

„Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act.” — Albert Einstein

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

No.289, March - April 2023 | www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro

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III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



Israel in the Eye of the Storm

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On April 8, an Iranian-backed Palestinian militia called Liwa al-Quds (Jerusalem Brigade) fired about six Grad missiles in two waves from Syrian territory toward northern Israel. This dangerous escalation came just days after Hamas fired about forty Grad and Katyusha rockets from southern Lebanon into the Galilee regions of northern Israel. In these two attacks, the Israel Defence Forces responded with limited airstrikes targeting locations in southern Lebanon, southern Syria and the region of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

On the other hand, officials of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia and the Palestinian Hamas spoke of a strategy that began to work on the basis of the so-called axis of resistance (which is Iran and the militias that support it in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine). The title of this strategy is “the unification of the arenas of resistance”. So where is the Israeli-Iranian conflict headed in light of this new reality?

At the outset, it must be emphasised that the Middle East in general is experiencing fundamental changes and fluctuations in the relations of the capitals there. These changes are directly linked to larger changes taking place in the world in light of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the rise of China, alongside an incoherent and less stringent US policy than it was at the start of the current millennium. Given the strategic relations between Washington and major countries in the Middle East, led by Israel and Saudi Arabia, any American retreat, even temporary, will reflect on allies and enemies alike. The new Iranian scene must be analysed on this basis.

The Iranian Scene

Undoubtedly, the turn-to-the-East strategy, which many Iranian officials have mentioned, led by the current Iranian President, Ibrahim Raisi, is beginning to bear fruit. Iranian-Russian relations have clearly contributed to the development of the Islamic Republic's military capabilities, while the development of Iran-China relations has provided significant economic support that has been translated into a geopolitical rise in the Middle East, which has reached its peak recently due to Tehran's denial on the European offer to return to the negotiating table on the issue of its nuclear program.

On the other hand, the long Iranian military arm, represented by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), has increased its movements and attacks on various fronts in the Middle East. This overconfidence of



Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/cross-border-fire-gaza-after-israeli-police-raid-al-aqsa-mosque-2023-04-05/>

Iran, which has recently pushed it to escalate against Israel on the fronts of Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza, can be seen as a sign of the rise of the Eastern lobby (Russia, China and Iran) in the Middle East at its expense western lobby (USA, NATO). This confidence in the East Bank is matched with a mix of erratic foreign policies on the other side.

The Scene in Israel

In Israel, there are complications related to two levels. The first is external. With Netanyahu's victory in the recent elections and the formation of a right-wing government, and extremist figures assuming high positions in the government, Israel's relations with its most important ally in Washington have deteriorated. Democrats in the White House clearly do not support this administration and are unhappy with its domestic and regional policies in general. This tension with Washington was reflected in Israel's prestige regionally, as the normalisation process with neighbouring Arab countries was interrupted.

As for complications at home, the Netanyahu government's proposed judicial overhaul has created a rift with the opposition and led citizens to massive protest rallies, demonstrating the internal division.

These internal and external complications have clearly affected Israel's military deterrence, and despite occasional military strikes by the Israeli Armed Forces inside Syrian territory, the weaknesses of the Netanyahu government are being exploited by its enemies, led by Iran.

Officials in Israel know that any military action against the Hamas and Jihad militias in Gaza will produce results no different from those produced by the latest round of clashes in May 2021. Also, the Lebanese front has become more complex, especially after the signing of the maritime border demarcation agreement and Israel's desire to become an important energy country. The capabilities of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia allow it to strike the natural gas pumping platforms in the strategic Karish field in any possible round of military escalation with Israel. As for striking Iran's nuclear programme, it is a suicidal step without a green light and explicit American support. This military backdrop literally ties the hands of the Netanyahu government.

Today, Israel finds itself in the eye of a Tehran-led storm whose reach stretches from Natanz in Iran to Sana'a in Yemen, passing through Baghdad, Damascus, the suburbs of Beirut and Gaza. A storm through which the Islamic Republic of Iran is working to impose a new reality on the Middle East, in which Washington is a pawn in the shadow of the rising Chinese player. Meanwhile Israel is turning from a country that imposes its vision to one that watches with fear for Tehran's next move.