

The Many-Sided Escalation in Middle East? No Sanctions against Israel. Ramping Up the Sanctions against Iran.

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On April 18, the US and UK imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran.

On April 17, European Union leaders had talked aggressively about ramping up sanctions on Iran. This has happened in the wake of Iran's April 13 attack on Israeli targets, which in turn was in response to the April 1 attack on an Iranian consulate building in Syria which killed seven Iranian commanders and which is believed very widely, by almost everyone, to be an Israeli attack.

However while increasing sanctions on Iran, the USA and the UK have not mentioned that the Iran attack itself was in response to an Israeli attack which had killed several Iranian commanders including a very senior one. In all fairness, the USA, the UK and the European Union should have been equally critical towards both attacks, in fact more towards the first one rather than the response to it. However they chose to impose sanctions only on Iran, while ignoring the attack on Iranian personnel and consulate building.

The damage suffered by Iran was clearly higher. It cannot be said that the Iran attack inflicted disproportionate damage. Was this only because of interception success by Israel and its allies? Several analysts feel that Iran had in fact deliberately avoided what could prove to be a highly fatal attack. This is the stand taken, for example, in an article published in Politico under the title '[Iran's Attack Seems like it was Designed to Fail, so what Comes Next?](#)' (14 April, 2014).

In this article, author Michael Hirsh has quoted Ali Vaez of the International Crisis Group as stating about the Iranian response,

“They (Iran) could have used a much higher number of projectiles, synchronized drones and missiles in a way that could have swarmed the air defense systems, and could have fired their new hypersonic missiles.”

The fact that they did not resort to such ways of inflicting more definite and higher harm available to them indicates, this expert has argued, that “they (the Iran side) clearly wanted something spectacular but not fatal.”

In addition, Iran hastened to announce to the international community that from their side the matter concludes here.

Hence the response of Iran can hardly be called so dangerous or escalatory as to call for further sanctions, to add to the many that already exist.

In addition despite the desperate need for peace, there are several other signs of escalation.

On April 15, Israeli opposition leader and former Premier Yair Lapid said that under Netanyahu “Jewish terrorist violence” against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank was “out of control”. Should not such violence be seen as escalatory?

Meanwhile, to mention another worrying front, conditions continue to be very tense on the Israel-Lebanon border too. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a non-profit, between October 7, 2023 and March 15, 2024, militias like Hezbollah in Lebanon on one side and Israel on the other side exchanged at least 4,733 attacks, among them 3,952 (83%) by the Israeli side. However, other estimates mention a higher number of Hezbollah attacks. Israel has evacuated 61,000 people belonging to 43 communities in the Upper Galilee region. According to ACLED, Israeli attacks in Lebanon have killed at least 357 people since October 7, 2023, while on the Israeli side 22 lives have been lost.

On April 18 the leader of Yemen’s Iran-aligned Houthis, who had been attacking shipping in the Red Sea, said that the group had carried out operations in the Indian Ocean and towards southern Israel. Leader Abdul Malik al Houthi said that so far 98 ships had been targeted in attempts to prevent ships heading to Israel from sailing through the Red Sea. He said such attacks would continue till the Israeli offensive in Gaza is stopped.

On April 18, Ahmad Haghtalab, Iranian Guards Commander-in-charge of nuclear security, said that Iran could review its ‘nuclear doctrine’ following increasing Israeli threats.

Hence it is clear that there are deeply worrying escalations at several levels in the Middle East.

All this, it should be remembered, is in addition to the extreme distress of the people of Gaza (where well over a hundred thousand people have been killed, are missing or seriously injured in the course of the six-month conflict) which is almost beyond words.

Those doctors and humanitarian workers who have been familiar with several conflicts have stated that they have seldom seen such extreme hunger and such terrible injuries inflicted on helpless people. There is urgent need for non-partial response and attitudes on the part

of the international community which is difficult to find. On the one hand, human distress is being aggravated and on the other hand the chances of escalation and a bigger conflict are increasing.

Several western analysts have stated that the 1 April attack on the Iranian Consulate was aimed at escalation in such a way that the USA gets more directly involved, but despite this, sanctions were introduced against Iran, not Israel. Hence it is important for many more countries and forces of peace to come forward for a non-partisan approach to resolving the crisis and for peace.

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