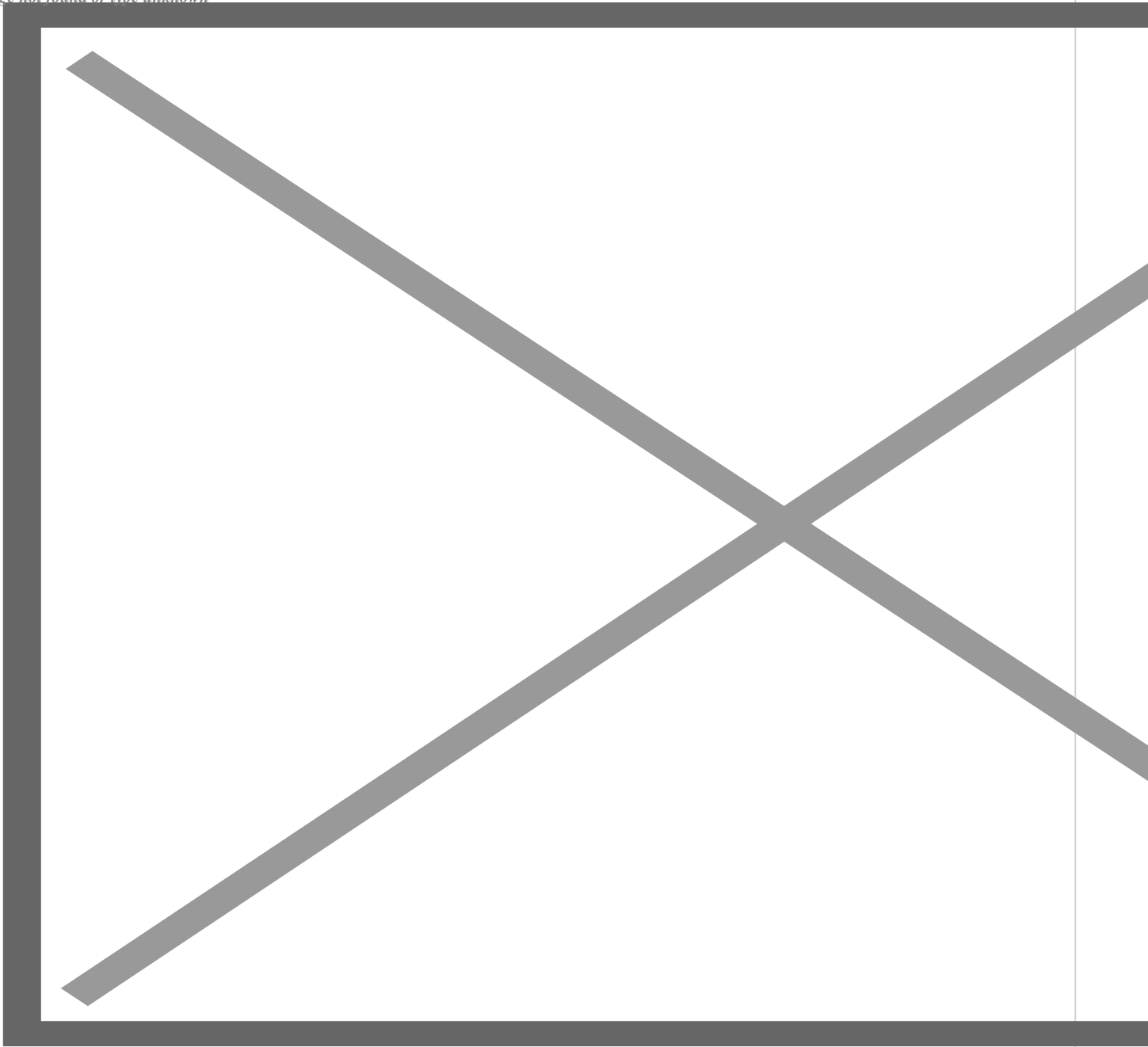


U.S. and Israel begin joint military exercises

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Washington, July 11 (RHC)-- United States and Israeli forces have started joint military exercises in Israel as the two countries deepen security cooperation amid tensions with Iran. The Israeli military said on Monday that the drills “will incorporate a number of scenarios, including long range strategic striking.”

For its part, the Central Command of the U.S military (CENTCOM), which oversees operations in the Middle East, said the joint training, part of an exercise series dubbed “Juniper Oak”, shows the U.S. “commitment to Israel’s defense.”

The exercise comes less than a week after Israeli forces raided the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank with air attacks and hundreds of troops, killing at least 12 Palestinians. But the Israeli and U.S. statements suggested that the exercise – which includes midair refueling of fighter jets needed for hitting remote targets – was focused on Iran.

“This event also demonstrates our full commitment to the security of the Middle East and ability to deter hostile acts against regional partners,” CENTCOM said in a statement. The Israeli military said in a series of tweets that the exercise is aimed at achieving “aerial superiority in the region and cyber defense in the face of a variety of threats and challenges”.

U.S. officials regularly voice “ironclad” support for Israel. And despite being accused of committing the crime of apartheid by leading human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Israel receives at least \$3.8 billion in U.S. aid annually.

Biden and his top aides have also emphasised “regional integration” to advance partnerships between Israel and Arab states against perceived common threats -- namely Iran. Washington has said that it would never allow Tehran to acquire a nuclear weapon, which Iran denies seeking.

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