



# Press Release

10<sup>th</sup> April 2006

For immediate use

## **Hyping up a military attack on Iran is damaging diplomatic negotiations – we are in danger of talking ourselves into a war**

**HUGH BARNES, Director of Democracy and Conflict at The Foreign Policy Centre and co-author of ‘Understanding Iran’, today said:**

“A plan to attack Iran with nuclear weapons smacks not just of a deranged strategic miscalculation but of sheer hypocrisy and idiocy.

The Foreign Policy Centre, in a report (1) to be published next week (19<sup>th</sup> April) will give a comprehensive account of why launching a military attack on Iran would be a disastrous move not just for regional security, but would go against US objectives. An excerpt is attached. (2)

“Media coverage in recent weeks has sought to create the illusion that armed conflict is inevitable. It is neither imminent nor inevitable, nor does it seem likely to be supported by the UN Security Council. Politicians, journalists and others in the public sphere need to act in a calm and rational fashion. This hyperbolic speculation emanating from some quarters is damaging to the painstaking diplomatic negotiations.

“Both sides of this dispute are in danger of talking themselves into a war – they need to take a deep breath and calm down.”

The FPC report outlines 5 potentially catastrophic consequences of military action against Iran.

1. Iran would likely withdraw from the NPT, kick out the IAEA inspectors and resume nuclear activities on the grounds of ‘self defence’ leaving the West with fewer ‘eyes and ears’ on the ground.
2. An attack on the Bushehr light water reactor, once it ‘goes critical’ could cause the spread of nuclear fallout across the region
3. Iran could interfere with oil supplies through the Straits of Hormuz, through which 25% of the world’s oil flows, damaging the world economy
4. Iran could launch retaliatory attacks through its Hezbollah conduits in Lebanon, through paramilitary attacks on Western Gulf states and support Shi’a insurgents to further destabilise Southern Iraq
5. To have maximum impact, attacks on nuclear sites would have to be done with the greatest amount of surprise, increasing the amount of likely civilian casualties from air strikes, as there will be less time for people to leave target areas.

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**ALEX BIGHAM, Head of Communications at The Foreign Policy Centre and co-author of 'Understanding Iran' said:**

"The idea amongst some neo-conservatives in the United States that a military air assault would cause the people of Iran to rise up against their oppressors is about as realistic as suggesting the Iraqi insurgents will come out waving flowers at US soldiers.

"Every analysis suggests that the external threat of military action will galvanise people behind the government of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad.

"Iran may seem superficially like Iraq – a potentially straightforward military target which would lead to a disastrous fallout, but in fact we need to treat Iran more like Libya. Diplomatic engagement must be allowed to run its course – there need to be bigger carrots as well as bigger sticks."

**ENDS**

## **Editor's Notes**

1. The Foreign Policy Centre will launch '**Understanding Iran**' a report on the political structures and power of the Iranian regime on **19<sup>th</sup> April 2006 at 12pm in the Thatcher Room, Portcullis House, Houses of Parliament**, London SW1A 0AA. Advance media copies will be available – please contact [alex.bigham@fpc.org.uk](mailto:alex.bigham@fpc.org.uk) or call 020 7388 6662.
2. **Excerpt from 'Understanding Iran' a Foreign Policy Centre report to be published 19 April 2006**

The authors believe that a military conflict is not inevitable, nor is it necessarily imminent. Given the US's commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan and the rest of the region, we have ruled out the possibility of a ground invasion, but consider the possibility of strikes led by USAF and US Navy forces. Despite the actions against Osiraq in Iraq in 1981, we do not believe that Israel could or would launch a unilateral attack. There would be two aims for military action, the first being to damage Iran's nuclear-related sites. These are reported to be at Bushehr, Natanz, Arak, Saghand, Ardkan, Gehine, Isfahan, Anarak and Tehran. The second aim would be to send a message that the US is prepared to take pre-emptive action to prevent WMD proliferation, and by implication take action against Iran doing things the US also finds unacceptable in the region. The authors believe that such a strategy could well backfire.

The United Nations are unlikely to give the military action moral or political legitimacy. It seems improbable at present, given the positions of Russia and China at regarding sanctions, that the P-5 on the Security Council would support military action. To have maximum impact, attacks on the nuclear sites would have to be done with the greatest amount of surprise, which would seem to rule out the possibility of a diplomatic debate in public as seen in the run up to the 2003 Iraq conflict. A surprise attack would also increase the amount of likely civilian casualties from air strikes, as there will be less time for people to move away from likely target areas.

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**For more information or a copy of the report, please contact Alex Bigham on 020 7388 6662 or 07830 195 812**



Iran could respond to military action by withdrawing from the NPT, kicking out the IAEA inspectors and resuming clandestine nuclear activities under the justification of 'self-defence'. Even though military action could set back any plans to develop nuclear weapons by 5 years or more, there would be at least two long term problems of not being able to negotiate with Iran diplomatically because of ill-feeling and the absence of UN inspectors to monitor the possibility of weapons proliferation. An attack on the 1,000 MW nuclear reactor in Busehr, once the reactor is fully fuelled and goes critical (scheduled completion date mid-2006) could have disastrous consequences. "Any destruction of the containment structure could lead to serious problems of radioactive dispersal affecting not only just the Iranian Gulf coast, but west Gulf seabords in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. As well as the direct human effects...these [also] comprise the world's most substantial concentration of oil production facilities."

Iran could respond to what it would see as 'unjustified US aggression' in a number of other ways which would be damaging to regional peace and security, in addition to resuming nuclear activities. Iran could seek to prevent or interfere with the oil supplies through the Straits of Hormuz (which is a thoroughfare for 25% of the world's oil) from its military capabilities on Abu Musa, Kharg and elsewhere, a fear being expressed in private by Gulf oil officials. It could increase active support for Hezbollah's terrorist activities from Southern Lebanon. It could attempt to sabotage oil facilities in the Western Gulf, through the use of paramilitary units, though few attempts would be likely to succeed. It could act to destabilise Southern Iraq, with fighters crossing the porous border. Links between the IRGC and Shi'a militias could lead to further attacks by insurgents against coalition troops and civilians in Iraq. Although there are no formal links between Iran and Al Qaeda, an attack against a prominent Islamic republic would heighten anti-American sentiment in the region. Most Iran watchers agree that military strikes would increase the popularity of the regime, and would have a powerful unifying effect, increasing the government's stability and power bases. This goes directly against the US's stated objective of supporting the Iranian people against the regime. Any civilian casualties would be widely reported by Iranian media, and other regional broadcasters further damaging the US's reputation in the Middle East.

The authors believe that there remain a large number of diplomatic options that would be acceptable to Iran, the United States and the EU to resolve the current crisis. Military action would be a highly dangerous move that could damage regional security, not prevent nuclear proliferation, encourage acts of terrorism and would of course result in civilian deaths.

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