



Target: Iran
**Yes, there is a feasible military option against
the mullahs' nuclear program**

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A military option against Iran's nuclear facilities is feasible. A diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis is preferable, but without a credible military option and the will to implement it, diplomacy will not succeed. The announcement of uranium enrichment last week by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad shows Iran will not bow easily to diplomatic pressure. The existence of a military option may be the only means of persuading Iran--the world's leading sponsor of terrorism--to back down from producing nuclear weapons.

A military option would be all the more credible if backed by a new coalition of the willing and if coupled with intense diplomacy during

a specific time frame. The coalition could include Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Britain, France, and Germany. Solidarity is important and would surely contribute to potential diplomatic success. But should others decline the invitation, the United States must be prepared to act.

What would an effective military response look like? It would consist of a powerful air campaign led by 60 stealth aircraft (B-2s, F-117s, F-22s) and more than 400 nonstealth strike aircraft, including B-52s, B-1s, F-15s, F-16s, Tornados, and F-18s. Roughly 150 refueling tankers and other support aircraft would be deployed, along with 100 unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, sur-

veillance, and reconnaissance, and 500 cruise missiles. In other words, overwhelming force would be used.

The objective would be, first and foremost, to destroy or severely damage Iran's nuclear development and production facilities and put them out of commission for at least five years. Another aim would be to destroy the Iranian air defense system, significantly damage its air force, naval forces, and Shahab-3 offensive missile forces. This would prevent Iran from projecting force outside the country and retaliating militarily. The air campaign would also wipe out or neutralize Iran's command and control capabilities.

This coalition air campaign would hit more than 1,500 aim points. Among the weapons would be the new 28,000-pound bunker busters, 5,000-pound bunker penetrators, 2,000-pound bunker busters, 1,000-pound general purpose bombs, and 500-pound GP bombs. A B-2 bomber, to give one example, can drop 80 of these 500-pound bombs independently targeted at 80 different aim points.

This force would give the coalition an enormous destructive capability, since all the bombs in the campaign feature precision guidance, ranging from Joint Direct Attack Munitions (the so-called JDAMS) to laser-guided, electro-optical, or electronically guided High Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM) for suppression of Iranian surface-to-air missiles. This array of precision weapons and support aircraft would

allow the initial attacks to be completed in 36 to 48 hours.

The destruction of Iran's military force structure would create the opportunity for regime change as well, since it would eliminate some or all of Ahmadinejad's and the mullahs' ability to control the population. Simultaneously or prior to the attack, a major covert operation could be launched, utilizing Iranian exiles and dissident forces trained during the period of diplomacy. This effort would be based on the Afghan model that led to the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Not only would the overt and covert attacks weaken the ability of Iran's leaders to carry out offensive operations in retaliation, they would cripple the leaders' power to control their own people.

Iran's diverse population should be fertile ground for a covert operation. Iran is only 51 percent Persian. Azerbaijanis and Kurds comprise nearly 35 percent of the population. Seventy percent are under 30, and the jobless rate hovers near 20 percent.

Iran's leaders have threatened to unleash a firestorm of terrorism in the event military action is taken against them. Any country involved in the attack would be subject to retaliation by Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and al Qaeda, the Iranians have claimed. If nothing else, this threat demonstrates how closely tied Iran is to terrorist groups. The United States and its allies would have to be prepared for stepped-up terrorist acts. Iran could also project forces into Iraq, but this is unlikely

because they would encounter the full strength of the American military. However, Iran might encourage proxies among Iraq's militant Shiites. Coalition forces in Iraq would have to be ready to respond.

No doubt the Iranians would attempt to close the Gulf of Hormuz and block the extensive shipping that goes through it. American air and naval forces are quite capable of keeping the gulf open, though shipping might be slowed. The most adverse economic consequences of

shipping delays would be felt in Iran itself.

President Bush is right when he says Iran cannot be permitted to have nuclear weapons. The prospect of leaders like Ahmadinejad, who advocates wiping Israel "off the map," with their hands on nuclear weapons is a risk we cannot take. Diplomacy must be pursued vigorously, but the experience with Iraq suggests there's little reason for optimism. Thus, a viable military option is imperative.

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