



[How Would U.S. Strikes in Three Countries Contain the Gaza War from Spreading into a Potential Regional War?](#)

In the aftermath of the recent January 28th drone strike on U.S. Base Tower 22 in Jordan, which left three U.S. service members killed and many more injured, the Biden administration vowed to retaliate against those who were responsible for the attack. The perpetrators of it, as well as other non-lethal strikes on U.S. bases, were Iranian-backed militia groups. The fact that Iran had links to these groups raised concerns that the U.S. may attack Iranian targets directly, potentially dragging the United States into a more troublesome and direct conflict. The anticipated U.S. response came late last week on February 2nd, with over 125 precision munitions fired against upwards of 85 targets. These included both the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its proxy militias in western Iraq and eastern Syria. Following the strikes, President Biden expressed that the U.S. did not want to get involved in a Middle East conflict, but that when Americans were harmed, the U.S. would respond. While the United States asserts that it has no desire to become entangled in a wider conflict, some U.S. lawmakers are calling for a more robust response that targets Iran directly, a move that would almost certainly escalate the situation in the Middle East. Some Republican lawmakers have been particularly hawkish, pressuring Biden to strike Iran directly and respond to attacks with a more forceful show of power. Thus far, the Biden administration has shown a reluctance to target Iran directly, but the U.S. strikes in the three countries of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen do not help in preventing the potential of the Gaza War from devolving into a regional war.

While the United States has not yet struck Iran directly for its role in supplying militias with munitions and other support, there have been some recent statements from U.S. officials that have elicited concern. John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council, claimed that the initial strikes were likely just the start of a wider U.S. response. Kirby said that this could take the form of a “tiered approach” wherein the U.S. takes multiple actions against targets over time. This statement is rather foreboding, and signifies that the U.S. may be prepared to become further involved in the Middle East if attacks persist.

The U.S. actions have irked some countries in the region. Aside from Iran and the proxy groups that it has been linked to, the U.S. strikes have also drawn criticism from Iraqi officials who have stated that they are a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Commentators have pointed out that if the United States is going to be conducting airstrikes against militias in various territories, it would be wise to work more closely with the countries where these will be carried out to avoid fallouts over sovereignty and possible further escalations. U.S. counterstrikes in the region ultimately risk further tit-for-tat attacks between the United States and various actors in the Middle East. While to some observers, the death of U.S. soldiers necessitated a response, the consequences of the retaliation may eventually outweigh the benefits. President Biden is attempting to walk a tightrope between degrading Iran’s ability to attack American assets through proxies and becoming involved in a wider-scale regional conflict with Iran – a challenging balancing act that is only made even more difficult with all of the various actors at play. In this way, avoiding dangerous escalations requires the use of diplomacy, a reality that must not be overlooked.

The U.S. strikes in the Middle East have come amid the backdrop of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken making his fifth trip to the region since the onset of the Gaza War. Blinken met with officials from various countries throughout the region as he discusses a potential ceasefire deal and postwar planning for quelling escalated

tensions and conflicts. As many analysts have rightly drawn attention to, most of the recent hostilities stem from outrage over Israel's destructive War on Gaza, and thus far, Israel and Hamas have been unable to agree on ceasefire terms following the expiration of the one-week pause in fighting back in late November. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu recently dismissed Hamas' proposed terms and hostage deal, claiming that Israel was seeking "total victory." Despite this, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken expressed that there was still room for negotiation toward an agreement. Blinken's trips to the Middle East signify an acknowledgement and desire to find diplomatic solutions that will prevent a wider-scale conflict, and once again emphasize the importance of achieving a lasting ceasefire in Gaza – undoubtedly the most important element needed in order to do so.