



Iranians attend the funeral procession for the seven Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps members killed in an Israeli strike in Syria, in Tehran on April 5, 2024.  
● HOSSEIN BERIS/AFP

turning point in the expanding Gaza conflict. Several countries have warned their citizens this week against travelling to the region. The war on Gaza, which has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, has already expanded beyond the narrow enclave. Iran-allied Lebanese group Hezbollah has been exchanging fire with Israeli forces daily. The Houthis have been firing missiles and drones at Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea, demanding an end to the war, and a US-led coalition has been targeting the Yemeni group to stem its attacks. But the trend towards regional escalation appeared to have subsided somewhat after Iraqi armed groups halted their attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria — at the request of Tehran, according to several media reports. A drone attack by Iran-backed Iraqi groups had killed three US soldiers at a base near the Jordan-Syria border. The US then retaliated with a series of strikes in Iraq and Syria, but the crisis was eventually contained.

**'Pressure' on US, Israel**

Now, the region is once again staring at the prospect of a widened conflict. "The pressure is now on Israel and the US rather than Iran. And yes, there are a lot of threatening remarks directed at Iran in the hope that the Iranians don't act. But the die was first cast by Israel," said Vali Nasr, a professor of international affairs at John Hopkins University. "And now people are trying to avoid what might be consequences." Biden does not want the US to be pulled into a war

with Iran, particularly as he seeks re-election in November. But Washington's default policy has long been to support Israel, Nasr added. "The American position is that they don't want the war to expand. They don't want to be dragged into a war with Iran. They don't want the Gaza war to become a regional war," he told Al Jazeera. "They may be saying things to Israel behind the scenes, but I think publicly they're trying to warn Iran not to escalate the war as well." But he added that every country has to contend with domestic politics in its foreign policy. "And in the United States, giving ironclad guarantees to Israel's defence is already a given." In Washington, Iran hawks are urging a forceful American response if Israel is attacked. Republican Senator Tom Cotton called on Wednesday for "joint American-Israeli retaliation" that would be "swift and devastating" to any Iranian military move against Israel.

**'Obvious de-escalatory path'**

For his part, Parsi of the Quincy Institute stressed that the best remedy to the simmering tensions across the Middle East is ending the war in Gaza. "In the broader picture, there has, of course, been an obvious de-escalatory path that has always been available to Biden, and that is to push for a cease-fire in Gaza," Parsi said. "A cease-fire would have stopped the attacks by Iraqi militias on the US, would have stopped the Houthi attacks, would have stopped the escalation between Iran and Israel and Israel and Hezbollah."

The full article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

gerous Israeli behavior in the wider region for years. Unconditional US support for the war in Gaza has led the Israeli cabinet to believe that it can keep pushing its luck with more provocative actions against regional states as well. Now, the Israeli cabinet is potentially facing some real blowback, and the US should want no part of it. US and Israeli interests have been diverging for decades, but US policy has failed to keep up. The president remains wedded

to a version of the relationship from the previous century with an entity that no longer exists. We need to bring US policy up to date and to bring it into line with the current realities of the Middle East, and to do that the US has to give up this idea of an "ironclad" commitment to Israel.

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The illustration depicts US President Joe Biden (R) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.  
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# Israel versus Iran

## What an open war between them could look like

By Anthony Capaccio  
Reporter  
**PERSPECTIVE**

The US and its European allies fear that an April 1 attack in Syria that killed several Iranian officers could push Israel and Iran to the verge of something they've avoided for decades: open war. Until now, Iran, with one exception, has used its backed groups to attack Israel, while Israel has avoided air strikes on Iranian soil. Now, Israel is bracing for retaliation for the strike in Damascus, a prospect provoking fears of a regional conflict.

**How might a war between them be fought?**

At this point, the two likeliest scenarios appear to be a missile barrage into Israeli territory, either from Iranian-backed groups in Lebanon, from Iran itself, or a swarming drone assault. A more remote possibility is that Iran could also direct the groups to deploy fighters on the ground from Syria or Lebanon. The details of Iran's current capabilities contained in a US Defense Intelligence Agency assessment released with little fanfare on April 11 suggested that any Iranian attack on Israel would likely be a combination of missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones.

with David's Sling air defense systems and perhaps with a system called Drone Guard made by ELTA Systems.

**Allies, their possible roles**

Iran's most important allies are the Shiite resistance groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen that it supports with money, weapons, and training. The Lebanese group Hezbollah would be positioned to play the most significant role. It's fought repeated battles with Israel and has been regularly firing missiles, mortars, and rockets into northern Israel since war broke out in October between Israel and the Iran-backed resistance Palestinian group Hamas. Hezbollah's arsenal contains more than 70,000 rockets and missiles, including long-range and precision-guided missiles, according to Israeli intelligence. An escalation of its attacks on Israel could test the entity's defenses at a time when it was also confronting Iran and Hamas. Iran's only state ally in the Middle East is Syria. The government of President Bashar al-Assad would be unlikely to be of assistance given that it's still struggling to gain control over the entire country following the outbreak of war in 2011. Iran has good relations with Russia, though its war in Ukraine would likely limit its ability to help, and with China, which has bought Iranian oil though it remains sanctioned by the US and allies. Israel has the US on its side. Already the US is



People walk by replicas of domestically-made missiles and UAV's in Tehran, Iran, in February 2024.  
● HOSSEIN BERIS/AFP

"Tehran's missile force is increasingly augmented by Iran's UAVs and serves as the regime's primary conventional deterrent against attacks on its personnel and territory," the agency said. It added that Iran has a "substantial inventory" of ballistic and cruise missiles capable of striking targets 2,000 kilometers, or about 1,250 miles, away — putting Israel well within range. Israeli fighters would be expected to strike back, including those in its fleet of stealthy F-35I Adir and non-stealthy F-15I fighters. An F-35 made aviation history when the Israeli Air Force announced in November that it had shot down a cruise missile from the southeast headed toward Israeli airspace. Israel scrambled navigational signals over the Tel Aviv metropolitan area early this month in preparation for an Iranian attack, a showcase of its capabilities. Another likelihood is cyber war. More than a decade ago, malware known as Stuxnet compromised operations at an Iranian nuclear enrichment facility in what's suspected to have been a US and Israeli operation. Pro-Iranian hackers have also launched attacks of their own, including a hack that sought to cripple computers and water flow for two Israeli districts, according to the Council on Foreign Relations.

**Israeli, Iranian military capabilities**

Iran has massive stockpiles of cheap but effective weapons in its arsenal. It's safe to assume that Iran has hundreds if not thousands of one-way drones in its inventory to attack Israel. Israel would counter ballistic missiles with its Arrow interceptors and drone attacks possibly

expediting shipments of munitions to Israel, to help it fight Hamas. Among the US forces in the Middle East region are two Navy destroyers that moved to the eastern Mediterranean in early April, according to a Navy official: the USS Carney and the USS Arleigh Burke, both capable of air defense. Early in the Israel-Hamas war, the Pentagon moved its newest aircraft carrier, the Gerald R. Ford, and its battle group into the eastern Mediterranean. It has since returned home. The Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group is on its way from operations against the Houthis. Each bristles with F/A-18E/F Super Hornet fighter jets and other advanced aircraft. In addition, 2,000 Marines were put on heightened alert for potential mobilization.

**How might Arab states react?**

An Israel-Iran war would put many of the countries in the region in a difficult position. Four Arab countries made peace deals with Israel in 2020 via the so-called Abraham Accords. Their distrust of Iran was part of what brought them together. But it's unlikely any Arab state would stand with Israel in a confrontation against a fellow Muslim country, let alone one as powerful as Iran. Iran and Saudi Arabia last year restored diplomatic relations after a seven-year freeze. Saudi Arabia has been exploring the possibility of normalizing ties with Israel as part of a broader deal in which it hopes to attain US security guarantees, and it would likely try to avoid becoming embroiled in the conflict.

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