

US Commander: 'US Troops Prepared to Die for Israel' in War Against Syria, Hezbollah

Operation Juniper Cobra is not a routine exercise; it is a portent of a potentially devastating war against Syria, Hezbollah and Gaza for which Israel is actively preparing — a war likely to erupt within the coming months.

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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Featured image: Soldiers from the U.S. Army and the Israel Defense Force (IDF) carry a litter with a mock patient during a mass casualty training as part of the combined missile defense exercise known as Juniper Cobra 18, Feb. 28, 2018. (U.S. Navy photo)

Last Sunday, the largest joint military exercise between the United States and Israel [began](#) with little fanfare. The war game, dubbed "Operation Juniper Cobra," has been a regular occurrence for years, though it has [consistently grown](#) in size and scope. Now, however, this year's 12-day exercise brings a portent of conflict unlike those of its predecessors.

[Previous reports](#) on the operation suggested that, like prior incarnations of the same exercise, the focus would be on improving Israeli defenses.

"Juniper Cobra 2018 is another step in improving the readiness of the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] and the IAF [Israeli Air Force] in particular to enhance their operational capabilities in facing the threat posed by high-trajectory missiles," Brig. Gen. Zvika Haimovitch, the IDF's Aerial Defense Division head, told the Jerusalem Post.

However, this year's "Juniper Cobra" is unique for several reasons. The [Post reported](#) on Thursday that the drill, set to end on March 15, was not only the largest joint U.S.-Israeli air defense exercise to ever happen but it was also simulating a battle "on three fronts." In other words, Israel and the U.S. are jointly simulating a war with Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine – namely, the Gaza strip – simultaneously.

What makes this last part so concerning are Israel's recent statements and other preparations for war with all three nations, making "Juniper Cobra" anything but a "routine" drill. It is instead yet another preparation for a massive regional conflict, suggesting that such a conflict could be only a matter of months away.

As [MintPress recently reported](#), Israeli officials recently told a bipartisan pair of U.S. Senators that it needed "ammunition, ammunition, ammunition" for a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon — a war that will expressly target Lebanese civilians and civilian infrastructure,

such as hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings. The alleged motive for the invasion is the presence of Iranian rocket factories. However, this allegation is based solely on [the claims](#) of an anonymous deputy serving in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and was first reported on by a Kuwaiti newspaper [known to publish](#) stories planted by the Israeli government.

In addition, Israel has been laying the groundwork for an invasion of Syria since last year and is [largely responsible](#) for the current conflict in Syria that has raged on for seven years. Israel's [current push](#) to invade Syria is also based [on flimsy evidence suggesting that](#) Iran is establishing bases in Syria to target Israel.

Israel has also been preparing for a conflict on the embattled Gaza strip, which – owing to the effects of Israel's illegal blockade and the devastation wrought by past wars – is set to be [entirely uninhabitable](#) by 2020. Reports have quoted officials of the Palestinian resistance group Hamas, which governs the Gaza strip, as saying that they place the chances of a new war with Israel in 2018 “[at 95 percent](#)” and that war games, like Operation Juniper Cobra, were likely to be used to plan or even initiate such a conflict. This concern was [echoed by](#) IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, who stated that another Israeli invasion of Gaza, home to 1.8 million people, was “likely” to occur this year. Eizenkot [ironically framed](#) the imminent invasion as a way to “prevent a humanitarian collapse” in Gaza.

U.S. lights match, prepares troops



US and Israeli troops deploy a Patriot missile defense battery during the 2018 Juniper Cobra air defense exercise in March 2018. (Source: Israel Defense Forces)

Such a war is likely to be ignited by the unrest destined to follow the U.S.’ imminent move of its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The move, set to take place in May, led Hamas [to call](#) for a third intifada, or uprising, in response to the U.S.’ unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in defiance of the international consensus.

Beyond the fact that Israel is preparing to go to war with several countries simultaneously is the fact that U.S. ground troops are now “prepared to die for the Jewish state,” [according to](#) U.S. Third Air Force Commander [Lt. Gen. Richard Clark](#).

“We are ready to commit to the defense of Israel and anytime we get involved in a kinetic fight there is always the risk that there will be casualties. But we accept that, as in every conflict we train for and enter, there is always that possibility,” Clark told the Post.

However, more troubling than the fact that U.S. troops stand ready to die at Israel’s behest was Clark’s assertion that Haimovitch would “probably” have the last word as to whether U.S. forces would join the IDF during war time. In other words, the IDF will decide whether or not U.S. troops become embroiled in the regional war for which Israel is preparing, not the United States. Indeed, Haimovitch [buoyed](#) Clark’s words, stating that:

“I am sure once the order comes we will find here U.S. troops on the ground to be part of our deployment and team to defend the state of Israel.”

Operation Juniper Cobra is not a routine exercise; it is a portent of a potentially devastating war for which Israel is actively preparing, a war likely to erupt within the coming months. In addition to overtly targeting civilians, these preparations for war — as Juniper Cobra shows — directly involve the United States military and give the war-bent Israeli government the power to decide whether or not American troops will be involved and to what extent. This is a devastating giveaway of national sovereignty by U.S. President Donald Trump.

While the potential involvement of the U.S. forces in such a war is being framed as limited in scope, there is no indication that such a war will be so in practice. Indeed, the U.S. is currently [occupying](#) 25 percent of Syria and the Trump administration has economically attacked Palestinians living in Gaza by [withdrawing](#) crucial aid, as well as Hezbollah by enforcing new [sanctions](#) against the group. Furthermore, Israel’s nuclear arsenal and the fact that Iran — and even Russia — could become involved in such a conflict means that it could quickly spiral out of control.

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Whitney Webb is a staff writer for MintPress News who has written for several news organizations in both English and Spanish; her stories have been featured on ZeroHedge, the Anti-Media, and 21st Century Wire among others. She currently lives in Southern Chile.



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