



(U//FOUO) Israel's Post-Sharon Policy Prospects: Part 2 -- Iran

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(U) In [part 1](#) of this article, we looked at Israeli prospects with the Palestinians. Now we'll look at the outlook with Iran.

(U//FOUO) At the same time that Israel was dealing with the loss of Sharon from its political leadership and the stunning HAMAS election victory, Iran's nuclear ambitions surfaced. Israeli leaders from all political parties and persuasions commented that a nuclear-armed Iran threatens Israel's existence and would be intolerable for any Israeli government. As if the nuclear threat were not enough, Iran's President Ahmedinejad (pictured) has called publicly for Israel to be "wiped off the map" and referred to the Holocaust as a myth. He subsequently announced that the "Zionist regime is a decaying and crumbling tree that will fall with a storm."

(U//FOUO) Following Ahmedinejad's threatening statements, Iran announced in early April that it had enriched uranium to a low level (3.5 percent) and planned to produce it on an industrial scale. The Israeli government reacted cautiously, reiterating the threat to Israel posed by a nuclear Iran. Israeli political and military leaders recognized that enrichment, although a significant step, was still nonetheless a long way away from a nuclear bomb. Tel Aviv indicated that it intends to continue to work with Europe, the United States, and others in the international community to resolve the Iranian threat through diplomacy.

(U//FOUO) Rumors abound in international political circles that Israel will act unilaterally to remove the Iranian nuclear threat as it did with the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981. Although the Israel Defense Force is capable of conducting a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, executing an *effective* strike would be difficult. The extent of Iran's nuclear program is not entirely known, the location of all key nuclear facilities is far from certain, and known nuclear facilities are dispersed around the country. In addition, the distance which Israeli aircraft must travel to conduct an attack and the necessary overflight and refueling requirements pose significant challenges. Moreover, Jane's Defense Weekly recently reported that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has accelerated a program to protect Iran's major nuclear facilities by constructing, with North Korean assistance, a defense infrastructure for them.

(TS//SI) Taking into consideration these difficulties, Israel's 1981 pre-emptive strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor does not serve as an effective model for predicting a possible Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. Israel's calculus for launching the Osirak raid was based on accurate information that ensured a successful strike would cripple Iraq's nuclear weapons development. Does Israel possess sufficient targeting knowledge to assure a significant blow to the Iranian program?

(TS//SI) The risk involved in the Iraq strike mission was manageable, requiring only a brief overflight of Jordan. Israel did not face the risk of retaliation against U.S. forces stationed in the immediate area, or the risk of inadvertently provoking an engagement with Coalition forces if OPSEC considerations precluded prior coordination with those forces. Iran's assessed ability to retaliate against Israeli territory with missiles is greater than the risk Israel faced from Iraq in 1981. Moreover, Iran continues to possess dual-use, chemical and biotechnological facilities which add to the potential threat. Finally, the political fallout from an attack on Iran's nuclear program, while the international community still debates Iran's intentions to acquire a nuclear option, is far greater than the tacit regional applause for Israel's removing the generally accepted fact of Saddam's threat.

(TS//SI) At this point, it is unlikely that Israel will undertake dramatic moves against Iran, such as ordering an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. Despite the Israeli government's

pronouncements that an Iran in possession of nuclear weapons would be completely unacceptable to Tel Aviv, there are currently no specific indications that Israel is preparing for imminent military action.

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