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THE POWER OF INTELLIGENCE: HOW INFORMATION SHAPES MODERN POLITICS

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“THE CASE OF ISRAEL – IRAN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE AFRICAN CONTINENT”

Elizabeth Achu C. Jervase

SUMMARY

In today's volatile global politics, the balance of power is no longer determined by the size of armies or supplies of weapons. The real gain lies in information gathered, analyzed, and strategically deployed. Intelligence has become the foundation of modern politics and warfare, enabling nations to outmaneuver their adversaries with precision, foresight, and minimal collateral damage. The recent military confrontation between Israel and Iran offers a compelling case study of how information drives modern statecraft and how intelligence supersedes firepower.

Modern conflicts have increasingly relied on intelligence over conventional firepower. Israel's use of real-time intelligence and cyber capabilities in countering Iran's attacks exemplifies how information can shape political and military outcomes. African states can draw lessons from this by investing in data systems, data science, research and development (R&D) to equip themselves with early warning mechanisms to strengthen national and regional security.

The lessons learned from the Israel's Iran confrontation is not merely about nuclear enrichment, sovereignty protection or allyship, it is a drop in the rousing ocean of technological advancement revolutions.

INTELLIGENCE OVER FIREPOWER: THE ISRAEL-IRAN CONFRONTATION

The conflict between Iran and Israel is deeply rooted in historical, ideological, and geopolitical tensions that have evolved over decades. Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the two countries maintained relatively cordial relations, cooperating on trade, intelligence, and oil. However, following the revolution, Iran adopted a hostile stance toward Israel, branding it as a Zionist regime and aligning itself with the Palestinian cause. This shift led Iran to support armed proxy groups such as *Hezbollah* in Lebanon and *Hamas* in Gaza, fueling a long-standing pattern of indirect confrontation.

In recent years, the rivalry has escalated dramatically. In April 2024, Israel conducted an airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Syria, killing high-ranking members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In an unprecedented retaliation on April 13th, Iran launched over 300 drones and missiles at Israel, marking its first direct attack. Israel's counterattack involved highly targeted strikes within Iran, demonstrating its advanced intelligence and strategic precision. The confrontation also extends to cyber warfare, covert operations, and proxy battles in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Gaza, with neighboring countries like Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf states caught in the geopolitical crossfire.

Despite the sheer volume of projectiles, Israel's intelligence-backed Iron Dome and regional coordination efforts with the U.S., UK, France, and Jordan intercepted nearly all threats. Days later, Israel executed a restrained but precise retaliatory strike inside Iran, targeting nuclear and military infrastructure while avoiding civilian casualties. This reflected not only Israel's military capacity, but its real-time intelligence superiority, enabling selective targeting and geopolitical signaling.

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20 high-ranking Iranian military officials, including Maj. Gen. Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, IRGC Commander Hossein Salami, and nuclear scientists such as Fereydoon Abbasi-Davani and Ahmadreza Zolfaghari. This marked one of the most significant decapitations of Iran's military and nuclear leadership in decades, severely weakening its strategic capabilities. These figures are supported by reports from credible sources including Financial Times, Al Jazeera, Anadolu Agency, and the Israeli Defense and Security Forum.

HOW INTELLIGENCE SHAPES INTERNATIONAL POLITICS?

The Israel-Iran case reveals how intelligence plays a pivotal role in modern geopolitics through: Cyber and Psychological Warfare where Iran has waged cyberattacks on Israel's

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i. Asymmetric Deterrence where intelligence enabled Israel to launch minimal yet effective retaliation, avoiding a full-scale war while projecting power.

ii. Diplomatic Calculations where both sides used strategic disclosures to shape global perception and earn diplomatic capital.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ISRAEL-IRAN WAR FOR AFRICA

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, is one of the most strategically vital maritime chokepoints in the world. Approximately 20% of the world's oil—around 21 million barrels per day—and about 25% of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) pass through this strait. Any disruption would directly impose shockwaves through the global economy. On the other hand, conflict near the Red Sea would disrupt

grain routes and fertilizer imports which could also intensify food insecurity in the region.

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the global realignment of militarization and proxy's radicalization, or arms flows in fragile regions can increase the risk of external actors using African conflicts as proxies increases.

For African nations, particularly those reliant on fuel imports or with fragile food and transport systems, such disruptions compound economic stress. This situation highlights the importance of creating and maintaining strategic reserves, diversified supply routes, and regional cooperation for energy and economic empowerment.

LESSONS LEARNT

Although geographically removed, African states particularly fragile ones like South Sudan can conclude the following strategic insights:

- i. Border Security and Conflict Prevention; intelligence tools can help African countries detect and defuse threats.
- ii. Economic Intelligence: monitoring oil markets and logistics disruptions can inform budget and fiscal planning.
- iii. Cybersecurity: digital infrastructure must be protected as states modernize.
- iv. Strategic Diplomacy: leveraging intelligence can improve Africa's global influence.

CONCLUSION

As established in the Israel-Iran and Russia-Ukraine cases, information and intelligence have replaced brute force as the foundation of global influence. The state that understands, anticipates, and communicates effectively holds the upper hand, not just in war, but in peace, diplomacy, and development.

Meanwhile, Israel's growing ties with Arab states may reshape regional alliances and further isolate Iran. Overall, the Iran-Israel conflict remains a critical fault line with the potential to reshape regional and global dynamics. African states do have the opportunity to reposition diplomatically and economically to attract multipolar investment, drive regional integration, and strengthen internal resilience.

Africa must recognize intelligence as a development asset not just a security tool. By building capacities in information gathering, economic analysis, and early warning, states like South Sudan can mitigate shocks and shape their geopolitical destiny amidst growing global turbulence.

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Ms. Jervase is a Research Fellow at CSPS. She is a development economist and peace advocate. She holds a Masters' degree in Economics, Finance and Development from the University of Bradford in England in 2018, and a Bachelor degree in Economics and Social Science from the University of Khartoum in Sudan in 2011. With over a decade of practical experience in corporate banking, investment financing, and strengthening financial institutions, Elizabeth's expertise is rooted in modern economic strategies for development, financial inclusion, financial management, project management, and policy analysis.

She is currently supporting the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as a National Project Specialist for the Climate Resilient Agri-Food Systems Transformation Programme (CRAFT-1) funded by the African Development Bank (2024-2030) which is the largest AfDB portfolio in agriculture and agribusiness development in South Sudan. She is also a part-time lecturer at the University of Juba, Faculty of Social and Economic Studies mainly teaching the course of Financial Institutions and Markets. Elizabeth had previously worked as a research assistant at the Peace Research Institute (PRI), and the Institute of Environmental Studies (IES) at the University of Khartoum in Sudan.

In addition to her financial acumen, she has been actively involved in promoting peacebuilding, mediation, and transformational leadership since 2007. She has been working in the field of peace-building and transformational leadership since she was 19 years old when she was elected the president of the Khartoum University Southern Sudanese Students Association (KUSSA) in 2010. Regionally, she was featured among 100 most influential African women working towards development by Donors for Africa in May 2020. She was nationally recognized by the South Sudanese Women Intellectual Forum and awarded certificate of appreciation in Youth leadership and Activism in July 2021. She was appointed as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP)'s Youth Country Liaison for Sudan and South Sudan in 2021 – 2022.

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The South Sudan Center for Strategic and Policy Studies (CSPS) is a non-profit organization, established in South Sudan just after independence, with the objective of producing policy relevant research that will enable the generation of critical and analytical thinking aimed at informing policy.



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