

Iran

'We're crazier than you realise': Iran delivers its message with attack on Israel



Tehran believes calibrated missile and drone barrage is enough to restore deterrent and bolster image

Najmeh Bozorgmehr in London and **Bita Ghaffari** in Tehran 6 HOURS AGO

Hours after Iran launched a barrage of armed drones and missiles against Israel Iranian military chiefs declared “mission accomplished”, having implemented a change of tactics designed to restore the Islamic republic’s deterrence.

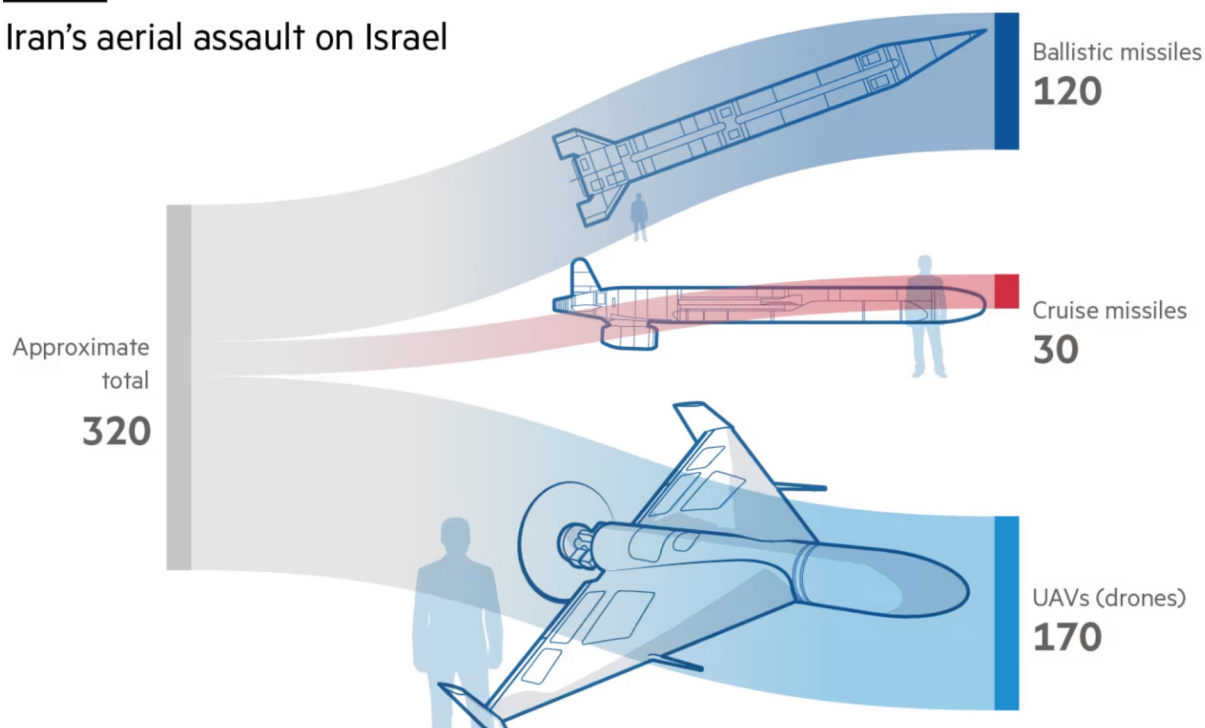
In launching its first direct attack against its long-standing foe, Tehran intended the assault to be a muscular — if clearly telegraphed — display of force that brought its long-running shadow war with the Jewish state into the open.

None of the 170 drones made it into Israeli airspace. Twenty-five of 30 cruise missiles were shot down before crossing the nation’s borders and most of 120 ballistic missiles were destroyed by Israel’s air defence systems, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

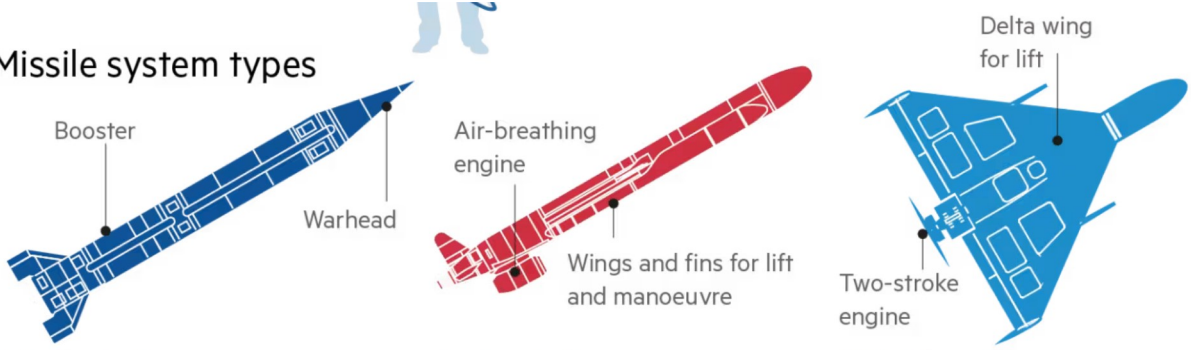
Yet within the Islamic regime, the operation was hailed as a success: a calibrated response to restore its deterrent and bolster its image among regional proxies and domestic loyalists. It was also viewed as proof that Tehran would back its threats and its readiness to take decisive action when provoked.

“Iran’s message was clear: we’re crazier than you realise and we’re prepared to endure the consequences of war if necessary,” said a regime insider. “This is meant to serve as a deterrent and a signal to the US and Israel that ‘enough is enough’.”

Iran’s aerial assault on Israel



Missile system types

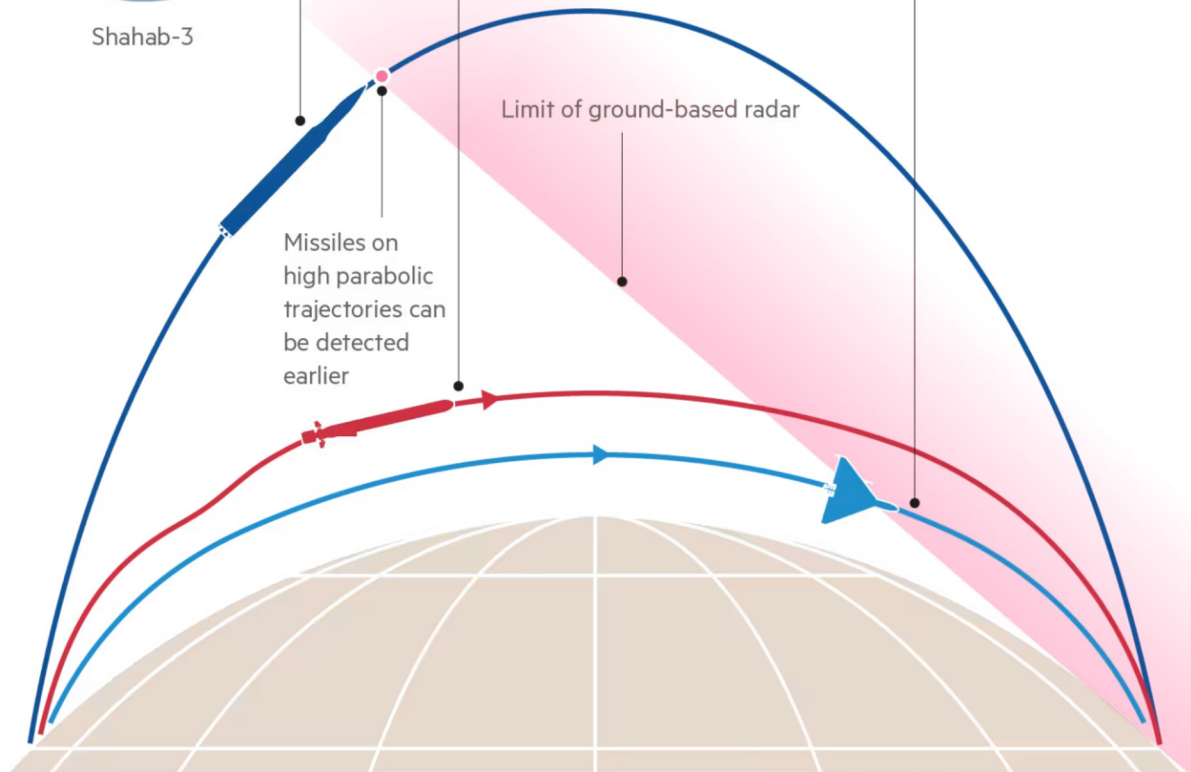


Ballistic missiles Lofted on high parabolic trajectories by boosters to predetermined targets. In some cases warheads can be manoeuvred by propulsion systems

Cruise missiles Propelled continuously by jet engines, as with an aeroplane. They remain within the Earth's atmosphere and can travel at low altitudes

UAVs (drones) Similar to cruise missiles but tend to be smaller, slower and less complex

Typical missile warhead weights



* Estimate based on similar Russian Kh-55 missile
Graphic: Ian Bott Sources: CSIS; Federation of American Scientists; The Aerospace Corporation; FT research © FT

The decision to launch a direct attack on Israel marked a significant political gamble for supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has traditionally pursued a “strategic patience” policy in responding to enemies such as the US and Israel.

That has meant the republic’s ultimate decision maker has sought to avoid direct

conflict, even after it has accused Israel of assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists and security officials inside the republic. Instead, it has relied on asymmetrical warfare and using regional proxies, such as Hizbollah as well and militias in Iraq and Syria.

Ahmad Dastmalchian, Iran's former ambassador to Lebanon, said the attack on Israel "opened a new chapter in Iran's defence policy" and represented a "paradigm shift from strategic patience to a multi-layered defence".

That attack was launched in retaliation for a suspected Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Damascus that killed seven Revolutionary Guard members, including two senior officers.

Israel has mounted a series of strikes against Iranian targets in Syria since Hamas's October 7 attack triggered the war in Gaza and set off a wave of regional hostilities involving Iranian-backed militant groups.

At least 18 Revolutionary Guard members have been killed in Syria, while Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon have killed more than 250 fighters of Hizbollah, Iran's most powerful and important proxy. All the while, Iranian officials have repeatedly said the republic wants to avoid a broader regional war or a direct conflict with Israel.

However, Tehran thinks the Damascus strike has crossed a red line, and it is also worried that a lack of response "would only embolden further Israeli threats and portray Iran as weak," according to the regime insider.

Iranian officials described the attack as "limited", with the drone and missile barrage designed to target an air base and an intelligence centre that they said Israel had used in its April 1 strike against the Damascus consulate.

"It's true that Israel intercepted a large number of 'kamikaze' drones. But by launching a barrage of drones, Iran's aim was to overwhelm Israel's multi-layered air defence so its missiles could penetrate the system," said Hamid-Reza Taraghi, a conservative Iranian politician. "The Islamic republic managed to strike a key military base with seven missiles."

Despite Iran's superior numbers, Israel's military hardware is far more sophisticated

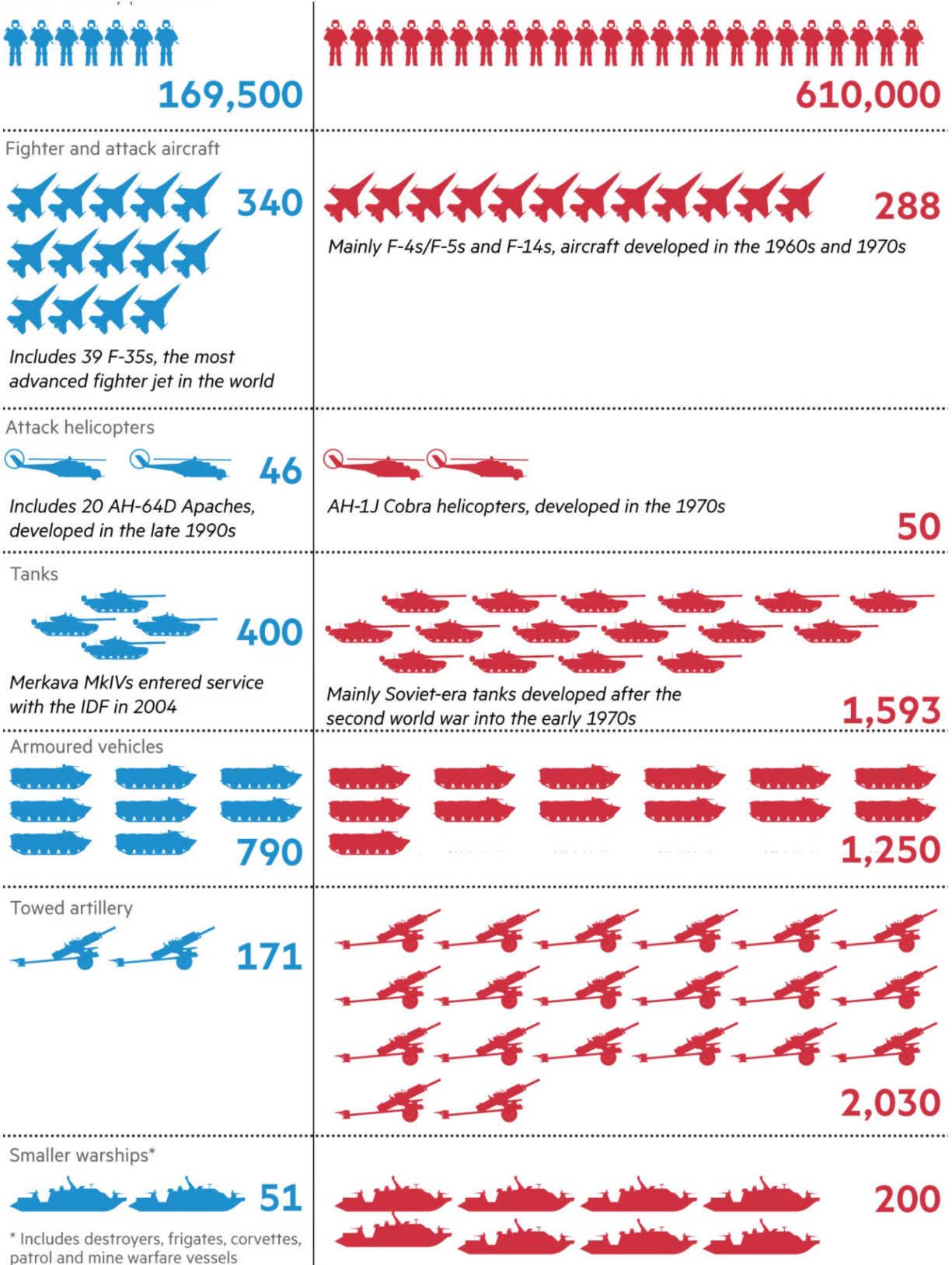
Israel
Defence budget 2023

\$19.2bn

Active military personnel

Iran

\$7.4bn



In addition Israel has five attack submarines, Iran has one

Key

-  25,000 troops
-  25 combat aircraft
-  25 attack helicopters
-  100 tanks
-  100 armoured vehicles
-  100 towed artillery pieces
-  25 warships

Iran totals include those held by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ground forces. Some equipment serviceability in doubt
 Sources: IISS Military Balance, 2024; FT research • Visual journalism: Steven Bernard

UPI

The Israeli military said the attack caused minimal damage to an air base in the south of the country. No fatalities were reported during the night's barrage, although a child was seriously injured by falling shrapnel after one interception.

Major Gen Hossein Salami, commander of the guards, said Iran's attack "could have been much larger but we restricted it to only target facilities the regime had used to attack the consulate".

Hossein Amirabdollahian, Iran's foreign minister, said Tehran had also given "our friends" in the region 72 hours pre-warning that the attack would be launched.

He said Tehran had passed a message to Washington on Sunday that its "operation will be limited with the goal of legitimate defence and the punishment of Israel" — signalling a desire to avoid any escalation with the US.

Iranians who took to social media expressed differing perspectives, reflecting an increasingly polarised country. Some defended the attack, saying it had revived their sense of national pride and punished Israel. Others believed it was a mistake to take the country nearer to all-out war, and worried about the expected Israeli response.

Despite the risks of Israeli retaliation against the republic, Iranian officials appeared, outwardly at least, to be confident that Israel would not respond directly against Iran, betting that Khamenei's gamble would pay off.

"This was an act of punishment that's now over," said Dastmalchian, the former ambassador. "If they [Israel] commit another mistake, Iran will respond on a much larger scale. But we believe neither the Americans nor the other parties have any interest in broadening the conflict."

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2024. All rights reserved.
