

Words, Not War, With Iran

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more."

(Isaiah 2:4)

As violence continues to rage in Iraq, and now in Lebanon and Gaza, a new confrontation is looming with neighboring Iran. Talk has increased of possible military attack against Iran to halt its nuclear program and support for Hezbollah. While we agree Iran should not support terrorism or obtain nuclear weapons, we come together as religious leaders to urge that the U.S. engage in direct negotiations with Iran as an alternative to military action in resolving the crisis.

We are encouraged that the U.S. government is cooperating with European countries and international agencies. While we welcome the U.S. willingness to join multilateral talks with Iran, we believe that a strategy of direct U.S. diplomatic engagement with Iran without preconditions is the surest means of reducing the nuclear danger and enhancing security in the region. The United States should negotiate with Iran on a mutually acceptable settlement of the nuclear standoff while making it clear that Americans absolutely reject anti-Semitism and threats against Israel. In response to the real threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions, strategic combinations of pressures and incentives must be seriously and persistently tried, beginning with direct negotiations.

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U.S. negotiations with Iran could also help resolve the crisis in Iraq. The U.S. should seek Iran's support for international efforts to rebuild and stabilize Iraq, in conjunction with an orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops, the removal of foreign military bases, and the renouncing of any proprietary American claims on Iraqi oil and reconstruction contracts.

As Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders, we are deeply concerned about the nuclear weapons danger in Iran, in the Middle East, and around the world. The teachings of the Abrahamic tradition command us to keep human life sacred and to act as stewards of creation. We consider all weapons of mass destruction — whether nuclear, biological or chemical — immoral and unacceptable for use in any circumstances. In pursuit of that principle, we strongly support international diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Our nation and the international community must pursue this goal without using military force for at least two reasons:

- First, short of full scale war and complete occupation of Iran, military actions will not remove Iran's potential nuclear threat; indeed, it would likely intensify Iran's goal of acquiring nuclear weapons.
- Second, another American-led war or military attacks in the Middle East would likely prove disastrous. To initiate another war in an area of the world already engulfed in

turmoil and human tragedy would intensify political extremism throughout the Middle East and beyond. It would add fuel to the fires of violence already consuming the region. It would exacerbate anti-American hatred and produce new recruits for terror attacks against the United States and Israel. Significant military opinion says it would not work. Responsible theological evaluation suggests it would not be morally or strategically justified.

Nuclear nonproliferation objectives in Iran should also be linked to broader denuclearization goals, including the creation of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. We believe that the U.S. and other nuclear weapons states would be in a stronger position to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons if they took the necessary steps toward eliminating their own nuclear arsenals — which our signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty commits us to but is a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Our scriptures call us to avoid war and to live as peaceably as possible with all. They teach us always to seek better ways to resolve our problems and conflicts.

- In the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, we read: “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm” (Hadith 32) and in the Qur’an 2:60 “Do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.”
- In the Hebrew scriptures we read, “The warhorse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.” (Psalms 33:17)
- And in the Christian gospel, we hear, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

We reaffirm our religious hope for a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." We pray that our government will be guided by moral principles, political wisdom, and international legal standards and will step back from seeing military action as an option in this crisis. We call on all our religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and laypersons to speak out against the option of war with Iran.

To attack Iran militarily would confuse noble ends (preventing Iran from supporting terrorism and developing nuclear weapons) with dangerous and irresponsible means. Especially given the continuing tragedy and chaos of Iraq, we must not make that mistake again. The moral wisdom of many religious leaders and the pragmatic warnings of many military leaders now offer a common message — WORDS, NOT WAR, WITH IRAN.

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