

# *Nuclear Iran is an exaggerated threat*

## **And the U.S. cannot afford to wage another war**

**By MALOU INNOCENT AND JONATHAN OWEN**

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The Republican presidential hopefuls, [Ron Paul](#) excepted, would prefer a more bellicose response to Iran's nuclear aspirations than [President Obama](#)'s current stance.

But a more aggressive policy could lead to another war in the Middle East, or at least a regime in Tehran more committed to seeking a nuclear bomb.

The assumption that a short war of limited strikes will keep Iran from getting a nuclear weapon is flawed. Damage to Iran's nuclear program from such a strike would be modest, likely requiring more strikes in another few years or a longer-term presence on the ground.

[James Clapper](#), U.S. director of national intelligence, said an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would set back its nuclear program by one to two years. U.S. military action every few years is an unmanageable strategy.

Worse, attempts to stop Iran's program militarily will bolster its resolve to pursue a nuclear deterrent. Former [Defense Secretary Robert Gates](#) has said the military solution will make Iranians "absolutely committed to obtaining nuclear weapons." He continued, ". . . they will just go deeper and more covert."

So if Iran lives to fight another day, with the ayatollahs still standing, hawks in Washington will surely argue that the U.S. cannot afford to show weakness — and that our credibility depends on staying behind to create a friendly state in Tehran.

It would be a slippery slope from this to a wider war.

If that is the case, Iran, a country with two-and-a-half times the population and four times the territory of Iraq, will not be a cakewalk.

Many of those pushing for immediate action ignore these realities, focusing on the claim that Iran is on the verge of acquiring enough fissile material to produce a nuclear weapon. But according to the U.S. intelligence community, Iranian leaders have not actually decided to build a weapon.

As nuclear expert [Joseph Cirincione](#) of the Ploughshares Fund has argued, Iran might decide, like Japan and other countries, to have only the ability to produce a nuclear weapon fast — in short, a rapid breakout option.

Even with a bomb, Iran is not an imminent threat to America's security. If it ever became one, the U.S. could quickly ensure Iran's absolute destruction, potentially through a nuclear strike.

As for the oft-cited question of Israel's security, our staunch ally's second-strike capability remains robust and can deter Iran.

Variouly over the course of the past 60 years, the U.S. government has overthrown Iran's democratically elected government, supported its Western-oriented dictator, covertly backed militants and regional actors against it, sternly enjoined other countries to not trade with it, encircled the country with its armed forces and declared its intention to bomb it.

Unless Americans are willing to fight Iranians to the death — possibly every few years — Washington must stop polarizing the situation. Aggressive policies and rhetoric do not benefit our security.

Without demanding that Iran surrender on the issue of uranium enrichment, the U.S. — which accounts for almost half of the world's military spending, wields one of the planet's largest nuclear arsenals and can project its power around the globe — should lift sanctions, stop its belligerence and open a direct line of communication with Tehran.

The President has said repeatedly that "all options are on the table." But contrary to popular belief, diplomacy with Iran is an option that has yet to be fully exhausted.

In the end, Iranians must decide that nuclear capability is not in their best interest. Mounting evidence and recent history suggest that anything else is a short-term solution.

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