

The US and Iran are content with a proxy war for now

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Over a week after the attack on the US base near the Syrian–Jordanian border, the United States finally implemented the promised “*retaliation strike*”.

According to the sources from CENTCOM (*US Central Military Command*), the US Air Force, launched three wave attack: “*struck more than 85 targets in Syria and Iraq, using numerous aircraft, including long-range bombers. More than 125 high-precision munitions were used during the airstrikes*”. The Central Command reported that the facilities that were struck included “*command and control operations, centers, intelligence centers, rockets, and missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicle storages, and logistics and munition supply chain facilities of militia groups and their IRGC sponsors who facilitated attacks against US and Coalition forces*”.

Commenting on the “*retaliation strike*”, President J. Biden and Defense Secretary L. Austin almost simultaneously vowed that the strikes could continue, but the United States did not want a big war in the Middle East. According to them, Washington's goal is to demonstrate that no hostile action against the United States will not remain without a mighty response.

Thus, the predictions that an open and unfettered war with Iran is contrary to the interests of the Biden team, and the United States as a whole, and they will not go to such a war, were justified. This is not about verbal assurances of Biden and Austin, but that Washington, with its strike, has already outlined the geography of the “*zone of retaliation*”, and that its punitive hand will not stretch beyond Iraq, Syria and, possibly, Yemen.

A few days before the operation, the influential American publication *Politico*, citing its sources in the Pentagon, wrote that the US Central Command was considering several options for a retaliation operation. In particular, the publication specifically mentioned two options: either an attack on Iranian proxies in Syria and Iraq, or an attack on Iranian navy deployed in the Persian Gulf. The latter option would inevitably entail a situation in which the Iranian Armed Forces and the IRGC elite units would no longer have any excuses against starting a direct and full-scale war with the United States in the Middle East and the western part of the Indian Ocean. While the first option, already being implemented, provides both sides with the necessary political space to avoid a head-on collision while saving face.

On the eve of the elections and in the context of the internal political crisis in the USA, considering the possibility of the “X” moment occurring on the Ukrainian front, Washington does not need a big conflict in the Middle East with unpredictable consequences. Exactly like Iran, which is experiencing economic problems, suffering from harsh sanctions and straining its resources to contain hostile advances along

the perimeter of its zone of geopolitical interests, to which such a war could have disastrous consequences.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the parties are mutually interested, as before, in the format of a proxy war on a “neutral” territory and, in many respects, “by proxy hands”, and therefore will strictly adhere to such a plan of actions, despite publicly voiced threats to initiate a total war against each other. In this regard, the main problem for them now is not so much the fact of mutual strikes on a foreign territory, but the possible loss of control to ensure this “exchange” does not develop into something more and existentially unacceptable.