

Back from the Threshold: The Last Chance for Diplomacy to Stop Iran

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Michael Herzog was appointed Israel's ambassador to the United States in 2021. Previously, he was an international fellow at The Washington Institute.



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In this timely and detailed paper, Brig. Gen. Michael Herzog (IDF, Ret.) proposes ways to maximise the chances of success in P5+1 talks to move the Iranians back from their nuclear threshold capacity.

Key Points

- Strong evidence suggests that Iran's nuclear programme is intended to actually construct nuclear weapons, not merely to develop the capability to do so. If it is not stopped soon, Iran will acquire the capacity to build nuclear weapons, shield that capacity from possible attack, and ultimately sprint to construct nuclear weapons when it deems circumstances ripe.
- Acquiring nuclear weapons will enhance Iran's position as a mainstay of radicalism in the Middle East, thereby overshadowing the calculations of regional actors, further destabilising the region and upsetting an already delicate strategic balance.
- For Israel, Iranian capacity to build nuclear weapons constitutes an unbearable threat, especially given the possible future threat of Iran using nuclear weapons through proxies, and the risk of strategic crises born out of miscalculation.
- In any diplomatic solution, the P5+1 must insist on terms which will set the Iranians significantly back from their existing threshold capacity. These should include the cessation of uranium enrichment above 3.5%, the shipping out of Iran of any uranium enriched above 3.5%, the closure of the enrichment facility in Qom and the introduction of unfettered inspections. Under these terms Iran could be allowed to maintain limited 3.5% enrichment capacity and material in a well monitored site.
- Whilst Iran should be made aware that this deal is not about regime change, it should also know that the diplomatic avenue is time limited, that sanctions begin to relax only when Iran demonstrates real cooperation and that the West is prepared to use force if necessary against Iran's nuclear facilities.
- The military option should be regarded as a last resort, as it is likely to trigger a violent Iranian response, with the possibility to escalate into a significant regional armed conflict.
- With Iran's nuclear capabilities soon reaching a 'zone of immunity' from an Israeli strike, failing to stop Iran through

sanctions and diplomacy, backed by the credible threat of force, will leave Israel having to decide in the coming months whether to use a unilateral military option.

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