

U.S. CENTCOM chief arrives in occupied Palestine over fear of Iran, Hezbollah retaliatory strikes

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Tel Aviv, August 4 (RHC)-- The commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has arrived in the occupied territories to help Israel prepare for Iran and Hezbollah's retaliatory strikes in

response to the recent assassination of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh and the deadly strike on southern Beirut, U.S. media says.

General Michael Kurilla landed in the occupied lands on Saturday, the American news website Axios quoted two U.S. officials as saying in a report. "The U.S. general in charge of American military forces in the Middle East arrived in the region on Saturday as preparations continue for a possible attack against Israel from Iran in retaliation for the assassinations of senior Hamas and Hezbollah leaders," the report said.

Axios claims that his trip was planned before the killing of Hezbollah's top commander Fuad Shukr in an Israeli air strike on the Lebanese capital Beirut on Tuesday night, and Haniyeh's killing in Tehran hours later.

It added that Kurilla is expected to use the trip to try to mobilize West Asian allies to foil any attack emanating from Iran, similar to Operation True Promise, a large-scale operation against Israeli-occupied territories last April.

In Operation True Promise, a multi-pronged attack, the Iranian armed forces launched dozens of drones and missiles at the occupied territories late on April 13 in response to the regime's aggression on the Iranian diplomatic premises in the Syrian capital, Damascus, on April 1st.

The Israeli airstrikes on Iran's embassy compound in Damascus had killed two generals of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi and General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, as well as five of their accompanying officers.

Three U.S. officials told Axios they expect an Iranian retaliation to Haniyeh's killing "as early as Monday." According to the report, Washington is concerned it will be difficult to garner the same amount of regional support in defense of Israel as it did in April, given that Haniyeh's assassination comes within the context of the bloody Gaza war – for which Israel has drawn major criticism from the Arab world and internationally.

U.S. Army General Kurilla is also expected to visit Jordan and Persian Gulf countries. Amman has already vowed to confront any violation of its airspace. However, Jordan opened up its airspace to U.S. and Israeli jets during Iran's April operation. "The United States hopes the same will happen again if needed," another U.S. official told Axios.

U.S. and Israeli officials also "don't know if Iran and Hezbollah will conduct a coordinated attack or operate separately ... they think both Iran and Hezbollah are still working on finalizing their military plans and approving them at the political level."

On Friday, Washington announced it would send navy cruisers, destroyers, and fighter jets to West Asia to bolster support for its main regional ally Israel.

Iran's interim Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has said that the Islamic Republic will use its legitimate and inherent right to punish the Israeli regime for the assassination of senior Palestinian resistance leader Haniyeh on Iranian soil.

Several foreign officials have contacted the top Iranian diplomat over the past few days, calling on Tehran to exercise self-restraint over a widely anticipated military response.



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