

Iran, Israel, and Armenia

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The tit-for-tat escalations between Iran and Israel over the last 15 years have garnered fascinating insights into both nations' doctrines and military strategies. Iran has used a strategy of deception playing games against military planners in the West. The strategy here is simple, to show weakness as a sign of strength, or strength as a sign of weakness, a very innovative strategy as one part of a larger deterrence doctrine. One example is military parades with dummy equipment showing off military hardware that, according to some experts, is not yet in its inventory. However, it makes military brass in the West second guess themselves. A second example is Iran's claimed quantum processor that, again, according to some researchers, turned out to be a development board. On the flip side Israel has massively propagated the perception of its Iron Dome system and its conscription of women as a deterrence value in their military power. Military science dictates many tactics, such as the above mentioned, and are part of doctrines based on deterrence. To add, Iran and Israel explicitly understand and practice these types of deterrence value strategies, including proportionate escalation upon being attacked, also often known as horizontal escalation, with both nations acting as experts on these military concepts. A quick dive into how the recent tit-for-tat played out and what the future looks like is on everyone's mind including how this will affect Armenia if Iran is struck by a coalition (NATO) force.

Israel struck the Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing Iran's top soldier, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, among other Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders. It has long been Israel's strategy to take out leading military and science figureheads, as evidenced by the killing of scientists in Iran from the nuclear research facilities. Iran's retaliation after the consulate bombings follows strict doctrinal protocol with proportionate escalation to instigate a deterrence value. Using proportionate escalation is a method to preserve the current level of tit-for-tat escalation, ensuring that Israel's counter retaliatory response will also be proportionate, while the retaliation itself solidifies Iran's ability to respond. In counter response, Israel took its time and mounted a smaller scale attack, again ensuring itself that a counter-counter-Iranian retaliatory response would also be limited in scale. These actions highlight military and doctrinal concepts that support deterrence value, in both nations.

Conduits for either nation's propaganda have a set of belief systems, however larger Israeli strikes can achieve military strategic objectives in Iran, if executed. Israeli support for Azerbaijan in the 44-day war of 2020 proved that circumventing air defense systems is

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manageable and with the bunker buster bombs in the Israeli inventory, it is possible to get at the core of Iran, but with a great difficulty. This is due to well-prepared underground fortifications and nuclear facilities deep underground. Furthermore, Iran's lack of air force also plays in favor of Israel's advantage for a larger strike package inside Iran. Moreover, with the Coalition support, deep strikes can also reduce Iran's capacity to counterstrike, however a full tit-for-tat scenario is out of scope of this article. It is worth noting though that the potential for coalition strikes is connected to the secrecy of underground ballistic missiles silos with many already geolocated by amateurs; it remains to be known just how much U.S. or Israeli intelligence has collected on silos scattered throughout the nation. To add, Iran's latest strike also relates to a spoofing doctrine, which essentially gives away exactly where these ballistic launches occurred, to baffle intelligence on other key strategic infrastructure. The primary issue regarding the entire tit-for-tat escalation, was that Iran's deterrence value counterstrike was implemented due to the limiting capacity it would have had in the future against major Israeli strikes. This military decision to retaliate is based on the idea of risking all-out war with the chance of potentially deterring or delaying a coalition strike in the future. Without deterrence, the likelihood of a larger coalition strike becomes more inevitable.

Other questions, that arise, revolve around the Israeli bases in Azerbaijan and the capacity at which they will be utilized. Experts note that these are purely used as intelligence centers, while others believe that they can be turned into launch platforms. However, alternatively, Russia has allowed Israeli support to Azerbaijan back from around 2015 and possibly before, which highlights Russian *laissez-faire* attitudes towards Israeli-Azerbaijani relations, especially when Russia's stranglehold on the region is prominent and can prevent such diplomatic relations if it chooses to do so. This *laissez-faire* attitude could mean several things with one scenario, including Russian support for Azerbaijani objectives in Karabagh, with another being potential deals broken between Russia and Israel, which favor Russia in other diplomatic arenas at the cost of Armenian national objectives or Russian influence over Azerbaijan, whichever way one looks at it.

Israel's military capacity is beyond Azerbaijan's intelligence centers with plenty of satellites, and high-tech reconnaissance, which can gather intelligence in real time without the use of these bases in AzR. Though, this is not to say Israel would limit itself with a foothold in the region. Furthermore, many are convinced that Iran will strike Israeli military property in AzR if tensions arise, however this is also not the case due to the warm relations Iran tries to keep with Azerbaijan, which is contrary to the accepted notion at face value. Alternatively, if the bases are used as launch platforms, there is no doubt that Iran will strike. The bottom line is that Israel has the full capability to bomb Iran with impunity and achieve, at least, a small part of its strike objectives, and if the coalition joins the strike package – further damage can be inflicted. This scenario of a larger coalition strike on Iran is continuously being prepared for by Iran's powerhouse military strategists. If this situation arises, Iran has the potential to overcome the strikes in a minimum amount of time and return to normal, however the lack of trade, and open access, and the deterrent value Iran provides for Armenia can have deeper strategic impact. Azerbaijan can benefit from Israeli

strikes, and if Israel notices Armenian–Iranian relations faltering, it could serve as one, but perhaps small, contributing factor to instigate larger strikes, however small the influencing factor might be. These strikes will in turn support Azerbaijani pressures on Armenia even if lasting peace has been formulated between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This means that the warm and cordial relationship between Armenia and Iran, that has been nurtured over the years and is continuing post 44-day war, must persevere. It seems for now that Azerbaijani–Israeli relations go far beyond arms purchases and include coordinated policies.