

WILL THERE BE A WAR BETWEEN IRAN AND ISRAEL?

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Publication date: 3 September 2019

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Iran and Israel used to be allies, until 1979. Since then Iran became a sworn enemy of Israel. In recent years Israel has been bombing Iranian objectives inside Syria, aiming at stopping Iran from building there a fire base against Israel, as Iran did in Lebanon. In a few times Iran tried to strike back, by launching missiles from Syria into Israeli territory, in the Golan Heights, which did not cause harm. In contrast Iranian forces and allies in Syria absorbed casualties and serious damages. Iran also suffered international humiliation. Could this ongoing friction bring Iran to start a war against Israel?

Iran still remembers the trauma of the Iran – Iraq war (1980-1988), which cost Iran dearly. Israel today has much less people and resources than Iraq had in the 1980s. Yet Iran knows that Israel is a regional power with a formidable military.

In the war against Iraq in the 1980s hundreds of thousands of Iranians were killed. Iran does not want to repeat this grim experience. In the war in Syria Iran lost about 2,100 troops. It bothers Iran, which shows how sensitive Iran became in this issue.

Many Iranians, including those who are against their regime, might separate between their loyalty to their homeland and their severe criticism of the regime. They could support the government, particularly if it seems to them that Iran was attacked, and it must retaliate. Yet as long as the fight between Israel and Iran is contained to Syria then the Iranian regime will have a problem in mobilizing its people against Israel.

There is already an opposition in Iran to their country's ongoing involvement in Syria, where Iran had invested heavily since 2011, about 20 billion Dollars. This money was taken from the Iranian people, who struggle to make ends meet. In that sense the more money Iran pours into Syria the higher the chances that the Iranian people might not tolerate it anymore and confront their regime. The Iranian aid, aimed at saving their Syrian ally, Bashar al Assad, might eventually be one of the reasons for the downfall of the Iranian regime. The Iranian – Israeli collision in Syria could turn out to be an Israeli trap, as part of the Israeli strategic goal: to weaken the Iranian regime, hopefully to topple it.

In a time of war Iran could, again, launch missiles at Israel from Syria, with or without exploiting its proxies there. Iran can also hit Israel directly from Iran, with its SU-24, a long-range attack aircraft, but the latter might not have the range to reach and return from Israel, which is more than 500 miles from Iran. If the SU - 24 can land and refuel in Iraq let alone closer to Israel, in Syria, it will be easier for Iran. Yet even then some and maybe all the SU-24s might be

intercepted by the Israeli air force (IAF), which has a very impressive reputation in this field.

Iran has the Shahab-3, a long-range surface-to-surface missile that could hit Israel, from Iran itself. The Israeli anti-missile system, the Arrow, might shoot them down. In spite of that some Iranian missiles might penetrate. In addition, Israeli aircraft and Special Forces will try to destroy Iran's bases from which Iran can fire its missiles. Iran might disperse its launchers of missiles and hide them in Iran's vast territory. Iran's size is 636,372 sq. mi.

Iran might pound military targets, since Israel attacked Iranian military objectives in Syria. Yet Iran might hit Israel's population centers. In response Israel might not necessarily bomb Iranian cities. Israel can strike key facilities that belong to Iran's energy industry. The IAF might even strike Iran's nuclear sites. It could be another Israeli trap, pushing Iran to attack Israel so the latter will have an opportunity to bomb Iran's nuclear infrastructure. This issue is a top priority for Israel, particularly if the agreement about Iran's nuclear program, the one from July 2015 (the JCPOA) will collapse and Iran will try to produce a nuclear weapon. Lately Iran already made setps in this direction.

The two states might be dragged into a war that will last weeks and maybe more, even if both sides are not interested in that. In such a case there is a need of a broker, maybe Russia and/or the European Union since they have ties with both Iran and Israel. Eventually a ceasefire, if only an unofficial one, could be achieved since Israel and Iran, like Israel and Hamas, don't recognize each other. If Israel has no choice such as if Iran raises too many demands, then Israel might escalate the war in order to convince Iran to end the fight.

Iran might not seek to risk a war, considering its huge economic problems and the growing tension between Iran and the United States, Israel's patron. Iran can prefer to conduct terror attacks in the Middle East and actually worldwide against Israeli and Jewish objectives, without taking responsibility and / or use its quite advanced cyber capability.

All in all the current stage is part of the long cold war between Israel and Iran. The latter has several options to strike Israel, but Iran might want to avoid an open conflict.