



The Chief Commander of the IRGC Major General Hossein Salami (R) and Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (L) walk past a Palestinian flag at a gathering in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 6, 2023.
● MAJID ASGARIPOUR/WANA



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INTERVIEW

After Iran's missile and drone retaliation against the Israeli regime, a number of Western officials, including the British and German foreign ministers, made their way to the occupied territories to stand by the regime. What were the motives behind these visits? What impact will Iran's military action have on the regional and neighboring countries that have ties with Israel? Shuaib Bahman, an expert in international affairs and the director of the Contemporary World Research Institute, provided some insights to Iran Daily in an exclusive interview.

West struggles to break free from Israel's crisis

Iran's strike tips scales for Tehran's diplomacy



IRAN DAILY: Following Hamas's operation on October 7, numerous Western officials jetted off to Israel to pledge their allegiance to the regime. Recently, some European officials, like the foreign ministers of Germany and the United Kingdom, made similar visits to the occupied territories. How should we interpret these visits?

BAHMAN: These visits carry two-fold significance. First, they serve as a show of solidarity with the Israeli regime and the atrocities it committed in the Gaza Strip over the past seven months. The West continues to stand by Israel without denouncing the genocide it is perpetrating. The second aspect, however, pertains to the future of Israel and countering Iran's military measure taken on April 14. It appears that Israel finds itself in a tight spot where a significant direct strike on Iran's soil would invite a harsher retaliation and pose a tougher challenge. On the other hand, refraining from such action signifies an acknowledgment of defeat. So, in either scenario, Israel emerges as the ultimate loser. The visit of Western officials to Israel aims to explore avenues to navigate the regime out of its current complex predicament.

Following Iran's military action, Western governments threw their weight behind Israel but also advised it against retaliating against Iran or targeting Iranian territory. Do you believe these gestures are part of the same strategy to bail out Israel? That could very well be the case. As the initial rhetoric from Israeli

authorities and their threats of a direct assault on Iranian soil simmered down, discussions centered around alternative responses. This dilemma not only poses a challenge for Israel but also for Western nations, particularly Europeans. Given that the escalation of the turmoil in West Asia will inevitably spill over to affect Europe, it appears that they are keen on avoiding further escalation between Iran and Israel, at least for the time being. Europeans find themselves in a tight spot as well, torn between showing support for Israel and preventing the escalation of tensions.

In this special case, America refrained from backing Israel's immediate retaliation despite restating its unwavering support. What realities does Washington's position imply?

Washington's calls on Tehran and Tel Aviv to show restraint are influenced by its domestic considerations, including the upcoming presidential elections, and global diplomatic relations. Engaging in a fresh conflict would have adverse effects on domestic public sentiment and American voters. Moreover, persisting with a policy of unilateralism and unwavering support for Israel prompts countries in the West Asian region to bolster ties and collaboration with other global players like China and Russia. Another significant factor at play is the cost-benefit analysis. Should Israel and subsequently the United States engage in a conflict with Iran, America's vulnerability in the region would be increased. Numerous American military bases in the area would be made sus-

ceptible to Iranian attacks without yielding substantial gains for the US. This course of action would also undermine America's international standing. Consequently, the Americans are currently averse to direct military confrontation with Iran. Following the Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria, the US conveyed messages to Iran indicating a lack of intent for war and urging Iranian restraint. Naturally, Iran reciprocated with cautionary messages as well.

Throughout decades of antagonism with Israel, Arab governments have largely avoided direct confrontations with Israel, particularly since the 1970s. Simultaneously, there exists a rift between Arab nations and their governments regarding support for Palestine. Do you believe that Iran's response to Israel's aggression will have a psychological impact on the region's governments and populace?

Iran's military retaliation against Israel garnered widespread approval and elation among the region's populace. This sentiment is evident from online reactions seen in cyberspace. Many users lauded Iran's actions while scolding their own governments. Iran's missile and drone strike could amplify the voices of the Arab people demanding more overt and resolute backing of Palestine from their respective governments. Of course, due to the constrained political environments in these nations, these pressures might not significantly sway the governments, yet they are likely to elevate the status and reputation of the Islamic Republic of Iran

among the region's populations. Furthermore, the countries of the region got to witness Iran's prowess, deterrence capability, and independent foreign policy. Iran adopted a policy that no Arab nation can adopt.

In essence, Tehran's military action served as a strategic asset, bolstering Iran's diplomatic influence.

Over the past few years, Israel has broadened its ties with some regional countries, including Iran's neighbors, and has even forged military ties. Do you reckon that the establishment of Iran's deterrence could have an impact on these specific ties?

The core strategy of the Islamic Republic towards its neighbors revolves around enhancing ties and fostering peace and stability. However, the recent altercation between Iran and Israel could prompt a reassessment of the policies of these countries or certain neighboring states. They believed that cozying up to Israel would offer them a protective shield and potentially enable them to plot against Iran from behind this shield. For instance, Iran has clearly set boundaries in the Caucasus region. Going forward, these nations will adopt a more pragmatic approach towards the region and Iran. They have come to understand that relying on Israel does not equate to security. While the likelihood of these countries distancing themselves from Israel remains slim due to their foreign policy, they will undoubtedly reconsider the prospect of allowing Israel to use their territory or resources against Iran.

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