

Iran – an Israeli Response

Unlike Germany (whose commitment to Israel's security Israel highly values), Israel is directly and strategically threatened by Iran. Israel regards Iran – its ideology, ambitions, policies and proxies – as the gravest strategic-military danger to its national security. This helps explain the differences in approaches towards Iran.

Specifically:

- a. Israel will not risk accepting Iran even as a nuclear-threshold state, not only a nuclear-armed one. It regards the Iranian drive to realize its continued nuclear ambition in the most severe terms, justifying far-reaching measures to prevent it.
- b. Israel is determined to block the Iranian push towards building a formidable military front facing Israel – in Lebanon, Syria and beyond – based primarily on a significant arsenal of highly accurate rockets and armies of armed proxies.
- c. Israel is not interested in escalating to war with Iran, yet it believes that only the willingness to push back including with military means could deter Iran and thus reduce the chances of war with it. This has been the essence of Israel's "campaign between the wars" against the Iranian military entrenchment in Syria.

There is a legitimate debate whether the JCPOA's basic faults should have been dealt with by abandoning the deal and applying "maximum pressure" on Iran. Notwithstanding, the current Iranian counter-pressures through regional violent activities and gradual encroachment of the JCPOA (alongside Iranian deadly repression of demonstrations at home and terror activities in Europe) raises a basic question: Are there European "red lines" the crossing of which by Iran would trigger a European response beyond rhetoric, such as sanctions? Applying a mix of "sticks" and "carrots" could be effective only in the context of an agreed and coordinated strategy between the U.S. and Europe, which is currently not at hand. If Europe provides only "carrots," it does not help produce a proper response to Iran's dangerous policies.

Israel would support a JCPOA 2.0 only if it effectively addresses the faults of the previous deal. To that end, the pressures that have been built on Iran should be cogently leveraged and not thrown away. Iranian regional activities should be addressed either within or outside a new deal, including measures against Iranian proxies (such as designating the whole of Hezbollah or sanctioning Iranian proxies responsible for killing demonstrators in Iraq). Ultimately, the key to changing Iran's behavior lies in trans-Atlantic cooperation based on solid grounds, to which Israel and other regional actors could and would contribute.