

# STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT



## Israel's Response to a Nuclear Iran

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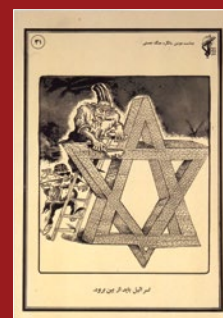
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# The United States, Iran, and Israel

*Edward N. Luttwak*

The disagreement with Israel over Iran's nuclear endeavors long predated the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of July 14, 2015," which the White House prefers to call "The Historic Deal that Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon,"<sup>1</sup> but which should really be called *Barjam*, the Farsi acronym that is entering local parlance for any big deal.

The Obama view is, of course, that the *Barjam* must be good because it sets limits on Iranian efforts to acquire both highly enriched uranium and plutonium. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opposes the *Barjam* because it removed the crippling sanctions that had constrained Iranian military activities across the board, from the assembly of ballistic missiles to the arming and funding of proxy forces, in exchange for nuclear limits that only last ten years. That was evidently an eternity for the Obama White House, which never mentions the time limit, but hardly so for Netanyahu, who might again be prime minister when the limits expire. He would then confront an Iran entitled to acquire nuclear weapons, and with ballistic missiles already in hand to deliver them, because the *Barjam* sets no missile limits at all.

For Obama, all such objections are simply irrelevant: having sworn that Iran would not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons, his choice was between the *Barjam* and an air offensive very much larger than the one he refused to contemplate when the Syrians crossed his "red line" by using chemical weapons, thereby blowing his credibility region wide (one wonders if bankers will follow his lead, by refusing to make a "fetish" of solvency). That being so, Obama could hardly resist the string of last-minute concessions that have surfaced in dribs and drabs since the agreement was supposedly published in its entirety—the latest to date is that the heavy water removed from the Arak reactor is still controlled by Iranian guards, albeit in forever cooperative Oman, within easy reach just across the water.

Ironically enough, the one thing Americans and Israelis had in common until the *Barjam* came into effect on January 16, 2016 was that neither wanted to attack Iran, albeit for very different reasons. For the Israelis, the overriding priority was to preserve the sanctions that weakened Iran all round, given that neither their intelligence chiefs nor their air-strike planners manifested any great sense of urgency, in sharp contrast to the public stance of Prime Minister Netanyahu. Mere arithmetic explained the attitude of the airmen: Israeli attack capabilities have been growing faster than the number and hardness

of Iranian nuclear-related targets, and while Iran's vast facilities are  $x$  times harder to destroy than Iraq's single Osirak reactor was back in June 1981, as inane commentators endlessly repeat, Israeli attack capabilities have increased by more than  $x$  times since that June 1981 strike by eight fighter-bombers without precision weapons (a growth less than obvious to tail-counters, because Israeli airpower is not used up for the suppression of enemy air defenses in the US style, down to the last inoperable hulk and antique missile).

As for the incongruous serenity of Israeli Intelligence, it reflected a confident expectation that it could reliably monitor Iran's nuclear activities in great detail, and in near real time. Its chiefs undercut Netanyahu's claims of urgency whenever

they were consulted because they were quite sure that they would know well in advance if Iran actually started to assemble a weaponized nuclear device, allowing sufficient time for properly prepared preemptive action. Even though their US counterparts did not share their confidence—while the CIA talks a lot about HUMINT, aka. spying, it hardly practices that art in hostile settings (most of its "covert operators" are bravely manning desks inside embassies), and rightly distrusts the meager fruits of its half-hearted efforts, mostly conducted by officers who are frequently rotated and rarely know the local language. The Israelis by contrast patiently invest in their sources for decades on end, routinely operate undercover wherever they have to (it is no secret that the Stuxnet virus was inserted, not downloaded), have local allies in Iran not entirely confined to peripheral areas, and then work hard to confirm what they hear as best they can, with overhead imagery and intercepts in which the United States is far better supplied than they are.

This difference in method has been a major source of friction in the US-Israel Intelligence dialogue over Iranian nuclear efforts, which started not so very long after April 1984, when Iran's then president and now supreme leader Ali Khamenei told his colleagues in the greatest secrecy that the demiurge Khomeini had changed his mind about nuclear weapons. Having shut down the shah's program, Khomeini now wanted nukes pronto, because war with Iraq was bleeding the country. Iran's nuclear engineers went for the gas



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centrifuge route but made little progress until they started purchasing ready-made technology from the thief and trafficker A.Q. Khan (the Pakistani schools named after him should logically offer prizes for larceny). By the end of 1987 Iran thereby acquired a centrifuge plant starter kit complete with technical drawings of a P-1 (Pakistan) centrifuge—a straight copy of the Zippe design that Khan had stolen—actual centrifuge components, and detailed instructions for enriching uranium to weapon-grade levels.

This was the prelude to the construction of the necessary facilities in Tehran and seven other localities, including reactor work in Arak, and plants for the conversion of uranium yellowcake into uranium hexafluoride gas in Isfahan, and the centrifuge separation of that gas in Natanz. The latter is especially much too large (one million square feet) not to generate all sorts of signals.

By the year 2000 if not before, Israeli intelligence started hearing enough from sources in Iran and elsewhere to be able to sort out meaningful signals from the “noise” of rumors and deliberate misinformation. It promptly shared the data with the United States, hoping to elicit confirmation from overhead imagery and intercepts. But there was a problem: the US side did not accept the Israeli assessment that there was an Iranian nuclear-weapon program that needed to be scoped out, presumably as a prelude to doing something about it. Evidently the latter was a disincentive to the former for US officials who had other agendas—including attacking Saddam Hussein’s Iraq as well as avoiding a confrontation with Iran—but there was also the CIA’s contempt for Israel’s human sources that spoke of facilities that did not show up in overhead imagery, or rather, did not yet show up.

Frustrated by their persistent inability to persuade the US side that Iran was on a path to acquire nuclear weapons, the Israelis finally decided to go public via third parties. Most notably, on August 14, 2002, the Iran M.E.K opposition (aka the Rajavi cult) never before or since a source of useful information, published exact details on the Natanz plant and deuterium oxide facility in Arak. These revelations could not be ignored and duly triggered International Atomic Energy Agency inspections, whose eventual findings forced everyone, including US intelligence skeptics, to confront the evidence of Iranian nuclear activities “in excess of what is needed for a civilian power program.” After years of tergiversation and entirely useless European negotiations (but for their exceptionally luxurious dinners), this evidence finally resulted in UN Security Council sanctions on December 23, 2006, which in turn eventually forced Iran to start negotiating the *Barjam*—whose contents are a tribute to the frivolity of most European participants (exemplified by Mogherini’s prancings before the cameras), the ambivalence of the Russians, the Calvin Coolidge “our business is business” attitude of the Chinese, the transparent eagerness of the Obama administration to evade the necessity of confronting Iranian hostility,

and also, of course, the undoubted bazaar skills of Tehran's negotiators, whose task, however, was made all too easy by Kerry's visible refusal to leave Geneva without his carpet, for which he made more and more concession as the days went by.

It is *highly* relevant to the question at hand, i.e., Israel's propensity to act against Iran now that the *Barjam* has removed the priority of prolonging sanctions, that the interminable process that lead to it was prolonged by an absurd intelligence error, to wit the November 2007 publication by the Director of National Intelligence of a National Intelligence Estimate of the National Intelligence Council, whose opening phrase was to derail action for years: "We judge with high confidence that in the fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program." Weasel words followed ("we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons...") but then came the clincher: "we do not know whether [Iran] currently intends to develop nuclear weapons." That is to say, the known criminal caught with a full kit of burglar tools in the richest part of town may have been on his way to...fish?

Amazingly, the compilers of this still revealing document missed the decisive significance of the specific date they themselves cited: Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program "in the fall of 2003," i.e., just after US forces had marched into Baghdad, raising the possibility that they might keep marching to reach Tehran as well. In other words, the Iranians had stopped in 2003 because they were terrified of the Americans, and

would resume once they saw them floundering—not least because of their own arming of both Shia militias in Iraq and the (Shia-killer) Taliban in Afghanistan, i.e. well before November 2007 when US intelligence issued its instantly obsolete flash-photograph of the heady days of 2003.

Given the appalling record of US Intelligence on Iran, the Israelis will not be dissuaded from launching a pre-emptive attack they deem necessary by any reassurances offered by US intelligence. For one thing, the Israelis refuse to compartmentalize the available information, as the Obama administration insists on doing by simply ignoring the significance

### **POLL: WHAT WOULD A SUCCESSFUL ISRAELI STRIKE UNLEASH?**

- ☐ An Israeli strike would prompt Armageddon.
- ☐ Iran would declare war and attack Israel.
- ☐ Major terrorist spikes would sweep the Middle East.
- ☐ After a few weeks of tensions and condemnation, quiet—and relief—would follow.
- ☐ Nothing much at all would follow the attack.

of Iran's undisputed procurement of ballistic missile technology in, as well as from, North Korea. Given that Iranian missile engineers are in North Korea, why not nuclear engineers as well?

Nor can the Israelis be dissuaded for long by the argument that any attack would undo "The Historic Deal that Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon," because even if there is no cheating at all, which is wildly improbable, the expiration of its critical restriction is just around the corner in military planning terms ("Iran must reduce its centrifuges to 6,104 for the next ten years").

To some, the *Barjam* has made Iran's regime somehow legitimate, even as the very thin façade of respectability of its determinedly affable negotiators cannot conceal an unending sequence of outrages and provocations. The British have just reopened their embassy in Tehran, closed since a 2011 mob attack, and trade delegations are in town. But such things cannot inhibit the Israelis who will remain fully entitled to attack Iran any time they choose, because of its continuing acts of indirect and even direct aggression (Iranian officers have been killed on the Golan Heights). No country whose official slogan is "Death to Israel" can claim immunity from attack.

That being so, there will be no waiting around for the lengthy solemnities of the US national intelligence estimating process (which last time presented 2003 realities in 2007) if the Israelis detect the violation that counts—imminent weaponization, perhaps accomplished in North Korea. If the post-Obama United State does not act promptly (as it might), they will, and in their own way, transcending the capability limits of the forces they are known to have.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal](http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal).



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# Time Is on Iran's Side

Thomas Donnelly

The conclusion of the US-Iran nuclear deal—formally the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”—last year has created a new and profoundly different set of strategic realities across the Middle East. While this shift is hardly irreversible, it is moving rapidly, and, by the time the next American president figures out where the restroom is in the White House, the process will, like quick-drying cement, be well set.

Among the new realities will be the fact that Israel's opportunity to act unilaterally—or, say, in concert with Saudi Arabia—to preempt further development of Iran's nuclear program will have passed. This Israel-alone option was never very likely in the first place, despite the muscular rhetoric of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the hope among some Americans that Israeli pressure would induce the United States to admit the necessity of such a campaign. But the Obama administration's commitment to the Iran deal all but eliminates the key element of international support, the geopolitical top cover that might make Israeli action feasible. The constraints that all future US presidents will face are written in Hillary Clinton's support for the deal; despite issuing statements larded with caveats, it's clear that the Democratic candidate has no intention of bucking her increasingly left-leaning party—or Obama, whose blessing she desperately needs—on a “legacy” achievement.

Moreover, the underlying rationale for the Iran deal—that there is a grand opportunity to habituate the revolutionary regime in Tehran to the

international order, to transform the Islamic Republic into a “normal” nation—is likewise entrenched, if only because the West wants it to be true (and, through the JPCOA, the West has made a giant wager on the proposition). Already, the Obama administration has looked the other way despite Tehran's direct violations of the deal, notably on ballistic missile testing, and its stepped-up drive, in Iraq and Syria, for regional hegemony. And there have been no consequences for taking Americans hostage, including US Navy sailors, or buzzing US warships in the Persian Gulf. In sum, Obama has reversed the course of American strategy in the region, distancing himself from Israel, the Saudis, and other mainstream Arab states in an effort to reach an accommodation with Tehran. Speaking through his amanuensis Jeffrey Goldberg at the *Atlantic* magazine, the president told the Gulf Arabs they must learn to “share the neighborhood” with Iran.

This is not to say that there could not be circumstances under which Israel might perceive an imminent Iranian nuclear threat that trumped its long-term strategic partnership



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with the United States, or that Netanyahu's dire warnings—expressed forcefully in his March 3, 2015 speech to Congress—don't reflect deeply felt Israeli worries. And it is further true that Obama's "pivot toward Tehran" has forced former close US allies—and past adversaries—like Israel and the Gulf states to explore greater partnerships. But these can never, for either Israel or the Gulf monarchies, provide what—at least until now—the relationship with the United States does. In sum, the geopolitical risks for Israel in a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear program have always been daunting, and the JPCOA makes them more so.

It's also likely that whatever military window of opportunity was open, which made such a campaign worth the political risk, is closing, if not closed altogether. The JPCOA gives the Iranians a kind of "time out" to reshape their nuclear project into something more militarily and strategically useful by improving the variety, accuracy, and range of their missile arsenal and reducing the size of their potential warheads. There's good reason to think that Tehran will adhere closely enough to the terms of the agreement, because the likely reward will be a much more effective deterrent, one that can be fielded in a rapid way to present a strategic fait accompli at the end of the road.

The one unilateral road that might remain open to Israel is a computer-based attack, as with the so-called "Stuxnet" virus. Indeed, in that case, the Israelis angered their American partners by spreading the virus more broadly and aggressively, likely leading the Iranians to discover the attack more rapidly. And much of the investment in the project, formally known in the Bush administration as "Olympic Games," was made by the United States. Whether the Israelis could have conducted the program unilaterally is impossible to assess.

But the most lasting effect of the JPCOA is the change it has wrought on strategic competition in the Middle East. It has opened a path for Iran to achieve its strategic goal of regional domination, possibly without resort to a fielded nuclear capability at all; its nemesis, the Great Satan United States, has retreated a very long way from where it stood in 2009. Iran also is reaping the rewards of strategic cooperation with Russia and has good reason to think it might entice the Chinese into some sort of similar, if less explicit, arrangement. What Israel—and the Gulf Arab states as well—now face is less the threat of instant annihilation than a grinding war of incredible complexity. And in this struggle they increasingly feel abandoned by the United States.

One reason that Israel has been able to survive in a hostile world is a kind of dry-eyed Clausewitzian ability to recognize the nature of the conflicts they face. Yes, Israeli leaders have made tactical errors, like everyone else. But they have demonstrated a remarkable strategic adaptability in the presence of a dizzying array of adversaries, from conventional Arab armies to Hezbollah irregulars to tiny-but-vicious terrorist groups. The post-JPCOA world again presents a new mix of challenges and a changed threat from Iran. Though it conceivably could come again, the moment for a strike against Iran's nuclear infrastructure has passed.



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# Missiles and More: Iran's Threats to Israel and the Middle East

*Kori Schake*

The Iran nuclear deal makes an Israeli strike less likely in the near term, and more likely in the medium term unless US policy changes to restore the credibility of our own military options and suppresses the nonnuclear threats Iran is fomenting.

From the very beginning of the Obama administration, there was a clear strategy for dealing with Iran: restrain the Iranian nuclear weapons program by multilateral agreement. President Obama's policy consisted of further tightening multilateral sanctions on Iran, and subordinating all other issues to the objective of attaining a nuclear deal.

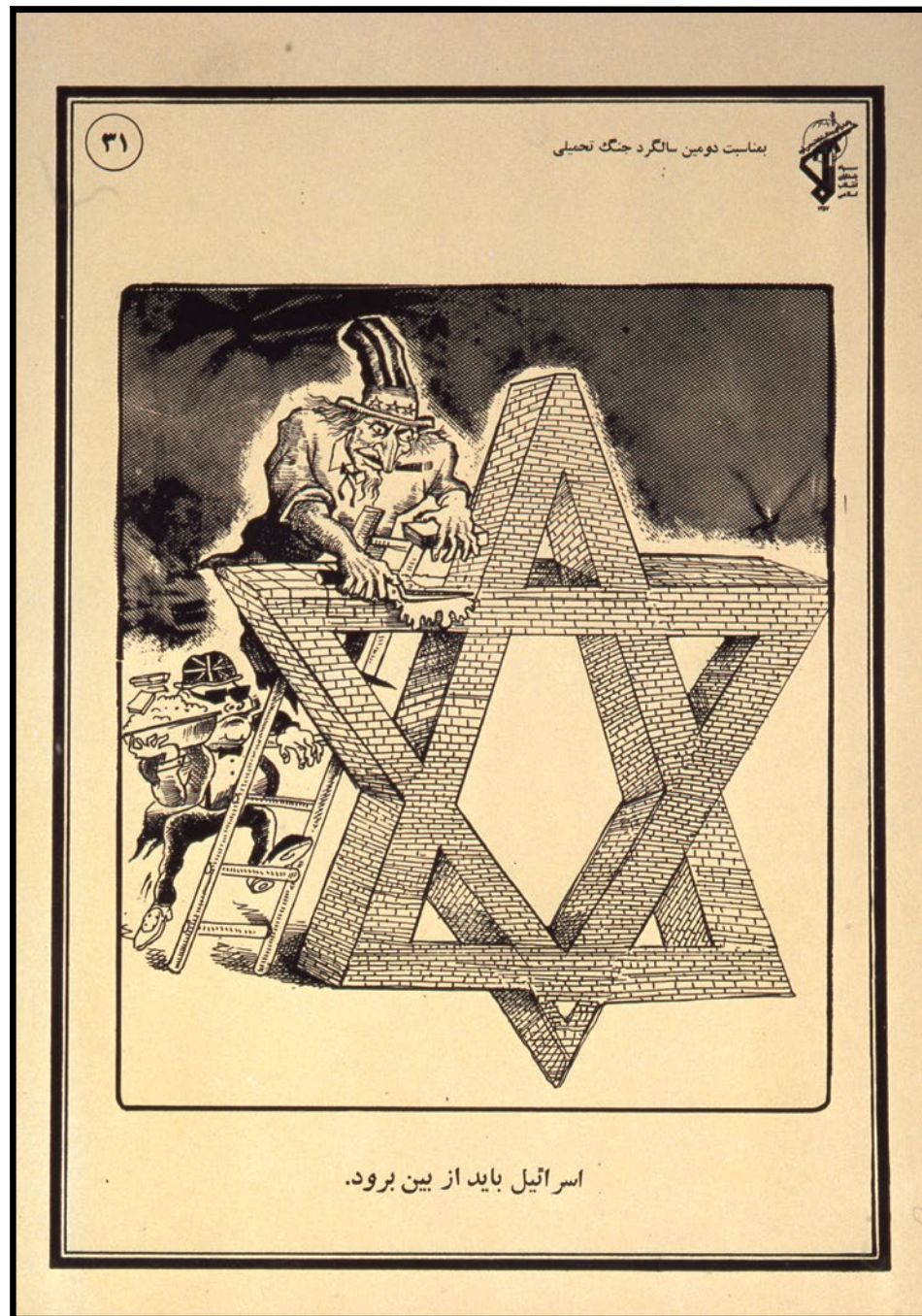
The Iran deal to some extent does restrain Iran's nuclear weapons programs by establishing international monitoring of known Iranian nuclear facilities. But among the many reasons for skepticism about the agreement is that we are unlikely to know the extent of Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Another important reason for skepticism is that Iran reaps the benefits of sanctions relief at the beginning of the process, which removes incentives to remain in compliance. The "snap back" sanctions provisions require consensus among the signatories, which means little short of a nuclear weapons test—or use—would be sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, initial enforcement strongly suggests leniency: since the agreement entered into force, the United States and other parties to the agreement have permitted Iran leeway in compliance. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported Iranian

low-enriched uranium in excess of treaty allowances, and more radiation containment chambers than listed in Iran's declaration; the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, China, and Russia allowed the treaty to enter into force anyway.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Iran was found to be making centrifuge parts restricted by the deal. The IAEA nonetheless concludes that Iran has engaged in no significant violations of the agreement.<sup>3</sup>

The agreement probably includes a sufficient mix of inspection and incentive to prevent any overt and militarily significant Iranian noncompliance in the near term, given the economic privation that drove Iran to the negotiating table. But it absolutely has not inhibited Iran behaving provocatively: it has accelerated its ballistic missile programs, harassed US naval vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, and engaged in dangerously reckless rhetoric, threatening to shoot down US vessels operating in international airspace. Iran has increased, not decreased, its provocations since the signing of the nuclear agreement.

The narrow focus on Iran's nuclear weapons programs ignores the many other threats Iran is posing: (1) terrorism—including attempting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington; (2) destabilizing neighboring states by aggravating sectarian tensions in Iraq and Bahrain, and arming insurgent groups like Hezbollah and Hamas; (3) disruption in the Strait of Hormuz by laying mines and harassing naval vessels



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operating in concordance with international maritime practice; and (4) ballistic missile attacks on neighboring countries.<sup>4</sup>

The principal mistake of the Obama administration's Iran deal was dealing *only* with the threat posed by a nucleararmed Iran. We have not sufficiently

addressed the non-nuclear security concerns of Israel, the UAE, and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In fact, the drumbeat of Obama administration policy choices in the Middle East have alarmed our friends: withdrawing from Iraq in 2010 when the insurgency had been beaten back and Iraqis voting for

multi-sectarian political slates, disparaging the value of military force against Iran's nuclear facilities and more generally to influence political choice by adversaries, declining to trust our allies with details of the Iran negotiations while they progressed, failing to enforce the red line in Syria, accepting Russia's intervention to bolster the Assad regime in Syria, and now becoming complicit in atrocities by Syria and Russia through our latest agreement.

It is the breadth of policy failure that has pushed our partners in the region into considering acting without American support. Saudi Arabia and Israel have never been closer in their security cooperation; neither have they been further from us (despite arms sales). If the United States cannot be relied upon to enforce the Iran agreement and attenuate the threats Iran poses, Israel may be forced to act in the medium term. The relationships being fostered among our allies in the Middle East will facilitate any Israeli military action—whether against Iran's nuclear facilities, or other targets selected to signal that whatever the

United States won't do, Israel is not likewise constrained. Only a more assertive US policy changing attitudes in the Middle East about our willingness to stop Iran's expanding influence will suffice.

1 Hoover's George P. Shultz and Henry Kissinger produced the most compelling indictment of the agreement in "The Iran Deal and Its Consequences," *Wall Street Journal* (April 7, 2015) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-iran-deal-and-its-consequences-1428447582>.

2 Jonathan Landay, "US, others agreed 'secret' exemptions for Iran after nuclear deal: think tank," *Reuters* (September 9, 2016) <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-exemptions-exclusive-idUSKCN1173LA>.

3 George Jahn, "UN nuclear report notes Iran is making sensitive parts," *Washington Post* (September 9, 2016) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/un-nuclear-report-on-iran-hints-at-potential-problem/2016/09/08/b870baco-75df-11e6-9781-49e591781754\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/un-nuclear-report-on-iran-hints-at-potential-problem/2016/09/08/b870baco-75df-11e6-9781-49e591781754_story.html).

4 Recall the recent missile test with "Israel must be wiped out" painted on the missile: Julian Robinson, "'Israel must be wiped out': Iran launches two missiles with threat written on them in Hebrew as country ignores criticism of its ballistic weapon tests," *Daily Mail* (March 9, 2016) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3483465/Iran-fires-2-missiles-marked-Israel-wiped-out.html>.



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# The Ripple Effects of an Israeli Preemptive Strike

*Peter Berkowitz*

An Israeli preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities is fraught with immediate and long-term ramifications.

A successful strike, which is likely to involve hundreds of Israeli aircraft flying more than a thousand miles and back, much of it through Arab air space, might, if all went well, set the Iranian program back two years. Much could go wrong.

In the best-case scenario, the destruction of their nuclear program would demoralize the Iranians and convince them that any effort to rebuild it would be met with a similarly punishing blow.

But who understands the Iranian leaders well enough to confidently say that, armed with irrefutable proof of their vulnerability without nuclear weapons, they won't respond by doubling down on their determination to produce nuclear weapons?

And who understands internal Iranian politics well enough to say whether the effects of such a strike would spur Iranians to demand the ayatollahs' ouster, or rather cause Iranians to rally around the hardliners?

Even in the event of a successful strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, Israelis must prepare for a daunting military response from Tehran and its proxies, as well as denunciation and possible economic sanctions from nations around the world.

In the short term, Israelis can expect that Iran will fire ballistic missiles—Israel is well within range of Iran's Shahab-3 MRBMs—at the greater Tel Aviv area, the largest population center in Israel and its commercial and cultural heart.

In addition, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon—with approximately 120,000 rockets and missiles, and capabilities of striking targets throughout Israel—is likely to launch a massive barrage on Haifa, Tel Aviv, and other urban centers, while targeting physical infrastructure and military bases throughout Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza may join in.

Israel's sophisticated air defenses and substantial offensive capabilities are unlikely to prevent hundreds if not thousands of deaths in Haifa and Tel Aviv, substantial damage to vital highways, the closing down of Ben Gurion International Airport, and perhaps the closing of the Haifa and Ashdod ports.

Furthermore, the international community will heap opprobrium on Israel. Regardless of how solid are its claims to be acting in self-defense, nations around the world will accuse Israel of flagrant violation of the international laws of war. While leaders in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan, and Egypt will rejoice in private at Israel's daring deed, they will do little to quell the worldwide denunciation of Israel.

If an Israeli strike takes place before Inauguration Day, January 2017, the United States certainly will do little as well.

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# Increasingly Isolated, Israel Must Rely on Nuclear Deterrence

Josef Joffe

Five years ago, Jeffrey Goldenberg published “The Point of No Return” in the *Atlantic*. In 10,000 words, he laid out the pressing rationale for an Israeli attack on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. Like many such pieces, it prompted this author to formulate a law: “The US can do it, but won’t; Israel wants to, but can’t.”

After the JCPA, we should add: “And Israel will not because it would bring the entire world down on itself, save for the Sunni powers.” So the issue is moot—until such time, perhaps, when Iran is caught cheating in a blatant way.

Even before the JCPA, Israel’s bark was worse than its bite. Perhaps, it could have done an “Osirak,” with half a dozen planes hitting a single target. But Iran is not a single-target country, as were Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007. To really squelch the threat, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) would have to demolish two dozen sites strung out along the entire fuel cycle from uranium conversion to enrichment, from heavy-water plutonium reactors to reprocessing, not to speak of weaponization labs. Add another dozen targets for longer-term gain. These are the research facilities strewn all over the country, particularly inside large cities, where collateral damage would be very high.

Given this target list, Israel would have to mount a very large strategic campaign. First, the IAF would have to lay low Iranian air defenses, but it has neither long-range nor stealth bombers. In the second wave, its F-15s and F-16s would have to fly at least a thousand

miles each way under ideal circumstances, that is, directly and with Jordanian and Saudi connivance.

Let’s assume a package of 80 to 100 planes. They would have to be refueled twice, coming and going, but the IAF has only nine tankers (with more KC-135 in the pipeline). The Saudis might let them refuel on each leg. But now consider what it takes to demolish Natanz or Fordow. Israeli bunker busters could “do” Natanz, but not Fordow, which is protected by 200 feet of rock. Not even George W. Bush granted the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (GBU-57) to the IAF, a 14-ton monster that may not even be capable of drilling all the way down.

To make the point in all its baldness, think about recent air campaigns over Afghanistan, Iraq, Serbia, and Libya, second- or third-rate powers all. These took many weeks with up to 800 sorties per day, even for an unmatched air force like the American one, plus NATO’s. So, the IAF could at best damage the Iranian program, not destroy it.

The ramifications promise to be horrendous: Iranian-inspired missile attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah, Iranian terror against US targets in the Middle East, closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Inevitably, the United States would be drawn in—something that would not endear Jerusalem to Washington.

Yet the attack scenario is now moot. What are the implications?

First, we observe an implicit realignment of historic proportions, with the United States putting its money on Iran as regional policeman at the expense of Israel and the Sunni powers.

Second, America is in withdrawal mode. Retraction is only fitfully interrupted by the half-hearted re-deployment to Iraq flanked by a listless bombing campaign against ISIS.

Third, there is the reinsertion of Russian power into the Middle East, as illustrated by base-building and the dispatch of special forces to Syria. Like nature, the international system abhors a vacuum. It is being filled by Russia and, even more so, by Iran.

The fourth change is a counter-realignment by Saudi Arabia and Israel, but it is at best implicit and at worst unstable because the two countries, driven apart by faith and interest, are not ideal bedfellows.

To sum up: The military option, whether an American or Israeli one, is now truly off the table. And Tehran knows it. With Israel on the sideline, America, Iran, and Russia are at center stage. It will be well-nigh impossible for the United States, even under a Republican president, to dislodge Moscow and to contain Tehran. Iran is not just a revisionist, but a revolutionary power. Such actors want not merely a larger slice for themselves, but the entire cake and the bakery, as well.

A fifth consequence relates to Israel and the Saudis, the victims of the incipient “reversal of alliances.” The Saudis will fight Iran by proxy warfare, as in Yemen. Will they build or buy a “Sunni bomb?” They don’t have the technology, nor is it foreordained that Pakistan will sell the wherewithal to Riyadh.

Israel, however, has been implementing Plan B for years. This is its submarine-based deterrent, built around six German state-of-the-art U-boats, which will be two more than France’s SSBNs. With its 80 to

200 nuclear weapons, as the guesstimates have it, Israel will have enough to destroy Iran as a civilization—and keep enough in reserve to deter whoever else might want to wade in. So deterrence will prevail.

Will stability, as well? Nukes, as the Cold War shows, have not prevented war—only a direct clash between the superpowers. So, look forward to endless strife in the Middle East—within and between states, and with participation by revisionist Russia and revolutionary Iran.

Tehran, on a “mission from God,” so to speak, does not need nukes to expand, not with the largest population in the Middle East and an economy liberated from sanctions. The real issue, then, is not so how much to keep nukes out of Tehran’s hand, but how to establish a halfway reliable balance of power in the region. It was previously upheld by the United States, which kept the Russians out, and by Israel chastising whatever Arab regime was angling for hegemony. Yet Israel is isolated, while the United States is sounding an uncertain trumpet. The ramifications are not reassuring.

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# Israeli Jab, American Knockout

*Ralph Peters*

The challenge for Israel in responding militarily to Iran's nuclear weapons program is that Israel has the capacity to start a conflict, but not to conclude it (save through the use of its own nuclear arms—an unlikely scenario, for now). Israeli airpower and missile forces could frustrate Tehran's ambitions for a period of a few and perhaps several years, but it would prove a Pyrrhic victory, given Iran's inevitable response.

Were Israel to strike (with the expected collusion of Saudi Arabia), Iran certainly would attempt to hit back directly at Israel, employing long-range missiles as well as “unleashing” Hezbollah. But that would be a necessary gesture, not the main axis of retaliation. In the wake of an attack, Tehran would respond asymmetrically by closing the Strait of Hormuz and attacking shipping in the Persian Gulf; by conventional attacks on oil storage, processing, and loading facilities along the Arab littoral of the Gulf; and by direct attacks on Saudi and other Gulf oil fields.

The immediate purpose would be to demonstrate resolve and inflict graphic damage on regional rivals, but the greater purpose would be to punish the global economy by disrupting oil and gas supplies and—of even greater importance—exciting an international financial panic that spread pain broadly.

The Iranians are incisive strategic thinkers and realize that they would not receive the primary blame for such a response; quite the contrary, the “international community,” with its reflexive, complex, and bitter distaste for Israel, would censure Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, not Tehran. The master strategists in Iran understand how dearly much of the world longs for an

excuse to abandon Israel as a cause and punish it as an aggressor.

For the United States, the scenario would be grim. Although Israel began the conflict, we would need to finish it. This would be a significant and costly endeavor, lasting months, at a minimum, and it would be waged in the face of divided global opinion, with the majority of states disapproving of our action and pressing for a premature end to any military campaign.

The potential for such a conflict spreading regionally or even beyond is great. And Israel would suffer grievous physical harm (from Hezbollah and Hamas attacks) but even greater diplomatic damage. Israel, not Iran, would emerge as the pariah among states.

The unappealing bottom line is that, should it be necessary to interrupt Iran's nuclear weapons program with military force, it would be better done by a US-led coalition or even by the United States unilaterally. And such a campaign would need to be comprehensive and ruthless if it were to disable Iran's retaliatory potential. Targets would need to go well beyond Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

In short, best for the United States to do what needs to be done, but better to do nothing than to employ military forces haltingly. Any small-scale attack would result in a large-scale disaster.

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# Snake Charmers and Snake Killers

*Andrew Roberts*

The immediate result of an Israeli strike—assuming it were successful in destroying or at least very significantly degrading the Iranian nuclear program—would be a collective exhalation of breath across the Middle East and Europe. One of WikiLeaks' most telling revelations came when the king of Saudi Arabia was heard urging the Americans "to cut off the head of the snake," and if the Israelis undertook the identical action the Sunni Arab leadership would be cock-a-hoop with pleasure and relief (while of course publicly reserving the right to denounce Israel for aggression and warmongering).

Yet it would not just be Sunni Arabs who would hypocritically denounce Israel while simultaneously wiping their metaphorical brows. The whole of the P5+1—bar one—would of course be concerned about the Iranian reaction, but they would also be delighted that the centrifuges had been finally stilled. The exception would be President Obama, who genuinely seems to have convinced himself that he has deflected Iran from pursuing nuclear threshold status through his own brilliant diplomacy. He might well be the only world leader besides the supreme leader of Iran himself genuinely to decry Israel's action in his heart of hearts.

Israel has been isolated and denounced in the United Nations many times before, but probably not as comprehensively as she would be after a strike on Iran. Yet with Bibi Netanyahu in Jerusalem and Ambassador Ron Dermer in Washington, at last the Jews have formidable communicators to make their case.

The much-threatened attacks by Iranian terrorist cells in America and Europe would probably not do as much damage as doom-mongers suggest, and in

any case would only wreak a fraction of the havoc that Iran's ultimate possession of the Bomb would unleash. Similarly, there would undoubtedly be a huge collapse in global stock markets the day after the attacks, especially if Iran moved to threaten shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, but a resolute United States could deal with both relatively easily, given strong leadership and economic fundamentals.

When the Holy Alliance of the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian autocracies finally broke up in the mid-1820s, the British prime minister George Canning declared: "Things have got back to a healthy state of affairs again—every nation for herself and God for us all!" A successful Israeli attack would return the Middle East to such a state. For all that Hamas and Hezbollah would be ordered to create maximum mayhem, the Israeli Defense Forces and Iron Dome would doubtless be more than a match for them.

Standard boycott and disinvestment campaigns against Israel would be ramped up, and there would be a marked rise in attacks on Jews in Europe. The BBC and other media organizations would of course portray Israel as a warmongering aggressor, regardless of the fact that this would have been an act of self-protection analogous to Winston Churchill sinking the French fleet at Oran in July 1940 before it could fall into the hands of the Nazis.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does the American-sponsored multiparty Iranian nuclear deal now make the possibility of a preemptory Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities more or less likely?
2. Have preemptory bombings of strategic targets worked anywhere in the past?
3. Does Iran have any strategic or conventional ability to retaliate against Israel?
4. In an Iran-Israel standoff, what would be the politics of the surrounding Arab states?
5. Does bombing offer only short-term bromides to ending the Iranian nuclear deal?
6. Does the Iranian nuclear deal make preemptory operations more or less difficult?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**DOES THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S DOCTRINE OF 'LEAD FROM BEHIND' MARK A PERMANENT DEPARTURE FROM THE ENGAGED AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY OF THE POSTWAR ERA?**



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## Strategika

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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