

Beyond Worst-Case Analysis:

Iran's Likely Responses to an Israeli Preventive Strike

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Although an Israeli preventive strike on Iran's nuclear program would be a high-risk endeavor carrying a potential for escalation in the Levant or the Persian Gulf, it would not be the apocalyptic event that some foresee. In this Policy Note, two Washington Institute military experts assess the likelihood of various Iranian responses based on the regime's past behavior and strategic culture. Cutting through Tehran's often-fiery rhetoric on the subject, they outline steps Washington can take to both impede reconstitution of the program and mitigate post-strike risks without appearing complicit in any Israeli decision to attack.

THE AUTHORS

Michael Eisenstadt is a senior fellow and director of the [Military and Security Studies Program \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/research-programs/military-and-security-studies-program/\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/research-programs/military-and-security-studies-program/) at The Washington Institute. A former U.S. government military analyst, he served for twenty-six years as an Army Reserve officer, with stints at U.S. Forces-Iraq headquarters, U.S. Central Command headquarters, the Office of the U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and elsewhere.

Michael Knights is a Boston-based Lafer fellow with the Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and the Gulf Arab states. As head of the Iraq Analysis and Assessments cell for the Olive Group, a private security provider, Dr. Knights directed information collection teams in-country and has worked extensively with regional military and security agencies. ❖

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