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Column: Twenty reasons not to attack Iran

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(The views expressed are the author's own and not those of Reuters.)

Recent news stories have detailed disagreements between Israeli and U.S. assessments of Iran's nuclear capabilities and intentions. While it would appear that for now the United States does not share the apparent Israeli desire for military action toward Iran, President Obama has done everything possible to prevent the Iranians from having the ability to produce a nuclear weapon at will. His efforts against Iran have outstripped those of his predecessors, and there is no doubt that his administration has inflicted the most harm on Iran. President Obama has mobilized the world to impose unprecedented draconian economic sanctions on Iran. Even from his first months in office, he secretly ordered expansion of America's sustained use of cyber weapons against Iran, while frequently threatening to use military force.



Although I believe it would be idiotic for any country to wage war with Iran, one cannot rule out the possibility. Here are 20 reasons why a military attack on Iran is a bad idea:

First, Iran has become the leading country in the Muslim world advocating for an end to nuclear weapons by religiously committing itself against weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Iranian Supreme Leader issued a Religious Decree, or Fatwa, that forbids the production, stockpiling and use of all WMDs.

Second, the IAEA in the past decade, following more than 4,000 inspection hours, frequently and constantly has declared that there is no evidence of diversion in Iranian nuclear activity toward building a weapon.

Third, the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) has maintained that Iran does not have nuclear weapons, has not made the decision to build them and is not on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons. The international community also accepts this conclusion.

Fourth, if the U.S. were to attack Iran, it would reverse non-proliferation efforts worldwide and weaken the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Since the United States is a member of the NPT and a nuclear weapons state with more than 5,000 warheads, using the nuclear threat to attack a non-nuclear-weapons state such as Iran would be extremely harmful to the credibility of the NPT.

Fifth, if Israel were to attack unilaterally, the consequences would be even more catastrophic for the NPT, since Israel is not a member of NPT and would be a nuclear weapons state threatening a non-nuclear member of the NPT. As a result, any Israeli attack would make the NPT irrelevant and its credibility in any non-proliferation efforts void.

Sixth, a strike would likely neither completely destroy the Iranian nuclear program, nor cause a major delay to the program.

Seventh, Iran would withdraw from NPT, suspend nuclear talks with international negotiators, kick out inspectors from all nuclear sites and hide its nuclear program.

Eighth, an Israeli or U.S. strike on Iran would kill the hopes for rapprochement between Tehran and Washington for decades to come.

Ninth, there is no doubt that in case of any strike, Iranians of all political stripes would rally around the flag to defend their land, integrity, identity, and rights, and to resist security threats.

Tenth, President Obama's effort to improve relations with the Muslim world is one of the most important U.S. foreign policy objectives. This was highlighted in his June 4, 2009 Cairo speech, calling for a "new beginning" between the United States and Muslims. Any strike on Iran by the U.S. or Israel would revive anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world and even other parts of the globe.

Eleventh, the U.S. budget is already under severe pressure because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the United States continues to pull itself back from the brink of an economic collapse, making the case for a third war is totally unrealistic.

Twelfth, the safe passage of energy from the strategic Strait of Hormuz would be in danger, and oil prices might hit \$200 to \$300 per barrel.

Thirteenth, America's standing in the Middle East is already under mounting strain on multiple fronts. The political order in a number of "pro-American" Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Lebanon is shifting away from the United States. In the event of an attack on Iran, this trend will accelerate and may shift the balance of influence and power more

toward Tehran.

Fourteenth, Iran has extensive reach, influence and assets throughout the Middle East that it can tap in case of any military strikes. Iran's military will use both its own resources and those assets to rapidly spread the conflict throughout the region and beyond.

Fifteenth, Iran would make the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan much more difficult and complicated, at a time when the U.S. military is stretched thin and is attempting to end its presence in both countries.

Sixteenth, Israel's security is of vital interest to the U.S. In case of an Israeli attack, there would be severe consequences for both countries, with domestic pressures due to engagement in the war that would jeopardize relations between Jerusalem and Washington. This friction might shatter the bipartisan unity that supports Israel, further complicating the U.S. domestic political scene and undermining Israel's security.

Seventeenth, Israel is already isolated. A war with Iran would worsen this situation and further strain both U.S. and Israeli relations with countries in the region.

Eighteenth, even if Israel takes unilateral military action, the U.S. would be considered complicit in the attack, and its assets, bases and personnel would be targeted by the Iranian retaliation.

Nineteenth, an Israeli or U.S. strike could dramatically widen the diplomatic split between the United States and Russia, China, and Non-Alignment Movement countries and may even create divergence with European and regional allies, reminiscent of tensions over the Iraq war.

Twentieth, the chance for diplomacy is there but requires the West and Israel to adopt a more realistic position. Iran is prepared to cooperate on major elements to achieve a fair deal. These include continued work with the IAEA and capping uranium enrichment below 5 percent as a further assurance for the international community that Iran is not after a nuclear bomb.

In return Iran is asking for the recognition of its legitimate rights under NPT for enrichment, in line with those accorded other member states, and gradual removal of sanctions. This is enough for the U.S. and other major powers to advance a mutually face-saving deal and limit Israeli and other hawkish efforts to derail the process.

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