

Confronting Iran

by [Moshe Yaalon \(/experts/moshe-yaalon\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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On March 7, 2006, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon addressed the Hudson Institute. General Yaalon, a distinguished military fellow at The Washington Institute, is the former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff. The following is the prepared text of General Yaalon's speech.

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Islamist regime in Tehran has continually declared its aspiration to annihilate the State of Israel. This policy—entailing not merely nonrecognition, but outright destruction—was most recently reconfirmed by President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, who declared this past October that Israel should be “wiped off the map” in the conference entitled “The World Without Zionism and America.”

Iran's confrontation with Israel is purely ideological and existential; Iran claims no territorial dispute with Israel and, prior to the Shah's ouster, maintained relations with the Jewish state. Yet, under the current Islamist regime and its extremist president, Iran perceives Israel as the “small Satan” to America's “great Satan”; it perceives Israel as a Western warhead whose defeat will mark the first step toward overtaking Western civilization and establishing a new global caliphate. Since Khomeini's revolution, Iran's anti-Israel posture has become part of its *raison d'être*, as well as a cornerstone of Iranian foreign policy, which acts in the name of the transnational, so-called “nation of Islam.”

Despite its militant talk, however, the Iranian regime has approached its violent foreign intentions pragmatically. Understanding that it cannot defeat Israel in one aggressive step—such as in a conventional war against Israel—Iran has adopted a strategy of constant attrition, aimed at both weakening Israel militarily and undermining its international legitimacy. It has thus sought nuclear capabilities—the superconventional capability—as a means of achieving strategic supremacy, further serving as an umbrella for subconventional aggression, including terror attacks and aggression against Israel and moderate regimes in the region.

A quick look at Iranian declarations and regional activities speaks to this devious policy. I wish to outline eight major recent areas of concern regarding Iran:

- 1) Iran has exported the revolution to the Shiite sector in Lebanon. In this vein, it has built, financed, equipped, and trained Hizballah, empowering it as a political party, armed militia, and terror organization. Indeed, Hizballah is the long arm Iran has long used to threaten Israel.
- 2) Iran has continued to support Palestinian terror organizations. This support has come in multiple forms, including financing, training, and equipping Palestinian terrorist groups in need of sponsorship. I wish here to point

to three major areas of Iranian funding of Palestinian terrorists:

- a) First, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) is financed and directed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard unit, al-Quds, and dependent on Iran.
- b) Second, Fatah terrorists are financed and directed by Hizballah special apparatus from Beirut. This relationship began with the Karine-A affair, in which Fatah, under Yasser Arafat, bought weapons and ammunition from Iran, loaded a ship in the Persian Gulf, and attempted to smuggle its contents into the Gaza strip. Since the implementation of the Disengagement Plan, Hizballah, via Fatah, has established front headquarters in Gaza.
- c) The third area of Iranian funding of Palestinian terror groups is Hamas. Although Hamas initially refused funds from Iran because of its status as an international pariah, over the past three years, Hamas has received financial support, terrorist mentorship, and weapons. Hamas leader Khalid Mashal's recent meetings with President Ahmadinezhad—before and after elections—demonstrates Hamas' strategic decision to cooperate with Iran. Indeed, the two are united in their common interests regarding Israel.
- 3) Returning to my list of major areas of concern regarding Iran, Iran is involved in influencing the political and security situation in Iraq.
- 4) Iran grants safe haven, protection, and assistance to al-Qaeda elements on its soil and granted support to Ansar al-Islam.
- 5) The Iranian Intelligence Ministry is responsible for terror attacks in Germany (Mykonos Cafe) and Argentina (the Israeli Embassy and AMIA, the Jewish Community Center). These attacks reflect Iranian modus operandi and tactics.
- 6) Iran operates behind the scene to blackmail regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, or to undermine regimes linked to the West, including Egypt and Jordan.
- 7) The Iranian regime consistently acts to prevent political agreements or settlements between Israel and its Arab neighbors.
- 8) Finally, The Iranian regime challenges the legitimacy of Western culture and values, as well as the legitimacy of the State of Israel's existence.

On Passover, when recounting each miracle performed by God in bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt, we say *dayenu*—which means “it would have been enough.” Indeed, with each of these eight areas of concern regarding Iran, we could say *dayenu*—it would have been enough in terms of proving its status as a rogue regime. But now I wish to address the mother of all *dayenus*—namely, Iran's determination to acquire military nuclear capabilities.

Iran is pursuing military nuclear capabilities as a shield for its other actions. With nuclear capabilities, Iran will have greater leverage vis-à-vis the West, and will thus have more options for implementing its anti-Western strategy. The Iranian regime believes that by having military nuclear capabilities, it will enjoy greater freedom for operating against Western interests in the region; they believe they will have acquired the necessary cover for undermining and blackmailing moderate regimes and using terror by proxies against Israel and Western targets.

So far, the Iranian regime hasn't faced determination from the West. It therefore believes that the United States and its allies fear the price of Iranian reaction to steps taken against it. The price to the West for standing up to Iran is clear: it includes terror attacks, economic hardship for those countries trading with Iran, and consequences resulting from possible fluctuations in Iranian oil production. Indeed, the Iranian regime believes that the West—including Israel—is afraid to deal with it.

Senator John McCain said recently: “There is only one thing worse than the U.S. exercising a military option, and that is a nuclear-armed Iran.” I agree with him. But before going to the military option, Iran must be isolated

politically and economically; the military option can be used only when these methods have been exhausted.

A military option has the potential to significantly damage the Iranian nuclear project. Such an operation might well postpone Iran's achievement of nuclear capabilities for years, as happened regarding Iraq's nuclear program after Israel's attack on the Osiraq reactor.

However, the challenge of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities is greater than in the case of Iraq. Unlike Iraq, in which nuclear production was confined to Osiraq, the Iranian nuclear project consists of a few dozen well protected and defended facilities, requiring more than one strike to accomplish a mission against Iranian nuclear targets. I believe that Western air forces—including USAF, EUAF, and IAF—can effectively execute such a mission. These Western air forces possess the necessary long distance flight capabilities, the ability to penetrate the Iranian air defense (AD) system, and the capacity for accurately hitting well-protected installations in a well-planned, sustainable operation.

We should assume that, in response to such an operation, Iran will react aggressively against Western targets, depending on who will be held responsible for the attack. Israel, in particular, would be vulnerable to attack by all arms of the Iranian military and terrorist proxy apparatus. Strategically, these threats include:

- Shihab-3 missiles aimed at Israeli cities launched from western Iran.
- Rockets from Lebanon launched toward northern Israeli cities, as well as Iranian UAV attacks deployed by Hizballah from southern Lebanon.
- Qassam rocket attacks on Israeli cities launched by Iranian-backed Palestinian groups from Gaza.
- Terror attacks executed by Hizballah from southern Lebanon and by Palestinian terror organizations from their territories.
- And, lastly, terror attacks against Western, Israeli, and Jewish targets globally, organized by the Iranian Intelligence Ministry and executed by Iranian agents or terror proxies, such as Imad Mughaniyah's apparatus.

Iran is currently encouraged and energized by the West's lack of determination in dealing with it. The regime has viewed Israeli unilateral withdrawals from southern Lebanon and Gaza as victories for its proxies, including Hizballah and the Palestinian terror organizations it supports.

The international community could undermine Iran's perception of victory. In southern Lebanon, the international community could act productively by pressuring Lebanon to disarm Hizballah and deploy the Lebanese Army along the Israel-Lebanon border. This would force the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to pull out of Lebanon, thus minimizing future damage in the Israel-Lebanon sphere.

In Gaza, the international community could undermine Iran's perception of victory by supporting political benefits for Israel and exacting prices for continued Palestinian cooperation with Iran. The international community could, for example, recognize Israeli positions on a number of issues relevant to future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, including the right of return, refugees, Jerusalem, the Jordan valley, settlement blocks, and the "safe passage" between the West Bank and Gaza.

Yet the West is a long way from isolating Iran. Iran thus continues to perceive progress in its confrontation with Israel and the West, and remains encouraged by its strategy. The West—the United States, Israel, and like-minded parties—must step up to this challenge and proactively prevent the Iranian threat.

To repeat the words of Senator McCain: "There is only one thing worse than . . . a military option, and that is a nuclear armed Iran." Or, to quote IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei: "Diplomacy has to be backed by pressure and, in extreme cases, by force."

In closing, a nuclear Iran is a threat to global stability. One way or another, it must be stopped. ❖

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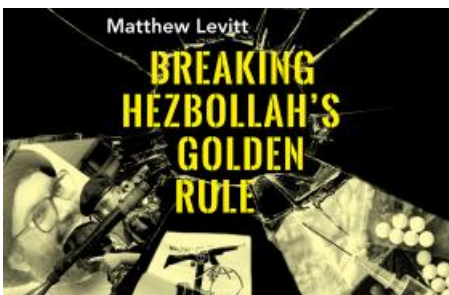
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