

Nuking Iran Is not off the Table.

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The (for any rational human being) bizarre possibility of a [U.S. nuclear strike against Iran](#) first reached public consciousness in early April 2006, when investigative reporter Seymour Hersh [wrote in the New Yorker magazine](#) that it was [one of six plans](#) being considered by the administration. Now Hersh reports that [the plan is off the table](#). Hersh is wrong on both counts. The “nuclear option” against Iran was, and still is, [the only game in town](#).

Hersh’s powerful microscope reveals a treasure trove of raw data invisible to the [naked eye](#)[\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#), [\[3\]](#). But as in science, it is essential to analyze the experimental observations to understand their true meaning; otherwise, one may be fooled into a [dangerous illusion](#) by taking them at face value. Notwithstanding Hersh’s [latest revelations](#), a [nuclear strike on Iran](#) is still an option on the table. The president has not publicly taken it off, after [confirming on April 18](#) that [it is among the options being considered](#). And Hersh’s latest article, by suggesting that an attack on Iran without that option is utterly unfeasible, in fact provides evidence that the intention is still to exercise this option, [which has been in the planning for a long time](#).

[Hersh reports](#) strong resistance from the military to the plans to attack Iran, welcome news. Because of [Congress’ complete capitulation](#), the military carries the additional burden of having to bring up the political and economic reasons that make the idea a disastrous folly. Unfortunately, there is no indication that the administration will not simply brush off the military’s concerns, given that the [diplomatic path](#) continues to be purposefully [designed to fail](#).

The [strategy](#) is clear. The administration succeeded in [getting “the world” united](#) in declaring that Iran has to suspend uranium enrichment. It is the only thing that Bush could get [Russia and China to agree on](#), but it’s enough. If [Iran doesn’t suspend](#), it is defying “the world.” If it suspends, the [IAEA seals](#) will be put in place, the [Bush administration will make sure negotiations fail](#), and [when Iran breaks](#) the “tripwire” seals, it will be defying the world. Either way, the world “[share\[s\] our assessment of the danger, but not our resolve to meet it](#).” [Son of Iraq](#), paraphrasing Hersh.

Nukes Are Not Off

Hersh reports in his [latest article \(July 3\)](#) that “Bush and Cheney were dead serious about the nuclear planning,” confirming what we said in [our column of Nov. 12, 2005](#): “The U.S. plan to nuke Iran will continue moving forward, focused and unrelenting.” He reports that “[Pace stood up to them](#),” and as a consequence, in late April “[The White House took \[the nuclear option\] off](#).” “[I]t’s no longer in the option plan.” In our [March 10 column](#), “Gen. Pace to Troops: Don’t Nuke Iran,” we anticipated that Pace would oppose the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. But this *does not mean that the nuclear option is off the table*: rather,

it means that Pace is likely to be on his way out the door.

In his [April 17 article](#), [Hersh reported](#) that “one of the military’s initial option plans, as presented to the White House by the Pentagon this winter, calls for the use of a bunker buster tactical nuclear weapon, such as the B61-11, against underground nuclear sites.” [In his latest article](#), Hersh gets it right: “[T]he brass feel they were tricked into it – the nuclear planning – by being asked to provide all options in the planning papers.” Indeed, as we wrote in our [Nov. 1, 2005 column](#), “The strategic decision by the United States to nuke Iran was probably made long ago,” by the [civilian leadership](#), which [fed it to military planners](#) and now, according to Hersh, “feels extraordinarily betrayed by the brass.” They may have taken the option out of discussion, but only formally.

According to the [Nuclear Posture Review of 2001](#), nuclear weapons are envisioned in response to “[surprising military developments](#),” so they cannot have been ruled out *unconditionally* in a potential military confrontation with Iran. And be assured that what “surprising” means is in the eyes of the beholder, and Cheney and Rumsfeld’s ability to be “surprised” should not be underestimated if it fits their goals. “Rumsfeld and Cheney are the pushers of this – they don’t want to repeat the mistake of doing too little,” reports Hersh from one of his trusted sources, “so the air war in Iran will be one of overwhelming force.” Even as it reports that the nuclear option is off the table, Hersh’s article is confirming that it is on, since “overwhelming force” is [a euphemism frequently used in lieu of “nuclear weapons.”](#)

The excuse for [using nuclear weapons](#) will be “[military necessity](#),” arising from “surprising military developments.” For example, we may hear of an “[imminent threat](#)” from [Iranian WMD](#), chemical or [biological](#), buried underground in Natanz or some other facility. The success of the whole enterprise is *predicated* on the use of nuclear weapons. Hersh’s article is subtitled “The military’s problem with the president’s Iran policy,” and it makes very clear the multitude of military problems that a conventional attack on Iran entails. Clearly, the hope is that an attack including nuclear weapons will scare Iran into immediate capitulation: “[rapid and favorable war termination on US terms.](#)”

The [military chain of command](#) runs from the president to the secretary of defense to the unified combatant commanders, bypassing the Joint Chiefs, who have no executive authority, according to the [Goldwater-Nichols Act](#). The [Joint Chiefs play an advisory role](#). The decision to employ nuclear weapons is solely the president’s ([NSC-30, 1948](#)), who will seek advice from [the nuclear hawks that surround him \(by design\)](#): Rumsfeld, Cheney, [Hadley](#), Cambone, Joseph, Schneider, Crouch II, Brooks, Bolton. He will also obtain the [desired “advice” from commanders](#) on the ground, [Gen. Abizaid](#) and [Gen. Cartwright](#). Gen. Pace, if he still holds his job, will be outvoted by a large margin. And it will all be perfectly legal.

President Truman’s [top military advisers were all reportedly opposed](#) to the use of nuclear weapons against Japan in 1945. That did not stop the civilian leadership. It will not stop them this time either.

The Real Reason for Nuking Iran

Hersh himself unwittingly reveals [the key reason](#) why Iran will be nuked: he reports that [the Air Force argued](#) that conventional rather than nuclear bunker busters should be used against the Natanz underground facility, because they would achieve the objective “without

provoking an outcry over what would be the first use of a nuclear weapon in a conflict since Nagasaki." *That* is the problem.

The opposition of the military to the nuclear strike option is confirming the [nuclear hawks'](#) worst [nightmare](#): nuclear weapons are becoming unusable, and as a consequence, they are not "[credible](#)" as a "[deterrent](#)." Today, Iran is not deterred from continuing its enrichment program by the threat of a U.S. nuclear strike, because, as the Hersh article tells us, such an action would be "politically unacceptable."

Fast forward five years into the future, a news report of July 2011: "The White House is considering a tactical nuclear strike against underground facilities of [fill in your favorite 'rogue state'] suspected of hiding WMD, in what would be the first use of a nuclear weapon in a conflict since Natanz. The leadership of [rogue state] is very worried." And in October 2011: "In what was hailed as a major victory for U.S. strong-arm diplomacy, [rogue state] agreed to close down its underground facilities. Democrats and Republicans in Congress praised the president for having achieved an important U.S. goal without the use of force."

Indeed, a 2006 low-yield nuclear strike on Natanz or any other Iranian underground facility that causes relatively little "collateral damage" will achieve the key objective: to make the U.S. "nuclear deterrent" against relatively minor nuisances *credible*.

The memories of the extensive death and destruction inflicted in the first and last uses of nuclear weapons in war, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are still seared in the public consciousness and are associated with any kind of nuclear weapon. These memories will not disappear, and the passage of time only reinforces the general view that nuclear weapons are unusable, making [a new use increasingly more difficult](#). Once a "[reduced collateral damage](#)" hit on a facility using a low-yield [nuclear bunker buster](#) has been accomplished, it will establish the credibility of the [new U.S. nuclear posture](#), and future adversaries will be effectively dissuaded "[from undertaking military programs or operations that could threaten U.S. interests or those of allies and friends](#)."

Both Democrats and Republicans will be happy that the U.S. nuclear arsenal will effectively play from then on its [designated role](#) [.pdf] as a "credible deterrent."

The [U.S. secretary of defense](#) is on a mission to [transform the military](#) so that the United States can achieve its military objectives "[on the cheap](#)." There is no cheaper way than the threat, and if necessary the use, of our nuclear arsenal. We have already spent over [\\$5 trillion](#) for it, so why waste it?

After Nuking Iran

In the best, even if utterly improbable, scenario, the U.S. will succeed in deterring Iranian retaliation by the use of nuclear weapons, Iran will be scared into immediate capitulation, regime change will ensue, and a pro-Western government will take hold.

Back to the future. The aforementioned news reports of 2011 failed to mention that another consequence of the Natanz nuclear strike was that Japan, Egypt, Brazil, Argentina, the Philippines, Poland, Australia, and Saudi Arabia raced full speed ahead since 2006 with clandestine efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and all reached their goal by 2011. Many other former signatories of the (now defunct) Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty followed closely behind.

America felt secure, with a strengthened nuclear deterrent. Until 2017.

Nobody anticipated the global nuclear war that erupted in 2017. It started with a minor regional conflict, when nuclear state X decided to launch a low-yield nuclear strike against supposedly non-nuclear state Y to deter a conventional response from Y. Y responded with a 10-times stronger nuclear hit on state X (Y had achieved nuclear weapons capability unbeknownst to the world). [Weather conditions had changed by then](#) in unanticipated ways, and radioactive fallout killed tens of thousands of civilians in neighboring states Z and W, which immediately entered the conflict. The war continued to spread and escalate, engulfing the whole world, including America.

And nobody could anticipate the news reports of 2022, chiseled in stone, read by a handful of survivors, speculating on the possible end dates of [nuclear winter](#).

Will We Survive?

America needs to [constrain the authority of the president to order nuclear strikes against non-nuclear states](#). Immediately. Change the law, change the Constitution. Congress is derelict in its responsibility by continuing to ignore this imminent threat.

The United Nations needs to address the first-use of nuclear weapons, and the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. Immediately.

The last use of nuclear weapons needs to remain Nagasaki, so that the world's nuclear nations will be "deterred" from using nuclear weapons ever again. The day the last use of nuclear weapons becomes Natanz, humanity will be irremediably doomed. And the greatest democracy in the world will be responsible.

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