

Look at the Facts: Who Is The REAL Nuclear Threat in the Middle East?

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Global Research, February 22, 2012

22 February 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Tensions, threats, and the danger of a U.S. and Israeli attack on Iran are escalating dangerously. The U.S. and Israel say Iran presents a grave danger because it is enriching uranium and—they claim—may be developing the technical capability to build nuclear weapons. “We’re not going to take any options off the table,” President Obama said in an interview broadcast during the Super Bowl, “and I’ve been very clear that we’re going to do everything we can to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon...”

Nuclear weapons in anyone’s hands are dangerous. And Iran’s Islamic Republic is a repressive and reactionary theocracy driven by its own interests to increase its influence and standing (even while those aspirations are well within the operation of the current oppressive world order). But since the U.S. and Israel have raised the issue of nuclear weapons, it’s only fair to look at what the facts actually show about just who is the biggest nuclear threat to the planet by far.

How much does Iran spend on its military?

\$7,044,000,000.

How much does the U.S. spend on its military?

\$687,105,000,000 (not counting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). This is nearly 100 times what Iran spends.

How many military bases does Iran have outside its borders?

None.

How many bases does the U.S. have overseas?

Officially there are 737 U.S. military bases in 132 of the 190 member states of the United Nations. The actual number may be more than 1,000.

How many nuclear weapons does Iran have?

None.

How many nuclear weapons does Israel have?

Between 75 and 200 nuclear warheads.

How many nuclear weapons does the U.S. have?

Approximately 5,113 active and inactive nuclear warheads and approximately 3,500 warheads retired and awaiting dismantlement. The 5,113 active and inactive nuclear warhead stockpile includes 1,790 deployed strategic warheads, approximately 500 operational tactical weapons, and approximately 2,645 inactive warheads.

Hasn't Iran "violated its non-proliferation (NPT) obligations"?

Iran and others dispute that claim, but what about Israel? Israel refuses to sign the NPT or allow any of its nuclear facilities to be inspected. On September 18, 2009, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called on Israel to join the NPT and open its nuclear facilities to inspection. Israel—backed by the U.S.—refused.

Which is the only country to have ever dropped a nuclear bomb?

The United States. In August 1945, it dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, killing 150,000-240,000 people (with many more dying of the effects of radiation for years after).

Isn't it true that after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S. has never used nuclear weapons?

Not really. Former Pentagon analyst (turned anti-war activist) Daniel Ellsberg wrote that since then, "Again and again, generally in secret from the American public, U.S. nuclear weapons have been used, for quite different purposes: in the precise way that a gun is used when you point it at someone's head in a direct confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled.... [I]n 1981 I summed up a listing of eleven instances for which there was authoritative evidence in which the American nuclear gun had been pointed," when a U.S. president "felt compelled to consider or direct serious preparations for possible imminent U.S. initiation of tactical or strategic nuclear warfare, in the midst of an ongoing, intense, non-nuclear conflict or crisis."

Even if the U.S. has many nuclear weapons, aren't "our" leaders rational people who seek to avoid conflict, while Iran's leaders are unstable lunatics who can't be trusted to possess nuclear weapons? (Or as Obama said in 2009 at Oslo, "modern technology allows a few small men with outsized rage to murder innocents on a horrific scale.")

Let's look at a few of those men threatening the world with nuclear destruction: Daniel Ellsberg exposed that during the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. drew up plans to wage a nuclear war that would have obliterated "most cities and people in the Northern Hemisphere." Ellsberg wrote, "The total death toll as calculated by the Joint Chiefs, from a U.S. first strike aimed primarily at the Soviet Union and China, would be roughly 600 million dead. A hundred Holocausts."

Former U.S. President Richard Nixon nearly started a nuclear war in 1969 by carrying out his "madman" theory of brinkmanship—whereby he made a conscious decision that it would be good if the U.S.'s opponents perceived he was crazy enough to actually use nuclear weapons as part of playing nuclear "chicken" with them.

In 1984, U.S. President Ronald Reagan (promoted as an American icon by the leaders of both the Republican and Democratic parties) “joked”—“My fellow Americans, I’m pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.” He also talked of welcoming Armageddon—the end of the world. Amitabh Pal wrote, “In 1971, he proclaimed to a dinner companion, ‘For the first time ever, everything is in place for the battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ.’ In 1980, he told evangelist Jim Bakker on his television program, ‘We may be the generation that sees Armageddon.’”

What about today under Obama? Aren’t nuclear weapons being phased out of the U.S. arsenal and U.S. military planning?

No. The U.S. has reduced the size of its nuclear arsenal, but it’s still enormously destructive and still central to U.S. military strategy. The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance plan prepared by the Obama administration states: “We will field nuclear forces that can under any circumstances confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage.” Obama’s defense strategy, called “Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” keeps all three legs of the U.S. nuclear weapons “triad,” enabling nuclear weapons to be launched “from ballistic missile submarines, from underground silos housing intercontinental ballistic missiles, and from B-52 and B-2 bombers.” Obama’s proposed 2013 budget calls for the highest level of spending on nuclear weapons in U.S. history.

Reactionary Islamic fundamentalists are irrational and callous toward human life. But so are those who rule the U.S.—with one major difference being that the rulers of the U.S. have exponentially more capacity to unleash nuclear horrors. Any nuclear attack would be irrational (and immoral) from the standpoint of humanity. But the rulers of the U.S. are driven by the logic and dynamics of their system of global exploitation and oppression. That capitalist-imperialist system is enforced with violence and the threat of violence. And that is why the rulers of the U.S. demand a monopoly on the ability to unleash nuclear devastation.

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