

Israel's strikes in Syria hurt Iran

IAF attacks are forcing Iran in Syria and its proxies in Iraq to go underground.



IAF attacks Syrian and Iranian targets in Syria, November 20, 2019 -(photo credit: YEDIOT M'HASHETACH (TELEGRAM))

The Israel Air Force has been unrelenting toward the Iranian build-up in Syria despite the dangers these attacks pose, most of all, the fear of incidents of clashes between the IAF and Russian Air Force planes.

No doubt the major reason for Israel's offensive posture toward the Iranian build-up in contrast to the containment policy directed both toward Gaza in the South and Hezbollah in the North, stems from the desire to prevent the introduction on a mass scale of precision-guided missiles against Israel and the establishment of a local Iranian-run weapons industry in Syria. Israeli leaders and just recently the IDF's chief of staff have spelled this out clearly on numerous occasions.

But there is clearly another reason behind Israel's resolve in striking the Iranians in Syria that dovetails with the American strategy toward Iran: increasing the costs of Iran's imperialism.

United States-led sanctions against Iran have struck hard. The BBC in six charts tells a woeful tale equivalent to thousands of words of recent Iranian economic decline. The Iranian economy boomed with the announcement of the nuclear deal struck between Iran and the world's major powers to record a 12% growth rate in 2016. With Trump's inauguration that growth rate decreased to 3% the following year. By the end of 2018, during which the sanctions against Iran were renewed, the Iranian economy had contracted by more than 3% and by a further 9% in 2019.

Most of that decline can be attributed to the effects of sanctions on Iran's oil production and even more critically, the decline of oil exports. Iran's oil production has declined by nearly 40%, from 3.8 to 2.4 million barrels a day, with an even steeper decline for exports, from nearly 2.5 million barrels daily to less than half a million.

The black market rate for the Iranian rial meanwhile has slid from 40,000 to the dollar to stabilize at 120,000. Little wonder then that car sales in Iran declined from a high of 1.5 million in 2017 to just less than one million a year later.

Worse still, China, one of the few friends the Islamic Republic has, and certainly the strongest and least threatening, which was heavily invested in Iranian energy production, has recently diversified its oil imports away from Iran in the fear of disruptions of oil supply due to tensions with the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, especially after its attack on Abkaik, Saudi Arabia's largest oil field, and nearby oil processing center. It is choosing instead to increasingly rely on Russian energy sources.

NOW IT is the turn of Israel's destructive sorties against Iran's military and economic infrastructure in Syria to increase the costs of a regime just at the time it faces decreasing revenues and a disgruntled and protesting public.

IAF attacks are forcing Iran in Syria and its proxies in Iraq to go underground. Jonathan Spyer reports that the Iranians in the Imam Ali Base in Abu Kamal along the Syria-Iraq border have already created a tunnel system for the storage of missiles and heavy weaponry, which presumably Israel attacked on December 25. The area forms a land bridge between Iran, its Syrian ally Hezbollah, and its Iraqi militia proxies.

The recent devastating US Air Force attack on the military base of the Iraqi Shi'ite Hezbollah Brigades in retaliation for its attack on US personnel in Iraq, which killed at least 25 of their fighters and injured at least double that number, has had much the same effect as Israeli attacks in Syria and Iraq, forcing Iran to expend considerable costs to enable its Syrian and Iraqi proxies to go underground in an attempt to reduce vulnerability.

Building the infrastructure below ground is an expensive proposition, so expensive that even the existing US military bases in the Gulf risk the dangers of operating above ground rather than incurring the costs of building a safer underground infrastructure.

Will such increasing costs prove to be the hair that broke the camel's back?

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and the conservative clerics who back him are probably willing to pay a high price to

continue the build-up project in Syria. Creating a missile siege around Israel based on precision-guided missiles in their strategic thinking is on par in importance with achieving nuclear-strike capabilities.

The regime is also banking on the 2020 presidential elections in the US to bring about the removal of sanctions that will enable it to bring both projects to fruition. As for the European states, three of the most important among them, Germany, France, and Great Britain, have been seeking ways to undermine the sanctions in the desire both to develop Iran as a market for their goods and a source of diversifying away from energy dependence on Russia.

So the Iranian leadership is most likely to buy time by depleting its monetary surplus, the CIA estimated to be 80 billion in 2014, and the monies Iran received as part of the thawing of monetary assets deposited in the United States during the reign of the shah as a result of the nuclear deal.

Fortunately for Israel, even if the probability that increasing costs will not fundamentally change Iranian resolve in pursuing both projects, forcing the Iranian underground in Syria is a benefit incurred at no extra cost to the major aim of denying the buildup in the first place.

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Source:

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