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OBSERVATIONS FROM IRAQ, IRAN,
ISRAEL, THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

ISRAEL: Possible Iran scenarios

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The military option against Iran's nuclear program always seems to be discussed in the context of one table or another. On the table, off it or under it, the possibility of a strike lurks in the background, a semi-abstract code for something potentially awesome -- and not in the cool sense of the word.

President Obama told Israeli television in a [recent interview](#) (in itself an interesting occurrence) that the possibility of Iran possessing a nuclear weapon was unacceptable and that the issue has been the No. 1 priority in foreign policy of the last 18 months. "We continue to leave the door open for a diplomatic resolution of this challenge, but I assure you that I have not taken options off the table," he told Channel 2.

Again, the table. So whose table is it?

Israel feels genuinely and directly threatened by Iran's nuclear program but consistently warns that everyone else is too. It maintains that the international community, not Israel, should be spearheading the move to stop the program. It has also indicated that when push comes to shove, it won't rely on anyone else to defend Israel.

[Recent polls](#) show most Americans would support an Israeli strike to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. Other figures from a [recent Pew Research](#) global attitude survey found strong objection to Iran possessing nuclear weapons and no small numbers willing to consider military action too, although it wasn't stated by whom.

Asked about concerns that Israel might strike Iran on its own, Obama said he thinks the relationship between the U.S. and Israel is sufficiently strong "so that neither of us try to surprise each other, but we try to coordinate on issues of mutual concern and that approach is one I think Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu is committed to," Obama said.

A new report by the [Oxford Research Group](#) says the potential for an Israeli military strike has "grown sharply" and estimates that even if carried out solely by Israel, such a strike would be viewed across the Middle East as having been undertaken with the knowledge, approval and assistance of the United States. So the question of who's sitting at the head of the table is irrelevant; crumbs will be falling everywhere.

[The course is almost run](#), say analysts from the Institute for National Security Studies, or INSS, a think tank in Tel Aviv. Typically, the pattern of the West has been diplomatic processes to nowhere. Iran's obvious nuclear progress is now such that the international community is taking a more realistic approach and making stronger statements. Punditry is talking about possible war and some, write experts Emily B. Landau and Ephraim Asculai, are "setting the stage for blaming Israel for pushing the U.S. to take military action."

The [Responsibility to Prevent Coalition](#) argues that Iran is everybody's table and that there's more than just the nuclear threat on the menu. Irwin Cotler, Canadian member of parliament and former Canadian justice minister, presented a 200-page report titled "The Danger of a Nuclear, Genocidal and Rights-Violating Iran: the Responsibility to Prevent Petition" last week in Israel. Focusing strictly on the nuclear issue has sanitized other threats, he warns, such as Iran's "genocidal incitement" and "domestic repression." The report has been endorsed by 100 leading jurists, scholars, rights activists and leaders and offers an [18-point 'road map'](#) for dealing with Iran.

Along with the tables come windows, windows of opportunity that open and close. And with the geo-political sands shifting, airspaces also open and close, shuffling the likelihood of different scenarios.

A special report broadcast last week by Channel 2 outlined various strike scenarios accompanied by a nifty graphic feature. For those who don't speak Hebrew, here are the main options, in order of appearance on the clip above and their likeliness:

- From Israel to Saudi Arabia and then to Iran. 1,600 km, refueling over Saudi Arabia. The only scenario that allows passing through one country's airspace.
- From Israel to Jordan and then to Iran. 1,600 km, refueling over Iraq, not far from border with Iran. Israel would have to get permission from two countries for use of airspace.
- From Israel to Jordan, then Saudi Arabia, then to Iran. 2,000 km, refueling over Saudi Arabia near its borders with Iraq and Kuwait. Recent reports that Saudi Arabia granted silent permission for Israel to use its airspace were denied.
- From Israel to Syria, then to Turkey, then to Iran. 1,800 kms, refueling over southeast Turkey, near its borders with Iraq and Iran. Considering Israel's nose-diving relations with Turkey, use of Turkish airspace is not taken for granted.
- From Israel to Syria, then to Iraq and on to Iran. 1,500 km, refueling over north Iraq. It's a shortcut but pretty unlikely, said the report.

-- Batsheva Sobelman in Jerusalem

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