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Americans Do Not Want or Need a Pre-Emptive War against Iran

by Allan C. Brownfeld

9/7/2012

Voices are increasingly being heard — both in Israel and the United States — urging a pre-emptive war against Iran to prevent that country from developing a nuclear weapon.

Those in Washington urging military action against Iran — mostly self-identified "neo-conservatives" — are the same ones who argued for the invasion of Iraq, beginning a year before it took place in 2003. While Iraq had no role in 9/11, no weapons of mass destruction, and no connection to Al Qaeda, we invaded nevertheless.

The war was fought off the books and was never paid for. Hence, our skyrocketing national debt. We now have the world's largest embassy in Baghdad — 104 acres on the banks of the Tigris River; and 15,000 employees, including 2,000 diplomats (as opposed to 85 in neighboring Turkey) at a cost of about \$1 billion a year. One result of all of this was to eliminate Iraq as a regional counterweight to Iran — and to increase Tehran's influence in the region, a development hardly in our best interests.

For the most powerful country in the world to launch a pre-emptive strike on a country that has not attacked us, and which, according to the latest U.S. intelligence estimates, is far from the point of producing a nuclear weapon, would be dangerous folly. Experts say that even a sustained air campaign would set Iran's nuclear program back only a few years; however, it would rally support for Iran both at home and abroad, and the current international consensus for sanctions would evaporate.

Three former U.S. Centcom commanders — Gen. John Abizaid, Anthony C. Zinni, and Admiral William Fallon — have expressed opposition to bombing Iran's nuclear installations. The same is true for the recent chiefs of Israel's three principal intelligence agencies -- Mossad, Shin Bet, and the Israel Defense Force.

These men understand Iran's asymmetrical retaliatory capabilities that include sowing hundreds of mines in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 30 percent of the world's seaborne oil passes. Among other unintended consequences of an attack on Iran would be an assault against oil production facilities in pro-Western Gulf nations — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Oil prices would triple, and rather than an economic recovery, we would see a recession much deeper than the one we have endured.

Former Mossad head Meir Dagan — who served an unprecedented eight-year term from August 2002 to November 2010 — views bombing Iran as “the stupidest idea” he had ever heard. He believes that such an attack would unleash a regional war conducted mostly through Tehran's proxies — Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and perhaps even Syria, which, he says, may seek to divert attention from its internal problems by focusing on a “threat outside the country.”

Beyond this consequence, in Dagan's view, an attack on Iran would not end that country's nuclear ambitions: “What you can do in some cases is eliminate the industrial infrastructure on the ground that is producing some part of the project. The question is not whether Israel is capable of doing so. Israel no doubt has the ability.... This is not the issue.... Such an attack cannot disarm the core factor of the Iranian program — knowledge. Knowledge in the nuclear issue is something that you are not able to prevent, because knowledge is something that remains in the brains of people. You are not really capable of eliminating knowledge from people.”

On a recent visit to Washington, Israeli vice prime minister and career military man Shaul Mofaz appealed for American support in ending the greatest threat to his country. The key challenge is not Iran's military program, he said; rather, it is the drawn-out conflict with the Palestinians. Mofaz, a former army chief and defense minister, called the idea of an Israeli attack on Iran “disastrous” and said any attack would have many dire unintended consequences.

Meir Javedanfar, who lectures on contemporary Iranian politics at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, says that any pre-emptive strike against Iran would not succeed in uniting the opposition against the regime: “The regime would even welcome such an attack, because it would actually shore it up.” He believes there would be a boost in popularity for the regime.

According to Javedanfar, the opposition would use a pre-emptive strike by a foreign power against Iran's nuclear facilities as a battle cry to unite the people against the regime. By overwhelming margins, he states, people in Iran are opposed to the regime, but they are also against an attack on Iranian soil by a foreign force, adding that such an attack “would bolster nationalist feeling in Iran.”

Americans are weary of war, particularly those conflicts that seem to serve no national purpose. The Founding Fathers feared needless wars. In his Farewell Address, George Washington warned against “permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular Nations and passionate

attachments for others” and advised us “to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” Thomas Jefferson called for “Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations... entangling alliances with none.” President John Quincy Adams said that America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Nazism and Communism were totalitarian movements bent on world domination, and we properly led an international coalition to defeat them. The problems we face today are quite different — yet, some in Washington are eager to go to war when the challenges we do face can be dealt with in other ways. To permit those who took us to war in Iraq to do so again in Iran would be to show that we have learned nothing from history — even very recent history.

Editorially, *The American Conservative* notes that, “America, in her infancy was surrounded by great powers: the British to the north and ocean east; Spain to the south in Florida; France in the lands Jefferson would purchase from Napoleon. What the statesmen of the early republic sought was to marshal the country’s strength by avoiding unnecessary conflicts — wars of choice — and while they were not averse to deploying that strength in limited engagements when necessary, they envisioned no role as peacekeeper, let alone ruler, of the world. America would lead — but by example, not arms. And those who follow this counsel today are not isolationists; they are, with a small-r, republicans.”

Let us hope, as those who promote war with Iran become increasingly vocal, that wiser heads will prevail.