

D-Day+1: Strategies for the Day after an Attack on Iran

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Describing the application of military force against Iran as an “attack” or an “operation” is misguided. The first strike wave would be nothing more than a catalyst for the military and political struggle that would take place in the months thereafter.

The purpose of this essay is to examine possible strategies that Iran, Israel, and the United States might adopt after a military strike on Iranian nuclear assets. To this end, the essay presumes that: (a) Israel has attacked Iran and caused moderate damage to the nuclear program, with tolerable losses to the attacking force; (b) the attack was carried out without the consent of the United States; and (c) the attack took place before Iran acquired the capabilities required to assemble a nuclear weapon. The essay also seeks to outline the core constraints and considerations of the respective sides and assess them as they evolve dynamically, relative to the steps of the other sides.

Four components created the fundamental strategic dynamic that has allowed Iran’s nuclear program to progress as far as it has: first, Iran succeeded in representing impressive military posturing that exceeds its real capabilities and enhanced its deterrence; second, Iran adopted a “patient” approach to nuclearization, i.e., steady expansion of its know-how and manufacturing infrastructures without breaking out to the actual development of a warhead; third, the United States preferred to reduce the costs and risks to itself rather than realize its stated policy objectives;

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and fourth, Israel hesitated to apply force, in part out of concern of military retaliation by Iran and its allies and America's political response.

The goal of Israel's strategy should be to terminate the said fundamental dynamic by undercutting these components. An Israeli strike would be designed to place Iran on the horns of a dilemma and prevent it from continuing along its current and – from its perspective – effective path. Whatever the techno-tactical outcome of the strike, Iran would at that point be unable to avoid making difficult, less than optimal decisions in at least two realms: one, against whom to retaliate and how, and two, whether to continue toward nuclearization with the same patient approach or whether to break out immediately toward nuclear weapons.

The first wave of strikes on Iran's nuclear program, then, is meant to force it to choose between abandoning the effective courses of action it has used to get to where it is today, and clinging to these same courses of action, yet in a new reality in which they will be less effective. Strikes need not necessarily destroy centrifuges; all they must do is undermine the effectiveness of Iran's strategy.

At the second stage after the strikes, Iran will naturally seek to present a counter strategy by which it will nonetheless be able to continue creating the political and strategic conditions it needs to complete its nuclear program. This essay contends, however, that Iran will find it challenging to formulate an effective counter strategy, and that any alternative it chooses will be less effective than its current approach.

At the third stage, Israel will try to exploit Iran's strategy in order to deny Iran the conditions it needs to complete its nuclear program. The new strategic dynamic that will emerge is intended to allow the Western powers to initiate new political processes, hitherto impossible, to dismantle the Iranian nuclear program. At that time, the political processes would be characterized by contradictory attributes. They would be characterized on the one hand by the advantage inherent in the fact that Israel's goals are in this case congruent with those of the international community, and on the other hand, by the disadvantage inherent in the international community's tendency to look for quick and easy exits from crises, inter alia, by applying pressure to the side more susceptible to it.

These stages and processes may take months, during which Israel might be required to resort to repeated applications of force intended

to prevent Iran from rehabilitating its deterrence, outdo any military success Iran might have in retaliatory moves, serve as ongoing pressure for the developing political process, and counter any proposed exits from the crisis that are incongruent with Israel's vital interests.

One cannot rule out the possibility that after an Israeli strike on Iran, contingency plans would remain unused and the three relevant sides would reassess their strategies, with their strategic constraints and core interests surfacing much more vividly than before.

Iran's Retaliation Dilemma

The fundamental strategic dynamic that allowed Iran to move forward with its nuclear program thus far relied on Iran's posturing as being undeterred by confrontation, while Israel and the United States were perceived as deterred by such a possible conflict. Indeed, to date Iran's adversaries have taken steps involving limited risks only, such as diplomacy, sanctions, and a covert campaign. America's clinging to its consistent, predictable course of action – another round of talks, more sanctions, the movement of forces in the Gulf, and covert activities – has served only to erode its strategic credibility and taught Iran not to fear steps beyond the range of challenges Iran has already taken into consideration and is prepared to deal with. The naming of Chuck Hagel as candidate for Secretary of Defense provided further reassurance for Iran's perception that no strategic surprises are to be feared.

Another important indication of the nature of the balance of deterrence (or lack thereof) may be found in comparisons with similar cases in the past, when Israel attacked nuclear programs in earlier stages of development than Iran's.¹ But in the Iranian case, it seems Israel has already allowed the most effective timing for an attack to elapse, at least in terms of the physical effect (to distinguish from the strategic effect) Israel could expect to gain.

Therefore all that Iran had to do was to ignore or adapt to its adversaries' limited steps and rely on them not to escalate into a direct confrontation.

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The day after Israel's first wave of strikes, Iran will no longer be able to rely on unrealized or unexecuted means of national power – such as the representation of force or deterrence – and will have to choose between admitting it sustained a blow to which it cannot retaliate effectively and using tangible, actual, and effective force.

Some argue Iran would find it useful to adopt the role of victim that doesn't retaliate, but for Iran, victimhood – a synonym for weakness – is unhelpful, considering its grand strategy. Iran strives for regional hegemony, labors to become the most dominant foreign force in Iraq and Lebanon, and takes part in violent struggles from Syria to Yemen. A core component of its grand strategy is its surrounding satellites – states, ethnic groups, and sub-state actors – that play on Iran's team precisely because of its power. Therefore, should Iran adopt the stance of the weak victim, its attractiveness to these satellites would be severely compromised. In effect, then, if Iran avoids taking effective military action, it risks damaging its status and ability to realize its regional ambitions.

Moreover, should Iran be struck and fail to retaliate effectively, it would implicitly confirm that the military route is the most effective one in stopping its nuclear program. A situation in which non-military efforts prove to be ineffective in stopping the Iranian nuclear program but military efforts prove to be effective is intolerable for Iran. As it cannot afford a situation in which its adversaries conclude that the military route is more effective, Iran will have to make them pay a steep price for an attack. This is true regardless of the actual damage to Iran's nuclear project: even if only a modest part of the program is degraded and reconstruction takes no more than a few months, it would still be impossible for Iran not to react. A failure to retaliate would only show that a more extensive strike in the future, which would degrade the program more extensively, might be sustained without a significant cost exacted from Iran's adversaries.

In order to continue making progress in its nuclear program and ward off undesired post-attack political processes, Iran will have to rehabilitate its deterrence, which will be undercut by a strike of any scope (irrespective of the techno-tactical outcome of the strike). It will have to apply effective, actual force to demonstrate its ability to rebuff any attempt by the international community to uproot its nuclear program.

But what are Iran's options for the application of effective force? Its first dilemma is against whom to retaliate. Iran could choose to target

Israel alone or opt to retaliate more extensively, i.e., also against the United States and its vital interests in the region. Retaliating against the United States entails several problems: Iran would force the United States to join in the fighting and force it to cross the political and psychological barrier of avoiding the use of force against Iran. From that moment onwards, the road to escalation is short, from naval battles in the Strait of Hormuz to attacks on Iranian nuclear and regime targets. Once Iran itself crosses the highest escalation threshold – attacking Americans or disrupting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz – it will have no further degrees of escalation with which to deter the United States from using as much force against Iran as it sees fit. Furthermore, action against the United States would expose the limits of Iran's abilities, as the actual show would fall far short of the apocalyptic image Iran has fostered over the years. Opening shipping lanes through military force is well within the core competence of the US Navy. And a high intensity direct American-Iranian confrontation also bears no resemblance to the attrition inflicted indirectly by Iran's proxies on the American forces in Iraq.

The United States is capable of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons,² and it does not have to hunt down every last hidden component of the nuclear program. It can do so by causing Iran to alter its policy. The techno-tactical analyses arguing that a military operation would only delay Iran's nuclear program by two to four years³ are therefore essentially irrelevant. The United States' primary actions may center on applying force to the most vital pressure points – Iran's energy industry, the Revolutionary Guards, and regime cogs – in order to persuade Iran to reverse its policy of acquiring a nuclear bomb. After the imposition of a change in policy on Iran, consequential arrangements about centrifuges and nuclear infrastructures would follow. Were the United States to attribute as much urgency and importance to the Iranian nuclear challenge as Iran itself does, it would be able to impose its will. The only superpower in the world is capable of forcing a policy change on a nation with a GDP similar to that of Argentina, where one in seven citizens is illiterate, and where some of the principal weapon systems were procured from the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

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Therefore, it seems it would be preferable for Iran to single Israel out for retaliation, but neither is this alternative particularly effective. On its own, Iran can retaliate against Israel in only a limited way with some 300 moderately accurate long range missiles.⁴ It would likely not use all 300, but would keep some in reserve for future contingencies. Therefore, and taking into account interceptions by the Arrow and Patriot anti-missile systems and problems related to intelligence and accuracy, Iran's own direct retaliation would not exceed more than a few dozen hits. While this retaliation would be painful, it is hardly the Armageddon some have projected following an Israeli strike. Moreover, such an Iranian retaliation would not overshadow the strike on its nuclear facilities; on the contrary, it would be liable to puncture Iran's image as a regional power, possibly causing it more harm than not retaliating at all.

Furthermore, an Iranian retaliation against Israel alone would be a convenient outcome for the United States because it would mean that there was damage, even if limited, to Iran's nuclear program, yet at the same time, an Iranian retaliation against the United States was avoided, a global oil crisis was averted, and the global economy was not rocked. This would undermine Iran's deterrence, which in turn would enable steps that had previously been impracticable. Therefore this course of action

is also not without problems for Iran, especially because Iran's deterrence is not aimed at Israel alone but is intended to be multi-directional.

Another Iranian dilemma concerns the intensity of the retaliation. The limitations of Iran's capabilities in high intensity situations have already been mentioned. A low intensity retaliation would probably involve terrorist attacks around the world and engagements in shipping lanes, sporadic missile fire at Israel, and other forms of harassment. But a low intensity response is effective only to a limited degree: first, to a certain extent Israel and the world have grown inured to such attacks, and it is doubtful that more of the same – e.g., attacks on embassies – would

be able to overshadow a strike on Iran's nuclear installations. Second, for a low intensity retaliation to affect the political campaign that would necessarily ensue after the strike on Iran, it must be unprecedented in

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terms of impact and would have to be carried out within a relatively short period of time, i.e., during the weeks and months of the political campaign. But experience has shown that when Iran and its proxies attempt to carry out attacks under time pressure, the result is often far from effective. There is also no guarantee that it would necessarily tip the political campaign in Iran's favor. There is no obvious causal link between a global wave of terrorism inspired and directed by Iran and a shift in international political dynamics, whereby the West accepts Iranian nuclearization.

Hizbollah's Strategic Dilemma

Hizbollah can ostensibly compensate for Iran's limited ability to act on its own against Israel. However, Hizbollah is a hybrid creation fraught with structural tensions. On the one hand, it was built and financed to serve as an expeditionary force of sorts for Iran's missile echelon. It was founded precisely to deter Israel, and if deterrence fails, Hizbollah's purpose is to engage Israel with large stockpiles of rockets. On the other hand, Hizbollah strives to be the authentic representative of the Shia on the Lebanese domestic political scene, and has indeed become a major shareholder in the Lebanese state and a member of the Lebanese government.

It is unclear if Israel knows how to deny Hizbollah of its ability to fire rockets in what Israel deems to be an acceptable cost and time. Hizbollah is currently deployed in some 160 urban areas⁵ and is embedded in the Lebanese civilian population. But strategically, this is a double-edged sword and the challenge is mutual: in any future campaign, Israel – even if the purpose of its use of force is to degrade Hizbollah's launchers – might have to reach those urban areas either with firepower or ground forces, whereupon the collateral damage to the Lebanese state would be intolerable.

Hizbollah therefore must choose its dominant identity: that of an Iranian proxy or a patriotic Lebanese player. Depending on the answer, it will have to decide whether to retaliate symbolically to an Israeli strike on Iran or to live up to its original purpose and retaliate with full commitment to Iran. There is no way to know what Hizbollah will choose. Its broad set of considerations includes the possibility, for example, of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood taking control of the western part of the Fertile Crescent, including Syria. Hizbollah's assessment may be affected by

the very fact of the attack on Iran and its results. Should an attack be perceived as successful and Iran's continued ability to finance Hizbollah is in doubt, and should Iran find it challenging to formulate a counter strategy for imposing its will on its adversaries, Hizbollah may hesitate to continue gambling on the Iranian horse. The larger the crack in Iran's posturing and the more decisive Iran's adversaries appear to be, the more it is probable that within the range of possibilities, there will also be a possibility that Hizbollah will opt for a minor retaliation.

Back to the Iranian Dilemmas: How to Go Nuclear

Another component in the dynamic enabling Iran to reach its current advanced stage in the nuclear program has been its patient approach.⁶ Iran invested heavily in developing and expanding its nuclear infrastructures but was in no rush to develop an actual nuclear warhead. This approach entails two advantages: one, the danger it poses is perceived as distant and amorphous and therefore appears to give Iran's opponents more options than the immediate application of military force, and two, its nuclear program is seen as irreversible and impossible to uproot since once the know-how is assimilated and Iran develops highly redundant infrastructures, the utility of a military attack appears limited (at least for those focusing on the techno-tactical aspect).

The day after the strike, Iran will have to decide whether to continue its patient approach, which proved valuable thus far, or to change tack and break out to nuclear warhead development. Both alternatives are problematic. If Iran continues its patient approach, and the operating assumption of this essay is that the nuclear program was moderately damaged, the conclusion is that is worthwhile striking the program again. If Iran is passive and continues its previous patient approach even though the military strike has set its program back to a degree, further strikes are likely to delay the program that much more, making the military an effective way of rolling back the Iranian nuclear program. This conclusion is hardly favorable for Iran.

If Iran changes its approach and decides to break out toward nuclear weapons, its own actions would reduce the United States' options. Under such circumstances, the United States would find it hard not to take immediate military action against Iran. Once a crack in Iran's deterrence has emerged following Israel's strike, Iran can no longer – as it did in the past – rely on its representation of power, and it will also be

counterproductive for Iran to challenge the United States so bluntly by breaking out to nuclear weapons development. This conclusion holds even if the Israeli strike is carried out contrary to Washington's wishes.

Does Iran Have an Effective Strategy for D-Day+1?

On D-Day+1, Iran's objective will be to resist changes in the strategic dynamics and rebuff new international processes designed to dismantle its nuclear program. To this end, Iran will have to devise a way to combine between rehabilitating its deterrence and finding an effective approach to advance the nuclear program.

On the moderate end of the alternatives spectrum is the possibility that Iran will abstain from retaliating and cling to its patient nuclearization approach. As noted above, this strategy is not effective from Iran's perspective because it creates incentives for further strikes and reduces Iran's value in the eyes of its allies and its deterrence against its adversaries.

At one degree of escalation above that option, Iran retaliates against Israel and attempts to keep the United States out of the crisis. To achieve this, it must maintain its patient nuclearization approach. From Iran's perspective, this alternative would seem to be the least of all possible evils, but it too entails several flaws. First, Iran's own means of retaliation against Israel are limited and it is far from certain they will be sufficient to rehabilitate Iran's deterrence. Second, Iran will have to rely on Hizbollah to retaliate on its behalf, but Hizbollah has its own complicated set of considerations and there is no way of knowing how it will eventually act. Third, damage to the West will be minimal and therefore Iran's supposedly multi-directional deterrence will be undercut. Finally, Iran will retain its patient approach to nuclearization, but with rolled back capabilities due to the strike. This situation, combined with the lack of a multi-directional retaliation, will demonstrate to the West that Israel's strike was an effective gambit against Iran's nuclear program and thereby introduce the possibility of starting new processes previously considered impracticable.

At the high end of the alternatives scale is Iranian retaliation against the United States, combined with a breakout to nuclear arms. In this scenario, Iran barely leaves the United States any choice but to join the fighting. In a direct, high intensity confrontation, the superiority of the United States is absolute, and the United States would be able to inflict

damage on the Iranian state and the pillars of the regime to the point of persuading the leadership there to reverse its policy on nuclearization.

Israel's Strategic Dilemmas

The main achievement of Israel's first wave of strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities would be the very fact of the attack itself, and its challenge to the fundamental dynamics that allowed the Iranian nuclearization process to crystallize in the first place. Such a strike would be designed to open the door for political processes to reverse Iran's nuclear policy that were not previously possible.

Israel's first challenge is how to maintain its achievement in the months that these follow-up processes take shape. To that end, it must demonstrate stamina and perseverance not only on the military front, but on the diplomatic, domestic, political, and economic fronts as well. The campaign in Iran is not a sprint ending with the first wave of strikes, rather a marathon requiring ongoing endurance and staying power.

International diplomatic dynamics are characterized by inconsistency: on the one hand, there is the propensity to move toward the goals at the consensus of the international community. This drive is convenient for Israel in this context, as Israel and the international community share similar goals. Moreover, regarding the Iranian nuclear challenge – unlike many security challenges in the past – Israel is capable of clearly articulating its political goals. In the fog and friction of international crises, the player that can clearly articulate what it wants benefits from a distinct advantage.

However, the dynamics of international diplomacy have another, less convenient tendency for Israel: the fierce desire to end crises as soon as possible while reducing costs and risks, by looking for the easiest way out or by pressuring the player more susceptible to pressure, irrespective of its positions. Both Israel and Iran will therefore want to seem to be more determined and less prone to pressure. Thus, an ongoing, repeated Israeli military effort is critical in order to achieve a number of goals: to prevent Iran from rehabilitating its deterrence in the months of negotiations following the first wave of strikes; to overshadow any Iranian military achievements during that time; to serve as an ongoing means of applying pressure by the international community in its attempt to dissuade Iran from continuing its nuclear enterprise (whether at the request of the international community or despite its reservations); and to demonstrate

the capacity to resist proposals to end the crisis without taking into sufficient consideration Israel's vital interests.

Israel must therefore maintain the ability to strike Iran repeatedly and effectively. Israel must also accumulate enough political capital to reinvest in the expected prolonged political campaign. To do so, it must come up with an initiative with regard to the Palestinians (no matter how remote the chances for success), initiate a thaw in relations with Turkey, try to forge a closer relationship with the new Egyptian regime, and work at fostering some coordination with Saudi Arabia. Israel must strengthen the narrative that a nuclear Iran is a threat not only to Israel but also to the Arab world and Turkey.

Israel's strategic dilemmas on D-Day+1 will be affected by how Iran decides its own dilemmas. In the most extreme scenario, in which Iran reacts retaliates against the United States as well and breaks out toward nuclear arms, Israel could possibly step aside to allow the United States to take the lead in conducting the crisis. However, Israel would face more intricate dilemmas should Iran act in a more restrained manner. For example, it would be more difficult to initiate an effective, concrete international political process on the Iranian nuclear issue if Iran retaliates only against Israel and maintains its patient approach to nuclear arms development. In such a case, Israel could put forward the following argument: (a) the first wave of strikes on the Iranian nuclear program damaged it to some degree or another yet did not cost the West much; (b) Israel proved it is possible to roll back Iran's nuclear program by military means, but the rollback depends on future strikes; (c) the strike exposed a crack in Iran's deterrence and the fact that no international apocalypse occurred as a result has cost Iran a vital card. Consequently, the conditions are ripe to launch a more effective political follow-on process than before.

Israel's most acute dilemma would occur should Iran choose to retaliate against Israel alone but at the same time break out toward nuclear arms. The question then would be: will the United States immediately take all the measures at its disposal to stop Iran from developing nuclear warheads. (The question would be even more acute if the narrative becomes that it was the Israeli attack that drove Iran to break out toward nuclear weapons.) In such a case, Israel would have to work in two directions: continue its strikes on Iran at higher degrees of escalation and persuade the international community of the need to act

immediately and effectively. In cold strategic terms, the fact that nuclear arms in Iranian hands are intolerable has nothing to do with the question of who is “responsible for Iran’s nuclear breakout.”⁷

Regarding the Hizbollah dilemma, Israel must wait for Hizbollah to reveal its intentions before deciding on its strategy against the organization. The organization will have to choose between serving Iran’s interests (thereby causing intolerable damage to Lebanon) and serving Lebanon’s interests (turning its back on Iran). Hizbollah will also have to assess whether Iran can present an effective counter strategy or it has turned a page and started to lose power, and thus weigh betting on the Iranian card or hedging its risks. Should Hizbollah decide to reduce its retaliation to the bare symbolic minimum, Israel will be wise to accept the implicit offer to contain the crisis. Intentions need not be revealed verbally; firing hundreds of rockets “only” at the northern border area of Israel could be indicative of Hizbollah seeking to contain the crisis. Israel must take note of this. In such a case, Israel as well as the United States and Saudi Arabia would have to examine the possibility of signaling to Hizbollah alternatives to its being an Iranian proxy.

The Strategic Dilemmas of the United States

Beyond all the position papers prepared for the American administration, on D-Day+1 the world will experience a new reality and the United States will have to reexamine four variables:

- a. What are America’s vital interests on the Iranian issue?
- b. What are the costs and risks it is willing to incur in order to defend those interests, and has the strike changed its calculation on this question?
- c. Has the strike created new opportunities or changed the strategic equation in any way?
- d. What attitude should the United States take toward Israel, which embarked on the strike without prior American approval?

The United States has a clear interest in keeping nuclear arms out of Iran’s hands. This is its stated policy objective and it has been amply explained by the President and various members of the administration.⁸ Moreover, Iran is the most significant actor undermining the Pax Americana in the Middle East, thus threatening the vital interests of the United States and its allies. Should Iran have nuclear weapons, it will become impervious to direct threats and its radiation of national power

will be enhanced. Iran will then represent a grave threat on the nuclear level⁹ and will be more daring on the conventional level and in its use of sub-state proxies. Other actors will seek to forge closer relations with it, while the fear of Iran will set off a multilateral nuclear arms race in one of the least stable regions of the world. Furthermore, an Iran that achieves nuclear arms in spite of adamant declarations by the United States that it will not allow this to happen will accelerate the waning of America's strategic credibility.

Analysis of America's behavior since the extent of the Iraqi quagmire became clear reveals that often, in cases of tension between realizing its foreign policy objectives and shouldering the pertinent costs and risks, the United States prefers to give up on its policy objectives as long as it limits the costs and risks it incurs. However, the Iranian and Israeli strategies are liable to impose costs and risks on the United States beyond its intents. Because both states will focus on protecting their most vital interests, and in certain respects their existential interests, the minimal cost and risk threshold of the game is liable to be higher than what the United States is currently willing to contemplate. Once it acquiesces to this reality, new courses of action will crop up.

The new dynamics that will be take shape on D-Day+1 must, almost by definition, change the United States' strategic calculations. No matter what choice Iran makes – continuing its patient nuclearization approach but with reduced capabilities following the strike, breaking out to nuclear weapons, retaliating against the United States and its vital interests, or avoiding doing so despite having been attacked and having its nuclear program suffer a setback – these choices will introduce new factors into the American equation. Almost any choice Iran makes is liable to work against it in America's calculations.

The United States is liable to punish Israel as an ally that imposed on it a new reality it did not want. But the United States will also have to separate its accounting with Israel from its accounting with Iran. Even if it does punish Israel, the United States would still have a clear interest in keeping nuclear arms out of Iranian hands. It would be irrational of the United States not to maximize the advantages and opportunities afforded by the strike to promote America's own policy goals just because the strike occurred against its wishes, even if it concurrently punishes Israel for having carried it out.

The United States will also have to weigh the following extenuating circumstances: first, it would be hard to punish Israel for having pursued goals similar to the goals of America's own stated policy and having acted to defend interests identical to American vital interests as publicly stated by American officials. The United States may perhaps differ with Israel on the method but not on the definition of the problem, goals, and end state arrangements. Second, it would be hard to punish Israel should the attack prove to be an effective means of promoting said shared Israeli and American interests. And third, should the attack be carried out with outstanding tactical excellence, it would be hard to oppose it politically, because public opinion tends to fall for tactical excellence.

Competition between Strategies

A first strike by Israel on some of Iran's nuclear facilities is not a manifestation of an Israeli strategy. Much more than preoccupation with the physical, technical world, strategy does not deal with isolated moments in time but rather with dynamics over time. In recent years, the root dynamics have been such that they allowed Iran to make efficient progress toward realization of its nuclear ambition. The purpose of the first wave of strikes would therefore be to challenge the existing root dynamics.

Iran has relied on a deterring image that far exceeds its actual capabilities, on a patient approach to nuclearization, on America's reservations about involvement in yet another international crisis, and on Israel's concern regarding both Iran's military retaliation and America's diplomatic response. In this case, Iran's strategy can be thrown off balance by taking an operational step that would place Iran on the horns of a dilemma. The operational opening stage is designed to force Iran to choose between abandoning its current effective courses of action and clinging to them in a new reality in which they will be less effective than before. Iran will not be able to avoid making tough, less than optimal decisions, and these will represent a new factor in the strategic equations of the other players. Hizbollah will also be forced to choose between sacrificing Lebanese interests and sacrificing Iranian interests. The strategy toward Iran is meant to shape new dynamics and equilibriums that would gradually develop in the months after D-Day.

Iran will of course try to put forward a counter strategy and force the dynamics in a direction more convenient to it. The international

community too is liable to surprise by pursuing easy ways out of the crisis that do not address the fundamental challenge or making propositions that endanger Israel's vital interests, all of which will force Israel to demonstrate ongoing stamina and carry out follow-up military and other steps that must be well orchestrated along the timeline.

Accordingly, it is clear that what is at stake is not an attack or operation similar to the 1981 mission against the Iraqi nuclear reactor or, as foreign sources have reported, the 2007 attack on the Syrian reactor. This time what is at stake is a long war of many moves and counter moves, and Israel must prepare for this war fully understanding its nature, circumstances, and unique characteristics.

Notes

- 1 Iraq and, according to media reports, the attack on a nuclear installation in Syria.
- 2 Ron Tira, "Yes They Can: The US Can Prevent Iran from Acquiring the A-Bomb," *Infinity Journal*, IJ Exclusive, May 2012.
- 3 James Dobbins, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader, and Frederic Wehrey, "How to Defuse Iran's Nuclear Threat," *Rand Review* 36, no. 1 (2012); speech by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta at the Saban Center, December 2, 2011; "Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran," *The Iran Project*, New York.
- 4 See the INSS Military Balance database on Iran, [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1317902891.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1317902891.pdf). This essay does not discuss the Iranian option of attaching biological or chemical warheads to these missiles.
- 5 Gabi Siboni, "The Challenges of Warfare Facing the IDF in Densely Populated Areas," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2012):5, [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1339051538.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1339051538.pdf).
- 6 Amos Yadlin and Yoel Guzansky, "Iran on the Threshold," *Strategic Assessment* 15, no. 1 (2012): 7-14, [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1337250215.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1337250215.pdf).
- 7 Just as it is not relevant that the United States is to "blame" for the election in which Hamas rose to power in the Gaza Strip, for Mubarak's fall and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or for the circumstances that made Iran the most dominant foreign actor in Iraq.
- 8 President Barack Obama speech at AIPAC Policy Conference, March 4, 2012; See also President Obama's interview to the *Atlantic*, March 2, 2012.
- 9 Ron Tira, "Can Iran be Deterred?" *Policy Review* No. 169, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, October 1, 2011.