Option 1: Use Military Action to Destroy Iran's Nuclear Facilities

The threat from Iran's nuclear program is real and it is immediate. It is clear that Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons. The country has a history of not cooperating with the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and has been secretive about its enrichment activities. The United States must act, alone if necessary, to destroy Iran's nuclear production facilities. If Iran gets nuclear weapons it might use them against Israel, an important U.S. ally. As a state sponsor of terror, Iran also may pass nuclear weapons on to radical militant groups that it supports such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In addition, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the region may feel that they need nuclear weapons for protection if Iran succeeds in acquiring them.

We must address this threat immediately. But we must also learn from the past and avoid the pitfalls of a military invasion or occupation. Our experiences in Iraq made clear the negative and unpredictable consequences that full-scale wars can have. Our top priority is to end Iran's nuclear program, not to conquer Iran. We must focus our efforts on strategic, surgical military actions aimed at destroying Iran's nuclear facilities. With targeted military strikes, drone attacks, and cyber warfare we can harm Iran's nuclear program. Coupled with harsh sanctions, this will send a clear signal to rogue countries around the world that nuclear proliferation will not be tolerated. At best, this policy will convince Iran's leaders to reverse course and abandon their nuclear program. At the very least, it will destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities and set back the program by a number of years, giving us more time for other economic, diplomatic, and military actions. While it is preferable to work with the international community, we are running out of time. If we wait until Iran has developed further nuclear capabilities, it will be too late to disable their nuclear weapons program. The United States should take immediate military action against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs and assumptions

- Iran's nuclear energy program is intended as a basis for developing nuclear weapons. We cannot trust Iranian claims to the contrary.
- The United States must take action against those who violate international nuclear agreements and threaten the peace and our allies.
- Negotiations are time-consuming and will be ineffective in the end.
- Excitement about Iran's new president and the country's interest in negotiations is misguided. None of Iran's leaders can be trusted.

Goals of Option 1

- Destroy Iran's known and suspected nuclear facilities and damage Iran's capability to develop nuclear weapons, hopefully forever.
- Send a clear message that the United States will act to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- Protect Israel, keep Iran in check, and maintain stability in the region.

U.S. policies to achieve these goals

• Act quickly, and alone if necessary, to launch military airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

• Sabotage Iranian nuclear facilities through targeted assassinations of nuclear scientists, drone attacks, and cyber warfare.

• Maintain strong sanctions against Iran.

Arguments for

1. Iran is a menace in the region—it supports terrorist groups and the brutal dictatorship in Syria that is waging a civil war against its people. The United States must keep Iran in check.

2. Even though it has signed the NPT, Iran has a history of noncompliance with IAEA weapons inspectors. It should not be trusted to enrich uranium for civilian use.

3. A crisis with Iran is coming sooner or later. Better to deal with it now and on U.S. terms.

4. Waiting through another round of ineffective negotiations would take too much time. Iran could be only months away from developing a nuclear weapon.

5. These policies will ensure that the NPT regime remains intact. More than seventeen thousand nuclear weapons exist in the world today—enough to destroy humanity many times over. As the NPT is the only international treaty governing nuclear weapons, it is critically important.

6. Addressing this threat protects our important ally, Israel.

7. Airstrikes are an effective way to achieve our goal without using U.S. ground forces.

Arguments against

1. Iran does not have a record of unprovoked aggression. Even if it has a nuclear weapon, Iran is likely only to attack others when its security is threatened.

2. A military intervention will not stop Iran from trying to acquire nuclear weapons. In fact, the very threat of military intervention makes Iran more likely to try to acquire them.

3. Eliminating all of Iran's nuclear sites, some of which are underground, will be very difficult, if not impossible.

4. Iranian officials have said they will retaliate against any military action. We must not risk the escalation of this conflict, particularly in a volatile region currently undergoing massive transformation. The United States is weary of war, and U.S. taxpayers have little interest in bearing the cost of an expensive intervention.

5. Military strikes will disrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf and cause price increases, sparking another global economic crisis.

6. Military strikes will claim Iranian lives. This will fuel anti-U.S. feelings and serve as a recruiting tool for terrorist organizations in the region.

7. For the first time in decades, the United States and Iran are on the verge of improving relations and creating a real solution to the nuclear problem. Military action would derail this process and destroy the possibility of cooperation on other pressing matters, such as ending the civil war in Syria.

8. Israel, Pakistan, and India have nuclear weapons and are not members of the NPT. They have disregarded international expectations about nuclear weapons, yet they do not face the same level of scrutiny as Iran.

Option 2: Make a Deal with Iran

Iran's actions surrounding its nuclear program are a concern for the United States and the rest of the world. But military action will not solve this problem. Instead we must use diplomacy and economic incentives to convince Iran's leaders to abandon any ambitions they might have to acquire nuclear weapons. To start, we need to address the underlying factors contributing to tensions between the two countries. For the past thirty years, the United States has carried out a provocative and ineffective campaign of intimidation and isolation against Iran's government. The Iranian government has used the threatening behavior of the United States to justify its repression of the Iranian people. The United States should stop threatening Iran. Military attacks and covert action will only intensify the problem and further convince Iran that it needs nuclear weapons for protection.

We must work to normalize relations with Iran and work with other countries to bring Iran back into the fold of the international community. This task will not be easy. History has shown that Iran's government can be hostile and difficult to work with. But right now, the Iranian government is eager for an end to the sanctions and isolation that have devastated its economy. If Iran participates in negotiations, cooperates with the international community, and agrees to monitoring of its nuclear sites, we can begin to lift the sanctions and reestablish diplomatic relations. The new Iranian leadership's interest in resolving this issue presents an opportunity for positive change that we can't pass up.

Nuclear weapons make the world a more dangerous place. Only by working constructively with other nuclear powers and reducing our own nuclear stores (as required by the NPT) can we convince world leaders that they do not need nuclear weapons for protection. By engaging with Iran's government, we will send a clear message that the United States is committed to a more peaceful and secure world.

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs and assumptions

- Iran's leaders will cooperate with the international community if cooperating leads to lifting the sanctions that have harmed Iran's economy.
- Iran, as a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has the right to enrich uranium for nonmilitary uses as long as it agrees to regular International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections.
- Iran may think it necessary to develop nuclear weapons if it feels threatened by the United States.
- It is possible to create a better relationship with Iran based on legally-binding agreements that can be verified and mutual respect.

Goals of Option 2

- Reduce Iran's belief that it needs to develop nuclear weapons as protection against a hostile world.
- Establish a more positive, mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and Iran.
- Limit Iran's nuclear program to enriching uranium for civilian uses, which is allowed by international law.

U.S. policies to achieve these goals

• Use a "carrots and sticks" approach to diplomacy in which Iran is rewarded for complying with international agreements with incentives like trade agreements and punished for noncompliance with sanctions. Sanctions should target the government and harm civilians as little as possible.

• Negotiate with Iran and set strict limits for Iran's uranium enrichment. Allow Iran to produce some nuclear energy for civilian use under close supervision and monitoring by the IAEA.

• Support existing international agreements on nuclear weapons like the NPT that call for further nuclear disarmament, but that allow Iran to enrich uranium for civilian use.

Arguments for

1. It is to the mutual advantage of the United States and Iran to strike a deal on this issue. Both sides bear the cost of sanctions, and both sides need to avoid a military conflict.

2. Iran's leadership is more open to striking a deal on its nuclear program than it has been in decades. We must seize this opportunity to reduce the risk of war.

3. A broad diplomatic effort that results in improved relations with Iran could enable the United States to address issues in addition to nuclear weapons, such as human rights and sponsorship of terrorism.

4. A policy of increased cooperation avoids dangerous and costly military action. Military action could escalate, and the U.S. public does not want another war.

5. Iran's huge youth population has a favorable attitude towards the United States. Anything but diplomacy will alienate Iran's youth and produce another generation in Iran that distrusts the United States.

6. By working with other countries we will have the support of the international community.

7. Iran is situated in a volatile region—violence is escalating in Iraq and a civil war continues to rage in Syria. Improving the U.S. relationship with Iran could strengthen our ability to address regional security concerns.

Arguments against

1. Trying to engage with a regime that supports terrorism and has an aggressive posture towards Israel only encourages bad behavior.

2. Taking such a soft position on Iran will anger our important allies in the region, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

3. Even sanctions that target the government will inevitably hurt the Iranian people. How can we hope to improve relations if we are willing to impose this type of harsh policy?

4. Iran has used diplomacy as a cover for years, misleading the international community while it develops nuclear capabilities.

5. Sanctions, UN resolutions, and other diplomatic measures have not worked in the past. There is no evidence that such tactics will work now.

6. Iran responds to hard-line U.S. policy. Retaining the threat of U.S. military action is important for a peaceful resolution to this problem.

7. While Iran's recently elected president seems less hostile to the United States, the ultimate decision-making authority lies with the Supreme Leader, who has been in power for the past twenty-five years.

8. Diplomacy and economic incentives take too long. We must address this threat immediately.

Option 3: Reduce Tensions and Rely on Deterrence

We must not blow this threat out of proportion. Iran with a nuclear weapon is not the doomsday scenario that warmongers are making it out to be. The risks to the United States of a U.S. military intervention in a volatile region far outweigh the risk of a nuclear Iran. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) states there is no definitive proof that Iran has a nuclear weapons program. But if Iran does acquire nuclear weapons, this is a manageable threat. In the past seventy years, ten countries have acquired nuclear weapons, but no country has used one since 1945. This tells us that deterrence works. (**Deterrence** is the idea that countries will not use nuclear weapons out of fear that other countries will strike back with a nuclear attack.) Deterrence will protect us and our allies against any Iranian threat. Since 1979, the United States has viewed Iran as a hostile nation, even going so far as to label it a member of the "axis of evil" in 2002. The United States has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq (Iran's neighbors). It is no wonder that the Iranian regime may believe it needs a nuclear weapon. But Iran's leaders are rational. They know that any nuclear strike would be suicidal, because the United States or Israel would respond with a nuclear strike that would destroy Iran.

There is already an existing system to monitor Iran's nuclear development and ensure that it remains peaceful. Because Iran signed the NPT, it must continue to allow the IAEA to monitor its programs and to ensure that it is only enriching uranium for civilian use. Negotiations with Iran should focus on monitoring agreements. We should settle for these monitoring agreements rather than try to force cuts in Iran's nuclear program. The United States can break away from its historical rivalry and reduce tensions with Iran, all without fear of endangering its security. There are also key economic incentives for the United States to reduce tensions with Iran. We depend on oil from the Persian Gulf; instability in the region could damage world oil markets. The United States has also lost billions of dollars by cutting off trade with Iran and imposing sanctions. The United States must change its position towards Iran and encourage our allies, including Israel, to do the same. Sanctions should be discontinued and U.S. trade with Iran should be restarted. We should rely on the IAEA to monitor Iran, and we can rely on the power of deterrence to prevent nuclear warfare.

Option 3 is based on the following beliefs and assumptions

- The threat of an overwhelming U.S. military response would deter a nuclear-armed Iran from ever using a weapon.
- Iran's leaders, if they were to acquire nuclear weapons, are too rational to use them.
- U.S. security is best served by reducing tensions with Iran, not angrily confronting it at every turn.
- Sanctions are an ineffective way to end Iran's nuclear program. They harm U.S. economic interests as well as the Iranian people.
- According to international law, Iran has a right to a civilian nuclear program. A monitoring agreement enforced by the IAEA can assure that Iran's nuclear programs remain peaceful.

Goals of Option 3

- Ensure the security of the United States and its allies.
- Distance the United States from the possibility of direct conflict in the Middle East.
- Protect the U.S. economy, particularly by keeping oil prices from sky-rocketing.

U.S. policies to achieve these goals

• Maintain a powerful military and nuclear weapons to deter others from a nuclear strike.

• Rely on robust monitoring by the IAEA to ensure that Iran complies with the NPT.

• Begin trade negotiations and start to lift sanctions.

• Stop threatening to use force against Iran to resolve this issue.

Arguments for

1. We can neither win a war against Iran nor make it our friend. This approach is realistic and has the most chance of success.

2. Pakistan, a country plagued by terrorism and with a weak central government, went nuclear in 1988. For more than a decade, we have managed this threat without going to war. If Iran, a country far more stable than Pakistan, gets a nuclear weapon, we will also be able to manage this threat.

3. This policy would not upset oil markets and would re-establish U.S. exports to Iran, helping ensure the economic recovery of the United States and our allies.

4. Our already-strained economy and military do not need another conflict. Military strikes could escalate into a larger war.

5. The Iranian people do not want a conflict with the United States and they are suffering under sanctions. We would have their support if we avoided military action, and Iran would potentially partner with us to reduce the fighting in Iraq and Syria.

6. Deterrence was effective against the Soviet Union, a country that was more hostile and more dangerous to the United States. Deterrence would also work against Iran if it ever acquired a nuclear weapon.

7. Iran is a signatory of the NPT and has shown increasing openness to the monitoring efforts of the IAEA. The IAEA has robust systems in place to monitor countries' nuclear programs. These reliable systems outweigh any concerns about not trusting Iran's leaders.

Arguments against

1. Israel, a close U.S. ally, feels particularly threatened by Iran. If we do not take decisive action against Iran's nuclear program, the Israelis will take action on their own—potentially sparking a major regional war.

2. Deterrence depends on rational leaders to be effective. Iran's leaders cannot be trusted to make rational decisions.

3. If Iran acquires a nuclear weapon, other countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt may feel that they also need nuclear weapons. This could mean four or five nuclear countries in the Middle East, a region with significant tensions.

4. The fact that Iran supports terrorist groups is deeply troubling. Iran could give nuclear weapons or technology to these dangerous groups.

5. We cannot trust Iran to fully allow the IAEA to inspect its nuclear program.

6. Changing our approach to Iran could create new tensions with other countries, frustrating members of the European Union and making Israel and Saudi Arabia anxious about their security.

7. If we allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons, it will undermine non-proliferation and give other countries the green light to acquire weapons of their own.