Retired Diplomats, Military Warn Against Strike on Iran

by Edward Spannaus

Sept. 17—A grouping of 35 former U.S. military, diplomatic, and intelligence officials—representing the highest levels of the institutions of the U.S. government—warned in a report issued Sept. 13, that U.S. military strikes on Iran could set back Iran's nuclear program by as much as four years, but that Iran probably would be able to retaliate, directly and through surrogates, in ways that ensure escalation, and risk igniting all-out war in the Middle East. Futhermore, they showed, an Israeli or U.S. military attack would likely strengthen the Iranian regime, and make it more likely that Iran would make the decision to develop a nuclear weapon—which, in the estimate of U.S. intelligence agencies, it has done not so far. And that would be under conditions which would make detection of such a program far more difficult than it is today.

While declaring that they were making no specific recommendation, the authors have assembled the *facts* which show that a war against Iran would be a disaster for all.

The report, issued under the auspices of the "Iran Project," was presented at a panel discussion held at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., featuring veteran U.S. Amb. Thomas Pickering, Dr. James Walsh from MIT (a close collaborator with Pickering on Iran back-channel discussions), and Lt. Gen. Frank Kearney, former deputy commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command.

Former Amb. William Luers, in introducing the panel, said the purpose of the Iran Project, which began about ten years ago, is to pursue official contacts and back-channel discussions between the U.S. and Iran. (Their best-known action was a 2008 proposal for an internationally monitored uranium enrichment facility to be established on Iranian soil.) Luers said that those involved in the Iran Project are "people who care for their country, care about our national security, and who don't want us to blow it." He added that the Project has been bringing in additional people, especially retired military officers, who "are concerned about the consequences of not thinking through what might happen if we were to use military force."

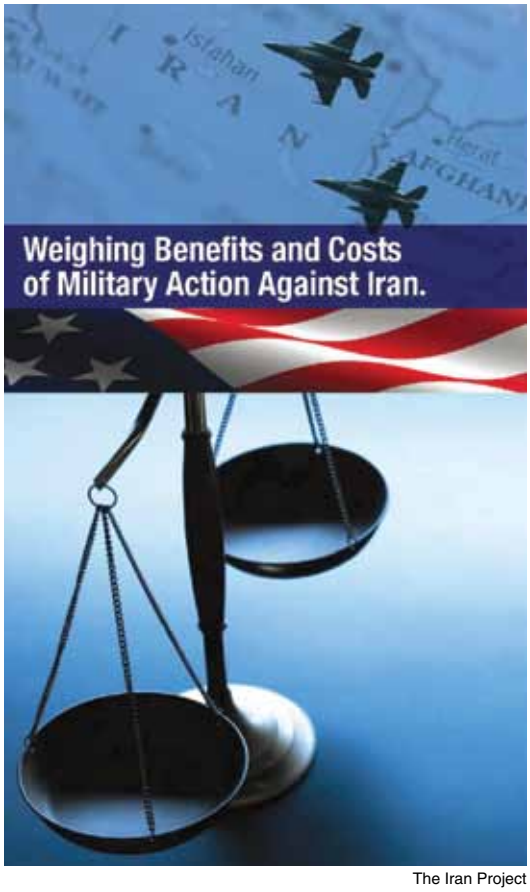
In addition to those cited above, the signatories to the report include other notable retired institutional figures: former CIA Deputy Director Paul Pillar; former U.S. Central Command commanders Gen. Anthony Zinni and Adm. William Fallon; Amb. Morton Abramowitz, Richard Armitage, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Amb. Nicholas Burns, Brig. Gen. Stephen Cheney, Joseph Cirincione, Amb. Edward Djerijian, James Dobbins, Leslie Gelb, Sen. Chuck Hagel, Rep. Lee Hamilton, Stephen B. Heintz, Carla Hills, Amb. Daniel

Kurtzer, Ellen Laipson, Jessica T. Matthews, Amb. William G. Miller, Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold, Sen. Sam Nunn, Brent Scowcroft, Vice-Adm. Joe Sestak, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Paul Volcker, James Walsh, John C. Whitehead, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, Sen. Timothy Wirth, and Amb. Frank Wisner.

'Unexamined Assumptions'

The Project's starting point is that a decision to attack Iran militarily would have "profound implications for U.S. interests. "Yet," they add, "the debate on this critical issue is often driven by politics and based on unexamined assumptions about the ability of military action to achieve U.S. objectives with acceptable costs." What they aim for, they state in their Introduction, is "to serve the cause of rational analysis and dispassionate policymaking in the national interest."

Put less politely, it is clear that their target is all the loose talk about striking Iran, coming from those outside the United States who want to drag us into a war which could quickly escalate into a major (actually, thermonuclear) war, and from those inside the U.S. who advocate striking Iran for geopolitical or partisan political reasons, without regard for the consequences.



The Iran Project

The Iran Project report, whose cover is shown here, digs in and examines the "unexamined assumptions about the ability of military action [against Iran] to achieve U.S. objectives with acceptable costs."

The main questions they pose and discuss, therefore, concern the timing and possible objectives of a military strike, the respective capabilities of the U.S. and Israel to inflict damage and/or destroy the Iran nuclear program, and the exit strategy. They present as well, a thorough discussion of the benefits of such an action, and the costs—particularly "the uncertainties and unanticipated consequences so familiar to those who have experienced or studied military conflicts." We review here some of their discussion and findings.

Timing. The U.S. intelligence community has determined, with a high degree of confidence, that the Iranian government has not made the decision to develop a nuclear weapon. Further, so long as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has inspectors and monitoring capabilities in Iran, the U.S. and the international community could detect and assess any Iranian actions—such as diversion of enriched uranium and other materials and personnel—which would signal the resumption of a nuclear-weapons program.

Although there is a lot of talk about when Iran might have a capability to produce a single nuclear bomb's worth of enriched uranium, the report notes the folly of such a construct, pointing out that building a single bomb "has little or no correspondence to how nuclear weapons programs function in the real world." No country has ever set as its goal, the production of one weapon, particularly knowing that its program would thereby be exposed.

Nonetheless, the Project's estimate is that the timeline for Iran producing enough enriched uranium for one nuclear weapon is, by conservative estimates, at least one year, and at least two years would be needed to build a nuclear warhead and a reliable missile delivery system.

Objectives. Here, the report really delves into "unexamined assumptions." Even though U.S. policy statements indicate that the objective of military action would be to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, this would be almost impossible to achieve with an air campaign alone. The Project's best estimate is that airstrikes, even combined with covert actions and special operations, could damage or destroy many Iranian facilities and stockpiles, but they would be unlikely to completely destroy Iran's nuclear program;

'Iran Project' Report Draws On U.S. Anti-Partisan Past

The "Iran Project" report takes precisely the kind of non-partisan, indeed, *anti-partisan,* approach which has characterized America's best Presidents, and which is currently being championed by Lyndon LaRouche. To underscore their intention, the authors of the report intersperse a series of highlighted quotes, mostly from U.S. Presidents, throughout the report, as follows:

"This paper offers a fact-based analysis that we hope will provide Americans sufficient understanding to weigh the balance between the benefits and costs of using military force against Iran—between the necessity and human folly of resorting to war."

—From the signers of this document

"Things seem to be hurrying to an alarming crisis, and demand the speedy, united councils of all those who have regard for the common cause."

—Thomas Jefferson

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts." *—Abraham Lincoln*

"Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." *—Franklin D. Roosevelt*

"Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future."

—John F. Kennedy

"Facts are stubborn things." *—Ronald Reagan*

and in fact, Iran would retain its scientific capability and experience which would allow it to restart its nuclear program.

Or, as Lt. Gen. Kearney put it: "You can't kill intellectual power."

What the U.S., and to a lesser degree, Israel, can do, the report states, is to *delay* Iran's nuclear program, for up to four years, by U.S. military action, or up to two years, by Israeli strikes.

But, as the report's authors note, many advocates have embraced wider objectives, such as regime change, severely damaging Iran's military and economic power, or forcing Iran to capitulate to Western demands.

To actually prevent Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon, would require "a significantly expanded air and sea war over a prolonged period of time, likely several years." And to accomplish broader objectives such as regime change or capitulation, would require a sizeable occupation force of troops on the ground, and a commitment of resources larger than what the U.S. had expended in Iraq and Afghanistn *combined*, over the past ten years. This, the authors note, is "due to Iran's large size and population and to the strength of Iranian nationalism, as demonstrated during Iran's long and brutal war with Iraq, which invaded Iran in 1980."

A Sober Analysis

Capabilities. With obvious input from the retired military officers who participated in its preparation, the report presents a sober analysis of the respective U.S. and Israeli capabilities to damage or destroy the critical Iranian nuclear facilities. (This was also presented graphically at the Wilson Center panel discussion, showing the various weapons capabilities.) The key difference involves the Fordo underground enrichment facility; an Israeli strike is unlikely to even seriously damage this facility, while the U.S. could damage it, but probably not destroy it.

Exit Strategy. This obviously depends on the objectives; a campaign of stand-off air strikes, with limited objectives, is the easiest from which to exit, if no broader objectives are adopted, including responses to Iranian retaliation. If the objective is regime change, or eliminating Iran's military capabilities, "or if an escalating spiral of retaliation and counter-retaliation

caused the conflict to spread," then, as we saw in Iraq, devising an exit strategy would be "challenging," to say the least.

Benefits. The section on "Benefits" is, understandably, relatively brief. Potential benefits including damaging Iran's nuclear facilities, weakening its ability to rebuild its facilities, and curtailing Iran's military capabilities (air defenses, communications, military bases, and rocket-launching sites). Military action might deter other nations from seeking nuclear weapons. It would demonstate U.S. determination to stop Iran's nuclear program, and it might weaken the Iranian regime—but this latter is "a highly contested assumption," the authors note, "and we join other experts in believing an attack would strengthen the Iranian regime instead of weakening it. . . ."

Costs of Military Action. The authors starkly warn that to initiate a preventive attack on Iran, even with limited objectives, "could be the beginning of a war entailing all of the uncertainties and unanticipated consequences" well known to those who have been involved in, or studied, prior military conflicts. Issues considered here, include the scope of direct Iranian retaliation against the U.S. and Israel, likely involving Iran's asymmetrical capabilities, and closing the Strait of Hormuz; secondly, indirect Iranian retaliation by Hezbollah or other proxies and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Quds forces. Third, and perhaps most ominous, is the danger of escalation, "with both sides taking actions that neither side contemplated before an initial strike."

Given the fog of war, the high levels of mistrust, absence of communication, etc., the authors warn that *"miscalculation and uncontrollable escalation to full-scale combat cannot be discounted"* (emphasis added).

Among other costs outlined by the authors, are the breakdown of the coalition of nations now joining in sanctions against Iran, particularly if an attack is made without an international mandate; Iran receiving renewed military support from Russia and others; reduced U.S. regional and international influence, including a reinforcing of the idea that the U.S. and Israel are at war with Islam; and increased regional and global instability, including growing terrorist recruitment by groups such as al-Qaeda.

Ex-CIA Chief Hayden: Libya Killing Is Obama's Fault

Sept. 17—On Sept. 12, former CIA Director (2006-09) Michael Hayden said that the violence that claimed the life of the U.S. ambassador in Libya, was the result of President Obama's decision to intervene in the Libyan revolt without a "true or deep appreciation" for the consequences.

"I'm reminded of Secretary of State Powell's comments about Iraq, going back almost a decade ago—the 'Pottery Barn' theory—that if you break it, you own it," Hayden said in an interview with Newsmax.com.

"Here's a case," Hayden explained, "where we went into Libya for reasons that seemed very powerful for some people at the time, almost all of them humanitarian, perhaps without a true or deep appreciation for what the secondary and tertiary effects of overthrowing Gadhafi would be. This was always the story we saw in those cell phone videos of oppressed and oppressor, but there were other stories going on too, other narratives—East versus West in Libya, tribal disputes in Libya, eastern Libya being home of the Islamic Libyan fighting group. All these subplots were always out there, and once you shatter the old society, these subplots become far more powerful, and now we are seeing the results of that: loss of control, manned portable air missiles, weapons from Libya being used to grab the northern half of Mali away from the Malian government, which is a good friend of the U.S."

"You've got the Russians, with some legitimacy, feeling that the U.N. Security Council resolution on Libya was bait and switch," Hayden declared. "It was never just humanitarian assistance, it was to overthrow the regime, and as for how that affects the Russians, think about Syria."

Plus—and they are not the first to point this out—a military attack, in fact, *increases* the likelihood of Iran becoming a nuclear state. The conclusion that a military attack would significantly increase Iran's motivation to build a bomb was also one that was reached by the Bush Administration, the report noted, citing Bush-era CIA Director Michael Hayden. While there is no evidence at the present time that Iran's Supreme Leader has decided that Iran should develop a nuclear weapon, after an attack or repeated attacks, the country's leadership would likely conclude that a nuclear weapon would be needed to deter future attacks. Moreover, "building a bomb would redress the humiliation of being attacked, and restore national pride which has been a major driver of Iran's nuclear program for a decade."

The Obama Insanity Factor

The authors of the report were scrupulous not to issue any formal recommendations, on the assumption that a rational, dispassionate presentation of the well-established facts of the matter would induce reasonable men and women to rigorously think through the consequences of military action.

The primary danger is this approach, is that we are not dealing with rational actors—not on the U.S., Israeli, or British sides. First and foremost, we are confronted with an insane U.S. President who gets his marching orders from a British oligarchy and monarchy committed to using war, up to and including nuclear war, to wipe out most of the world's "useless eater" population.

All of which is made more dangerous by the British and Israeli exploitation of the hyper-partisan politics during the U.S. presidential election campaign.

Until Barack Obama is removed from office, the world will face the imminent threat that he will launch a war which would likely escalate rapidly into a global thermonuclear holocaust. The authors of the Iran Project report are to be commended for their effort, in trying to force through a rational dialogue—but they seriously underestimate the factor of irrationality now dominating the U.S. Presidency.

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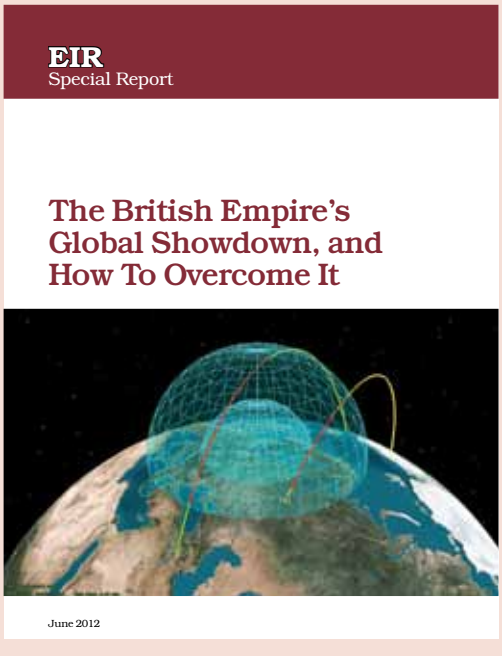
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