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Drexel GPS: Geopolitical Update

Iran Launches Multi-Wave Drone and Missile Attacks on Israel In Response to Consulate Bombing

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Last week's geopolitical outlook closed out as the world waited to see how and when the Iranian military would respond to Israel's bombing of its consulate in Syria. Most intelligence agencies and analysts concurred that some type of action by Iran was imminent. On Saturday, the answer was made clear as Iran backed up its rhetoric of retaliation with a massive, multiple-wave attack on Israel consisting of over 300 drones and missiles that lasted for hours.

Based on an analysis of the Iranian regime's rhetoric leading up to Saturday's attack, it can be assumed that this response, though massive in scope, was still very calculated and designed by Iran as a "split the middle" option, serving both foreign and domestic agendas. When viewed through the lens of geopolitics and the risk of a wider escalation of conflict throughout the region, Iran had many options to consider when planning its response. None of the most aggressive options were desirable given the potential for direct conflict with Israel and its de-facto ally in such a scenario - the United States.

If Iran had used one of its proxies to attack Israel as a "response," it could have inflicted a desired amount of damage on Israeli targets. However, by using a proxy instead of Iranian-based forces and assets, the optics for the Iranian regime would have conveyed signs of weakness and fear of a direct Israeli response.

By launching an attack directly from Iranian territory into Israel, this supported the rhetoric of retaliation and projected a show of strength to Iran's target audiences across the region and globally. However, this also opens the door for Israel to retaliate directly into Iran.

GPS Assessment

What the Iranians achieved with this "middle of the road" strategy of Saturday's attacks:

- Using slow drones for the majority of the initial attacking force as opposed to ballistic missiles which have a much shorter launch-to-impact time, it seems that Iran wanted to telegraph this strike in order to allow Israel and the United States time to respond. Iran actually leveraged the knowledge of the surged-up U.S. military deterrence and anti-air assets in the region to its advantage.
- With multiple waves involved over the course of several hours prior to any impact, and with the knowledge that the launches would be no secret, Iran knew that shelter-in-place emergencies and air raid alarms would go off in Israel. This allowed the regime to declare to its domestic audience a

narrative that promotes the regime's power and ability to "make Israel cower and hide" in the face of Iranian military might.

- This strategy allows the Iranian regime to "claim a win," showcase its military capabilities, and make a statement that Iran is still the preeminent Arab/Muslim military force to be reckoned with in the region. Iran's strategy also provides the necessary scale of face-saving action demanded by hardliners within the government and their domestic supporters.
- While the attack was telegraphed and 99% of the missiles and drones were successfully intercepted, it also showcased Iran's advanced drone and missile platforms that could have easily targeted more populated areas. Iran also could have changed the timing of the mix of ballistic missiles and drones, which would have produced a very different outcome on the Israeli side with regard to casualties and damage.
- The attack also sent a signal to China and Russia that Iran is still the country they need to align with if they have any aspirations of forming a power bloc in the region.
- Israel has been put on notice, and while still undetermined, it is likely that the surged-up U.S. presence in the region will not last indefinitely. The assets and resources that were available to assist with the interception of drones and missiles in this attack will at some point in the future not be as readily available to Israel.
- Israel now has the option of avoiding further escalation of direct hostilities by claiming a victory of its own; it was able to protect its citizens and populace with its defensive systems in the face of such a massive attack.

GPS Assessment

What if Israel Still Responds and Attacks Iran?

- The Iranian regime used social media effectively to signal that the attack satisfied their need to respond to the consulate bombing. Doing so publicly puts more pressure on Israel to avoid responding militarily. Israel will now **not** be able to claim that any attack into Iran is in response to a continuing threat of retaliation by Iran.
- If Israel responds, this will create more self-perpetuating issues: Iran would come under an intense amount of domestic pressure to activate all of its proxies in the region along with its own forces. For example, Hezbollah in Lebanon could engage its thousands of available and powerful missiles for attacks directly into Israel, opening up multiple fronts of combat and triggering a wider escalation of all-out war in the region that many have feared all along.
- In a scenario where Israel is engaged in direct combat with Iran and all of its proxies in the region, the U.S. would find itself hard-pressed **not** to intervene militarily in some form on behalf of Israel, inviting more criticism and accusations of collusion with Israel against Arab interests in the region.
- This is one of the many reasons the Biden administration has had a major falling out with the Netanyahu government over the Syrian consulate bombing. (The U.S. was not given advance warning of the consulate bombing by the IDF prior to the attack....IDF planes were already enroute when U.S. was notified).

- It is possible to interpret Israel's decision to bomb the consulate as an attempt to reframe the global narrative which has increasingly been critical of Israel's conduct against civilians in its war with Hamas in Gaza. By forcing Iran into the picture, Netanyahu could be attempting to shift the focus away from the humanitarian crisis and civilian deaths in Gaza that have been attributed to the manner in which he has prosecuted the Hamas/Israel war.
- By eliciting the type of Iranian military response we saw Saturday, the narrative has quickly shifted to an Iran-based conflict. Netanyahu and his supporters may have calculated that this would garner much more support from the U.S. than its current strategy against Hamas in Gaza.
- Based on the shift in the narrative of media reporting after this weekend's Iranian drone attacks, this angle may prove to be more accurate as events unfold.

Final Thoughts:

- The anticipation of what the Iranian response would be is now over, but the risk for regional escalation remains high. The focus now shifts to how Israel will react to Saturday's attacks, which is especially worrisome since they were based directly from Iranian territory.
- Will the Netanyahu government move forward with its promise of a military response to any Iranian attack? All of this is occurring against the still looming potential for an IDF offensive push to root out Hamas in Rafah by Israeli forces which the Biden administration has increasingly advised against.

Timeline of events leading to Saturday's Attack

ISRAEL'S WAR ON GAZA

Iran launches drones, missiles at Israel

Israel says nearly all incoming drones and missiles - numbering more than 300 - from Iran, Iraq and Yemen have been intercepted. Iran says the attack is in response to an Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria on April 1 and that the matter can now "be deemed concluded".



Israel's "Iron Dome" fires at Incoming Iranian Drones



Drexel GPS will continue to monitor this situation as it develops.

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