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Iran's Attack on Israel Has Deepened Concerns About Its Nuclear Program

The exchange of direct fire between the two foes opens an era of more dangerous competition

By Laurence Norman / Updated April 28, 2024

Iran's decision to launch more than 300 missiles and drones in its first direct attack on Israeli soil earlier this month showed an appetite for risk that is putting renewed focus on Tehran's nuclear program and whether it will continue to refrain from developing a bomb.

[...]

"The escalation between Iran and Israel may strengthen Iranian calls for weaponization," said **Raz Zimmt, senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies**. "So, while the risks of such a move continue to outweigh the advantages, the Iranian leadership is more likely to reconsider its nuclear approach than previously."

Israel is widely believed to have nuclear weapons but has a policy of never confirming or denying their existence.

Before this month's direct strike, Iran had primarily confronted Israel via a network of regional proxies and has used the threat of engaging those militias, particularly Hezbollah in Lebanon, to deter more aggressive action by Israel. The exchange of attacks on each other's territory has left the foes in a more dangerous competition as the new rules of engagement firm up, analysts say.

Iran's failure to damage Israeli military sites during this month's attacks could persuade Tehran to seek a more powerful deterrent. Zimmt says challenges in controlling and operating the proxy network, whose interests don't always line up with Tehran's, also could add pressure on Iran to pursue a bomb.

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