



Escalations Between Iran and the United States Elicit Concern Over the Possibility of an Intensified Conflict

Over the preceding months, Iran-backed militant groups have conducted over 160 attacks on the U.S. military in response to the role that the Biden administration has played in supporting Israel's destructive War on Gaza. The majority of the strikes carried out by these groups have been repelled and did not inflict any casualties; however, earlier this week, a drone strike killed three U.S. service members and wounded 34 at a base known as Tower 22 in northeast Jordan. According to accounts in the aftermath of the incident, the drone that struck the base may have been mistaken for an American drone, explaining why it was not shot down. Iranian officials have denied being involved in the attack, while the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is made up of multiple Iran-backed militias, has claimed responsibility. This has provided Iran with plausible deniability for the attacks, allowing them to achieve their interests without appearing to directly order the group's actions. Following the attack, U.S. President Joe Biden issued a statement claiming that the U.S. would "respond," insinuating that the United States would retaliate and hold Iran responsible for supplying the drone used in it.

Experts are concerned that this drone strike and the subsequent response that will follow from the U.S. will likely only serve to balloon the already rising tensions in the region. The United States is slowly showing signs that it may once again become embroiled in Middle East conflicts. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby expressed that while the U.S. seeks to hold those responsible for the attack to account, the administration does not plan on getting directly involved in another round of Middle Eastern engagement. However, U.S. involvement seems ever more possible in the face of recent attacks against American bases in Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, and with the ongoing Red Sea crisis. If the United States chooses to respond to these attacks in a heavy-handed manner, then conflict in the Middle East could potentially spread like wildfire and may lead to deeper U.S. entanglement in the region. This would cause a host of security and economic issues that would impact U.S. interests both abroad and domestically. In fact, earlier this week, it was reported that oil prices are on pace for their first monthly gain since September, in response to fear that the United States and Iran stand on the brink of a potentially more direct confrontation in the Middle East. If this was to manifest, economic commentators have outlined that it would pose an expected risk to crude supplies in the region and the energy market itself as a whole. Just as so many others are closely monitoring the United States' anticipated response to the attack in Jordan, traders and those involved in the global economic market are doing so as well.

Preventing a larger and wider-scale war in the Middle East will require the U.S. to tread lightly and avoid confrontation with Iran. When considering their possible responses, the Biden administration should think twice before targeting Iran directly, which would undoubtedly escalate tensions. Instead, the United States needs to strike a balance between deterring possible future attacks while containing any risk of igniting a direct conflict with Iran. As such, most military analysts have predicted that direct retaliation on Iranian territory is unlikely and would be imprudent. In the context of a possible broader dispute, both the United States and Iran must take steps to de-escalate current tensions and mitigate the possibility of an all-out armed conflict. Thus, it would be wise to seek diplomatic avenues of engagement to ensure that the situation is not exacerbated.

For months now, one way in which many social justice and peace activists have been advocating that the United States could de-escalate regional tensions is by using its leverage against Israel to demand a lasting ceasefire in Gaza. Most of the hostilities that have flared up in recent months are due to outrage regarding Israel's reprehensible War on Gaza, and it seems probable that the entities involved in regional tensions will continue their actions unless a ceasefire is implemented. A lasting ceasefire could provide an important juncture to allow hostilities to dissipate, not to mention putting an end to the devastation of Gaza and its citizens. Whether or not the United States gets heavily involved in the region has much to do with how prolonged the War on Gaza is, as the longer that it carries on, the more likely that it could be drawn in. This would also increase the risk of future attacks like the one that took place this week, and therefore, the Biden administration should make achieving a lasting ceasefire in Gaza its top priority.