

TO: Madam President Packwood
FROM: Secretary of Defense Hart
DATE: March 9, 2021
RE: Military responses to Iran

This memo outlines options for United States military action in response to the Iran nuclear crisis. I will present three choices for President Packwood to evaluate before making her final choice. Failure to take action against Iran could lead to further destabilization in the Middle East, as well as Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon and therefore countless deaths and disaster.

BACKGROUND:

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, tensions between the US and Iran have been high. In 2002 it was discovered that Iran had been making secret investments toward building nuclear weapons. This included 160 centrifuges and an enrichment facility. This led to the implement of more international oversight. This culminated in the JCPOA. In 2018, former President Donald Trump took the United States out of the JCPOA because he believed it was not restrictive enough. In December of 2019, the United States assassinated General Qasem Soleimani which led Iran to announce that they were halting commitments to JCPOA and planned to move forward with their nuclear program¹. This is the crisis that faces the NSC today. A nuclear weapon in the hands of Iran would be catastrophic.

OBJECTIVES:

The Department of Defense has three objectives in this matter:

¹ "Iranian Escalation in the Middle East," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 07, 2021, <https://modeldiplomacy.cfr.org/simulation/49774/notes-background>

- Prohibit Iran from having the ability to make and/or acquire nuclear weapons.
- Stop the United States and Iran from going to war.
- Limit Iran's influence and support of other terrorist regimes in the Middle East.

OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS:

In order to accomplish these goals, the Department of Defense has the following three options.

1. Implement a military quarantine of Iran

- a. Option: The U.S. could order a military quarantine of Iran's ports in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the country as a whole. The ultimate goal of this would be to cripple Iran's ability to participate in global trade, specifically in the oil industry. This would cause their economy to suffer significantly and could provide incentive for them to re-enter negotiations and comply with JCPOA regulations.² In addition, a quarantine would limit their ability to continue to destabilize the region through their proxy groups.³
- b. Execution: This effort would take massive amounts of both naval and air forces. The Makin Island Expeditionary Strike Group with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit are already stationed in the Persian Gulf.⁴ This strike group claims two battleships, the USS Somerset and USS San Diego, which both have almost 700

² Cancian, Mark. "Five Options for US Military Response to Iran." Forbes.com. September 17, 2019. Accessed March 07, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcancian/2019/09/17/five-options-for-a-u-s-attack-on-iran/?sh=40455d61b0ec>.

³ Iranian Escalation in the Middle East,"

⁴ "USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: March 8, 2021." USNI News. March 08, 2021. Accessed March 08, 2021. <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/08/usni-news-fleet-and-marine-tracker-march-8-2021>

military personal on board. However, it is unlikely that this would be enough military support to accomplish a total quarantine of the Persian Gulf and it may require a shift of other U.S. forces. This could include moving the USS Theodore Roosevelt from the Celebes Sea⁵. Another option is deploying about 35,000 U.S. forces to Persian Gulf state military facilities such as Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the Naval Support Activity facility in Bahrain, Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, and Camp Arifjan in Kuwait. A third option is gaining multilateral participation which could come from the International Maritime Security Construct which has been monitoring Iran since November 2019.⁶

2. Order airstrikes of strategic economic structures in Iran

- a. Option: The United States Airforce could engage in a strategic targeting of Iran's essential economic structures. The majority of Iran's revenue comes from crude oil⁷ so this would significantly effect their economy. Other options for targets include bridges, communication centers, and electrical generation.⁸ By targeting these structures, the US could cripple Iran's economy and make it necessary for them to seek a reprieve from sanctions. In addition, it would limit their ability to continue providing support to their terrorist interests in the region.
- b. Execution: These airstrikes could be carried out by using an unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV). This would limit the number of American lives at risk. The

⁵ "USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: March 8, 2021."

⁶ "Iran: Internal Politics and U.S. Policy and Options." Congressional Research Services. December 09, 2020.

⁷ "Iran Overview." World Bank. Accessed March 09, 2021. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>.

⁸ Cancian

targets could also be chosen in such a way that they do not endanger the lives of Iran's non-military citizens. This action could also be taken unilaterally. However, it is unlikely that one strike would be enough to bring Iran back to the negotiating table, therefore this may be a longer air campaign.

3. Order airstrikes of IRGC military structures

- a. Option: The United States Airforce could target IRGC military structures in both Iran and their proxy groups. Targets could include the IRGC headquarters, the Iranian Ministry of Defense, well as hubs for Iran's ballistic missile program. Simultaneously the US should target IRGC supported groups abroad, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, to limit retaliation.
- b. Execution: These airstrikes would also employ a UCAV. These targets are more likely to result in the deaths of Iranian citizens. After Iran's reaction to the U.S. assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, it is likely that there would be some form of retaliation. This could come in the form of the missiles; however, these remain extremely inaccurate and could be stopped with standard missile defense systems.⁹ Another option for retaliation could be through their growing influence in the region. Their targets could include U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf, U.S. embassies, and U.S. allies in the Middle East.¹⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS:

⁹ "Iran's Ballistic Missile Program." The Iran Primer. January 13, 2021. Accessed March 08, 2021. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-ballistic-missile-program>.

¹⁰ Cancian

After a careful analysis of all three options, the Department of Defense has concluded that the most feasible option is ordering multiple airstrikes of strategic economic structures within Iran. It risks the least amount of American and Iranian civilian lives, while still accomplishing the goal of setting back Iran's economy and nuclear programs. The Department of Defense recommends targeting essential oil structures, as well as communication centers. These airstrikes should be carried out as soon as possible.

SUMMARY:

This memo has outlined three options for military action in response to the Iran nuclear crisis as recommended by the Department of Defense. These options are a military quarantine of Iran, airstrikes against economic structures, or airstrikes against IRGC structures. After a careful analysis, the Department of Defense recommends multiple airstrikes to strategic economic structures within Iran.