

Iran Strikes Back: Containing Israel, Avoiding Washington

Israel's attack on Iran was rooted in the principle of the “shock and awe” strike—a cornerstone of its national security doctrine, developed since the founding of the state in recognition of its limited geographic depth and manpower compared to its neighbors.

This doctrine assumes that decisive outcomes are achieved only by initiating an offensive—swiftly and forcefully—to shatter the opponent's cohesion and disrupt its leadership before it can mount an effective response.

Israel's initial strike aimed to replicate the model it had executed with relative success in prior engagements. It simultaneously targeted the military-security leadership hierarchy, air defenses, ballistic missile launchers, and nuclear facilities—including assassinating scientists.

The intention was to cripple the command-and-control infrastructure, sever communication between political and military echelons, and disable vital components of Iran's defense system.

However, this Israeli assumption faltered. Iran demonstrated a clear capacity to absorb the blow and recover swiftly by filling gaps, reestablishing communication lines, and shifting to emergency mode.

This rapid response blunted the impact of the Israeli strike and halted prematurely the euphoria within Israeli circles that had pinned hopes on a swift collapse of Iran's structure.

Missile Saturation: Iran Tests Its Deterrence Strategy

On the evening of Friday, June 13, shortly after Israel's strike, Iran launched a large-scale military response. Through its official news agency, it declared the “start of overwhelming Iranian retaliation,” firing hundreds of ballistic missiles toward deep Israeli territory.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) stated that the response was “decisive and precise,” targeting dozens of military bases and airfields “in three waves,” concentrating on central Israeli areas, including the greater Tel Aviv region.

Footage after the attack revealed significant effects on Israeli homefront. With more than 200 missiles launched on the first day and around 80 on the next, Tel Aviv's streets bore what Israeli officials called “unprecedented destruction.”

Symbolically, the strike on the Kiryat complex—the central hub of the Israeli military since 1948, housing the War Ministry and the underground “Gefen” command center—stood out.

This retaliation was a direct response to Israeli strikes on sensitive Iranian sites, such as the Defense Ministry, IRGC bases, and the assassination of the operational commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters.

Tactically, Iran’s strikes revealed a deliberate “missile saturation” strategy: multiple salvos of varying missile types, sizes, and speeds were used to overwhelm Israel’s air defenses and allow the heaviest, most precise missiles to penetrate and hit critical targets with minimal losses.

Despite Israel’s extensive efforts, supported by US defense systems—such as the US CENTCOM-affiliated THAAD batteries—these systems failed to intercept all projectiles, allowing a significant number to hit sensitive Israeli targets.

This round of Iranian retaliation shows a significant early conclusion: despite the intense and focused Israeli offensive aimed at vital military capabilities, Iran’s missile infrastructure remained operative and resilient.

Tehran’s pre-emptive protective measures mitigated the first strike and preserved its launch, control, and targeting capacities in one of the most sophisticated missile operations seen in the region.

Targeting Israel’s Urban Core and Breaking the “Safe Margin”

With the onset of Iran’s counterstrike, Tehran shifted to a strategy focused on hitting Israel’s urban centers—particularly Greater Tel Aviv—moving decisively toward “center strikes” rather than limited military targets. This shift was a tactical move intended to accumulate force and convert Israel’s vulnerabilities into leverage on its homefront.

On day one, major cities—Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Rishon LeZion—suffered heavy damage. According to Israeli media, nine buildings were destroyed in Ramat Gan, with hundreds more damaged across Gush Dan, hitting infrastructure and vehicles in the country’s economic heartland.

Channel 13 reported that “unprecedented destruction” forced Tel Aviv municipality to evacuate hundreds, while police declared multiple missile impact sites and a state of emergency for rescue forces.

On the second day, strikes continued on Bat Yam and Rehovot, resulting in nine deaths, over 200 wounded, and at least 35 missing, per Israeli homefront estimates.

In a symbolic blow, the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot sustained direct damage,

with a laboratory fire—a scientifically strategic response to Israeli strikes on nuclear scientists and research centers.

Conflicts in the north included a focused missile strike on Haifa port, which hit an oil refinery, pipelines, and transport lines—a rebuttal to Israeli hits on the Kongan port in Iran’s Bushehr province and a signal that Tehran could target critical energy infrastructure.

These attacks reflect Iran’s determination to strike deep into Israeli territory, based on the assessment that targeting vital military infrastructure—airports, nuclear sites—risks failure amid advanced Israeli and US air-defense systems.

The more effective strategy, therefore, became “city bombing,” intended to strike the enemy’s homefront directly, triggering near-paralysis in the economy and daily life.

Iran relies in this strategy on two main factors:

Israel’s homefront weakness—it was not built to endure warfare on its own soil but rather to export conflict. Sustained bombardment and structural damage disrupt Israeli society and erode public confidence in government and security institutions.

Israel’s lack of strategic depth—concentrated strikes at its heart cause real paralysis in economic and civic mobility, inflicting enduring damage that is hard to swiftly repair. Vital energy and transport infrastructure lack sufficient protection against precise strikes.

By contrast, Iran—with 1,648,195 km², the 18th largest country—is geographically deep. It enjoys strategic depth and flexible maneuver options when faced with extensive strikes.

Although Israeli strikes hit air-defense and command sites, Iran’s resilience remains tied to its ability to protect strategic assets from full destruction or disruption of hostile strike effectiveness.

Are American Interests on the Target List?

A central question in strategic analysis is America’s role amid the escalating Iran–Israel confrontation. The US, until recently conducting indirect nuclear talks with Tehran, was not immune to the “misdirection” preceding Israel’s first strike.

While President Donald Trump quickly lauded the Israeli strike as “perfect,” asserting that Iran’s 60-day deadline to reach a nuclear deal had expired, he later emphasized that Washington did not seek wide war, hoping instead to bring Iran back to the negotiating table.

Trump also claimed the US “had nothing to do with the Israeli strike on Iran,”

adding that any Iranian attack on America would be met “with unprecedented maximum force.”

This apparent Discord in American messaging—praising the strike, urging restraint, and threatening force—reveals a structural ambivalence within US institutions about entering a new Middle East war, despite the deep strategic alliance with Israel. It reflects a dual desire: protect Israel without becoming ensnared in open conflict with Iran.

In this context, a US official told Al Jazeera that “the United States remains uninterested in military involvement alongside Israel in targeting Iranian nuclear sites,” expressing hope that Iran would return to negotiations and seek peace.

Similarly, Washington clarified early in the Iranian counterstrike that it was not engaged in offensive operations—but was integrated into joint air-defense systems protecting Israel. The US played a practical role by integrating defense coverage to safeguard the region.

One Iranian official told CNN that Iran “will respond firmly to any country that supports the Zionist regime,” implicitly alluding to US bases in the region potentially becoming direct targets if the confrontation escalates.

Such remarks suggest Tehran includes US interests in the region as potential targets—but is exercising strategic discipline, aware that direct confrontation with America would escalate beyond control and justify a major US strike on Iranian infrastructure, leveraging its superiority in air, missile, and technology systems amid factions within the US administration advocating for such action.

Conversely, Iran is treating the US–Israel alliance as a fixed reality while seeking to compartmentalize the theater of confrontation. By intensifying pressure on Israel and warning regional powers hosting US bases, Iran intends to prevent American escalation without provoking a regional conflict that could destabilize the broader geopolitical order.

Tehran’s undeclared threat to US interests is part of a preventive deterrence strategy designed to diminish direct US military backing for Israel—without provoking a justification for war.

This current confrontation between Iran and Israel is more than a military escalation—it represents a central clash in the project to reshape the Middle East’s balance of power. Israel’s goal extends beyond altering Iran’s nuclear trajectory: it seeks to neutralize Tehran’s influence or prompt regime collapse.

The decisive factor will be Iran’s ability to maintain its offensive capability and sustain pressure on Israel’s domestic front. If Tehran can keep applying high-caliber, sustained pressure, it will present an unprecedented challenge to

Netanyahu's government—leaving Israeli security institutions exposed to such prolonged internal bombing, with no sanctuary and no proximate political resolution in sight.

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