

Iran, Again. Will Israel Start a New War?

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In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

When politicians are feeling the heat, they start a war and their popularity goes up even if the war is unnecessary or completely ridiculous. Donald Trump, the presidential candidate who promised that he would not take the nation into another Middle Eastern war, did so when he launched a fifty-nine cruise missile barrage against a Syrian Air Base even before he knew for sure what had happened on the ground. It was totally stupid but proved to be popular, even among talking heads and Congressmen, some of whom described his action as “presidential” in the best sense of the word.

It's the same in Israel. For those who have not been following developments there, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under pressure due to an ongoing investigation for corruption. One of the truly great things about Israel is that while they have a lot of corrupt politicians, just like everywhere else, they actually investigate, indict, prosecute, convict and send them to jail. The betting is that Netanyahu will soon be in prison, so he has been responding in the time-honored fashion by threatening his neighbors and hinting at the possibility of increased military action and even war. If there is a war going on, he believes, probably correctly, that no one will want to remove him.

In an amicable recent meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin, Netanyahu stressed that there are some red lines that Israel will [not allow to be crossed](#), while also suggesting that some of them have already been violated, most notably through the alleged construction of an Iranian military base inside Syria. Netanyahu provided Putin with "top secret intelligence" to make his point and [told the Russian premier that](#) "Iran is making an accelerated effort to entrench itself militarily in Syria. This poses a danger to Israel, the Middle East and in my opinion the world itself."

Netanyahu characteristically depicted himself as restrained in his responses, telling Putin that Israel had taken only limited action in Syria against Hezbollah supply lines, but that was a lie as Israel has also hit Syrian army positions. Netanyahu described an Iran that is largely a fantasy creation of his own Foreign Ministry,

"We don't for a second forget that Iran continues to threaten Israel's destruction on a daily basis. It arms terrorist organizations and initiates terror itself. It is developing intercontinental ballistic missiles with the intention to equip them with nuclear warheads."

He went on to claim that his strategic objective was to prevent the development of an Iranian controlled land bridge, described as “territorial continuity,” that would extend through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea.

The reality is, however, somewhat different, that Israel has long preferred chaos in Syria since it eliminates any threat from a unified and powerful government in Damascus. But just as nature abhors a vacuum that policy had a considerable downside with Iranian supported militias and Revolutionary Guard units increasingly become part of the conflict, picking up the slack where the Syrian Army has been too overstretched to operate. Iranian influence over Syria, both overtly and covertly, will continue after Damascus eliminates the last vestiges of al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS, not to mention the rag-tag “moderate rebels.” And Iran will have standing behind it the Syrian Army, Iraqi Shi’a militias, and Russian firepower. This has meant that the Israeli plan to have a chronically weak state across its border has backfired, bringing into the fighting and post-war reconfiguration Iran, which Tel Aviv fears most as a regional adversary.

So Israel has two strong motives to begin a war with Iran, one political and the other ostensibly linked to national security. Ironically, however, it also knows, and [has even admitted](#), that Iran does not actually pose any threat against a nuclear armed Israel that has complete air superiority over any or even all of its neighbors. The often-cited land bridge threat is also a bit of a chimera, as whether it could potentially exist or not depends on effective interaction with Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, all of which have their own political dynamics and are somewhat wary of Iranian involvement. If there is any actual threat against Israel it comes from Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is an independent player even though it has strong ties to Tehran, but even in that case the threat is not as serious as fearmongering government leaders have claimed.

All of which is not to suggest that Iran is toothless if Israel were to get really aggressive. Hezbollah would undoubtedly unleash its missile arsenal against Israeli cities, some of which would get through, and any attack on Iran using aircraft would be confronted by formidable air defenses. Iran could also strike back against Israel using its ballistic missiles, all of which means that attacking Iran would be far from cost-free.

From Netanyahu’s point of view, it is far better to stage an incident that brings in Washington and then allows Uncle Sam to do the heavy lifting. The U.S. has strategic military capabilities that Israel lacks, including heavy bombers and armaments that could penetrate Iranian defenses, but it also has vulnerabilities in terms of military bases within striking range and ships at sea that could be attacked by swarms of small boats and land launched missiles.

Israel believes that bringing Washington into the conflict is doable given that the U.S. media has heavily propagandized against Tehran and that inside-the-beltway groupthink largely perceives Iran as an enemy. Recently Henry Kissinger [spelled out](#) the new line of strategic thinking which Israel is already exploiting to make its case. Per Kissinger, the impending defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq will create a power vacuum which will open the door to the creation of an “Iranian radical empire,” a more evocative version of the “land bridge” warning, which he refers to as a “territorial belt reaching from Tehran to Beirut.” As Iran is also fighting ISIS, Kissinger warns against complacency, that “in the contemporary Middle East...the enemy of your enemy is also your enemy.”

Israel has been pushing hard on Washington, recently [having sent](#) a high-level combined intelligence and military delegation to confer with National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster and Special Mideast Envoy Jason Greenblatt to explain the alleged Iranian threat. And the neocon chorus is also signaling that it expects the Trump Administration to do something.

Frederick Hof of the hardline *Atlantic Council* recently wrote that the [fundamental mistake](#) made by Washington consisted of not invading Syria and installing an acceptable government years ago, which would have kept Iran out.

Saudi Arabia, which is demonstrating some signs of [political instability](#), would also welcome conflict with Iran, which means that there is an existing coming-together of parties who for various reasons would welcome the escape from other problems that war offers. Donald Trump himself [was angry at](#) the State Department in July because it had certified that Tehran was in compliance with the nuclear pact signed last year and Congress also vented its anger by initiating new sanctions against Iran. The next certification is due in October and the president would clearly like to have a good reason, contrived or actual, to break the agreement.

[Speculation in Israel](#) is that some kind of preemptive strike is being planned, possibly directed against an Iranian target inside Syria. The danger is that such a move could quickly escalate, with the U.S. Congress and White House quickly aligning themselves with Netanyahu. The United States has no real compelling interest to attack the Iranians and would again find itself in a conflict generated by feckless regional allies that are not allies at all. The results could prove catastrophic in practical terms as Iran is capable of striking back, and it could be devastating to actual American longer terms interests both regionally and worldwide. It is time to say "no" when Israel comes knocking.

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