

# The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

## [U.S. Rewards Aggression by Providing Israel with THAAD System](#)

Recently this past weekend, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin – under direction from President Biden – authorized the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) antimissile system to Israel. Notably, it is a rare and costly system, with the U.S. government having only seven THAAD batteries currently available for deployment. THAAD is capable of intercepting ballistic missiles and engaging targets at 93 to 124 miles (150 to 200 kilometers). Reportedly, three are at Fort Bliss and two are at Fort Cavazos – both sites in Texas – and one is in Guam and another in South Korea. The latter two are on guard for North Korean missiles, and it is one of the THAAD systems from Texas that is on its way to Israel. A THAAD battery was deployed as a part of increased U.S. forces in and around the Middle East back on October 21st of last year following the October 7th Hamas attacks, and now sending a THAAD system directly to Israel marks a new chapter in the ongoing regional hostilities.

Critics of the move have understandably decried it as the latest increase in U.S. involvement and as a significant reward to Israel, which has only been escalating its combat operations and regional provocations in recent months, with a desire to seemingly perpetuate hostilities indefinitely. Observers point to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as continuously coming up with new demands for any potential ceasefire deal, and deliberating derailing the prospects of halting military attacks and operations. With the THAAD system's deployment, roughly 100 U.S. soldiers will operate it, putting American lives in grave danger. Any successful attack on the system could result in the direct killing of American soldiers and in doing so give war hawks fuel for trying to advocate for further American intervention. Regardless of President Biden's intentions, as long as American soldiers are on the ground, it risks deepening U.S. involvement in a potentially deadly and devastating conflict. At the same time, it allows Netanyahu to wage his endless war, and continue to ignore American and United Nations calls to de-escalate.

Israel's latest escalations include its indiscriminate airstrikes on the Lebanese capital city of Beirut over the past several weeks. Israel and Hezbollah have been engaging in tit-for-tat strikes since shortly after the October 7th, 2023 Hamas attacks. Hezbollah has made clear that it would respect a ceasefire in Gaza, and instead of reaching a deal to do so which would undoubtedly ease tensions in the region, Israel has instead chosen to open another front to its war by sending ground forces into Lebanon and carrying out airstrikes that have led to at least 2,350 recent deaths in Lebanon – the overwhelming majority of these being civilians. Furthermore, upwards of 1.2 million people have been displaced from their homes in Lebanon due to the Israeli airstrikes, which have even drawn public criticism from U.S. State Department officials who have commented that “...when it comes to the scope and nature of the bombing campaign that we saw in Beirut for the past few weeks, it's something that we made clear to the government of Israel we had concerns with and we were opposed to.”

As the destructive Gaza War continues, Israel has also, for the past six months, been provoking a direct conflict with Iran. Back in early April, Israel attacked the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital city of Damascus, which was the catalyst for the Iranian retaliation attack on Israel less than two weeks later. Then, in late July, Israel assassinated Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, which in conjunction with another targeted killing in Lebanon, sparked the second Iranian missile attack back in early October. Before his assassination, Haniyeh was involved in ceasefire negotiations for Hamas. As Israel opens new war fronts, in Gaza, the situation remains

devastating. Earlier this week on Monday, an Israeli attack on Shuhada al-Aqsa Hospital led to images circulating online of civilians being burnt alive, again sparking outrage.

While the U.S. government has criticized Israel's actions with some of its words and statements, military aid continues to flow, making any calls for Israel's restraint hollow and hypocritical. Once THAAD is enabled, this will only embolden Israel, as it provides increased security that is even more advanced than Israel's Iron Dome system. What is particularly troubling is that all of this comes at a tense and volatile time when the world is waiting to see the manner in which Israel carries out its next attack on Iran – with the scope and timing of this remaining unclear. It is unknown if Israel has agreed to any conditions for receiving THAAD, however, the coverage provided by the new system might encourage more aggressive Israeli behavior. In fact, military analysts suspect that Israel is waiting for the cover that THAAD would provide before it strikes Iran. On the same day as the THAAD announcement, President Biden also released a letter demanding that Netanyahu increase aid to Gaza or risk the United States withholding weapons, but with 30 days to take action. However, Israel has crossed Biden's "red lines" before, including with its military operations in Rafah. Various observers have questioned the timing, and how it would not even take effect until after the upcoming U.S. election.

The United States' decision to send the THAAD antimissile system to Israel takes place at a time when the entire Middle East is at risk of all-out war. Doing so allows Netanyahu and his right-wing government to continue their pursuit of endless war, and paves the way for the perpetuation of conflict and hostilities in the region. What has become clear is that Israel is abusing the United States' support and intentionally inflaming tensions in order to continue receiving the latter's backing. For the sake of preventing a broader war in the Middle East which the U.S. would likely be dragged into, the United States should hold Israel accountable for its provocative and bellicose actions instead of playing the role of its public relations manager and trying to downplay Israel's harmful behavior.