

# Opinion The Iranian Threat and the Arab Peace Initiative

We should consider the initiative a way to deal with the threat from Iran and its creation, Hezbollah. And if Iran opposed the foray, its isolation in the Arab and Muslim

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is right: Iran is the greatest threat to Israel. Today this threat seems distant, but it would only take a few errant Israeli bombs hitting an Iranian target in Syria, or a massive terror attack by Hezbollah, to undermine the calm and create a dynamic that could lead to war. And that war, with the main task reserved for Hezbollah's missile arsenal, would differ from all past wars. Less than two years ago, Military Intelligence chief Herzl Halevi warned in an interview of "hundreds of tons of explosives reaching the center of the country."

Try to imagine central Tel Aviv, for example the Yoo Towers, hit by dozens of tons of explosives. Or several dozen precise missiles carrying half-ton warheads hitting the Hadera power station, putting it out of commission and denying Israel a significant percentage of its electricity production.

And these are only a few examples. Even if the military landed a harsh blow on Hezbollah in a spectacular ground maneuver, the home front, which the military is supposed to protect, would pay a high price. Israel would be very different after such a war.

And the fact that the prime minister correctly diagnoses the threat doesn't necessarily mean he's addressing it optimally. At this point, he and the defense establishment deserve credit for the cautious effort that has been made to reduce the Hezbollah threat without breaking all the rules of the game. The investment in missile defense systems will prove itself if a war breaks out.

But the MI chief is well aware of all these things, and still he speaks of hundreds of tons of explosives that would hit the home front, so we have to ask whether we should also be investing more in reducing the chances of war. In other words, is it possible to talk to Iran, and on what basis?

On the face of it, the answer is no. For almost 40 years, Iran has been our greatest enemy, one that considers Israel the Little Satan (the Great Satan is the United States). We're used to threats of extermination by Iran's leaders, just as until 1967 we were used to threats by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to destroy Israel. The arming and training of Hezbollah, terror attacks against Israeli targets abroad, Iran's belligerent policy and its nuclear potential are different expressions of the fact that these aren't empty threats. And still, Iranian hostility toward Israel isn't absolute, and here may lie the key to change and hope.

Since the Arab Peace Initiative (which began as the Saudi Peace Initiative) was proposed in 2002, Iran hasn't expressed opposition to it. Moreover, the initiative was adopted by the foreign ministers at a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2003, in Tehran of all places.

At the heart of the initiative, we should recall, is recognition of Israel by all the Arab and Muslim countries, a normalization of relations in exchange for establishing a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, and an agreed-on solution (including by Israel) of the refugee problem. In 2008, the Iranian approach was confirmed by then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who said he would honor whatever was acceptable to the Palestinian people.

To this day, the Arab Peace Initiative hasn't received the public discussion it deserves. This is the most important development in the conflict since the Six-Day War, which gave Israel the territories whose return today would enable an end to the conflict. Most of Israel's former defense chiefs, who are members of Commanders for Israel's Security and the Council for Peace and Security, consider it a suitable basis for starting negotiations, and many politicians, including former right-wingers, believe we should respond to the proposal.

Thus far the emphasis has been that responding to the initiative would move Israel's relations with the Sunni countries in a positive direction and reduce the chances of a new conflict with the Palestinians. But just when Iran's power is rising, we should also consider a response to the initiative an effective way to deal with the threat from Iran and its creation, Hezbollah.

That doesn't mean doing so would make the regime in Tehran pro-Zionist, but it would to a great extent take the wind out of Iran's ideological sails regarding its all-out war against Israel. It would lower the hostility between the two countries

and reduce the chances of war, with all its risks. Such a response could also create a basis for talks between the two countries, first in secret channels and then perhaps overtly. And if Iran opposed the peace initiative, its isolation in the Arab and Muslim world would grow.

If Netanyahu wants to be remembered as Mr. Security, he should also invest in reducing the chances of war, not just lowering the price. Otherwise he might be remembered in an entirely different way.

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