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Complete Essay on prospects and analogy of a possible Israel war with Iran 12 pages

12.30.21

As it enters 2022, Israel's population nears 9.45 million, 73.9% are Jewish

12.30.21

As it enters 2022, Israel's population nears 10 million

Out of 9.45 million residents, 73.9% are Jewish and 21.1% Arab; 25,000 new immigrants, with 30% of them from Russia, 14.6% from France, 13.9% from U.S. and 12.4% from Ukraine; 4,870 Israelis have succumbed to coronavirus-related complications

Yaron Druckman | Published: 12.30.21, 14:27

Israel's population grew by about 160,000 people (1.7%) in 2021, reaching about 9,450,000, a report by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) said on Thursday.

According to the survey, which was released ahead of New Year's, 6.98 million (73.9%) of Israel's residents were Jewish, about two million (21.1%) were Arab and 472,000 were from other sectors.

Most of the population growth in the country this year was natural (83%), while the rest (17%) came from immigration.

About 184,000 babies were born in Israel in 2021: 73.8% to Jewish mothers, 23.4% to Muslim mothers and 2.8% to other mothers from other sectors.

About 25,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel in 2021, 5,000 more than last year. According to CBS, 30% of them came from Russia, while 14.6% came from France, 13.9% came from the U.S. and 12.4% came from Ukraine.

Additional, about 9,000 additional migrants entered the country.

About 51,000 Israelis died this year and about 7,500 moved out of the country for more than a year.

The number of deaths this year was higher than in past years and even higher than 2020, when 47,788 Israelis died amid the coronavirus outbreak.

According to the Health Ministry, 4,870 Israelis have succumbed to coronavirus-related complications in 2021.

12.30.21

U.S. says 'very pleased' with Gantz-Abbas meeting

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U.S. says 'very pleased' with Gantz-Abbas meeting

During meeting at defense minister's private residence, Palestinian leader warns Israel of disturbing the status quo at holy sites, such as Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque, fearing such a move could stir up popular unrest that even he could not quell

Ynet| Updated: 12.30.21, 08:54

The U.S is "very pleased" with the meeting between Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price tweeted on Wednesday.

The defense chief hosted the Palestinian leader at his personal residence in the Israeli city of Rosh Haayin on Tuesday evening in what was the latter's first meeting with an Israeli official inside Israel since 2010.

"We hope confidence-building measures discussed will accelerate momentum to further advance freedom, security, and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis alike in 2022," Price added.

Both sides consider the meeting to be a success, with Abbas stressing the importance of keeping the security coordination with Israel strong in order to tackle illegal arms and destabilizing forces in the West Bank. Abbas also emphasized he won't allow tensions within the Palestinian people to simmer over into armed conflict against Israel.

However, he warned Israel of disturbing the status quo at holy sites, such as al-Aqsa mosque on top of Jerusalem's Temple Mount compound, fearing such a move could stir up popular unrest that even he could not quell.

Abbas also addressed the recent rise in settler violence against Palestinians and stated that he was troubled by the impression that nationalist Jewish crime was becoming organized. The Palestinian leader also noted that Israel's expectation for the Palestinian Authority to pull its petition to the International Court of Justice, in which it claims the Jewish nation has committed war crimes were in the so-called "Occupied Territories", was not realistic as long as Israel does not make significant policy gestures.

Following the meeting, the Defense Ministry announced a series of trust-building measures, including the addition of hundreds of entry permits for Palestinian businessmen as well as for Palestinian vehicles, additional VIP permits for dozens of PA officials, and the advancement of garnished tax payments to the authority to the tune of NIS 100 million.

In addition, Gantz agreed that Israel will officially recognize the status of some 6,000 Palestinian residents of the West Bank and 3,500 Gazans in the PA's Population Registry, which is under Israeli control, allowing them freedom of movement within the Palestinian territories.

12.29.21

Abbas warns Israel 'not to bring religious elements into the conflict'

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Abbas warns Israel 'not to bring religious elements into the conflict'

In meeting with Gantz, Palestinian leader warns disturbing status quo at holy sites, such as al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, could stir up popular unrest that even he could not quell
Elior Levy | Published: 12.29.21, 23:14

In their meeting at the private residence of Defense Minister Benny Gantz Tuesday night, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a stern warning to Israel not to bring religious elements into the conflict.

Both sides consider the meeting to be a success, with Abbas stressing the importance of keeping the security coordination with Israel strong in order to tackle illegal arms and destabilizing forces in the West Bank. Abbas also emphasized he won't allow tensions within the Palestinian people to simmer over into armed conflict against Israel.

However, he warned Israel of disturbing the status quo at holy sites, such as al-Aqsa mosque on top of Jerusalem's Temple Mount compound, fearing such a move could stir up popular unrest that even he could not quell.

Abbas also addressed the recent rise in settler violence against Palestinians and stated that he was troubled by the impression that nationalist Jewish crime was becoming organized. The Palestinian leader also noted that Israel's expectation for the Palestinian Authority to pull its petition to the International Court of Justice, in which it claims the Jewish nation has committed war crimes were in the so-called "Occupied Territories", was not realistic as long as Israel does not make significant policy gestures.

Gantz approved a host of trust-building concessions following the meeting with Abbas, including the addition of hundreds of entry permits for Palestinian businessmen as well as for Palestinian vehicles, additional VIP permits for dozens of PA officials, and the advancement of garnished tax payments to the authority to the tune of NIS 100 million. In addition, Gantz agreed that Israel will officially recognize the status of some 6,000 Palestinian residents of the West Bank and 3,500 Gazans in the PA's Population Registry, which is under Israeli control, allowing them freedom of movement within the Palestinian territories.

12.30.21

Iran launched rocket with 3 devices into space, state TV says more are on the way

12.30.21

Iran launched rocket into space, state TV says

Move comes amid onerous talks with world powers in Vienna on reviving nuclear deal; unclear whether any of the 3 research devices onboard successfully entered orbit
Associated Press| Published: 12.30.21, 13:14

Iran on Thursday announced it launched a satellite carrier rocket bearing three devices into space, though it's unclear whether any of the objects entered orbit around the Earth.

The state TV report, as well as others by Iran's semiofficial news agencies, did not say when the launch was conducted nor what devices the carrier brought with it. However, the launch comes amid difficult negotiations in Vienna over Iran's tattered nuclear deal.

Previous launches have drawn rebukes from the United States. The U.S. State Department, Space Force and the Pentagon did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ahmad Hosseini, a Defense Ministry spokesman, identified the rocket as a Simorgh, or "Phoenix," rocket. He said the three devices were sent up 470 kilometers (290 miles). Hosseini was quoted as saying the "performance of the space center and the performance of the satellite carrier was done properly." He described the launch as "initial," suggesting more are on the way.

Iran's TV aired footage of the white rocket emblazoned with the words, "Simorgh satellite carrier" and the slogan "We can" shooting into the morning sky from Iran's Imam Khomeini Spaceport. A state TV reporter at a nearby desert site hailed the launch as "another achievement by Iranian scientists."

However, officials were silent on whether the launched objects had actually reached orbit. Iran's civilian space program has suffered a series of setbacks in recent years, including fatal fires and a launchpad rocket explosion that drew the attention of former President Donald Trump.

Iranian state media recently offered a list of upcoming planned satellite launches for the Islamic Republic's civilian space program. Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard runs its own parallel program that successfully put a satellite into orbit last year. The blast-offs have raised concerns in Washington about whether the technology used to launch satellites could advance Iran's ballistic missile development. The United States says that such satellite launches defy a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on Iran to steer clear of any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, maintains its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component

Announcing a launch as nuclear negotiators meet in Vienna aligns with Tehran's hard-line posture under President Ebrahim Raisi, a recently elected conservative cleric. New Iranian demands in the nuclear talks have exasperated Western nations and heightened regional tensions as Tehran presses ahead with atomic advancements. Diplomats have repeatedly raised the alarm that time is running out to restore the accord,

which collapsed three years ago when America unilaterally withdrew under then-President Trump.

Iran has now abandoned all limitations under the agreement, and has ramped up uranium enrichment from under 4% purity to 60% — a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels. International inspectors face challenges in monitoring Tehran's advances. Satellite images seen by The Associated Press suggested a launch was imminent earlier this month. The images showed preparations at the spaceport in the desert plains of Iran's rural Semnan province, some 240 kilometers (150 miles) southeast of Tehran. Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space. But under Raisi, the government appears to have sharpened its focus on space. Iran's Supreme Council of Space has met for the first time in 11 years.

12.30.21

Historic conclave: Chinese bishops brief Hong Kong clerics on Xi's religious views

12.30.21

Historic conclave: Chinese bishops, priests brief Hong Kong clerics on Xi's religious views

By Greg Torode

HONG KONG, Dec 30 (Reuters) - Chinese bishops and religious leaders briefed senior Hong Kong Catholic clergymen on President Xi Jinping's vision of religion with "Chinese characteristics" in an unprecedented meeting organised by the mainland's representative office in the city, according to four clerics.

The clerics who attended or had knowledge of the Oct 31 meeting described it as Beijing's most assertive move yet in its attempts to influence Hong Kong's diocese, which is answerable to the Vatican and includes some high-ranking leaders who have long been defenders of democracy and human rights in the semi-autonomous territory.

While Hong Kong's Catholic leaders have met their mainland counterparts individually in the past, it was the first time the two sides had met formally - and the first time mainland religious officials had instigated such a meeting, the clerics said.

Despite the meeting's symbolism, the mainland officials and religious leaders generally avoided an overtly political message, they said.

The meeting, which has not been revealed publicly, also sheds light on what some religious figures, politicians and diplomats describe as the expanding role of Beijing's Central Government Liaison Office in Hong Kong, which formally represents the mainland in the city but has traditionally kept a low profile.

The Liaison Office and officials from the State Administration of Religious Affairs monitored the Zoom sessions as **three leading bishops** and about 15 religious figures from mainland **China's** state-backed official Catholic church and about **15 senior clergymen** in Hong Kong participated in the **day-long meeting**.

The Vatican regards Hong Kong as a single diocese so it has only one bishop.

The Liaison Office and the State Administration of Religious Affairs did not respond to requests for comment.

Susanne Ho, a spokeswoman for the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, told Reuters the diocese "does not disclose details of private meetings".

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni had no comment.

NO MENTION OF XI

Without mentioning Xi or issuing any instructions or orders, the mainland speakers described how Xi's policy of "sinicization" aligned with long-term Vatican policies of inculturation - adapting Christianity in traditional, non-Christian cultures, two of the clerics said.

Xi has been an active proponent of sinicization, setting out policies to foster religions with what he calls "Chinese characteristics" and closer ties to the party and state. It includes tying religions more closely **to Chinese culture, patriotism and goals** of the ruling Communist **Party** and state to achieve Xi's **"Chinese dream"**.

"This was just the first step and I felt they knew that they could not come into this too heavy or dogmatically," said one cleric.

"We all know **the word sinicization carries a political agenda behind it**, and they didn't have to spell that out."

"Xi was the elephant in the room," the second cleric said.

The Hong Kong side spoke broadly about the long-standing policy of inculturation, avoiding giving any political offence and any topics that could invite mainland interference, the two clerics said.

NEW BISHOP'S ORDINATION

The meeting came just weeks ahead of the ordination this month of new Hong Kong Bishop Stephen Chow, a moderate Vatican appointment that followed two failed attempts to fill the post after Beijing had sought to influence the decision, amid other pressures.

The Hong Kong side was led by a senior priest, Reverend Peter Choy, a figure widely seen by local Catholics as close to Beijing and, earlier, its preferred choice for bishop.

Chow, Bishop-elect at the time, attended the event only briefly after it was opened, which may give him room to manoeuvre in future, three of the clerics said.

Acting Bishop Cardinal John Tong opened and closed the event, they said.

A diocese spokesperson said Choy, Chow and Tong had no comments.

While some of Hong Kong's government and commercial elites are Catholic and pro-Beijing, including the city's leader Carrie Lam, other Catholics have long been active in the pro-democracy and anti-government activist movements.

Earlier this month, Xi told a conference in Beijing, described in official reports as the National Work Meeting on Religious Affairs, that all religions in China needed to embrace the Communist Party, expanding on one of his long-held policies.

"(We) must maintain the party's essential direction on religious work, we must continue our country's direction for the sinicization of religion, we must continue to take the large numbers of religious believers, and unite them around the party and the government," Xi said.

REMAINING STRONGHOLD

Some diplomats and activists say they are closely watching developments following Beijing's imposition of a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong in June 2020.

They see Hong Kong's broad religious freedoms and traditions, like the rule of law, as one of the remaining strongholds of the "one country, two systems" model under which Britain handed its former colony back to Chinese rule in 1997.

The Basic Law, the mini-constitution that governs "one country, two systems", explicitly provides for freedom of conscience and broad religious freedom, including the right to preach in public.

The church in Hong Kong operates essentially on pre-1997 lines, staying in close touch with the Vatican and hosting an extensive foreign missionary presence.

A deal struck between China and the Holy See in 2018 to ease long-running friction by giving the Chinese government a significant say in the Vatican's appointment of bishops does not apply to Hong Kong, Vatican officials say.

Chinese and Hong Kong officials have repeatedly said that the city's wide-ranging freedoms, including that of religious belief and affiliation, remain intact.

The October meeting ended with a loose understanding by both sides that future sessions should be held but no dates were set, three clerics said.

"The pressure is building on us in Hong Kong...some of us see (sinicization) as code for Xi-nification," one of them said. "We are going to have to be clever to resist."

Reporting by Greg Torode; Additional reporting by David Stanway, Philip Pullella, James Pomfret, Jessie Pang, and Sara Cheng; Editing by Raju Gopalakrishnan
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12.29.21

Gantz gives 100s of PA VIP permits & legal status to 9,500 in West Bank & Gaza

12.29.21

Gantz okays string of concessions for Palestinians after Abbas meeting

Planned measures apparently include hundreds of additional entry permits to Palestinian businessmen and PA VIPs, as well as approve legal status of thousands of undocumented Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza

Ynet, Associated Press| Published: 12.29.21, 12:16

Benny Gantz approved a string of trust-building concessions following his meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the Defense Minister's Office announced Wednesday.

Gantz hosted Abbas at his personal residence in the Israeli city of Rosh Haayin on Tuesday evening in what was the first meeting of the Palestinian leader inside Israel since 2010.

The concessions and reliefs approved by Gantz include the addition of hundreds of entry permits for Palestinian businessmen as well as for Palestinian vehicles, additional VIP permits for dozens of PA officials, and the advancement of tax payments to the authority worth NIS 100 million.

In addition, Gantz okayed the status approval of some 6,000 Palestinian residents of the West Bank and 3,500 Gazans in the PA's Population Registry, which is under Israeli control - meaning Israel will officially recognized the legal status of thousands of Palestinians, which will allow them freedom of movement within the Palestinian territories.

The defense minister added there are a number of additional economic measures on the agenda, including lowering the handling fees for fuel purchases for the territories, the creation of an online VAT platform for Palestinians, as well as the creation of a dedicated digital platform that will enable Israeli employers to pay Palestinian workers on the spot.

These measures, among others, are expected to add hundreds of millions of shekels to the authority's budget every year.

Gantz and Abbas reportedly also discussed the need to approve additional outlines that would benefit the Palestinians, including of "additional building programs" in the West Bank.

The meeting between Gantz and Abbas came amid growing unrest in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and a number of consequent attacks aimed against Israeli civilians, as well as against IDF troops and police officers.

The Defense Minister's Office added that the meeting and the concessions were part of an effort to "avoid a third intifada."

12.28.21

In surprise visit, Gantz hosts Palestinian leader at his private residence

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In surprise visit, Gantz hosts Palestinian leader at his private residence

The two discuss security and civilian affairs, with defense minister promising to take further steps in aiding Ramallah's economic and civilian struggles; this is first time Abbas has held an official meeting within Israel since 2010

Itamar Eichner | Published: 12.28.21, 23:39

In a surprise visit, Defense Minister Benny Gantz hosted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at his personal residence in the Israeli city of Rosh Haayin.

This is the first time the Palestinian leader has held an official meeting within Israel since 2010, excluding his partaking in the funeral of former president Shimon Peres in 2016.

"The two discussed various security and civilian issues," a statement from his office said. "The defense minister emphasized the shared interest in strengthening security coordination and maintaining stability, and preventing terrorism and violence."

The statement also said that Gantz told Abbas that he intends to "further promote bond-building steps in the economic and civilian spheres, as the two agreed on during their last meeting."

Also present at the meeting was attended by the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Maj. Gen. Rassan Aliyan, as well as the Minister of Civil Affairs in the Palestinian Authority, Hussein a-Sheikh, who is responsible for civilian and security coordination with Israel, and Palestinian Chief of Intelligence Majed Faraj.

The meeting lasted about two and a half hours — partly in a broad forum and partly in private.

As previously mentioned, this is the second meeting between Gantz and Abbas, with the last one taking place at the latter's official residence in Ramallah in August.

12.28.21

IDF airstrike on Syrian port hit arms shipments destined for Iran-backed fighters

12.28.21

Fire contained after reported Israeli attack on Syrian port

Damascus says blaze caused major damage to terminal, which handles country's imports; in its year-end review, IDF admitted to have carried out strikes in Syria

Associated Press| Published: 12.28.21, 19:15

Firefighters contained a blaze that raged for hours in Syria's port of Latakia on Tuesday, officials said, hours after an attack Damascus has attributed to Israel, igniting the fire in the container terminal. It was the second such attack on the vital facility this month.

The early morning raid was a rare targeting of the port, which handles most imports to Syria, a country ravaged by a decade-old civil war and Western-imposed sanctions. Another attack took place Dec. 7, when Syrian media reported Israeli warplanes hit the container terminal, also igniting a major fire.

Syrian officials and state media said Tuesday's attack caused more damage and the explosion could be heard miles away. Syrian air defenses were activated when the missiles started to fall on the terminal at around 3:20am, state media reported.

A military official said Israeli missiles were fired from the sea, west of Latakia, hitting the terminal and igniting fires that caused major damage. The unidentified official quoted by the official state news agency SANA said firefighters battled the flames after the attack.

There were no immediate reports of casualties from the missile attack, according to SANA.

Syria's state-run Al-Ikhbariyah TV ran footage showing flames and smoke rising from the terminal. It later aired images of broken glass and other damage at residential buildings and cars parked in the area near the port. It said a nearby hospital was also impacted.

An Al-Ikhbariyah reporter said Tuesday's attack could be heard in Tartus, another coastal city more than 80 kilometers (nearly 50 miles) away.

Maj. Mohannad Jafaar, head of the Latakia fire department, said 12 fire trucks worked for hours to contain the fire. He said the containers that were hit held spare auto parts and oil but there were no casualties. Footage from the area showed large black plumes of smoke over the port as various fires burned around the terminal.

Port manager Amjad Suleiman told Al-Ikhbariyah the damage was much larger than that caused by the Dec. 7 attack and required a major effort to move in-tact containers away from the flames.

At the time of the Dec. 7 attack, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitoring group, said the airstrike hit arms shipments destined for Iran-backed fighters.

The Israeli military declined to comment on the reported strikes in Syria. But in a year-end statement issued by the military, chief of staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi boasted of success in disrupting weapons shipments to Israel's enemies in the region.

"The increase in the scope of operations over the past year has led to a significant disruption of the movement of weapons into the various arenas by our enemies," he said. The statement did not elaborate.

In its year-end assessment, the Israeli military confirmed carrying out strikes on dozens of targets in Syria in what it called "the campaign between the wars." Three targets also were struck in Lebanon, it said. It gave no further details.

It also reported about 100 operations by the Israeli Navy, including dozens of "special operations." It did not elaborate, but the navy operates in both the Mediterranean and Red seas.

The Israeli military rarely comments on individual attacks or discusses details of such operations.

Some past strikes have targeted the main airport in the Syrian capital of Damascus. Israel says it targets bases of Iran-allied militias, such as Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, which has fighters in Syria. It says it attacks arms shipments believed to be bound for the militias.

12.27.21

Lapid warns Israel will act alone on Iran if necessary

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Foreign minister says that while Jewish state will not outright oppose any deal reached between Tehran and world powers, agreement must include 'real oversight' of Islamic Republic's nuclear program

i24NEWS| Published: 12.27.21, 21:15

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid warned Monday that Israel is prepared to act alone against Iran and its nuclear ambitions if the need arises.

"Of course, we prefer to act in international cooperation, but if necessary - we will act alone," Lapid told Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

The foreign minister added that Israel presented its allies with "intelligence that proves Iran is deceiving the world in a completely systematic way."

"All Iran cares about is that sanctions are lifted, and billions of dollars are poured into its nuclear program, Hezbollah, Syria, Iraq, the terrorist network they have deployed around the world," added Lapid.

The minister further stated that, while the main challenge of Israeli foreign and security policy is the nuclear agreements, Jerusalem will not outright oppose every agreement.

"A good agreement is good. We oppose an agreement that does not allow for real oversight... of the Iranian nuclear program," said Lapid, adding that he would rather the U.S. and other powers walk away from nuclear talks than reach a "bad deal."

Israel opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) when Iran and six world powers first signed it in 2015. Former U.S. president Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018 shortly before imposing several harsh sanctions on Iran.

12.27.21

Syria condemns Israel's decision to double number of settlers in Golan Heights

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Damascus calls plan — which calls for NIS 1 billion to be spent on housing, infrastructure and other projects with goal of attracting roughly 23,000 new settlers to the area — a 'dangerous and unprecedented escalation'

News agencies | Published: 12.27.21, 18:35

Syria's Foreign Ministry on Monday condemned Israel's decision to double the number of settlers in the Golan Heights, calling it a "dangerous and unprecedented escalation", state television reported.

Israel's government set a goal on Sunday of doubling the number of Jewish settlers in the Golan within five years, a move that could tighten its hold on the territory it captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day war.

"Syria strongly condemns the dangerous and unprecedented escalation from the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and its persistence in settlement policies and grave and methodological violations that rise to the level of war crimes," a Syrian Foreign Ministry statement said.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's cabinet voted in favor of the plan that aims to build 7,300 homes in the region over a five-year period, during a meeting held at the Mevo Hama community in the Golan.

It calls for NIS 1 billion to be spent on housing, infrastructure and other projects with the goal of attracting roughly 23,000 new Jewish settlers to the area.

"Our goal today is to double the population of the Golan Heights," Bennett said ahead of the meeting.

He was forced to leave the meeting after his 14-year-old daughter tested positive for the coronavirus, putting him into isolation, but a vote on the program went ahead after a delay.

Around 25,000 Israeli settlers live in the Golan Heights, along with about 23,000 Druze, who remained on the land after Israel seized it.

Israel annexed the territory on December 14, 1981, in a move not recognized by most of the international community.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump granted American recognition to Israeli sovereignty over the Golan in 2019.

12.26.21

Palestinians, security forces clash near West Bank Homesh outpost

12.26.21

Palestinians, security forces clash near West Bank outpost

Clashes come in wake of Palestinian riot spurred by march of thousands of settlers to the illegal outpost of Homesh, where a yeshiva student was gunned down; 10 rioters reportedly hurt by live fire; one IDF soldier also lightly hurt

Associated Press | Published: 12.26.21, 12:22

Security forces clashed with Palestinians in the West Bank on Saturday, in an area that has seen a recent uptick in friction, the Israeli military and Palestinian medics said.

The clashes were part of days of tension in the area surrounding the West Bank outpost of Homesh and a spike in violence elsewhere in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

During the clashes, the military said, hundreds of Palestinians threw rocks and burned tires and shots were fired in the area. The military said forces responded with live fire and "riot dispersal means," typically tear gas and stun grenades.

The military also said shots were fired from a passing vehicle toward a military post near the West Bank city of Nablus, which is south of Homesh. It was not clear if the shooting was related to the clashes.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 10 people were wounded by live fire. The Palestinian Health Ministry said one of them, a 17-year-old, was seriously wounded. Dozens of others were wounded by rubber bullets.

A soldier was lightly wounded, the military said.

The most recent clashes come amid an increase in Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Last week, 25-year-old yeshiva student Yehuda Dimantman was killed and two others were wounded near Homesh, when a Palestinian gunman opened fire at their passing vehicle.

On Thursday, thousands of Jewish nationalists marched to Homesh to mark the end of the mourning period for Dimantman and on Friday, Israeli forces dismantled structures that settlers had erected at the outpost.

Earlier this month, an ultra-Orthodox Jew was left seriously injured after being stabbed by a Palestinian attacker outside the walls of Jerusalem's Old City.

A week before, a Hamas militant opened fire in the Old City, killing an Israeli man. Both attackers were killed by Israeli forces.

Settler violence against Palestinians has seen a similar increase during the olive harvest. In mid-November, Jewish settlers attacked a group of Palestinian farmers with pepper spray and clubs in the farmland surrounding Homesh, injuring four people.

12.24.21

Iran's war games in Gulf were warning to Israel, top Iranian commanders say

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Iran's war games in Gulf were warning to Israel, top Iranian commanders say

Tehran says launched 16 ballistic missiles in response to threats of military action voiced by Israel if diplomatic route fails at talks with world powers to revive 2015 nuclear deal
Reuters| Published: 12.24.21, 14:07

War games conducted this week by Iran in the Gulf were intended to send a warning to Israel, the country's top military commanders said on Friday, amid concerns over possible Israeli plans to target Iranian nuclear sites.

The Revolutionary Guards' war games, which included firing ballistic and cruise missiles, ended on Friday.

"These exercises had a very clear message: a serious, real ... warning to threats by the Zionist regime's authorities to beware of their mistakes," Guards chief General Hossein Salami said on state TV.

"We will cut off their hands if they make a wrong move... The distance between actual operations and military exercises is only a change in the angles of launching the missiles," Salami added.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri said 16 ballistic missiles of different classes had been fired simultaneously and had destroyed predetermined targets.

Iran says its ballistic missiles have a range of 2,000 km (1,200 miles) and are capable of reaching Israel and U.S. bases in the region.

Israel, which opposes efforts by world powers to revive Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, has long threatened military action if diplomacy fails. Iran says its nuclear ambitions are peaceful.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz has called on world powers not to allow Iran to play for time at the nuclear negotiations, in recess at Iran's request and scheduled to resume next Monday.

Israel is widely believed to be the only Middle Eastern country with a nuclear arsenal.

12.23.21

More than 15,000 march to open entrances to West Bank Palestinian villages

12.23.21

Thousands march in memorial of slain settler on West Bank

More than 15,000 people call for illegal outpost Homesh to be resettled after fatal shooting of Yehuda Dimantman in suspected terror act last week; Homesh evacuated by Israel in 2005

Elisha Ben Kimon | Published: 12.23.21, 19:18

Thousands of West Bank settlers on Thursday, attended the memorial service of yeshiva student Yehuda Dimantman who was killed in an alleged terror attack last week where two others were wounded.

According to some estimates, some 15,000 arrived by buses to northern West Bank for the memorial service at the sight of the shooting, which was held under heavy rain,

Dimantman's family demanded that the government not take any steps to evacuate the yeshiva in Homesh and would in fact legalize it.

After the ceremony, the crowd, which was led by Yehuda's widow Atia, marched towards the yeshiva.

"The more people join us, as it becomes rainier, the more challenging and difficult it is for us, and Yehuda would be happy, I'm certain," said the widow.

Dimantman, 20, is a resident of the settlement of Shavei Shomron. He was killed when he and three of his friends came under fire in what security forces said was a planned ambush while driving near the illegal outpost of Homesh.

"We invite all the people of Israel, anyone who hasn't arrived yet or regretted not coming, you all are invited to march with us in our heart or to come here tomorrow or the day after tomorrow", Dimantman's widow said. "We will return to all places that Yehuda dreamed of, and all the people of Israel dream of," she said.

IDF troops were on hand to secure the march and the entrances to the Palestinian villages were blocked.

Before the march, Shlomi Dimantman, Yehuda's brother, called on the public to join.

"We will take comfort in the mass participation in the march to the site of the murder of our beloved son Yehuda, at the Homesh yeshiva. We turn to the government of Israel and the IDF, and ask to allow entrance to anyone who wishes to come and comfort us in our heavy mourning," said the brother.

Settlers said they would leave a small presence at the Yeshiva to stop any attempt by the IDF to remove structures from the outpost.

12.22.21

Turkish President hosted a summit of Islamic State Rabbis to restore Israel ties

12.22.21

Erdogan hosts rabbis at palace, says will restore Israel ties 'soon'

As part of Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States summit, Turkish president meets with host of Jewish leaders, telling them he is fighting anti-Semitism as ardently as he is battling Islamophobia; adds ties between Israel and Turkey will 'continue to grow'

Itamar Eichner | Published: 12.22.21, 22:54

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday hosted at his palace in Ankara a large group of rabbis, telling them he wishes to restore ties with Israel "soon".

The meeting was attended by the chief rabbi of Turkey, along with rabbis from communities, cities and countries in the Muslim world as part of a summit organized by the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States.

Among the Jewish leaders who attended the summit, were chief rabbis of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, Nigeria, Albania, the United Arab Emirates, as well as Northern Cyprus and others. Due to coronavirus restrictions, the rabbis of Morocco and Tunisia were unable to physically attend the event.

During the meeting, Erdogan issued a series of surprisingly warm statements about his attitude towards Jews and Israel.

"Relations between Turkey, Jews and Israel will always be strong," he said. "Economic relations between the two countries are stronger than ever and will continue to grow."

According to the rabbis present at the meeting, Erdogan also said that normalizing relations with Israel is an important goal for him.

The Turkish president apparently received the rabbis warmly and talked about the fight against anti-Semitism, emphasizing that he would fight it just as passionately as he fought Islamophobia. Erdogan even mentioned that Turkey had signed a treaty against Holocaust denial and said it would boost Holocaust education in the country.

Erdogan, normally an ardent critic of Israel, also said he hopes for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "I hope for peace and trust between Israel and the Palestinians. A peace in which everyone will respect each other."

The warming of ties between the two countries after years of hostilities, became apparent after the release of an Israeli couple held by Turkey on suspicion of espionage back in November.

The couple were arrested and detained for allegedly taking photographs of Erdogan's residence during a trip to Istanbul, but were freed a week later after a massive diplomatic campaign by Israel.

12.17.21

Complete Essay on prospects and analogy of a possible Israel war with Iran

12 pages

12.17.21

What the public doesn't know about an attack on Iran

For the last six months, the IDF has been working feverishly to prepare for a possible attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. It entails incredibly complex strategic and diplomatic planning, along with preparations for possible responses from Iran, Hezbollah, and Gaza. By Yoav Limor Published on 12-17-2021 12:30 Last modified: 12-17-2021 13:30
What the public doesn't know about an attack on Iran

A lot of words have been devoted in the past few weeks to the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran. One after another, senior officials in the defense establishment and the political echelon have made it clear that as far as Israel is concerned, "all the options are on the table" when it comes to stopping Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

There is a clear purpose to these threats: to push Western powers to take a more aggressive line on Tehran. They are mostly aimed at the US administration, which has consistently declared that it will not allow Iran to nuclearize, but in effect, is taking a passive stance. To put it simply, Israel is telling the world that if it won't stop Iran, we will have to take military action.

Israel made a similar threat a decade ago, one that was backed up by practical plans for an attack: Israel wanted the world to see that its air force was drilling long-range flights and strikes, and wanted it to know that it was discussing the optimal timing for an attack. US intelligence – and that of other countries, obviously – did not miss the IDF's announcements of high alert ahead of a possible imminent attacks.

All this did the job. The world was pressured by the possibility of an Israeli strike, and took action. The US launched secret talks with Iran, which led to the signing of the JCPOA in 2015. Iran stopped enriching uranium and got rid of the stocks of enriched uranium it already had. The possibility of an Israeli attack was taken off the table, followed by accusations back and forth between the political leadership (Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak) and the military leadership (Gabi Ashkenazi and Meir Dagan) at the time about what the correct course of action had been, and who torpedoed whom.

While the Iran nuclear deal was in effect, Israel fell into a certain complacency. Assuming that as long as the deal was valid, there would be no military action against

Iran's nuclear program, the plans for a strike were shelved, and never underwent the necessary updates and adjustments needed to keep them relevant in light of the changes of the past 10 years.

Even after the US withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018, Israel was still asleep at the wheel. The assumption was that one of three scenarios would play out: The Tehran regime would collapse under the crippling sanctions the US applied after it pulled out of the deal; the Iranians would beg to sign a new deal, and it would be possible to make it a better, stronger, longer-term one; or Donald Trump would be reelected and order an American strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

None of these came to pass. The Iranians proved impressively determined, and today – despite a terrible economic situation that includes 30 million people living below the poverty line, crumbling infrastructure, and the Iranian rial at an unprecedented low – they aren't blinking when it comes to their nuclear program.

This hardline policy is being led by a brutal regime that has not been destabilized, and apparently won't while US President Joe Biden is in office (and most likely wouldn't have happened even if Trump had been reelected).

The American withdrawal from the deal prompted the Iranians to hit the gas on their nuclear development. It didn't happen immediately, but in the past few years they have made impressive progress, not hesitating to skip over their commitments under the deal, especially in everything having to do with a ban on installing advanced centrifuges and enriching uranium to a high rate, in large quantities. Recently, they also started enrichment at an underground facility at Fordo, which is much better-defended against a possible attack.

Israel is following this all closely, but took too long to respond. For example, to attack Iran, it will be necessary to refuel mid-air. Currently, the IDF depends on 50-year-old aircraft that need to be replaced immediately. At the end of 2018, then-Defense Minister and IDF Chief Avigdor Lieberman and Gadi Eizenkot approved a broad equipment acquisition plan that included the purchase of new fueling aircraft. But the new IDF Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, wanted to delay the decision so it would fall in line with his multi-year plan. Then Israel found itself in a political maelstrom of repeated elections and no state budget. The result: a two-year delay to the decision (which was finally approved at the end of 2020 and inked in early 2021) and therefore to the acquisition of the equipment.

The IDF was waiting for a budget from outside (a "box," as it is termed in the military) to start preparing again for the possibility of an attack on Iran. Kochavi preferred to channel funds to other things, like the multidisciplinary Tnufa unit he set up as part of his multi-year plan. When other high-ranking IDF officers, primarily Israeli Air Force commander Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin disputed his decision, Kochavi responded that that IDF would be given a "box" like it had previously to deal with the Iranian issue and other matters, like air defense and the construction of security barriers.

When Biden was elected US president, the option of an American attack on Iran was dropped, and then the penny dropped for Israel. At the start of this year, Kochavi revived the military option in an aggressive speech at the Institute for National Security Studies. Once the new government was forced, he got the "box" he had been hoping for – special funding of over 5 billion shekels (\$1.6 billion) for three years for preparations to attack Iran.

As a result, for the past six months the IDF has been working feverishly to make the military option a relevant tool. The Israeli military currently has plans and capabilities, but the attention and resources allow it to improve them with every month that passes. This, incidentally, is why many senior Israeli officials support a return to the previous bad deal; it might not keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons, but it will keep it farther away from them, and will allow Israel time, after which – in another three to five years – it should have an effective battle plan against Iran, of which attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities are only one element.

Still, Israel could find itself having to decide on a strike before that, for a number of reasons: the nuclear talks could collapse, leading to Iran continuing its nuclear program until it reaches the nuclear threshold; a temporary deal that Iran will constantly challenge; or a return to the original nuclear deal, which Iran would secretly violate. And there could be other reasons that have nothing to do with its nuclear program, like an Iranian attack on Israel using cruise missiles fired from Yemen or Iraq in response to some Israeli action or other. An attack of this type, especially if it results in wounded, could lead to an Israeli strike on Iranian turf.

According to Sima Shine, former head of the Mossad's research division and now a senior researcher at the INSS, "No Israeli prime minister will allow Iran to become a nuclear power on his watch. The question we need to ask ourselves is what we want to achieve by an attack, and how capable we are of doing it."

This question is not part of the public discourse in Israel, which is limited to whether there will or will not be an attack. For the Israeli public, an attack means that planes will suddenly appear in the Iranian sky, drop bombs that will send Iran's nuclear facilities up in flame, after which our heroic pilots will return home and be greeted with cries of joy, which is what happened after the strikes on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007.

"The Iranian project is farther away, better defended, and more compartmentalized than the projects attacked in the past," says Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin: The Iranian project is farther away, better defended, and more compartmentalized than the projects Israel attacked in the past
"In Iraq and Syria, we had the advantage of surprise, and here, we don't. Israel has already proven that it can find creative ways of overcoming these obstacles, but it's a much more complicated event," Yadlin says.

The dramatic change is not only in comparison to the destruction of the Iraqi and Syrian reactors, but also to the situation that existed in 2010, when the option of an attack was first raised. Then, the Americans controlled Iraq and there was a need to coordinate with them, and Iran's nuclear program was much newer and less protected. Since then, Iran has started using the Fordo facility, scattered sites related to its nuclear program throughout the country, and tripled its air defenses, adding dozens of batteries – including Russian S-300 systems as well as systems the Iranian military developed based on Russian and Chinese systems. Iran's air defenses are much more advanced than those of Syria, which the IAF is able to handle in the strikes it carried out there.

The planning stage for an airstrike on Iran is longer than you might think. A senior IDF official told me this week that "There won't be a situation in which someone makes a decision and 24 hours later there are planes in Tehran. We'll need a long time to get the system ready for war, because our working assumption needs to be that this won't be a strike, but a war."

This definition, war, is part of how the IDF's thinking has evolved in the past few months. It is no longer looking at a localized strike on nuclear facilities, but preparing for war. This will be a different war from any we have known – no 7th Division or Golani or shared borders, but multiple different fronts in which battles are waged in multiple ways. One need only watch the maritime battles being waged between Israel and Iran in recent months to understand the potential, which extends far behind Iran's borders to the missile and rocket systems its satellites maintain in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip.

Attacks like these require models – mock training on identical targets at similar distances, to get the system used to what is expected of it on the way to Iran and back. In the past, the IDF would train relatively easily; the enemy was always behind technologically and unable to detect the preparations. Anyone who did, like the Americans – in the case of the strike on Syria's reactor – would have been in on the secret anyway.

Today, the world is equipped with sensors everywhere that will not allow a large contingent of aircraft to take off without alerting the enemy. To obscure the preparation, the IAF will need to create an ongoing routine of drills, which comes at an immense expense – money, fuel, replacement parts, flight hours, and reservist days.

At the same time, Israel will have to make sure all its systems are operating at full capacity. First and foremost, air defense, which will react to anything that looks like a response on any scale, and the Military Intelligence Directorate and the Mossad, which will have to make an unprecedented effort ahead of any strike, collecting not only information about the Iranian nuclear program but also tactical and operational intelligence that will allow it to strike effectively.

While all this is happening, Israel's ground forces will have to be on the highest alert, ready for the possibility of a war in the north or with Gaza, or both, all without leaving

any signs. They will have to up the preparedness of various units, step up drills, and supply missing equipment. It's not easy to do all this in secret. Leading up to the attack on Syria's reactor, the army was forced to adopt trickery in order to prepare for a possible Syrian response. Syria opted not to respond, but the Iranians might behave differently.

It takes time to make all these preparations. The IDF is waiting for four Boeing KC-46 Pegasus aerial refueling aircraft, but it could take years for them to arrive, and the Americans are refusing to let Israel jump the line and deliver them sooner. It will also take months to refill the warehouses with Iron Dome interceptor missiles and other IAF precision equipment.

A decade ago, the IDF would have needed a few years to get ready. Then, too, it was impossible to shift the military into a state of immediate readiness, and when it was put into attack mode – and that happened a few times – the directive was for it to be ready within 16 days of the moment the political leadership gave the green light. At the time, the IDF wanted to cut down the preparation time as much as possible, because it kept it from other activities and also because it came at a heavy cost to the economy. Ashkenazi would say that "In every round of preparations, El Al is half-grounded, because its pilots are on reserve duty with me." That was true for other systems, as well, some of which have been bolstered since then – namely, military intelligence and cyber.

All the preparations will have to be done in secret. "The issue of information security is dramatic in an event like this," said a high-ranking reservist officer. "We've never handled a challenge like this, and it's not clear if it's even possible to keep a secret like this for long."

Keeping things secret will be a problem not only for the IDF and the defense establishment (the Mossad is an integral part of this mission, as well as the Israel Atomic Energy Commission and parts of the Defense Ministry), but also – and mainly – the government. Such a dramatic decision would need to be approved by the cabinet and the Opposition leader would need to be informed. This is what Menachem Begin did prior to the attack in Iraq when he informed Opposition leader Shimon Peres of the plan. Ehud Olmert also informed Netanyahu ahead of the attack in Syria.

In this case, the cabinet will be frequently updated about preparations, and give the IDF authority to prepare for the operation. Only when the attack is imminent will the cabinet be asked to approve it. A very small group will decide on the final timing – the prime minister, the defense and foreign ministers, and possibly another minister, Lieberman, as a nod to his seniority and his status as a former defense minister.

Anyone let in on the secret at any stage will be asked to sign draconic confidentiality papers. All officials will be ordered to keep it secret and it will be made clear that anyone who lets it out will face severe punishment.

Even before a final decision on an attack, Israel will have to decide on its red lines. It will have to define them not only for itself, but also for the world. It will have to build

international legitimacy for action. Without that legitimacy, a strike could have negative results and put Israel in the position of the aggressor, while giving Iran legitimacy to return to its nuclear project. In this case, Iran will argue that because its "nuclear research project" was attacked by a nuclear nation, it has to develop nuclear weapons to defend itself from similar attacks in future. Israel would find it difficult to thwart that a second time.

Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN Ron Prosor says, "Building legitimacy in the world is complicated, because it's hard to do without exposing the operations, which would put the attack at risk."

"We need to explain to the world not only why it's vital to stop Iran, but also that an action like this could hold it back for years," he says.

Former Israeli Ambassador to the UN Ron Prosor: We need to explain to the world not only why it's vital to stop Iran, but also that an action like this could hold it back for years "It requires precise diplomatic preparatory work, which is also hard to do without giving anything away. The diplomats at the Foreign Ministry need to be in the loop, but none of them will know why, and certainly not when. The Mossad, the IDF, and the National Security Council will be responsible for delivering information. We can only work in full coordination with the Americans, both in terms of the military and diplomacy," Prosor adds.

"With everyone else – the Russians, the Chinese, the Europeans, the Gulf States – we need to prepare the background. Take them step by step, explain why Iran is so complicated and warn them about what will happen if Iran becomes a nuclear threshold state, or heaven forbid, a nuclearized state."

This process will have to work differently in every country. With the British and French, for example, Israel has intelligence agreements that allow a certain amount of material to be shared. It's likely that Israel will share some information with the Gulf states, as well, especially to enlist its new partners (and the ones that are still in the closet) to stand by its side on the day of the attack and during whatever follows.

"Coordination with the Americans is strategic, it's at the core of our interest," says the senior IDF official. "They can give us lots of help in the attack itself – for example, intelligence or radar support, which are deployed in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, and even search and rescue capabilities, and of course, in providing us military protection after the attack."

As part of the new plans being drawn up now, the IDF is also preparing for the possibility to attack without coordinating with the Americans.

"We don't need a green light from them, but it would be good if there were an understanding, an amber light, mostly so we don't surprise them," a former senior defense official says. "So this attack should come after the Americans despair of ever reaching a nuclear deal with the Iranians."

As noted, the Americans controlled Iraq in 2010, and Israel needed to coordinate with them down to the smallest details in order to carry out a strike in Iran. This is no longer the case, but the Americans still have a significant presence in the region that could help Israel. It's unlikely that they will offer Israel use of their air bases in Qatar or their naval base in Bahrain, and there's no chance that any Arab state would agree to openly cooperate with Israel, exposing itself to a retaliatory attack by Iran. But localized, secret cooperation is a possibility, from helicopters to search and rescue services, to setting up various detection and interception systems.

Because of the Arab boycott, until the start of this year Israel fell under the US European Command (EUCOM), even though it operated in the Central Command's territory, which necessitated complex coordination. After the Abraham Accords, Israel was moved to CENTCOM, which makes things simpler and creates a space for cooperation – starting with ongoing updates about strikes in Syria, to joint military drills.

Preparations for an attack will require Israel to carry out frequent war games. It will have to practice every possible scenario on every front, and make sure that the political leadership is present. Our leaders don't like this, as they would prefer to leave themselves as much room to maneuver as possible and not show ahead of time what they will do in any given scenario. So the drills used various "former" officials to play the role of prime minister. When it comes to Iran, our political leaders would do well to show up in person and prepare for the day they will have to give the order and the ramifications of them saying "Go."

The stage of the attack itself requires, first of all, a decision about what the targets are. The range of possibilities is almost endless – localized strikes on uranium enrichment facilities, strikes on any facility linked to the nuclear program, or an all-out attack that would also target missile launchers and Shahab missile manufacturing sites, cruise missile launching sites, facilities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, and more.

"The backbone of the [Iranian] nuclear program is the enrichment facilities at Qom [Fordo] and Natanz," says the senior IDF officer.

Aside from these sites, Israel can also attack factories around Tehran that manufacture centrifuges, the uranium conversion facility at Isfahan, the heavy water reactor at Arak, and the experimental site at Parchin. It will also be necessary to destroy the air defenses around all of these sites.

Most experts think that the operation will have to focus only on the core of the nuclear program and its enrichment sites: "Make it clear to them that this is what we insist on, and that we have no interest in a full-scale war," the former defense official says. "But if they respond – we'll take the rest, too."

Israel would prefer to carry out a strike like this in a single shot, which is why it would prefer that the Americans do it. They could attack, assess the damage, and go back the next day and the day after if necessary. Israel, however, is extremely limited because of the distance, its number of planes, and its need to defend itself against a response from multiple fronts the moment it attacks.

Some officials think that Israel should take advantage of the opportunity of an attack to eradicate as many of Iran's capabilities as possible – and especially try to destabilize the regime through an attack on the IRGC. But that scenario is unlikely. Conversations with many defense officials past and present leads one to conclude that Israel would prefer a more focused action.

In the future, Israel should have additional capabilities, but in the near future, it will depend on its abilities to carry out an airstrike on Iran. It would be a complex strike involving hundreds of aircraft. Presumably, the first planes to arrive in Iran would be the F35 stealth fighters, which would destroy Iran's air defenses. Then F15s and F16s would arrive, with the various weaponry they can carry and fire.

The main factor is what each aircraft can carry for the requisite distance: the more fuel the plane is holding, the less weapons it can carry, and vice versa. So there will be a need for mid-air refueling, as well as decisions about what plane to send in to leave enough to defend Israel's own skies. There will also need to be precise plans about the kinds of ammunition to be used, the angles of attack, and the strikes on targets, especially underground ones. Of course, the selection of the combat pilots to fly the mission will be especially careful.

"Everyone dreams of taking part in a mission like this. There will be a war between the pilots about who gets to be there," a veteran pilot says.

We can assume that the airstrike will be accompanied by search and rescue forces in helicopters and on the ground, who will have been flown in secretly ahead of time or moved in on ships. Naval forces will also be moved toward the Gulf. Other aircraft will have to provide air coverage over a distance of 1,300 km. (807 miles) or more.

There is no expectation that this attack will go smoothly, like the ones in Iraq or Syria. It's not only that Iran is much better defended, but also that an operation like this will inevitably face problems because of the enormous number of aircraft taking part in it. Planes could go down because they are hit or malfunction, and pilots could have to abandon their planes over enemy territory and be taken prisoner.

Pilots will have to undergo complicated mental preparation, far beyond the usual, as will those who send them on the operation. The political leadership will probably ask the IDF for a probable casualty count, as well as the projected number of wounded in Israel as a result of an Iranian response. But even if the numbers are high, it's unlikely that they would cause any leader in Israel to ignore Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons.

It will be complicated to reach Iran by air. You don't need to be an expert to analyze the flight routes and possibilities: supposedly, all of Iran's neighbors – including Turkey – have an interest in working with Israel, given their common concerns about Iran. But it's doubtful they will want to be exposed as having allowed Israel to use their airspace to attack Iran. This is particularly true of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states, and to a lesser degree Azerbaijan, which also shares a border with Iran. The IAF will know how to overcome this difficulty from an operational perspective and fly unseen (certainly on the way out), but this is another reason why extensive diplomatic preparations are necessary to create legitimacy and understanding so Israel can use a certain country's airspace en route to attack without having problems with it later.

An airstrike will probably not be able to destroy Iran's underground nuclear facilities. It's possible that some will require ground forces, which would go in secretly and plant materials that would make it possible to target the sites in the strike. This element significantly adds to the planning and problems of execution. There are a number of ways into Iran, but it's a huge country, difficult to get around, certainly when one has to do so covertly. The Americans will testify to this – they learned in 1980 when they landed for their failed attempt to free the hostages being held in Tehran.

The former defense official notes that "If we attack and delay Iran's nuclear program by a year or two, it's as if we did nothing. We need to be sure that significant damage is done and we'll put them off [nuclear weapons] for many years."

There are many officials in Israel who think that given the state of Iran's nuclear program, the mission is too much for Israel, and only the Americans (or the Americans with Israel) can pull it off. Others think that Israel can carry out an effective localized strike that will deal a blow to one aspect of Iran's nuclear program, but won't destroy it entirely. In making the decision, Israel will have to weigh not only the results, but also the ramifications: "the day after." Here, too, the range of possibilities is nearly endless, from the Iranians ignoring it to an all-out war in the Middle East.

In 2010, the US warned that an Israeli attack on Iran would lead to a world war. The Americans were mostly bothered by the price they would pay, which they claimed would entail a US ground incursion into Iran to stop it.

Yadlin says, "I thought then, and I think now, that there won't be a world war, or even a regional war. Even if there is an Iranian response against Israel, it will be moderate, and even if it causes damage, it won't be the end of the world. We certainly won't see another sack of Jerusalem here."

Supposedly, the Iranians have three possibilities: a full-out response, a partial response, or no response. Middle East scholar Professor Eyal Zisser of Tel Aviv University thinks that there will be a response from Iran.

"If they don't respond, it will send Israel a message that it can keep attacking them without interference, like it does in Syria. The attacks on oil tankers in the past two years proved that the Iranians aren't sitting quietly. They respond. Otherwise, why have they been making threats all these years and building their forces? They can attack us, or our allies, or both," Zisser says.

The Iranian decision will to a large extent be dictated by the extent to which the Americans back the attack.

"Iran can't risk a war with the US," the IDF official explains. "Even after Qasem Soleimani was killed, they made due with a symbolic firing of 16 rockets at the American base in Dir a-Zur, and that was only after they made certain that no soldier would be killed."

Shine also thinks that the Iranians will respond, "but if the US is behind us, it will be completely different. This isn't the Syrian nuclear reactor, which was built secretly and no one knew about. Everyone knows about Iran, and it won't go unnoticed. Iran will have to decide whether or not to respond from its own territory, on its own, or through its satellites."

Thus far, Iran has avoided launching open attacks from within its borders. It's not that it doesn't – the massive strike on Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil facility in September 2019 was secretly launched from Iran. Recently, Defense Minister Benny Gantz revealed cruise missile bases that the Iranians maintain at Kashan, north of Isfahan. That facility and others are operated by the IRGC Aerospace Force under the command of Ali Hajizadeh, whom Israel has already marked as the most problematic official in Iran after Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike two years ago.

Iran can act on its own, even fire Shahab missiles at Israel. It has hundreds of them, and some might even have been fitted out with chemical warheads. It can also take action via its satellites: the Houthis in Yemen have precision capabilities, including long-range attack drones, as do some of the militias in Iraq, which have already used drones against US military bases.

Israel's main concern will be how Hezbollah will respond. Will it launch a war, be satisfied with a symbolic response, or sit on the fence? This is a critical issue, and experts don't agree about it.

"Hezbollah was built up and prepared precisely for this, and we can assume that it will use everything it has against us," Shine says. Zisser, on the other hand, thinks that Hezbollah will want to avoid a full-scale war.

"[Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah will try to stay out of it. He might respond here or there, but it will depend on how much pressure the Iranians put on him. He might be satisfied with a symbolic response, to do his duty, and nothing more," Zisser says.

The other side isn't the only one that will face tough decisions. Israel, for example, will have to decide whether or not, after an attack on Iran it will want to carry out preemptive strikes against Hezbollah's various sites, especially those linked to the group's precision missile program. The advantage of strikes like these is that they can take out specific capabilities that threaten Israel. The disadvantage: it will surely start a war with Hezbollah, and turn the strike on Iran into a war in the north.

Most experts think Israel will avoid doing that. It will send Hezbollah clear warnings that the attack was directed at Iran's nuclear program, and if Hezbollah keeps quiet, that will remain its only goal.

"If we do otherwise, if we take massive action in Lebanon, Hezbollah will respond significantly," Zisser says. "But if we act wisely, even its responses will be moderate, because they have no interest in the IDF taking a few divisions and invading Lebanon."

The senior IDF official also thinks that Hezbollah won't rush to demolish Lebanon for Tehran's sake. "Nasrallah is a Lebanese patriot. He'll respond, but moderately. Assuming that the main target of the whole event is Iran's nuclear program, Israel should even accept some 'stings' from him, even a few casualties, and ignore it, to avoid a widespread conflict in the north."

Yadlin also thinks that Hezbollah will keep itself in check, "But if it chooses to respond, it would be better for us to take action now, before it's defended by Iranian nuclear weapons."

A war in the north, on any scale, will require Israel to call up massive forces, which will hinder its ability to wage an ongoing battle against Iran. It will certainly need to equip itself ahead of time with tens of thousands of Iron Dome and David's Sling interceptor missiles, only a small part of which have been agreed on and are due to arrive bit by bit in the next few years. This is in addition to the need for Arrow missiles to intercept long-range missiles. All this will cost billions, and only part of it is in place (and that was thanks to special US aid). For years, the IDF has been screaming that the country's air defenses fall far short of what is necessary, given the threats, and need massive restocking.

It's likely that **Iran will also prod Gaza to respond**. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad already cooperates with it, and so does Hamas, to some extent. It could also try to attack Israel's weaker allies, like the Gulf states, or Israeli interests there. It will certainly try to attack Israelis, and Israeli and Jewish interests all over the world.

At the same time, Iran will take diplomatic action. "It will turn to its allies, especially Russia and China, and argue that Israel is the aggressor and ask for protection," Zisser says. "It might also use [the attack] as an excuse to try and return to its nuclear project, this time in the position of the one who needs protection against Israeli aggression."

Therefore, Israel has to do everything so that the attack is as effective as possible, and if the first wave doesn't succeed – attack again, despite all the complications this would entail. This comes as a possible cost of an open war with Iran in which the two countries trade blows every so often. The IDF is also preparing for this possibility as part of its new plans. When they are in place, **Israel should be ready for an all-out war with Iran, and not only isolated strikes on its nuclear project**.

None of this is expected to happen in the next few days or weeks, and probably not even the next few months. As long as the Iran nuclear talks are underway, and the US is reaching out to Iran diplomatically, an attack would be out of bounds because Israel would be accused of torpedoing the talks and its allies would turn on it, including Washington, which has already made it clear that it expects "zero surprises" at this time. Israel has no commitment to this, but won't act without coordinating with the Americans. That's what it did a decade ago, to avoid a conflict with the US that could have ramifications much broader than the Iranian issue.

This "down time" is good for Israel. It can use it to try and influence the American (and European) moves and the nascent deal, while at the same time stepping up its military preparations, completing its plans, building models and equipping itself in order to reach a higher level of operational readiness.

And when all this is done, if it turns out tomorrow that Iran lied to the world and is closer to a nuclear bomb than we thought, the decision-makers will have to decide whether or not to attack immediately. As always, it would be better if the Americans – who promised that Iran would never have nuclear capabilities – did it. But if the IDF takes charge, it will take several long weeks of preparation before an operation like this can get off the ground, less than optimally ready and with less certainty of success.