



What Experts Have to Say about the Path to War with Iran

As the Trump Administration continues to raise questions about the future of the Iran nuclear agreement, as well as U.S. policy toward Iran more generally -- including by raising the spectre of regime change -- it is important to understand what the consequences will be for our national security if we either break with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or escalate tension with Iran into open conflict.

It is widely understood among security experts in the United States and around the world that abandoning the JCPOA could put us on a path to a nuclear-armed Iran, another bloody military confrontation in the Middle East, or both. A war of choice against Iran would be ugly, costly, and almost certainly breed more instability and insecurity -- just like the US invasion of Iraq.

Here's what experts have to say:

"I think tearing the [Iran] deal up would be a mistake. I came at that from a position, certainly in the last decade of my leadership in uniform, the great worry for me was are we on the verge of starting another war in the Middle East."

- *Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen, USN, [November 21, 2016](#)*

"America's talk of regime change in Iran is really a kind of self-indulgence; picking at the scab of the 1979-81 hostage crisis, and hitting back at one of former President Barack Obama's genuine foreign-policy achievements for purely internal domestic political reasons. But that kind of language could eventually lead to war, to everyone's detriment. The leadership of the free world demands more maturity and more common sense."

- *Former Head of the Iran Section, British FCO Michael Axworthy, [July 18, 2017](#)*

"[W]e can see that the agreement has been successful in significantly curtailing the Iranian nuclear program, to the benefit of our security... The bottom line is that we should never give up on diplomacy. Sometimes, against all odds, it can be our best tool in the struggle for international security."

- *Former Secretary of Defense William Perry, [July 14, 2016](#)*

"If you think the Iranians are so bad -- **and they are** -- it doesn't make much sense to unravel a deal that puts the only meaningful constraints on them racing to a bomb. No problem in the Middle East gets easier with a nuclear-armed Iran."

- *RADM John Kirby (Ret.), [April 20, 2017](#)*

“While no agreement is perfect, this achievement must not be underestimated. For decades, leaders and experts in Israel and among our allies contemplated the drastic steps we might have to take to restrain or destroy Iran’s nuclear program. That included potential military operations that might have triggered a major escalation and cost many lives — with no guarantee of achieving their goal.”

- *Former Director of Shin Bet Carmi Gillon, [July 13, 2017](#)*

“The United States will always maintain our right to use military force to protect our interests and the security of regional allies like Israel. But war with Iran is not inevitable, and regime change in Iran should not be the policy of the United States. For those who suggest such a course [in Iran], I urge them to be wary, particularly given our track record in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Regime change would be unlikely to succeed. Let’s not stumble into a new conflict while trying to manage our anti-ISIS campaign, the North Korean threat, the rise of China, and an increasingly belligerent Russia. President Trump himself called regime change dangerous and wasteful during his campaign. If we did pursue this ill-advised approach, would terrorist groups fill the vacuum created by instability inside Iran? What would be the impact on markets and the free flow of energy from the Persian Gulf? More importantly, what would be the composition of the next regime? Would an alternative government be stable? Would it be seen as legitimate by the Iranian people, or would it be seen as a Western-backed puppet? There are far more questions with bad answers or no answers at all. If our recent experience teaches us anything, it’s that we should consider what follows the use of military force in the Middle East and approach these decisions with humility. Calls for regime change or war in Iran are reckless....We should preserve all diplomatic channels – and exhaust all options before using military force.”

- *Senator Chris Coons, Delaware [July 12, 2017](#)*

“The last thing the United States needs is another war in the Middle East. Yet a drumbeat of provocative words, outright threats and actions — from President Trump and some of his top aides as well as Sunni Arab leaders and American activists — is raising tensions that could lead to armed conflict with Iran.”

- *New York Times Editorial Board, [July 20, 2017](#)*

“Europe wanted peace rather than war and worked to bring a reluctant United States and a hesitant Iran into a diplomatic process that eventually produced the nuclear deal. The agreement was strongly supported by Russia and China and endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. However, now Trump wants out of the nuclear deal. His latest tactic seems to be to [claim](#) that places all over Iran need sudden and intrusive inspections. Of course, the international community and Iran balk at this, being aware of the game being played. Trump, in reaction, could then be inclined to say that the deal is over and war is on the horizon. At some point, we might even see Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stumbling through some dramatic presentation to the U.N. Security Council. It’s cut-and-paste from the road to the Iraq War.”

- *Former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, [August 1, 2017](#)*