

Weekly Briefing: Iran's growing burden of confronting Israel

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Israel and the US should act in concert on Iran

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- *If Israel assesses with high confidence that it can, independently, completely take out Iran's nuclear program, it is in its interest to act despite American opposition because the Iranian nuclear program poses the greatest threat to the country and Israeli leaders have declared they will not tolerate it.*
- *However, it is doubtful whether Israel currently has the necessary capability to dismantle the entire program on its own, and it is only by minimizing their differences and acting in concert that Israel and the United States can send the right deterrent message to the Iranian regime.*

In the wake of the latest Iranian missile attack on Israel, on Oct. 1 — wherein it fired 180 missiles, most of which were intercepted — the Israeli side has been issuing stern warnings to Tehran even as it carefully considers its next steps. After the last such direct attack, in April — when Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel — Israel's response was precise but clearly failed as a deterrent. As a result, there is seemingly growing consensus inside Israel that this time it must respond forcefully.

Israel's restraint in April and its current hesitation stem, first, from heavy American pressure to limit its response so as to avoid a strong Iranian retaliation that could lead to a wider regional conflict. Second, Israel remains focused on more immediate enemies, Hamas and Hezbollah, with its military campaigns against those groups seeking to change the security reality along its borders. Opening another front, this time against a regional power, would hinder Israel's ability to concentrate its efforts in the current battlefields. Moreover, Tehran is threatening its Arab neighbors that it will attack their oil facilities if the Israeli military strikes Iranian energy assets. Iran is aware of its own vulnerabilities and, as usual, seeks to intimidate its weaker neighbors as a deterrent measure.

Israel maintains good relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, relationships that have continued despite the war, and is interested in moving forward with a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia. Attacking Iran's oil facilities would send a clear deterrent message to Iran but would very likely lead to regional escalation and damage Israel's relations with the Gulf states, which hope to sit out the conflict and not have to choose sides, to avoid harm.

Israel's most critical target would be Iran's advanced nuclear program, which poses the greatest threat not only to Israel but also to the wider region. However, even here, American opposition remains firm. A military strike on nuclear facilities is far more complex than targeting oil installations. Israel would need American support, diplomatically but especially militarily, to inflict severe damage on Iran.

If Israel assesses with high confidence that it can, independently, fully take out Iran's nuclear program, it would be in its best interest to act despite American opposition. Iran's nuclear program is the greatest

threat facing Israel, and all Israeli leaders in the past two decades have declared that they will not tolerate it. However, a military strike that fails to neutralize the nuclear program could backfire and push Iran to sprint toward a nuclear weapon breakout point. It is doubtful whether Israel currently has the necessary capability to dismantle the entire program on its own; and in any case, it would first have to consult its most important ally. Only by minimizing their differences and acting in concert, can Israel and the United States send the right message to the Iranian regime.

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