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Decoding Israel's Attack on Iran

On 26 October, Israeli Defence Forces carried out airstrikes on 20 military targets in Tehran and Elam and Khuzestan provinces in Western Iran. IDF spokesperson noted that Israeli fighter jets carried out 'precision strikes' on missile production



facilities and air defence systems, which will give Israel broader aerial freedom of operation in Iran. Notably, the operation titled "Days of Repentance" was the first open attack by Israel on Iranian territory. Earlier strikes on Iranian military facilities, most recently in April 2024, were not officially claimed by Israel.

Israeli strikes were the latest in the second round of tit-for-tat strikes that began after Iran launched a barrage of missiles into Israel on 1 October as retaliation against killing of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on 31 July and death of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and IRGC Quds Force operations in the Levant Gen. Abbas Nilforoushan in Israeli airstrikes in Beirut on 27 September. Following the Israeli strikes, Iran's air defence command announced that the integrated air defence system of the country successfully tracked and countered this aggressive action, resulting in limited damage to some areas, and the extent of this incident is under investigation. Subsequently, the Iranian Army said four of its personnel serving in the military air defence had died during the attacks. Iran's mission to the United Nations noted that Israeli jets struck targets in Iran from Iraqi airspace, which remains under the command and control of the US military.

Iran's denial of major damage suggested its preference for de-escalation. However, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Iran considers attacks as a "violation of international law and the United Nations Charter, especially the principle of prohibiting the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of countries" and that it "considers itself entitled and obliged to defend itself against foreign acts of aggression, based on its inherent right of legitimate defence."

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who is the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces stated that Israeli attacks should "neither be exaggerated nor downplayed." In remarks suggesting that Iran was not considering an immediate military response, he said "How to convey this power and resolve of the Iranian nation to the Zionist regime is for our officials to determine." As Israel planned its reprisal, the US military sent THAAD, or the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence System, a critical part of the US military's layered air defence systems to add to Israel's anti-missile defences. Washington also played a role in dialling down tensions between Iran and Israel by convincing the latter to not attack Iran's oil or nuclear facilities.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi made a regional tour covering Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey, seeking assurances that they will not allow Israel to use their land or airspace to

attack Iran. The Times of Israel reported that Gulf Arab States, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, apart from denying their airspace for any attack on Iran, were also lobbying Washington to stop Israel from attacking Iran's oil sites because they are concerned that their own oil facilities could come under fire from Tehran's proxies if the conflict escalates.

Since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, when Iraqi missiles caused damage in major Iranian cities, including Tehran, it is the first time that the heavily populated Iranian capital has been exposed to enemy fire. Iran's two attacks on Israel using drones and missiles, instead of deterring Israel from attacking Iranian territory, have put the two countries on an escalating trajectory. However, as the Israeli military campaign has degraded the military capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah, thus weakening Iran's strategy of seeking deterrence through proxies active close to Israeli borders, Iran is increasingly relying upon its missiles to maintain its tenuous deterrence vis-à-vis Israel. At the same time, Iranian officials have linked Iran's response to Israeli operations and strikes on Iranian territory to developments in Gaza and Lebanon, especially prospects for a ceasefire. This linkage in the Iranian narrative is important as Iran does not want its display of hard power to be interpreted by its Gulf Arab neighbours in terms of Iran having an aggressive intent or dragging the entire region into conflict.

As the Iranian side assesses the damage caused by Israeli strikes, this incident may lead Iran to engage in a counter-attack or it risks being seen as weak and ineffective in the face of the rising direct Israeli threat to Iran. As per reports, Iran has indicated a 'definitive, painful' response to Israel's attack on its soil.

Indonesia's New President Prabowo Subianto: Priorities and Challenges

On 20 October 2024, Indonesia's Prabowo Subianto assumed the presidency of the world's third-largest democracy following a decisive electoral victory in the 14 February 2024 election. Prabowo was sworn in as Indonesia's eighth president during a plenary session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in Jakarta, alongside his vice president, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the 37-year-old eldest son of outgoing President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. Prabowo has introduced Indonesia's largest cabinet since the 1960s, appointing 48 ministers and 58 vice-ministers. While this expanded cabinet may help in securing political stability through coalition-building, it risks increasing government expenses, particularly given Prabowo's promises to implement extensive social welfare programs.



Prabowo Subianto, a former general and son-in-law of Indonesia's ex-President Suharto, rose to prominence after a military career marked by human rights controversies. After leaving the army in the late 1990s, Prabowo became a successful business leader, overseeing ventures in oil, coal, palm oil, and fisheries.

In 2008, he founded the Gerindra Party and ran for vice president in 2009. He later contended for the presidency in both 2014 and 2019 but lost to Jokowi in each election. Despite his defeat in 2019, Prabowo joined Jokowi's cabinet as the Minister of Defence. He won the presidential election through Jokowi's endorsement, with Jokowi's son serving as Prabowo's vice president.

On 20 October, he announced Indonesia's largest-ever Cabinet with 109 members representing his pledge for a strong government. He named his Cabinet of Ministers, Vice-Ministers and head of national agencies the "Red and White Cabinet", referring to the colours of Indonesia's flag. In a symbolic signal of his strong government, President Prabowo Subianto hosted his cabinet on 25 Oct at an army academy retreat where ministers dressed in camouflage fatigues went through drills and marches.

Indonesia's new president has outlined his policy priorities and vision for tackling key national challenges like poverty, inequality, and self-sufficiency in food and energy. Prabowo's presidency represents both continuity and change, as his policies reflect a commitment to social welfare, economic revitalization, and enhancing Indonesia's global diplomatic role while raising concerns regarding governance, resource allocation, and the safeguarding of democratic values.

Upon taking office, President Prabowo underscored the enduring challenge of persistent poverty in Indonesia. His initiative to provide free meals to 83 million schoolchildren across 400,000 schools aims to combat malnutrition and stunted growth, with an estimated annual financial commitment of 71 trillion rupiah (\$4.4 billion). He has also emphasized the importance of economic self-sufficiency, particularly in food and energy. Despite being a leading rice producer, Indonesia struggles to maintain its food supply due to changes in land use and climate change. His administration's focus on food security seeks to reduce import dependency and bolster domestic agriculture. Energy independence, especially through renewable energy projects, is another priority. Prabowo has framed these initiatives as crucial for achieving a sustainable energy supply, reducing reliance on foreign sources, and positioning Indonesia as a leader in Southeast Asia's clean energy development. However, the execution of these plans requires substantial investment and inter-sectoral coordination, which may be challenging given Indonesia's intricate bureaucracy.

Over the past decade, "Jokowi" has used "economic diplomacy" to enhance the manufacturing sector, significantly strengthening the economy. Foreign investment has accelerated infrastructure projects, including the construction of the new capital in "Nusantara" and the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, which is under discussion for further expansion. However, the burden of Chinese debt raises significant concerns for Indonesia.

Indonesia, as the largest nation in Southeast Asia, faces complex geopolitical dynamics while maintaining a carefully balanced foreign policy based on its longstanding principles of "independent and active" diplomacy and non-alignment. Under President Jokowi, Indonesia strengthened its defence ties with the United States for regional security while fostering deep economic relations with China, despite

tensions arising from China's expansionist claims in the South China Sea, particularly around Indonesia's Natuna Sea. Jokowi's administration was criticized for leniency toward Chinese incursions, but his approach established a delicate balance. Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's new president, has pledged to continue this non-aligned stance, emphasizing the importance of neutrality while fostering robust relationships with both the U.S. and China.

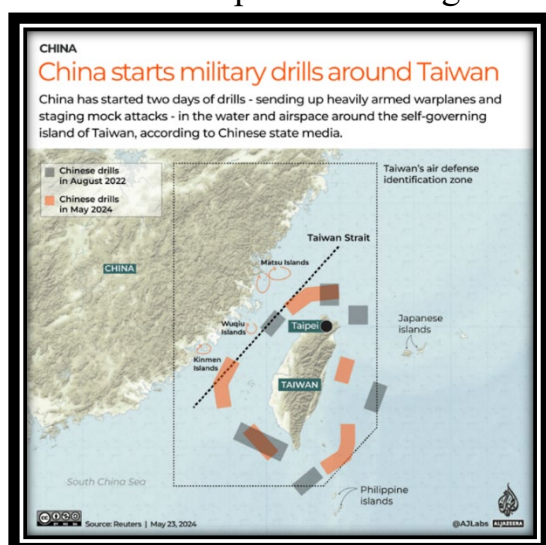
Prabowo's leadership prioritizes strengthening national defense, with a focus on modernizing and diversifying Indonesia's military capabilities. As defence minister (in the previous government), he restructured defence procurement strategies from traditional suppliers, opting for partnerships with countries like France, Germany, and India.

Prabowo has shown interest in Indian defence equipment, aligning with his goal of reducing reliance on traditional suppliers and enhancing self-sufficiency. The growing military cooperation between Indonesia and India, particularly through joint naval exercises, plays a critical role in safeguarding Indonesia's maritime interests.

China's Military Exercise - Joint-Sword 2024 B

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) announced on 14 October that it had successfully conducted blockade drills around Taiwan. The military exercise titled Joint-Sword 2024 B came four days after President Lai Ching-te's National Day address where he expressed resolve to defend Taiwan's sovereignty and resist attempts of annexation and encroachment. Reportedly the military exercise was launched with Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning* sailing to the strategic east of the island. Thereafter, troops from the army, navy, air force and rocket force conducted land and sea strikes on the north, south and east of Taiwan and in the Taiwan Straits.

In a detailed analysis, the Chinese newspaper *Global Times* argued that the drills achieved "multiple breakthroughs". Besides the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessels



conducting law enforcement patrols in waters surrounding Taiwan, the PLA expanded the scope of "deterrence" by moving closer to the island, compared to previous exercises. Further, the PLA's naval and air forces along with the CCG, simulating a complete blockade, advanced towards Taiwan from multiple directions. Moreover, the drills blockaded key northern and southern ports of Taipei that handle a significant amount of Taipei's import of natural liquefied gas. Following the exercises, Beijing launched an elaborate press campaign justifying the exercises.

Senior Captain Li Xi, spokesperson for the Chinese PLA Eastern Theatre Command (ETC), stated in a press briefing that the military exercise fully tested

the troops' joint operation capabilities. He stressed that the troops of the ETC will always remain on high alert, keep strengthening combat readiness with arduous training, and "resolutely foil Taiwan independence, separatist attempts". Reiterating the sentiment, China's State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office, in its press statement noted that the exercise was a deterrent against the provocations of separatist forces and represented a just action in defence of national security and sovereignty. Notably, the Chinese Ministry of Defense, stated in another statement that the Joint Sword Exercise was not a repetition of previous military drills but aimed to intensify pressure against Taiwan's independence. Claiming that the exercise was a response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's National Day speech, Chinese Defense Ministry Spokesperson Wu Qian accused Lai of "inciting hostility and confrontation". He added that while the exercises intended to counter provocations by Taiwan separatists, the exercises were not targeted at the people in Taiwan.

Observers have noted that the 14 October exercise was the second such exercise this year and the third overall in the series of exercises surrounding Taiwan. The exercises conducted in August 2022, following then-Speaker of US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan remain most provocative to this date as PLA fired missiles over Taiwan and near Japan and started the initial blockade exercises. Over the past two years, the blockade exercises around Taiwan only intensified. The first Joint Sword exercise simulating encirclement and attack on key nodes in the island was conducted in April 2023, in response to former President Tsai-Ing Wen's meeting with then-US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Thereafter, Joint Sword 2024A was held on May 2024, in response to Lai's inaugural address and involved symbolic encirclement and patrols by the Chinese Coast Guard. It was also opined that China had already planned the exercise, regardless of Lai's speech, as Reuters had already reported about the possibility of China holding a military exercise around Taiwan, before Lai's National Day address.

Downplaying the significance of the military exercise, Taiwan's Defense Minister, Wellington Koo, said to the reporters that while the Joint Sword 2024 B delineated an exercise area, there were neither no flight nor no-sail zones. Further, military exercises are different from an actual blockade as the latter according to United Nations (UN) regulations would be an act of war, which would affect the international community. However, the US describing the exercise as a matter of grave concern called on China to act with restraint and avoid actions that could undermine regional peace and stability.

The State Department Spokesperson Mathew Miller, stated that the PRC's military response to a routine annual speech was unwarranted and risked escalation. Thereafter, the US approved a 2 billion USD arms sale package for Taiwan which includes surface-to-air missile systems and radar. Similarly, the spokesperson of the European External Action Service (EEAS) also issued a statement, underlining that China's military activities around Taiwan were increasing cross-strait tensions.

Notwithstanding the international response, China again conducted a three-day live-fire drill around Taiwan, from 22-25 Oct 2024, with President Xi calling on the PLA to strengthen their war preparedness.