IDF said. Out of over 120 ballistic missiles, only a few crossed into Israeli territory, with the rest being intercepted. The ones that impacted targeted the Nevatim F-35 Air Force Base in southern Israel, causing only minor damage to infrastructure. The base remains operational.

“Iran hoped to incapacitate the base and thus impair our aerial capabilities, but it failed. IAF aircraft continue to take off and land from the base and depart for offensive and defensive missions. This includes the ‘Adir’ [F-35] fighter jets, which are now returning to the base from an aerial defense mission, and you will soon see them landing,” IDF Spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari stated on Sunday morning.

In addition to the launches from Iran, several launches occurred from Iraq and Yemen on Sunday—but none of them crossed into Israeli territory, Hagari said.

A seven-year-old Bedouin-Israeli girl was severely injured by shrapnel in the Negev and is being treated in hospital.

Hezbollah, for its part, remained in its usual low- to medium-intensity wartime mode, firing dozens of rockets from Lebanon in recent hours, and absorbing strikes by IAF jets.

The IAF’s Aerial Defense Array as well as aircraft pilots have been preparing for this moment for years.

Iran fired extremely dangerous threats at Israel on Sunday. Its ballistic missile attacks likely included projectiles with very large warheads, each one of which can

destroy multiple buildings on impact, if not intercepted. Iranian media claimed the attack included Kheibar Shekan ballistic missiles, which have a warhead of 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds).

The IDF chief of General Staff, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, directed the defensive air battle together with IAF head Maj. Gen. Tomer Bar and other senior commanders from the Israeli Air Force's Operations Center at the Kirya IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv.

Just as Iran dropped its mask and revealed its fanatical intentions on Sunday, so too did Arab states in the region that are badly threatened by Iran reveal their intentions to push back against Iran, according to international media reports.

If Saudi Arabia took part in interception activities, this would not be the first time.

In November 2023, Saudi Arabia reportedly intercepted a ballistic missile fired from Yemen, by Iran-backed Houthis, at Israel.

Several factors enable this cooperation. The existing framework of U.S.-Israeli missile defense collaboration, built over three decades, Israel's entry in 2021 to the U.S. Military's Central Command (CENTCOM, which is responsible for the Middle East) area of operations, and sales of American Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems to Saudi Arabia all make such cooperation possible.

"Over the past six months, we have been operating in close coordination with our partners, led by U.S. CENTCOM, the U.K., France and other countries that operated last night. This partnership has always been robust, but last night it was exceptionally evident," said Hagari on Sunday.

In this context, it is important to note decades of joint Israeli-American research and development on all Israeli air defense systems (except Iron Dome), the integration of

radars and interceptors across the Middle East and the building of an intricate web of information-sharing.

On this network, American sensor data from various sources is fused and shared with Israel, and vice versa.

This likely includes data from American satellite assets, and radars stationed in places like Turkey, Qatar and Israel, which can nourish Israeli interceptors, along with Israel's own extensive radar and sensor network.

The network could well include Saudi and Jordanian sensors. Two U.S. Navy ships in the eastern Mediterranean shot down at least three ballistic missiles using the Aegis missile defense system, according to CNN, while U.S. fighter jets also shot down Iranian aerial threats.

As such, a defense architecture that has been assembled for years by the United States, Israel and Arab states shined on Sunday.

Looking ahead, an Israeli response against Iran looks like a certainty. The fact that Iran launched its attacks from its own soil means that Israel will direct its response at targets on Iranian soil.

Israel has a range of options at its disposal. The Israeli War Cabinet will have to balance its response options against Iran with the need to move in on Hamas's last bastion of Rafah in Gaza, and a potential escalation with Hezbollah in Lebanon. These factors will help shape the Cabinet's dilemma: Choosing between limited retaliatory strikes, which themselves could attract further Iranian attacks, or broader operations that could even target Iran's nuclear program.

Israel must pursue its core security interests based on the realization that international legitimacy is fickle, waxing and waning in the space of days and even hours. If Israel makes good on its duty to fight back against its enemies, its allies will respect it more, despite public posturing.

Mr. Lappin analyzes and reports on Israel-based military affairs.

Why U.S. Warnings Haven't Deterred Iran

By The Editors

nationalreview.com

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"Don't" isn't enough.

The Iranian regime on Saturday launched a massive and unprecedented attack on Israel, firing over 300 projectiles, including drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles, toward the Jewish state. It was the first time that Iran attacked Israel from its own territory, though the attack also relied on its proxies in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

Thanks to an impressive joint response from Israel and the U.S. (with help from allies including Jordan), nearly all of the projectiles were intercepted — even over Jerusalem, Israel's capital. There was minimal damage to an Israeli air base, which remained functional, and sadly a seven-year-old girl from a Bedouin village suffered a serious head wound. Given what was fired at Israel, the successful defense was an amazing achievement.

Iran has claimed that the attacks were a retaliation for

Israel's recent strike on an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hangout in Damascus, which killed several top commanders, including Quds Force commander Mohammad Reza Zahedi, who is believed to have been involved in the drone attack in Jordan that killed three U.S. troops.

Though President Biden did the right thing by deploying American assets to assist Israel's defensive response, the reality is that things never would have gotten to this point had it not been for his accommodating policies toward Iran and months of chastising Israel. Looking further back, the origins of last night's Iranian aggression could be traced to his former boss.

In pursuing a disastrous nuclear deal, the Obama administration sought to reorient the Middle East around an improved relationship with Iran and more "daylight" between the U.S. and Israel. In pursuit of the deal, the

administration overlooked Iran's malign activity around the world — its sponsorship of terrorism and its destabilizing attacks through its proxies in the region. The ultimate deal funneled tens of billions of dollars in sanctions relief to Iran and allowed the regime to become a greater conventional threat, all while preserving its nuclear ambitions in the long term.

While President Trump pulled out of the deal and reestablished U.S. deterrence against Iran by ordering the killing of IRGC commander Qasem Soleimani, Biden and his team — many of the same people responsible for Obama's failed policies — sought to resurrect the deal. Once again, in doing so, they tried to downplay Iran's bad behavior and funneled tens of billions of dollars in sanctions relief to Iran.

Within weeks of taking office, Biden removed the terrorist designation on Iran's proxy in Yemen, the Houthis, and in 2023, he allowed the U.N. sanctions against the Iranian missile and drone program to expire. Those were the types of weapons not only that were used last night but that Iran has sold to Russia for use against Ukraine.

Since October 7, whenever Biden has been asked about the possibility of Iran getting involved in the fighting, he has simply said "Don't," without offering any explanation of what would happen if it did. What Iran has seen from the U.S., sadly, has been weakness. For months, Iran has had its proxies fire at U.S. military assets in the region and harass shipping lanes. Aside from a few symbolic retaliatory strikes, the Biden response has been muted.

More recently, what Iran has witnessed has been Biden and other U.S. officials berating Israel for its response to the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust. Biden has chastised Israeli actions as "over the top" and its bombing as "indiscriminate." He has cited Hamas casualty figures uncritically and warned Israel against finishing off the terrorist group in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, threatening to condition aid to Israel. And he has tried to pressure Israel into ceding more and more ground in cease-fire talks, while Hamas keeps rejecting every deal that has been put on the table, and won't even disclose how many of the 130 hostages it still holds are alive.

Biden's actions sent a clear signal to Iran's leaders that

the U.S. had abandoned Israel and that it was now free to launch the type of attack that it had resisted doing for over 40 years. The question is, now what? I

In a statement following a call to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden referred to "America's ironclad commitment to the security of Israel" and touted the joint Israel-U.S. response to blunt the Iranian attacks. Publicly, he did not offer any support for an Israeli response or warn against it. Privately, there have been multiple leaks, some claiming merely that the U.S. would not be participating in any response, others claiming that Biden would outright oppose a response. Axios reported that Biden was trying to convince Netanyahu to see the thwarting of the Iranian attack as a "win" and leave well enough alone. Even if the U.S. opposes the response, however, it's not clear whether Biden would put roadblocks up to an Israeli response as he has to Israel's advance into Rafah.

Any effort to impede Israel's retaliation would be morally disgraceful and strategically inane. Iran just fired hundreds of projectiles, including ballistic missiles, toward Israel's capital city, after decades of its proxies launching attacks on Israel. The Iranian attacks were thwarted through great efforts and incredible technology, but they also paralyzed the nation, closing schools and its only major airport — which connects the country economically with the rest of the world.

Thanks to the policies of the Obama and Biden administrations, Iran — which has vowed to destroy Israel as a step toward its ultimate goal of "Death to America" — has thousands more ballistic missiles it could fire at Israel. If Iran is not stopped, eventually those missiles could be nuclear. No nation could live under a situation in which another nation vowing to destroy it can threaten its population in this manner, and rest on the hope that it can meet every future attack with the same amount of success in shooting down weapons.

Any action by the Biden administration to prevent Israel from doing what must be done after months of warning Iran "Don't" would only further embolden Iran, leading to more frequent and ambitious attacks, and inviting the very regional conflict Biden is desperate to avoid. Instead, Israel must have our unwavering support for a devastating response against Iran.

Iran's Calculations and America's Mistake

By Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack

The recent attacks show that the U.S. must take the lead.

The latest Iranian salvo against Israel is raising fears that a regional war will engulf the Middle East. On Saturday, Iran launched a large drone and missile attack against Israel and seized an Israeli-linked container ship in the Strait of Hormuz. These attacks followed the Israeli assassination of several senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leaders in Syria.

The Iranian assault on Israel included more than 300

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drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. This is obviously quite a bit more than the 15 ballistic missiles Iran fired at Ayn al-Asad Air Base and Erbil International Airport in retaliation for the U.S. killing of Qassem Suleimani, who led the IRGC's elite Quds Force, in January 2020. The difference speaks to several points worth considering.

First, the retaliation for Suleimani's death was about nothing more than restoring Iranian honor. Brazenly killing so important and popular a figure as Suleimani

demanded some Iranian response, but Tehran was cautious because it feared an escalatory war with the United States.

Those killed by the Israeli attack on Iran's Damascus embassy complex on April 1 were not as famous or as powerful as Suleimani, but the retaliation was larger and more sophisticated. The difference suggests that this response was about more than just honor: It was about some element of deterrence.

Iran is well aware of the extent and capability of Israel's air defenses. The scale of the strike was almost certainly designed to enable at least some of the attacking munitions to penetrate those defenses and cause some degree of damage. Their inability to do so was doubtless a disappointment to Tehran, but the Iranians can probably still console themselves that the attack was frightening for the Israeli people and alarming to their government. Iran probably hopes that it was unpleasant enough to give Israeli leaders pause the next time they consider an operation like the embassy strike.

Nevertheless, while 300 or more attacking munitions certainly sounds like a lot, it also shows signs of restraint that signal Tehran's own concerns about further escalation. First, Iran could have launched considerably more—not orders of magnitude more but probably at least double what it did without badly depleting stockpiles of its longest-range assets. Second, initial reporting indicates that the attack reportedly focused on one or more military targets, including an Israeli air force base outside Beersheba. That, too, suggests an important degree of caution on Iran's part. It could have launched at Tel Aviv or Haifa, where any impact would have been far more likely to kill Israeli civilians.

Third, Hezbollah did not participate. Hezbollah is Iran's ace in the hole. With more than 150,000 rockets and missiles, the Lebanese militant group could overwhelm Israeli air defenses. But Hezbollah is an Iranian ally, not a puppet, and a massive Hezbollah strike could have provoked an all-out war with Israel, something Hezbollah has been trying to avoid. Tehran would only play the Hezbollah card if what it is doing is critically important to it.

All of this reinforces the strategic assessment that Iran is not looking to escalate with Israel and is, in fact, working very hard to avoid escalation. Although Israel has hit Iran's ally Hamas hard, the war in Gaza has gone very well for Tehran so far. Israel was badly wounded in Hamas's attack on Oct. 7, 2023, plans for Israeli-Saudi normalization have been put on ice, and much of the Middle East and the wider world is blaming Israel and the United States for all of it. There is no reason for the Iranian leadership to jeopardize all that by giving Israel (or the United States) a justification to do massive damage to Iran, which could snatch defeat from the jaws of their victory.

Moreover, the clerical regime faces significant economic challenges, widespread protests, and violence

from ethnic Balochis. In addition, Iran's military is weak, and it would be on the losing end if there were an all-out confrontation with Israeli military forces, let alone if the United States came to Israel's aid, as it likely would (and as Iran certainly believes it would). A regional war where Iran might be on the losing end is a risky proposition for a regime already in a difficult position.

Still, Iran has crossed a Rubicon, although it may not recognize it. Iran had never struck Israel directly from its own territory before Saturday. Israel has never openly hit Iranian territory either—all of its attacks on Iran have either been military attacks on Iranians in Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere or covert attacks on Iranian territory, therefore invoking plausible deniability. This was an acknowledged, indeed trumpeted, military strike on Israel from Iran. It opens the door to Israel now doing the same, and Israel can do far more damage to Iran than Iran can to Israel.

Yet Israel's calculations are also complex. Iran arms, funds, and trains an array of Israel's regional foes, including Hamas and Hezbollah. Israeli leaders are preparing for a conflict with Hezbollah, and some even see it as inevitable. Iran also backs the Houthis in Yemen, who are attacking international shipping in the name of striking Israel. Not surprisingly, Israeli leaders believe stopping Iranian influence in the region is perhaps the country's top priority.

Moreover, Israel has always believed that the sanctity of its deterrent was vital to the survival of the state and the safety of its citizens. Time and again, Israel has responded to any attack guided by the most fundamental logic of deterrence theory: When someone hits you, if you want to make sure they will never do it again, you hit them back 10 times harder. Oct. 7 revived Israel's commitment to this approach, after years when the country felt safe enough to pull some of its punches to solicit greater international support.

Despite the abject failure of the Iranian attack, Israel might still feel the need to hit Iran somewhere to demonstrate that it will never itself be deterred from responding to restore its deterrent.

The failure of the Iranian attack, however, makes such an Israeli response less likely, and Israel and its military already have their hands full. The war with Hamas is ongoing, and Israel has signaled it intends to clear Rafah despite widespread international resistance, including from Washington. As a result of the war, Israel's international reputation has plummeted, support has fallen in the United States, and its rapprochement with the Gulf Arab states is on pause. Ordinary Israelis understandably want to return to a more normal life, and the Israeli economy has taken a major hit from both the war and the massive mobilization of reservists. Right now, the Israeli army and most of the Israeli government are looking to shed military problems, not proliferate them.

There are military technical considerations as well. A

small but important point is Jordan's stakes in all of this. The Royal Jordanian Air Force gamely supported Israel not just by shooting down Iranian drones and cruise missiles crossing Jordanian territory but also reportedly opening Jordanian airspace to Israeli fighters to do the same. Although any self-respecting country would have done the former, the latter was exceptional. The Israelis probably won't forget it—they certainly shouldn't. Israel should be reticent to launch strikes of its own that violate Jordanian airspace—and the same should be its view toward Saudi airspace for fear of further undermining its desired normalization with Riyadh.

That leaves only a Syria-Iraq or a Turkey-Iraq route for Israeli aircraft and missiles to fly to strike Iranian targets, neither of which is ideal. They are longer legs to many key Iranian targets than the flights across Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Turkey is a NATO ally with some formidable air defenses of its own. There are still Russian air and air defense assets in Syria.

Israel has a quintet of German-made submarines capable of firing cruise missiles of their own. These can be deployed in the Indian Ocean, where their missiles would overfly only international water and Iran itself. But they have only the five, with limited numbers of cruise missiles.

None of that precludes an Israeli counterstrike on Iran, now or in the future, but it certainly complicates it. It suggests that Israel may be more likely to just go back to targeting Iranian personnel and military assets in Syria and Lebanon, and probably Iraq and Yemen, to a greater and greater extent in the future. In other words, Israel won't be deterred by the Iranian strike, but it probably won't be

provoked by it either.

Finally, the U.S. position is simple. The United States wants to avoid a regional war that could drag in U.S. forces, roil international markets, and complicate the position of Washington's Arab allies. It wants to protect Israel, but it also wants Israel to wrap up its operations in Gaza. The biggest sighs of relief were probably those in the White House Situation Room overnight, in the belief that neither Israel nor Iran is likely to do much more.

Nevertheless, although both Iran and Israel have strong reasons to de-escalate, politics in both countries are messy, and fear and uncertainty are running high. A simple miscalculation, such as the belief that the enemy will inevitably escalate, could be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What Saturday's fireworks hopefully also illustrated is the danger of U.S. disengagement from the Middle East. The region is not better without the United States; it is far more dangerous, unpredictable, explosive, and threatening to America's own interests. U.S. diplomacy has helped reassure Israel and makes it less likely that Israel will escalate, while U.S. military forces are part of why Tehran hesitated to do more. The latest round of violence shows why it is important for the United States to take the lead on pushing back on Iran and its proxies and bolstering U.S. allies.

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Why Weren't Iran Sanctions Immediately Triggered by the Attacks?

By Seth Mandel

commentary.org

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On Sunday morning, barely twelve hours after the conclusion of Iran's unprecedented missile barrage on Israel, White House spokesman John Kirby was asked on Fox News Sunday about the Biden administration's recent decision to waive some sanctions on Iran.

"You know the conversations about unfreezing assets, about waivers on sanctions," Shannon Bream began. "Could this administration have been tougher on Iran? Did it sense an opening?"

Kirby responded: "It's hard to look at what President Biden has done with respect to Iran and say that he hasn't been tough on Iran, or that we haven't put pressure on them."

Is it? Because it seems to me that if the administration was prepared militarily for the Iranian attacks Saturday night, and if the president doesn't want Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to retaliate, then a punishment of some kind could have been ready to be instituted immediately, and certainly two days later. At the very least, it would have been easy for the president to cancel the recent sanctions waiver.

It is certainly not the case that sanctions are somehow

off the table, at least conceptually. "Biden on Sunday convened leaders from the Group of Seven nations, who said they would consider new sanctions on Iran," reports the Wall Street Journal. The Journal article, like most of the reporting since the attacks, stressed that the president wants a diplomatic response. It is also clear from the statements that Biden considers sanctions a plausible contribution to such a diplomatic response.

So, where are the sanctions?

The Germans don't seem to be an obstacle here. "I am strongly in favor of extending [sanctions] to Iran, because we can see how dangerous its actions are at the moment," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said.

Would the British consider more Iran sanctions? "Yes, absolutely," says Foreign Minister David Cameron. "We already have 400 sanctions on Iran. We put in place a whole new sanctions regime at the end of last year, which is proving very effective. We've sanctioned the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, in its entirety, and we'll continue to look at what further steps we can do."

Great. So once again, where are they?

Were the allies waiting to see how much damage was

done by the Iranian missiles and drones? If so, that's an indication that no, there will not be sanctions immediately forthcoming. And there is evidence for this idea that the seriousness of the attack would only be judged by the seriousness of the damage it caused. It's an absurd scale on which to weigh a response because, like spritzing a misbehaving cat with water, it loses its effectiveness if not done right away. The West had the ability to ensure that this case would be more like touching a hot stove: Iran would immediately feel the burn, triggering a response that was basically automatic.

Having the debate over sanctions now—or any retaliative measure, to be honest—only makes it seem as though you can escape punishment by attempting and failing to murder lots of people.

There is also the problem of pretending the Iranian attacks occurred in a vacuum. “U.S. and Western officials anticipate that Israel will quickly respond to Iran's attacks, as soon as Monday, officials said,” the Journal reports. “But the officials said they hoped both countries could come away with a sense of victory, giving them an off-ramp that would limit escalatory moves.” (Emphasis added.)

That does not sound like any punishment is even being considered. If you want Iran to “come away with a

sense of victory,” you certainly wouldn't come down on the mullahs' heads. More generally, as a world power trying to maintain equilibrium in an American-led global order, why on earth would you want Iran to come away with a sense of victory at all? That strikes me as a mortifying statement.

The Iranian attack was an unprecedented and direct act of war. Iran should not be left with a sense of victory. It should, by definition, be shown to have very clearly lost this exchange, otherwise it will be repeated. If you want this reckless attack to cost Iran, but you don't want to see a wider military escalation, then your obvious move is to have sanctions at the ready. Not to discuss sanctions. Not to be talked into sanctions by Israel, as if the Jewish state must negotiate with the U.S. for its right to assert its own sovereignty.

A precedent here could have easily been established by automatically linking the Iranian barrage to sanctions, because the world does not want to encourage the idea that rogue states are permitted to take free shots at our allies.

It should have been done already, but it's not too late: Bring on the sanctions, or the world will have just become a much more dangerous place.

Between Hope and Despair

By Avraham Dov Greenbaum

On a visit to Sderot, Hamodia discovered children who've returned home, but don't feel safe, and a Holocaust survivor who is struggling with the trauma of Oct. 7

Abba,” the girl on the phone said in a trembling voice, “they just sounded the Red Color alarm and I didn't know what to do. I was on the street; I bent over, put my hands on my head and davened that Hashem should save me, that the rockets not land near me. I'm very sacred.”

This conversation took place on the day that the girl, Ora Ohayon, returned to her home in Sderot, after nearly half a year of exile. Ora is one of thousands of children, residents of the “Gaza envelope,” who have been traumatized. They were uprooted from their homes and taken to the unknown.

For years they were known as “the children of the Kassem rockets.” They've now become the children who were saved from the Oct. 7 inferno. They speak about the jarring noises that come back to them at nights, about the pictures they see again and again in their mind's eye, about the familiar sounds of the Red Color alarm, about the constant boom-boom of missiles.

These children returned home not because they wanted to; but because the schools in Sderot reopened.

These are children who began the school year three times: in September in Sderot, in late October in the hotels they were evacuated to, and in March, back again in Sderot.

hamodia.com

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We met some of them this week, returning home from school with book bags on their backs. They look like regular children, but when you talk to them, you get a sense of what they've been through. These are children who grew up way too fast in the past half year.

“The hotel we were evacuated to was a safe place,” Yair tells us, “but it was hard for us to live in a small room. This caused a lot of problems and fights. But we knew that this ‘together’ in a small place in the hotel was the safest situation for us, far from the war zone.”

His friend Avner interjects. “On Simchas Torah I heard everything. The terrorists were right near here,” he says pointing to Kikar Hachanukiah in the Ben Gurion neighborhood. “Right here, under my house.

We were very frightened. My father saw the terrorists and we heard the shots.

“We hid in the security room, and didn't come out for two days. Only when the soldiers told my father that there weren't any more terrorists in our neighborhood did we run away to our uncles who live in Yerushalayim. A few days later, the government evacuated us to the Vort hotel in Yerushalayim, where we lived until a week ago.”

Yair adds: “We were in a hotel in the Dead Sea. In the beginning it was fun, but little by little it turned into a nightmare. These days, though, when I hear explosions every night, I prefer the Dead Sea. We returned home only because they closed our school in the hotel, and I didn't want to be without an education.”

Yair and Avner speak about the missiles that fall regularly and the sounds of the Red Color alarm that remind them they are back home in Sderot, and that the war isn't over. Every house in the city shakes, and there is a feeling of living in a war zone.

Exposed to Uncertainty

"I'm afraid that the war will end before Hamas has surrendered," says Meir Peretz, a resident of the city who was exiled to Teveria and then to Eilat. "And even if it does surrender, another organization will rise up and take its place, and we'll face the same danger.

"We moved from Teveria to Eilat because of the war that's brewing in the north. Even though we lived in a rented villa in

Eilat, we missed the flavor of Sderot so we decided to return to our city and to reality. If you ask me, nothing has changed here."

You can hear the insecurity in his voice. "I have two sons," he says, "and they have been traumatized. After experiencing a few months of quiet, everything is blowing up in our faces, and the children wake up in a state of fear. They hear the buzz of planes, the echoes of explosions and the Red Color alarms. This is a reality that would never be acceptable in any normal country in the world. We feel like sitting ducks."

Next to Sasson's Corner, a local eatery, we meet Charlie, Baruch, and Armond.

They have returned from exile, like everyone else, and are trying to get back into routine.

"There is a feeling in the air that everything's gone back to the day before Simchas Torah," says Charlie. "My family and I were evacuated to Natanya, where we had quiet. I have elderly parents that I take care of; I can say that since our return, my mother cries all the time, and shakes with fear. It looks like I'll have to move her out of the city. That's the only solution. Apparently, we'll rent an apartment in Natanya, and move there for good."

Armond interjects: "I'm not leaving, but the younger generation is already gone. No young person who has experienced months of a life of quiet will be willing to accept continuous gunfire."

Baruch speaks of his brother-in-law who tried to make a go of it in Sderot, but moved his family back to the hotel in Natanya. "What happened to my brother-in-law is happening to a lot of families," he says. "On the one hand there is a desire to return to routine, which is also good for the children; on the other, there is fear. What children go through at night is the hardest, the occasional alarms and all the constant explosions. That's the kind of life we lead."

While we are speaking, an explosion sounds. Was that a missile falling on the city, without early warning from the Red Color alarm? Charlie reassures us: "That's our forces, they're bombing Hamas."

The Survivor Who Went Into Exile Again

The publisher and editor-in-chief of Hamodia, Mrs. Ruth Lichtenstein, who has dedicated her life to keeping alive memories of the Holocaust, asked me to try and find

a survivor who had to be evacuated from the city — experiencing yet another exile. So I went in search of Yisrael Toren, a survivor I had met a few years ago in a Chabad House in Sderot, and whose life story left a deep impact on me.

I found Toren's story riveting. It's a dramatic tale of a young boy who saw his father murdered, was raised as a Christian, and made a fascinating journey back to the Jewish people.

"I was born in 1935 in Warsaw, the capital of Poland," he begins, "to my father Yaakov (Yank) and mother Toibe (Tusha), from the Huberman family.

My father was born in Lvov, in Ukraine, and since he had helped the Poles fight Russia, during World War I, receiving many awards for bravery, he was allowed to live in Warsaw. He was appointed commander of a neighborhood police station.

"I have two strong memories from my childhood.

One is of myself walking every Erev Shabbos to the shochet with a chicken so that he could shecht it for us for Shabbos. The second was coming home from shul after Shacharis on Shabbos with a pot of cholent that had been kept warm in the oven of the Jewish bakery.

"When the Nazis took over Poland, they fired my father from his job as police commander and we moved to our family's vacation home located 12 kilometers outside of Warsaw. After a short while, the Nazis nationalized our home and moved us to the ghetto. At that time, my father sold Christian religious items to survive.

"I was only five, but I understood that this was a time of emergency and we had to be careful. But then something

happened that made me aware of the dangers I faced as a Jew. My mother, Hy"d, became part of the war effort against the Nazis. She served as a courier passing messages from our ghetto to the Warsaw ghetto and back.

"And then, at one point, she disappeared. We later learned that she had been arrested by the Nazis. My father tried to bribe high-ranking Polish officers to get information on her whereabouts, but was unsuccessful.

This situation forced my father to be very clear with me on the dangers, and how I should run from the Germans, from large gatherings, and from Polish collaborators."

At one point, Yisrael's father, fearing for the boy's future, decided to take action.

"He took me outside the ghetto, to a Polish family that were good friends of ours. He gave them a lot of money and jewelry, and asked them to watch over me.

He also gave them my ID documents and repeated that they must do everything to protect me. When he left, he told me again and again to be careful about the Germans and to never forget that I was a Jew.

"And then, a few days later, the Warsaw ghetto uprising broke out, and the family threw me into the streets. I'll never forget and never forgive that cursed family — the Ponovke family — that banished me to the

cold, to starve to death in the streets.”

Yisrael walked back to the ghetto. For two days, he wandered around the area, searching for food. At nights he slept in the doorways of stores, which were relatively protected from the cold and wind.

“The Germans took large numbers of Jews out of the ghetto and led them in a convoy to the square near the train station in the center of the city. I followed from a distance and saw them instruct the Jews to split into two groups. The elderly, the women, and the children to the left, the young people to the right.

“I stood on the side and hid — despite the fact that I was just six and a half, I had sharp survival instincts. My father’s warnings about taking precautions made me understand that this wasn’t child’s play and I needed to watch out for myself.

“They told my father to go the left ... and then they took him and the others to the forest and shot them to death... I saw them shooting my father.” The pain in Yisrael’s voice hasn’t ebbed, even 80 years later.

And then an unfamiliar woman approached. “She was walking toward the train station, and I told her she shouldn’t advance in the area, since the Germans were killing people there. She asked me if I was Jewish and when I said yes, she said, ‘If you are not Jewish, come with me.’ I understood that I had an opportunity to go to a protected place and I accompanied her. She led me to her house, a two-story structure a short distance away, and on the way told me that her husband had been a Polish soldier who was killed in the Nazi invasion of Poland. Only much later did I learn that he had been a Jew.

“At the entrance to the house I noticed a small boy and an elderly woman, but didn’t have a chance to say a word to them since she took me straight up to the attic. She made it clear that I was forbidden to come down under any circumstance, and that she would take care of feeding me.

“That woman, Sofia Hochinski was her name, saved me. She’d bring me food and water every evening, mostly cooked potato peels and some other dish.

“That’s how I lived for about a year. In all this time, I was by myself in the attic, trying to keep myself busy.

I went crazy from loneliness, boredom, and longing for my parents, but didn’t dare leave the place. After a year, she told me that we were moving to an apartment in Warsaw. When I finally came down from the attic, the house was empty. I asked her what had happened to the grandmother and boy, and she burst into tears. She told me that they were her mother and her son, and that both had died of typhus.

“In Warsaw, Sofia managed to get ID papers showing that I was her son. I was called Alexander Hochinski — her dead son’s name. I went with her every Sunday to church and played the game.”

When the war was over, Yisrael went to school for the first time in his life. His adoptive mother chose not to

reveal his true identity to the school. And then one day everything changed.

“I left home on my way to school and bumped into an officer in the Polish army and a respectable woman, both in a military vehicle. Within a minute I found myself inside the car and learned that these two were activists on behalf of Poalei Agudas Yisrael who went from city to city in search of Jewish children being raised by Christian families that saved them.

“The woman in the car was named Sarah Lederman, and they took me to Lodz, to a home for Jewish orphans like me. I didn’t get along there and after two or three weeks, I ran away, and boarded a train back to Warsaw, to Sofia’s house.

“But the Jewish activists didn’t give up on me, and a few days later Sarah Lederman showed up at the house together with a young boy by the name of Yaakov Springer and they sat for a talk with Sofia. They explained to her how important it was that I return to the Jewish people, and after another few conversations, Sofia gave in and with a heavy heart agreed that I should go with them. But first she asked me if I wanted to continue living with her as a Christian; I was told that I had to give up on her in order to return to the Jewish people.”

Toren was taken to a Jewish children’s institutions in the city of Bituv. A year later, when the communists tightened their hold on Poland, the institution moved to Bratislava and from there to Austria and then Munich.

In Munich they were given three options: move to Israel, the United States, or France. Springer chose France and Toren chose Israel, where he was sent to learn in Ponevez and then in the Pressburg Yeshivah in Yerushalayim.

As an adult, he held a key position in the Shaar Hanegev regional council, retiring after 48 years.

He lived in Sderot surrounded by his children and grandchildren — until the morning of Simchas Torah.

On my visit to Sderot, I looked for Toren, but he was nowhere to be found.

The man who had survived the Nazis apparently couldn’t deal with the Hamas butchery. In the wake of the Simchas Torah massacre, his son Tal told me, Yisrael left the city. He’d had enough of

the difficult scenes he had experienced in his lifetime and didn’t want to stay in a war zone.

Tal, and his sister, moved their elderly father to a nursing home in Ramat Efal, where his health quickly deteriorated; he now suffers from dementia. To our great sorrow, Yisrael Toren’s daughter died a month ago from a serious illness, and Tal remains alone, mourning his losses.

Tal, himself a resident of Kibbutz Erez, hasn’t returned home since Simchas Torah. His family is in Mitzpeh Ramon and he is serving in military reserve duty.

“Our kibbutz has broken up and scattered,” he says in obvious pain. “A large part of it was exiled to Mitzpeh Ramon and the rest were dispersed all around the country.

Are Ceasefire Negotiators Talking to the Right People?

By Khaled Abu Toameh

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Understanding Hamas's rival leaders.

The Egyptians and Qataris are negotiating with Hamas leaders in Qatar and Lebanon in a bid to reach an agreement that would result in a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of the Israeli hostages held by the Iran-backed terror group. The Hamas team is led by Khalil al-Hayya and Ismail Haniyeh, both based in Qatar.

Al-Hayya is a member of Hamas' Politburo and deputy head of Hamas's Regional Politburo in the Gaza Strip, which Yahya Sinwar heads. Al-Hayya left the Gaza Strip in 2021, shortly after he was appointed as Hamas's liaison to Arab and Islamic countries.

In February 2017, Sinwar was secretly elected Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, taking over from Ismail Haniyeh, who is the current chairman of Hamas Politburo. Haniyeh, too, left the Gaza Strip five years ago and has since been living in Qatar.

In recent years, several other senior Hamas officials have also left the Gaza Strip. Most have settled in Qatar, Lebanon, and Turkey.

According to Palestinian sources in the Gaza Strip, the Hamas leaders who chose to leave the coastal enclave did so after falling out with Sinwar and his brother, Mohammed, a commander of Hamas's armed wing, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. "The Sinwar brothers carried out a silent coup against the veteran political leadership of Hamas," the sources said. "Yahya and Mohammed did not tolerate any competition and ruled the Gaza Strip as if it were their private fiefdom."

Since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, the Sinwar brothers, the masterminds of the Hamas invasion of Israel, have gone into hiding to avoid being captured or assassinated by Israeli security forces. The two, who have not been seen in public in the past six months, are believed to be hiding in the southern Gaza Strip, surrounded by a handful of close and trusted aides and bodyguards.

Prior to the war, relations between the Sinwar brothers and the Hamas leadership abroad were said to be tense. The Sinwar brothers, with the help of Hamas military commanders Mohammed Deif and Marwan Issa, acted as if they were a separate group from Hamas, often refusing to accept dictates from Haniyeh and other senior Hamas officials in Qatar and Lebanon.

As part of an attempt to tighten their grip on the Gaza Strip, the Sinwar brothers opened direct channels with Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In return, the Iranians rewarded the Gaza-based Hamas leaders with financial and military aid.

The Hamas leaders abroad, though dismayed by the open challenge to their authority by the Sinwar brothers, chose not to engage in an open confrontation with the

Gaza-based leaders. From their offices in Doha and Beirut, Haniyeh and the other Hamas leaders silently watched as the Sinwar brothers pushed them to the sidelines and commandeered the terror group's armed wing.

Some Palestinians in the Gaza Strip claim that the October 7 assault on Israel caught the Hamas leaders abroad by surprise. "This shows that Sinwar and his brother don't trust the Hamas political leaders in Qatar and Lebanon," said a Palestinian political analyst in the Gaza Strip. "In light of the rupture between the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip and the Hamas leadership abroad, it's safe to assume that there is almost no direct contact between the Sinwar brothers and Ismail Haniyeh and Khalil al-Hayya."

In the aftermath of the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, the disconnect between the Sinwar brothers and the Hamas leadership abroad has only deepened. It's not clear how messages are being directly communicated, if at all, between the Hamas leaders abroad, who are negotiating with the Egyptians and Qataris, and the incommunicado Gaza-based Hamas leaders.

According to an Arab diplomatic source, Yahya Sinwar recently sent an urgent message from his hideout to the Egyptians to the effect that any deal brokered by Haniyeh would be turned down by the Gaza-based leadership and Hamas' military wing. As a result, Haniyeh was forced to call off a planned visit to the Egyptian capital of Cairo.

The tensions between Hamas' "tunnel leadership" in the Gaza Strip and the terror group's leaders in Doha and Beirut are the main reason why the negotiations over a ceasefire and the release of the hostages remain stalled. The Sinwar brothers, together with the commanders of Hamas' armed wing, are worried that the group's leaders abroad are prepared to make unacceptable concessions to Israel as a result of immense pressure from Qatar and Egypt.

As far as the Sinwar brothers are concerned, the only thing that matters now is their personal survival and retaining control of the Gaza Strip. Apparently, they are concerned that the Hamas leaders abroad would be happy to see them either killed or forced into exile, probably to Algeria, Yemen, or Lebanon.

Given the mistrust (and disconnect) between the Gaza-based Hamas leadership and the terror group's leaders abroad, one can only wonder whether the Qataris and Egyptians are not wasting their time negotiating with representatives who do not represent the Sinwar brothers and the shambles of what remains of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

Mr. Toameh is an award-winning Israeli Arab journalist, lecturer, and documentary filmmaker specializing in Palestinian affairs.