

Iran is trying to avoid a clash but may surprise Israel

Tehran will find it hard to remain silent for long if Israel strikes Iranian targets; at some stage it might shock us with the timing, weapons or method

Ephraim Kam / Feb. 26, 2018

[The latest confrontation between Israel and Iran](#) on the northern front was predictable. We can assume that neither side wanted the clash, but with Tehran having sent substantial Iranian and Shi'ite combat forces to Syria while arming Hezbollah with advanced weapons, and with Israel determined to check the danger, a clash was almost inevitable.

On top of that is the consensus among Israel's leaders that Iran presents the most serious threat to Israel. This perception is based on a number of elements: Hezbollah and its huge missile system, Iran's large and improved missile system, and Tehran's policy of encircling Israel with radical Shi'ites, marked by the anti-Israel front in Syria and Lebanon.

Clearly if Iran goes nuclear some day this threat will increase to an unprecedented level. But the balance of powers is more complex. The main tool used by the Israel Defense Forces in Syria is the air force, and Iran has no answer to it; its own air force is based on planes 30 to 40 years old and clearly can't cope with its Israeli rival.

In addition, Iran has to operate forces hundreds of kilometers from its borders without any real defense when they're subject to Israeli attacks and provocations by Sunni groups in Syria. Weapons convoys to Hezbollah and arms plants in Syria are exposed to attacks.

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