Empowered by Biden's grant of impunity

Netanyahu violates Vienna Convention, plays the victim

By Juan Cole

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O P I N I O N

It was not only the strike on the Iranian embassy that set the stage for Iran's barrage but also the six months of intensive Israeli bombing of the Palestinians of Gaza, in which the vast majority of those killed were innocent non-combatants, with 70% being women and children and many others noncombatant men. The death toll now stands at 33,686 Palestinians.

Only a small clique of fighters committed the horrific October 7 attack on Israel, without telling anyone else what they were planning. There is no military or other justification for using an artificial intelligence program to identify all members of Hamas's paramilitary (some of which is the equivalent of a neighborhood watch for local security) and to murder them from the skies along with their spouses, children, extended families, and neighbors.

Iran is pledged to defend the Palestinians, and Israeli atrocities have set the blood of the peoples in the Middle East to boiling and much raised the esteem in which they hold Iran. The embassy strike was the last straw. If Iran did not reply to it at least symbolically, its credibility, and any deterrence it was perceived to have, became a joke.

Netanyahu for his part was attempting to provoke Iran, in the hope that Tehran would take the bait. He knew that even Washington had come to see Israel as the aggressor in Gaza and that he was losing support in Congress. He knew that if the issue became an Iranian attack on Israel, the Western capitals would all rally around him and forgive him, at least for a while, for having brought the Israeli equivalent of Neo-Nazis into his cabinet and then gone Amalek on tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians.

Earlier on Saturday the naval section of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps boarded and confiscated a container ship in the Gulf of Oman that belongs to the company of one of Netanyahu's billionaire backers. While this action violated the law of the sea and can't be condoned, it hit Netanyahu where it hurts, and no one would have cared about it in the outside world.

Now, we have to suffer with Netanyahu proclaiming his victimhood (he started it) and suffering through statements of solidarity with his fascist cabinet.

As many observers are pointing out, this very dangerous situation was caused by President Joe Biden's mishandling of the Gaza crisis. He should have cut Netanyahu off at the knees by January 1, once it became clear that the Israelis were implementing their notorious Amalek imperative, which implied genocide. By vetoing three United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding a ceasefire and by undercutting the only one he allowed to pass by branding it non-binding, Biden let the butchery continue apace. It continued the past week, during which Israel continued to bomb the bejesus out of Gaza, to kill hundreds of innocents, and to starve them (despite phony pledges to let more aid in, on which Netanyahu did not follow through).

Biden, UK PM Rishi Sunak, and other leaders could also have defused the deliberate provocation of Iran by Netanyahu by simply condemning the embassy attack of April 1 and defending the Vienna Convention. The Iranian mission to the UN said this plainly:

"Had the UN Security Council condemned the Zionist regime's reprehensible act of aggression on our diplomatic premises in Damascus and subsequently brought to justice its perpetrators, the imperative for Iran to punish this rogue regime might have been obviated."

Instead, Biden and his allies declined to condemn Netanyahu's action, continuing the North Atlantic insouciance toward Israeli war crimes and continuing the implementation of their double standard whereby International Humanitarian Law applies only to white people. That is, there is not as much difference between Trumpian white nationalism and Biden's foreign policy as it might seem on the surface, though the latter is, of course, worse.

The full article first appeared on Informed Comment.

US President Joe Biden (3rd-R) meets with members of the National Security team in the White House Situation Room regarding the unfolding missile attacks on Israel from Iran on April 13, 2024.
● *ADAM SCHULTZ/THE WHITE HOUSE*

Revenge, geopolitics and ideology

Why did Iran attack Israel?

People wave the Palestinian and Iranian flags as they gather in the streets of Tehran in celebration of Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel on April 13, 2024.
● *ATTA KENARE/AFP*

By Daniel Harper

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PERSPECTIVE

Iranian missiles and drones rained down on Israel on Saturday, tipping the pair close to war. But why? What is driving hostility between Israel and Iran?
The Middle East is currently on high alert, bracing for more potential violence between Israel and Iran.
This heightened state of readiness comes in the wake of an unprecedented Iranian attack on Israel overnight from Saturday to Sunday, with Tehran launching hundreds of drones and missiles.
But why? What has pushed the two powers into direct confrontation?

Recent events in Syria

A recent air strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria has reignited hostilities between the regional rivals.

Israel is suspected of being behind the attack, though it has not claimed responsibility.

Several senior military officers, including two top Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders, were killed in the strike, with Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei threatening to "slap" Israel in retaliation.

However, the incident underscored deep-seated animosity between the two nations, rooted in decades of geopolitical rivalry and ideological differences.

Initially, during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, bilateral relations were relatively peaceful. Iran was even one of the first Muslim-majority countries to recognise Israel's statehood.

This suited Israel's diplomatic stance toward creating ties with non-Arab neighbours, as the Arab nations surrounding Israel were hostile after events like the 'Nakba' and the Six-Day War.

The dynamics shifted dramatically with the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which saw the establishment of the anti-Western Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. This regime change led to the severance of diplomatic ties between Iran and Israel, with Iran's new theocratic rulers not recognising the legitimacy of Israel.

They rallied in support of fellow Muslims in Palestine and denounced Israel as an imperialist creation of the US.

A cold peace followed. However, the onset of Yitzhak Rabin's cabinet in Israel in the early-mid 1990s saw an adoption of a more assertive stance towards Iran.

One reason was the defeat of Iraq by the US in the Gulf War, which shifted regional power towards Israel and Iran.

The rhetoric between the two nations then intensified during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran in the 2000s, who made inflammatory statements against Israel, exacerbating bilateral tensions.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology since the 2000s has raised alarm bells in Israel and beyond, with fears of a potential nuclear arms race in the region.

Spheres of influence

One of the key drivers of conflict between Iran and Israel is their pursuit of influence in the Middle East through proxy wars.

Iran has a long history of supporting resistance groups such as Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War and Hamas in Gaza, both of which have engaged in armed conflict with Israel.

Israel has conducted numerous military strikes against Iranian targets in Syria, perceiving Tehran's presence as a direct threat to its security.

Iran and Israel have been engaged in a prolonged proxy conflict since 1985, significantly shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Both countries have provided support to opposing factions in Syria and Yemen.

In Syria, Iran backed the Syrian government, while Israel has supported opposition groups.

In Yemen, Iran has supported the Houthis, while Israel has assisted the Saudi-led coalition.

These conflicts are driven by geopolitical interests with each trying to undermine the other or achieve goals that would enhance their position.

Hostilities have extended into realms such as cyber-attacks and sabotage, targeting each other's infrastructure, including nuclear facilities and oil tankers.

Entanglement in Israel–Hamas war

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has further heightened tensions in the region.

Iranian leaders have openly criticized Israel's military operations in Gaza, expressing support for Hamas and other groups engaged in attacks against Israeli targets.

The recent escalation of violence in Gaza has exacerbated the already volatile situation, raising concerns about the potential for further conflict across the Middle East.

The conflict between Iran and Israel holds significant implications not only for the region but also for international actors like the United States.

With Israel being a key ally of the US, any escalation in tensions could draw American involvement, impacting broader strategic interests in the Middle East.

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