

Background

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An Israeli Preventive Attack on Iran's Nuclear Sites: Implications for the U.S.

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Abstract: *Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions are ominous in light of its hostile foreign policy and longstanding support for terrorism. But Iran's repeated threats to annihilate the state of Israel while it develops the world's most dangerous weapons have created an even more explosive situation. If diplomatic efforts to defuse the situation fail, Israel may see no other choice than to launch a preventive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. Heritage Foundation Middle East expert James Phillips maps out the likely results of an Israeli attack, outlines Iran's probable reaction, and explains why it is now crucial that the Obama Administration take action to mitigate and defend against Iran's response to an Israeli strike.*

The Iranian regime's drive for nuclear weapons, rapid progress in building up its ballistic missile arsenal, ominous rhetoric about destroying Israel, and the failure of international diplomatic efforts to halt Iran's nuclear weapons program have potentially created a—literally—explosive situation. Israel may launch a preventive strike against Iran's nuclear weapons infrastructure.

The United States would almost certainly be drawn into an Israeli-Iranian conflict. The Obama Administration must start planning now to counter and minimize the destabilizing consequences of an expected Iranian backlash. To mitigate the threats posed by Iran to U.S. national security and to protect U.S. interests, the United States must:

Talking Points

If Iran provokes an Israeli preventive strike against its nuclear program, the United States should:

- Recognize Israel's right to self-defense against a hostile Iranian regime that repeatedly has called for its destruction.
- Deploy missile defenses to defend Israel and other U.S. allies from Iranian missile attacks.
- Deter Iran from retaliating against the U.S. by preparing for war with Iran.
- Work with allies to minimize the impact of a possible Iranian-instigated oil crisis.
- Veto any Security Council resolution that does not acknowledge Iran's provocations and continued defiance of U.N. resolutions.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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- Recognize Israel's right to take action in self-defense against Iran's growing threat;
- Prepare for a violent Iranian response to an Israeli preventive strike, including preparations for a possible U.S. war with Iran;
- Deploy missile defenses to defend Israel and other U.S. allies from Iranian missile attacks;
- Enhance deterrence against Iranian attacks by making it clear to Iran's leadership that such attacks will make a bad situation worse for Iran;
- Work with allies to take precautions to mitigate the impact of a possible Iranian-instigated oil crisis;
- Block arms sales to Iran; and
- Veto any U.N. Security Council resolution that does not acknowledge Iran's provocations and continued defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions on the nuclear issue.

Israel's Preventive Option Against Iranian Nuclear Threat

Israel has acceded to the Obama Administration's engagement strategy despite having strong doubts that it will succeed. Israeli leaders have stated their preference: that the Iranian nuclear weapons program be halted by diplomacy—backed by punishing sanctions. But they warn that they must regard the use of force as an option of last resort.

Israel has repeatedly signaled a willingness to attack Iran's nuclear sites if diplomacy fails to dissuade Iran from continuing on its current threatening course. The Israel Air Force staged a massive and widely publicized air exercise over the Mediterranean Sea in June 2008 in which Israeli warplanes, refueled by aerial tankers, simulated attacks on targets that were more than 870 miles away, approximately the same distance from Israel as Iran's uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. Lt. General Dan Halutz, the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces in 2006, when asked how far Israel would go

to stop Iran's nuclear program, replied simply: "Two thousand kilometers."¹

Last year, Israeli officials leaked the details of a secret Israeli air attack against a convoy transporting Iran-supplied arms in Sudan that was headed for Egypt's Sinai Peninsula to be smuggled through tunnels to Hamas. The officials stressed that the long distances involved signaled Israeli preparedness to launch other aerial operations against Iran if necessary.²

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The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sent even stronger signals since entering office last March. In an interview conducted on the day he was sworn into office, Netanyahu warned that, "You don't want a messianic apocalyptic cult controlling atomic bombs. When the wide-eyed believer gets hold of the reins of power and the weapons of mass death, then the entire world should start worrying, and that is what is happening in Iran."³ Significantly, both Netanyahu and his Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, formerly served as commandos in the Israel Defense Forces and would be open to bold and risky action if the circumstances warrant it.

From May 31 to June 4, 2009, Israel staged its largest country-wide civil defense drill, which simulated widespread missile attacks. In late June, an Israeli *Dolphin*-class submarine transited the Suez Canal for the first time to deploy in the Red Sea, and two Israeli *Saar*-class warships followed in July. An Israeli official warned that if Iran failed to halt its nuclear program, "These maneuvers are a message to Iran that Israel will follow up on its threats."⁴ The high-profile transits of the canal also signaled that

1. "Family Feud: Israel v. Iran," *The Economist*, January 19, 2006.

2. "How Israel Foiled an Arms Convoy Bound for Hamas," *Time*, March 30, 2009, at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1888352,00.html> (January 13, 2010).

3. Jeffrey Goldberg, "Netanyahu to Obama: Stop Iran— Or I Will," *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2009, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200903u/netanyahu> (December 16, 2009).

Egypt, which shares Israeli concerns about the threats posed by Iran, particularly after the discovery of a large Hezbollah cell operating in Egypt, is willing to cooperate with Israel to defend against threats posed by Iran.

The head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency reportedly has met with Saudi officials and assured Prime Minister Netanyahu that Saudi Arabia would turn a blind eye to Israeli warplanes passing through Saudi air space to strike Iranian targets in a possible future air raid.⁵

An Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities would not be unprecedented. Israel has launched preventive air strikes at nuclear facilities developed by hostile states in the past. In June 1981, Israel launched a successful air strike against Iraq's Osiraq reactor and inflicted a major setback on the Iraqi nuclear weapons program.⁶ In September 2007, Israel launched an air strike against a nuclear facility in Syria that was being built with North Korean assistance. The Israeli warplanes penetrated Syrian air defenses—which were more formidable than the air defense systems currently protecting Iranian nuclear sites—with little apparent problem.⁷

Israel probably can only delay, not halt, Iran's nuclear program. Nevertheless, Israeli leaders may conclude that buying time is worth the considerable costs and risks of Iranian retaliation because Israel perceives a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat. Israel is a small country that would be devastated by a single nuclear explosion.

It would take an extensive air campaign, probably including more than a thousand sorties over several weeks, to increase the certainty of destroying the bulk of Iran's known nuclear infrastructure. But Israel does not have enough warplanes and refueling capabilities to sustain such an intensive campaign against such distant targets over a prolonged period of time, especially if the countries located

between Israel and Iran (Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia) object to Israeli use of their airspace, as they undoubtedly would, at least publicly.

Nevertheless, Israel could opt to launch a single surprise attack at a limited number of key facilities to disrupt the Iranian nuclear weapons effort. The overall success of such a mission would depend on the quality of Israeli intelligence on Iran's nuclear facilities, the capabilities of Iran's air defenses, the accuracy of the strikes and the capability of Israeli ordnance to penetrate hardened targets. A single wave of attacks would not bring lasting benefits; Israel would have to launch multiple follow-up strikes to inflict higher levels of damage on Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

From Israel's perspective, buying even a small amount of time to postpone an existential threat is a worthwhile endeavor. The 1981 strike on Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor did not end Iraq's nuclear weapons efforts, but it paid large dividends because Saddam Hussein's regime never was able to replace the reactor. Iraq's nuclear program suffered further setbacks due to U.S. air strikes during the 1991 Gulf war and the U.N. sanctions that followed after Iraq refused to abide by the subsequent ceasefire agreement. An Israeli military operation that delayed the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran also would have the benefit of delaying the prospective cascade of nuclear proliferation that would accelerate a nuclear arms race among other states threatened by Iran, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, which would further destabilize the tense region and immensely complicate Israel's security environment.

An Israeli strike against Iranian nuclear facilities would be a much more difficult and complex operation than the 1981 raid on Iraq's Osiraq reactor. The Iranian dictatorship learned the lessons of Israel's 1981 strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor: The Iranian nuclear infrastructure is more decentralized,

4. Jonathan Marcus, "Israel's Military Message to Iran," BBC News, July 16, 2009.

5. Uzi Mahnaimi and Sarah Baxter, "Saudis Give Nod to Israeli Raid on Iran," *The Times*, July 5, 2009.

6. For a good analysis of the attack, see Peter Ford, "Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?" Occasional Paper No. 59, Institute for National Security Studies, U.S. Air Force Academy, July 2005.

7. Uzi Mahnaimi, Sarah Baxter, and Michael Sheridan, "Israelis 'Blew Apart Syrian Nuclear Cache,'" *The Times*, September 16, 2007.

dispersed, hardened, and protected than was Iraq's nuclear program. Some of the nuclear sites have been located in cities, which would magnify the collateral casualties of air strikes. Other sites have been built deep underground with assistance from North Korea, which has developed world-class tunneling technology.

Israel's window of opportunity for launching an air strike could soon close if Iran acquires more sophisticated air defense missiles, such as the S-300 surface-to-air missile that it has long sought from Russia.

Israel may not have the specialized "bunker buster" ordnance necessary to destroy some of the hardened facilities buried deep underground. But the Israelis may strike the entrances of the underground facilities to shut them down, at least temporarily. Israeli warplanes could destroy nearby power plants to deprive some of the facilities of the electrical power necessary for their operation. The Israeli air force also has trained to destroy Iranian targets by using low-yield nuclear weapons.⁸ But it is doubtful that Israel would break the nuclear taboo unless Iran first launched ballistic missile or air attacks with chemical, biological, or radiological weapons of mass destruction.

Israeli strikes are likely to be hampered by long distances to targets and the need for extensive air-to-air refueling from slow-moving aerial tankers. Iran's air defenses, which rely on quantity rather than quality, probably would pose a limited threat to Israeli warplanes, which have sophisticated electronic warfare capabilities.⁹ But improvements in Iranian air defenses could make air attacks much riskier. Israel's window of opportunity for launching an air strike could soon close if Iran acquires more

sophisticated air defense missiles, such as the S-300 surface-to-air missile that it has long sought to purchase from Russia.¹⁰ The delivery of this system, which can track up to 100 targets and engage up to 12 targets simultaneously within a 120-mile range, could greatly complicate an Israeli air campaign.

The timing of an Israeli attack would also be determined by estimates of when an attack would no longer be effective. Israeli analysts reportedly believe that Iran now has enough low enriched uranium that it could further enrich to build a bomb in about 10 months, but that after another year of uranium enrichment it would only need half that time to build one.¹¹ Clearly, the clock is ticking not only for Iran's nuclear program, but for Israel's preventive option.

Iran's Reaction

Iran's retaliation for an Israeli strike is likely to be fierce, protracted, and multi-pronged. Iran is likely to bombard Israel with its Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missiles, possibly armed with chemical, biological, or radiological warheads. Such a missile barrage would amount to a terror campaign, similar to the "war of the cities" during the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq war, when the two adversaries launched hundreds of SCUD surface-to-surface missiles at each others' cities. Possible suicidal air attacks, perhaps launched from bases in Syria, or attacks by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), based in Lebanon, Syria, or ships off Israel's coast, could not be ruled out.

In addition to direct attacks on Israel, the Tehran regime is likely to launch indirect attacks using a wide variety of surrogate groups, such as Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas, all of which are armed with Iranian-supplied rockets. Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist organization created in 1982 by Iran to oppose the Israeli intervention in

8. Uzi Mahnaimi and Sarah Baxter, "Revealed: Israel Plans Nuclear Strike on Iran," *The Times*, January 7, 2007, at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article1290331.ece> (December 17, 2009).

9. Anthony H. Cordesman, "Israeli and U.S. Strikes on Iran: A Speculative Analysis," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 5, 2007, p. 8, at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/070305_iran_israelius.pdf (December 17, 2009).

10. Ariel Cohen, "The Russia–Iran S-300 Air Defense Systems Deal: Beware of Russians Bearing Gifts," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2350, March 20, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/wm2350.cfm>.

11. Ethan Bronner, "Painful Middle East Truth: Force Trumps Diplomacy," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2009.

Lebanon and support Iran's Islamist revolution, continues to receive arms, training, financial support, and ideological leadership from Iran's radical regime through the Revolutionary Guards. Iran has completely re-equipped Hezbollah since its 2006

Iran also has armed Hamas with increasingly sophisticated long-range rockets.

war with Israel in direct violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. Hezbollah has received longer-range and more lethal Iranian rockets that would threaten many more Israeli civilians than during the 2006 war.

Iran also has armed Hamas with increasingly sophisticated long-range rockets. Recently, Israeli military officials disclosed that Hamas has acquired an Iranian-supplied rocket capable of striking Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city, from Gaza.¹² Terrorist attacks on Israeli targets outside Israel, as well as against Jewish communities abroad, would also be near-certain. Iran was involved in the 1992 and 1994 Buenos Aires bombings of the Israeli embassy and a Jewish NGO.¹³ Iran could activate Hezbollah sleeper cells to attack Israeli targets not only in the Middle East, but in South America, North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.¹⁴

Tehran could also attack American interests in the region in retaliation for an Israeli strike. Despite the fact that both the Bush and Obama Administrations have opposed an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, the conspiracy-minded Islamist regime may presume the existence of at least tacit American support for an Israeli attack. Iran could target American soldiers in Iraq by escalating its support for proxy groups such as the Mahdi Army or by infiltrating more elements of the Revolutionary Guards into the

country to attack Americans directly. The Iranian regime could increase the supply of sophisticated improvised explosive devices, such as the lethal explosively formed projectile (EFP) mines that are capable of penetrating even the heaviest armor. It could also foment more trouble for the United States in Afghanistan by inciting Shia Afghans against U.S. forces, renewing its support for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezbi Islami (Party of Islam) forces, or throwing its weight more forcefully behind the Taliban. Tehran has already provided limited quantities of arms and supplies to the Taliban.¹⁵

American military, diplomatic, and government personnel, as well as civilians, would be put at risk of Iranian-supported terrorist attacks throughout the world, particularly in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In addition to using surrogates, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iran may also upgrade its arms-length relations with the al-Qaeda terrorist network and give it more support beyond the sanctuary and tacit cooperation that it has already provided.

International Reactions to an Israeli Strike

Russia. Moscow would be the big winner of an Israeli-Iranian war. Russia has invested heavily in cultivating a strategic alliance with Tehran that has given it a lucrative export market for its nuclear, military, and other technologies and a useful ally for contesting American influence. Russia also stands to accrue substantial economic benefits from the spike in world oil prices that would accompany an Israeli-Iranian military crisis since its chief export is oil. But an Israeli-Iranian war would also pose risks for Moscow. Hundreds of Russian scientists and technicians work at the Bushehr nuclear complex and could become collateral casualties if Israel opts to destroy that facility. If any were killed it would be

12. Amy Teibel, "Intel Chief: Gaza Rockets Can Reach Tel Aviv," Associated Press, November 3, 2009.

13. James Phillips, "The Challenge of Revolutionary Iran," A Special Report to the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Human Rights, Heritage Foundation, March 29, 1996, p. 5, at <http://www.heritage.org/dataconvert/pdf/cb0024.pdf>.

14. James Phillips, "Hezbollah's Terrorist Threat to the European Union," Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe, June 20, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/tst062007a.cfm>.

15. Lara Setrakian, "Petraeus Accuses Iran of Aiding Afghan Taliban," ABC News, December 16, 2009.

added incentive for Moscow to push hard at the U.N. Security Council for sanctions on Israel.

China. Beijing is likely to protect its growing economic, energy, and geopolitical investment in Iran by firmly supporting its ally at the Security Council and pushing for a denunciation and possible sanctions against Israel.

Arab states. Publicly, most Arab countries would denounce an Israeli preventive attack as further evidence of Israeli hostility to the Muslim world. But most, with the exception of Iran's ally Syria, would privately welcome the attack. Even if it did not permanently prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb, it could divert Iran from threatening its smaller Arab neighbors.

Europe. Most European states, with the possible exception of Britain and France, would likely criticize Israel for launching its attack. Many European states would suffer adverse economic consequences from the resulting spike in world oil prices.

U.S. Policy and the Limits of Diplomacy

Despite the diplomatic efforts of several U.S. Administrations, Iran has repeatedly rejected offers to permanently defuse the long-simmering confrontation over its illicit nuclear weapons program. Tehran temporarily froze its uranium enrichment efforts from 2003 to 2005, undoubtedly due to fear of possible U.S. military action after American interventions in neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq. But once the Iranian regime concluded that the U.S. was bogged down in Iraq, it dropped the charade of negotiations with the EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) and resumed its nuclear efforts in 2005 after hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took power.¹⁶ The Bush Administration endorsed the EU-3 diplomatic initiative and later joined the broader P5 +1 (the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany) diplomatic initiative, but Tehran dismissed these diplomatic offers and ignored three rounds of mild sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council.

The Obama Administration sweetened the U.S. diplomatic offer and sought to engage Iran diplomatically without any preconditions. But President Obama's engagement policy has failed to budge Tehran, which has accelerated its uranium enrichment efforts and again was caught cheating on its legal obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty by building a secret nuclear facility near Qom that was revealed by President Obama in late September. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) suspects that Iran has additional secret nuclear facilities that it has illegally hidden from the IAEA.

Diplomacy backed by timid U.N. Security Council sanctions is not likely to dissuade Iran from continuing its nuclear weapons program. It is too late in the game and Tehran has invested too much scarce economic resources, human capital, and prestige to refrain from taking the final steps to attaining a nuclear capability. Moreover, Iranian hardliners, who have established an increasingly firm grip on power, are vehemently opposed to better relations with the United States. They fear that improved bilateral relations with the "Great Satan" would pose a threat to their own dominant position within Iran because it would tempt disillusioned Iranians to join a "soft revolution" against them. They know that three previous Iranian revolutions were aborted after westernized elements defected from the revolutionary coalition and cooperated with foreign powers.

Iranian hardliners have established an increasingly firm grip on power and are vehemently opposed to better relations with the United States.

The Obama Administration argues that the erosion of Iranian domestic political support for the regime after the post-election crackdown in June will make Tehran's hardliners more open to compromise on the nuclear issue. But in reality, the prospects for any kind of a satisfactory diplomatic

16. James Phillips, "U.S. Policy and Iran's Nuclear Challenge," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 942, June 2, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Iran/hl942.cfm>.

resolution of the stalemate over Iran's nuclear activities are bleaker in the wake of Ahmadinejad's disputed "re-election." Having violently quelled opposition protests, which were blamed on Western meddling in Iran's internal affairs, it is unrealistic to expect a more conciliatory attitude from Iran's dogmatic anti-American regime.

On the contrary, isolated internationally and stripped of any semblance of legitimacy at home, the regime now has an even greater incentive to finish its nuclear weapons project to ensure its own survival. Iran's hard-line leaders see a nuclear capability as a trump card that will deter foreign intervention and give at least a modest boost to their shrinking base of popular support. Negotiations are useful to the regime for buying time and staving off more international sanctions, but Tehran will obstinately resist international efforts to persuade it to halt uranium enrichment, as its leaders continue to publicly proclaim at every opportunity.

The United States has the advantage of being geographically further away from Iran than Israel and thus less vulnerable to an Iranian nuclear attack. But it must be sensitive to its ally's security perspective.

Vice President Joseph Biden spoke the truth when he said on July 5 that "Israel can determine for itself—it's a sovereign nation—what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else." Biden recognized that, "Look, we cannot dictate to another sovereign nation what they can and cannot do when they make a determination—if they make a determination that they are existentially threatened."¹⁷ President Obama quickly denied that his Vice President's comments signaled a green light for an Israeli attack.¹⁸

But Vice President Biden was correct in assessing that Israel cannot afford to bet on Iranian self-restraint. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, also has warned that "there is

a leadership in Israel that is not going to tolerate" a nuclear Iran.¹⁹ Given this reality and Iran's public threats to attack the United States in retaliation for an Israeli attack, the Obama Administration must be mindful of the fact that the United States inevitably will be drawn into an Israeli-Iranian crisis.

To mitigate the threats posed by a nuclear-armed Iran and protect American interests, the United States should:

- **Recognize Israel's right to self-defense against a hostile Islamist dictatorship that also threatens U.S. interests and regional stability.** Washington should not seek to block Israel from taking what it considers to be necessary action against an existential threat. The United States does not have the power to guarantee that Israel would not be attacked by a nuclear Iran in the future, so it should not betray the trust of a democratic ally by tying its hands now. Although an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear program will entail increased risks for U.S. interests in the Middle East, these risks would be dwarfed by the threats posed by a nuclear-armed Iran. Not only would a nuclear Iran pose a much more dire direct threat to the U.S., Israel, and other allies, but Tehran might pass a nuclear weapon to one of its Islamist terrorist surrogates. Its support for terrorism against Israel, insurgent attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq, and subversive efforts against moderate Arab governments are likely to grow steadily if it believes its nuclear capability gives it a *carte blanche* to act with impunity. Moreover a nuclear Iran would induce many other Middle Eastern states to seek their own nuclear weapons. This cascade of nuclear proliferation would enormously increase the risks of a future nuclear exchange involving some combination of Middle Eastern nuclear powers, threaten Israel and other U.S. allies, and increase the risks of oil disruptions, even if Iran was not involved in a future crisis.

17. ABC News, "'This Week' Transcript: Exclusive Vice President Joe Biden," July 5, 2009, at <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/Politics/story?id=8002421&page=2> (December 17, 2009).

18. BBC News, "'No Green Light' for Iran Attack," July 8, 2009, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8139655.stm> (December 17, 2009).

19. "Warnings on Iran," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 2009, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123897499619091093.html> (December 17, 2009).

- **Prepare for war with Iran.** Given that the United States is likely to be attacked by Iran in the aftermath of an Israeli strike anyway, it may be logical to consider joining Israel in a preventive war against Iran. But the Obama Administration is extremely unlikely to follow this course. However, the Administration must be ready to respond to any Iranian attacks. It must prepare contingency plans and deploy sufficient forces to protect U.S. military forces and embassies in the Middle East; defend allies, oil facilities and oil tanker routes in the Persian Gulf; and target Iranian ballistic missile, naval, air force, and Revolutionary Guard forces for systematic destruction.²⁰ In the event of a conflict, Iran's nuclear facilities should be relentlessly targeted until all known nuclear weapon-related sites are destroyed completely. Perhaps the preparations for such a war, combined with the knowledge that Washington will not restrain Israel, would enable cooler heads to prevail in Tehran before Israel is forced to take action to defend itself.
- **Deploy missile defenses to defend Israel and other U.S. allies from Iranian missile attacks.** The Pentagon has already deployed a sophisticated X-Band radar to Israel to support several different types of American and Israeli missile defense interceptors. Israel has already deployed the Arrow and the Patriot PAC-3 missile defense systems. In addition, the United States should make preparations to deploy or transfer to Israel the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and sea-based or land-based versions of the Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors. It would be particularly useful to deploy U.S. Navy Aegis-class warships off the coasts of Israel and other threatened U.S. allies in the event of a crisis to help defend against a possible Iranian ballistic missile attack.
- **The United States should also hold more frequent missile defense exercises with Israel and other allies.** The recent Juniper Cobra joint missile defense exercises conducted with Israel in October–November 2009, for example,

involved up to 2,000 personnel and some 17 U.S. Navy warships that simulated a joint defense against a missile attack on Israel from all directions. The most important aspect of the exercise was that it provided hands-on experience to the U.S. and Israeli military personnel in operating an integrated command and control system for defending Israel against missile attack. This experience is necessary to maintaining an effective overall missile defense system.

The U.S. and Israel, however, still need to keep an eye on the development of more sophisticated missile threats, which may include countermeasures designed to confuse or overwhelm existing and near-term missile defense systems. This is why Israel should ask the United States to develop and deploy space-based missile defense interceptors for its own defense and for the defense of U.S. allies. Such space-based systems will address the countermeasures threat because they will be effective in downing ballistic missiles in the boost phase, before such countermeasures are released. The U.S., however, has not pursued space-based defense options since the early 1990s. The Obama Administration has shown no commitment to move on this front. The U.S. needs to move forward in this area and Israel should be encouraging it to do so.

The Obama Administration also should offer to deploy land-based or sea-based missile defense systems in the greater Persian Gulf area and conduct missile defense exercises in the area with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the alliance formed in 1981 by Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to provide collective defense against Iran and other threats.

The Bush Administration's "third site" missile defense plan for Europe would have provided some additional protection to European allies and the United States from Iranian missiles by the middle of the next decade. The Obama Administration abandoned that system,²¹ intending to

20. Heritage Foundation Iran Working Group, "Iran's Nuclear Threat: The Day After," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 53, June 4, 2009, at http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/upload/sr_53.pdf.

replace the planned ground-based third-site systems with sea-based and land-based versions of the SM-3. The two should be pursued in tandem to build a more robust defense. The Obama Administration's retreat on missile defense in Europe has sent a signal that foreign political pressures, in this case from Russia, can cause the U.S. to withdraw defensive commitments to its allies and friends. This is not a reassuring message in the dangerous and volatile Middle East.

- **Enhance deterrence against Iranian attacks.** To deter Iran from following through on its threats to attack American targets in response to an Israeli preventive attack, the Obama Administration must make it clear to Tehran *beforehand* that such attacks will make a bad situation much worse for the regime. Since the Islamist dictatorship's highest priority is its continued domination of Iran, Washington should privately warn the Supreme Leader that if the Ahmadinejad regime launches attacks against U.S. targets, the U.S. will respond with devastating strikes not only against Iran's military and nuclear targets, but against regime leaders and the institutions that keep the regime in power: particularly the Revolutionary Guards, intelligence agencies, and internal security forces.
- **Mitigate the impact of a possible Iranian-instigated oil crisis.** Iran has threatened to disrupt oil shipping through the Strait of Hormuz in the event of a crisis. This would put at risk approximately 16–17 million barrels of oil per day, or about 20 percent of world oil consumption. Such a disruption would spike oil prices to previously unseen heights and would impose a major oil shock on the global economy. Iran could also launch air attacks, naval attacks, commando raids, or sabotage operations against Arab oil facilities in the Persian Gulf to further disrupt world oil markets. The United States and its allies must be prepared to immediately take action to defend against these attacks, repair any

damage to pipeline or other oil infrastructure, and facilitate the production and transportation of alternative sources of oil to panicked oil consumers. Washington should mobilize and lead a coalition of NATO, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Japan, Australia, India, and other interested countries to deploy naval and air forces to prevent the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and minimize the economic impact of an oil crisis as soon as possible.

Washington should also warn Tehran that if it takes action to disrupt Arab oil production in the Persian Gulf or attacks American targets, the U.S. will prevent any Iranian oil from being exported through a naval blockade. Communicating this ahead of time could help to deter Iran, as the loss of oil income would be a major blow that would threaten the survival of the regime.

- **Block arms sales to Iran.** Washington and its allies should make every effort to deprive Iran of foreign arms transfers, particularly the impending sale of Russian S-300 surface to air missiles, which could provoke Israel to strike sooner rather than later. Stronger multinational efforts also need to be made to prevent Iran from transferring arms to Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups, which pose a threat not only to Israel, but to stability in Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan. On November 3, Israeli naval forces intercepted the *Francop*, an Antigua-flagged cargo ship that was transporting about 500 tons of weapons from Iran to Hezbollah, via Syria.²² The U.S. should press other allies to join in giving greater assistance to Israeli efforts to intercept Iranian arms flows, particularly to Hezbollah and Hamas.
- **Veto any Security Council resolution that does not acknowledge Iran's provocations and continued defiance of U.N. resolutions.** The U.S. should veto any resolution at the U.N. Security Council that condemns Israel without condemning Iran's long history of threats and sponsorship of terrorism against the Jewish state.

21. Baker Spring, "Two Plus Two Equals Five: The Obama Administration's Missile Defense Plans Do Not Add Up," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2624, September 23, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/ballisticmissiledefense/wm2624.cfm>.

22. Jeffrey White, "Iran and Hizballah: Significance of the *Francop* Interception," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* No. 1600, November 12, 2009.

Iran's radical regime has brought this war on itself. The Ahmadinejad regime has frequently stoked tensions with Israel by threatening to "erase Israel from the page of history" and a constant stream of other threats that are tantamount to incitement for genocide. Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust while building weapons for another possible holocaust was unwisely provocative as well. Israel, whose unofficial motto is "Never again," is especially sensitive to such bellicose rhetoric, particularly when it is backed up with concrete signs that Tehran is developing a nuclear capability and the missiles to deliver it. Washington should point out to members of the Security Council that are critical of the veto that the U.N.'s weak and ineffective response to Iran's nuclear program helped to sow the seeds of the Iran-Israel war.

Conclusion

The Obama Administration must develop a Plan B to contain the fallout if its engagement strategy fails to dissuade Iran from continuing on its current nuclear path. Tehran must recognize that America's allies and friends will protect their own interests, particularly Israel, which faces the greatest threat from a nuclear Iran. As bad as the consequences could be if Israel launched a preventive strike against Iran—it would be far worse if the two countries fought a nuclear war, or if the United States were forced to fight a war against a nuclear Iran.

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