

What Would War with Iran Look Like?

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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The debate over what to do about an Iranian Islamist regime apparently bent on acquiring nuclear weapons has been on or near our front burner for at least six years, and is now almost a settled feature of the policy landscape. There is general agreement in the United States on two points. First, an Iranian nuclear weapons capability is "unacceptable," as both the Bush and Obama Administrations have put it; and second, we prefer getting to an acceptable outcome without using force. The debate gets testy when we consider that means short of force, such as sanctions and covert technical sabotage, might not work.

It may be too simple to reduce the argument to just two sides -- those who fear the regime's acquisition of nuclear weapons more than the consequences of a war to prevent it, and those who fear the consequences of a war above all else -- but in this case simplicity has the virtue of capturing the essence as observers ponder which set of unpalatable risks they would rather run. What is remarkable, though hardly surprising, is that the two sides usually put forth very different assessments of what using force would entail. Those who fear Iranian nukes above all else tend to minimize the risks of using force, while those who fear war tend to exaggerate them. Neither side, however, has persuasively spelled out the reasons for their assessment, leading one to suspect that much of the argument rests on less than rigorous analysis. What would an honest assessment of the risks of military conflict with Iran look like? How should we think about it?...

[Read the full article on the American Interest website. \(http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=982\)](http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=982)

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