

The Optimistic, the Realistic, and the Pessimistic Scenarios for Iran

By Victor Davis Hanson

We're in the midst of about the seventh to eighth day of this Iranian-Israeli conflict and we're getting all sorts of information. It's not disinformation or misinformation, it's just speculation because we don't really have enough information coming out of Iran or out of the [White House](#) or out of Israel to make a firm consensus—a solid consensus—of what's actually going on.

In that lacuna, maybe we should just, very quickly, look at a pessimistic, an optimistic, and a realistic appraisal.



Here's what the pessimists are saying—these are not my views. I'm trying to give an accurate portrayal of what they're saying.

The pessimists, both here in the United States and abroad, are of two types. They are the MAGA base and they are saying:

This breaks [President Donald Trump](#)'s promise not to intervene in wars that are optional. This is a forever war. If we hit the Iranians, that will not be the end of it. That will be the beginning. They will send cadres all around the world to attack our diplomats, our soldiers. They may try to kill Trump, again. And this is a violation of his campaign oath.

Realistically, some military analysts say:

Well, wait a minute. Even if you take out some of the more prominent nuclear facilities, doesn't mean they can't be rebuilt very quickly. So, then the question hinges on: Are you going to take out the regime?

There's not a lot of evidence in the past that airstrikes will take out a regime. We tried it with Saddam Hussein, as you remember, in 2003. And it did not work. We tried it with Muammar Gaddafi during the Reagan administration. It did not work. We couldn't quite get rid of Slobodan Milosevic. That was a combined air, in the Balkans, and we had troops on the ground.

So, it doesn't seem that even if the Israelis or us took out the supreme leader, it doesn't necessarily mean that the government would collapse or that whatever replaced it would be much different, in this pessimistic appraisal.

And the pessimist then would say:

Why not negotiate and bring back the monitors? And you would have a breathing space of three to four years, given the rubble of the current nuclear infrastructure, whether it be heightened, the tension. And we could negotiate ourselves out of this and stop this war that has ripples throughout the [Middle East](#) and involve superpower possible intrusion

from China, Russia.

Let's go through the most optimistic scenario, very quickly. There are people who are saying:

No, no, no, no, no, no. This is going great. Israel's taken out 50% of the mobile launchers. If you look at the number of missiles that are reaching Israel each day, they are diminishing. And Israel's ability, therefore, to knock out these vestigial attacks will increase. And they have wiped out all of the command and control of people in their 50s and 60s in the military. They have taken out a whole generation of nuclear physicists.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is all by himself. And now that he's hit an Israeli hospital, he can be taken out. And the Iranian people may come up and decide—come out of the shadows and say, 'We're tired of them, especially because most of these people that have tormented and directed the torture and the oppression and the destruction of our daily lives are dead.'

And now, Khamenei is under assault. And he may be killed and that would create a revolution. And if you have a revolution, even if you did not hit all of the sites that would be necessary to ensure the end, forever, of the nuclear program of Iran, a new government would be better. And they, on their own initiative, would take it out.

That's an optimistic appraisal.

Here's a realistic appraisal. That Donald Trump is going to wait for at least a week. And he is going to see if the Israelis can come up, on their own, with a formula, in lieu of a bunker-buster, to diminish or actually end all of these nuclear infrastructures, viabilities.

And what do I mean by that? Send commandos on the ground. Take

F-35s with small bunker-busters just again and again, every day. Send them through the same blast hole. Or maybe get a C-130 and jerry-rig it up to get a—I don't know—a 30,000-pound bunker-buster. You wouldn't be at 50,000 feet. It might not have the momentum. But if you came in at 30,000 and you had air supremacy, maybe you could drop two or three of them, four or five of them with a C-130. And the United States would not be involved.

And then more importantly, [Israel](#) is achieving complete supremacy of the air. And by that I mean not just the ability to go into Iranian airspace, but more importantly, to diminish both the number and the effectiveness of Iranian missiles that are landing in Israel.

As far as the MAGA base, the fact that Donald Trump said that he would take up to two weeks to make that decision and that he's talked to people in the MAGA base and he's assured them there's not gonna be a lot of boots on the ground, there's not going to be a long American presence. If he intervened, it would be a one- or two-shot deal.

I think he's pacified most of the criticism because the MAGA base isn't going to say, "My gosh, you sinned against us. We're going to look at—" Whom? There's nobody else there. There's only Donald Trump. There's no Republican alternative to him. And so, I think he's pretty safe there.

And finally, are Russia and China gonna come in? I don't think so. Russia looks at this and it starts to bully. It starts to say, "This is our former patron. We should protect it." But Russia's got its hands full in Ukraine. It's lost over a million wounded, dead, and lost. It is in a wartime mode against Ukraine. And more importantly, when they look at the Middle East and they see all this turmoil and oil prices creeping up, they think it's wonderful.

How about China? China, for just the opposite reasons, is not

going to intervene. It looks at this and says, "Oh my gosh, we used to get 70% to 80% of the oil from [Iran](#), 50% of all the Middle East oil goes to us. We don't want any turmoil. Please just cool it. Stop it. It's not in our interest to encourage this conflict to continue." And more importantly, China is in a trade war with us. And the last thing it wants is to get on the wrong side of a still military-superior United States.

Sum it up: The war seems like it's going well for Israel, in their point of view. There's a 50-50 chance there might be a regime change. There's probably a 25% chance, if there were, it would be something much, much better. The United States may have to intervene but it's holding back because it still thinks that the Israelis, as brilliant as they are, will come up with some sort of new solution to destroy these underground facilities.

That is the realistic appraisal. And it's somewhere in between, as I said, the pessimistic and the optimistic outlook that I reviewed.

First published in the [Daily Signal](#)