

Guide to the perplexed



by **Caroline B. Glick, JPost**

Israel's leaders are reportedly concerning themselves with one question today: Are there any circumstances in which US President Barack Obama will order the US military to strike Iran's nuclear installations before Iran develops a nuclear arsenal?

From Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu down the line, Israel's leaders reportedly raise this question with just about everyone they come into contact with. If this is true, then the time has come to end our leaders' suspense.

The answer is no.

To all intents and purposes, there are no circumstances in which Obama would order an attack on Iran's nuclear installations to prevent Iran from developing and fielding nuclear weapons. Exceptions to this statement fall into two categories. Either they are so implausible that they are operationally irrelevant, or they are so contingent on other factors that they would doom any US attack to failure.

Evidence for this conclusion is found in every aspect of Obama's foreign policy. But to prove it, it is sufficient to point out point three aspects of his policies.

First of all, Obama's refuses to recognize that an Iranian nuclear arsenal constitutes a clear and present danger to US national security. Obama's discussions of the perils of a nuclear Iran are limited to his acknowledgement that such an arsenal will provoke a regional nuclear arms race. This is certainly true. But then that arms race has already begun. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, the U.A.E., and Kuwait have all announced their intentions to build nuclear reactors. In some cases they have signed deals with foreign countries to build such facilities.

And yet, while a nuclear arms race in the Middle East is bad, it is far from the worst aspect of Iran's nuclear program for America. America has two paramount strategic interests in the Middle East. First, the US requires the smooth flow of inexpensive petroleum products from the Persian Gulf to global oil markets. Second, the US requires the capacity to project its force in the region to defend its own territory from global jihadists.

Both of these interests are imperiled by the Iranian nuclear program. If the US is not willing to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, it will lose all credibility as a strategic ally to the Sunni Arab states in the area. For instance, from a Saudi perspective, a US that is unwilling to prevent the ayatollahs from fielding nuclear weapons is of no more use to them than Britain or China or France. It is just another oil consuming country. The same goes for the rest of the states in the Gulf and in the region.

The Arab loss of faith in US security guarantees will cause them to deny basing rights to US forces in their territories. It will also likely lead them to bow to Iranian will on oil price setting through supply cutbacks.

In light of this, the Iranian nuclear program constitutes the greatest threat ever to US superpower status in the region and to the wellbeing of the US economy.

Then there is the direct threat that Iran's nuclear program constitutes for US national security. This threat grows larger by the day as Iran's web of strategic alliances in Latin America expands unchallenged by the US. Today Iran enjoys military alliances with Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil and Bolivia.

As former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton has argued, at least the Soviets were atheists. Atheists of course, are in no hurry to die, since death can bring no rewards in a world to come. Iran's leaders are apocalyptic jihadists. Given Iran's Latin American alliances and Iran's own progress towards intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities, the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran makes the Cuban missile crisis look like a walk in the park.

In the face of this grave and gathering threat, Obama cancelled plans to deploy anti-ballistic missile shields in Poland and the Czech Republic. He has shunned the pro-American Honduran and Colombian governments in favor of Nicaragua and Venezuela. He has welcomed Brazil's anti-American president to the White House. He cancelled the F-22.

The fact that Obama fails to recognize the danger an Iranian nuclear arsenal poses to the US does not in and of itself prove that Obama would not attack Iran's nuclear installations. After all, the US has fought many wars and launched countless campaigns in its history against foes that posed no direct threat to the US. In most of these cases, the US has fought on behalf of its allies.

In the case of Iran's nuclear weapons programs, because the Iranians have openly placed Israel first on their nuclear targeting list, US debate about Iran's nuclear program has been anchored around the issue of Israel's national security. Should the US attack Iran's nuclear installations in order to defend Israel?

Given the distorted manner in which the debate has been framed, the answer to that question hinges on Obama's view of Israel. Three recent moves by Obama and his advisors make clear that Obama takes a dim view of Israel. He views Israel neither as a credible ally nor a credible democracy.

First there is the character of current US military assistance to Israel and to its neighbors. In recent months, the Obama administration has loudly announced its intentions to continue its joint work with Israel towards the development and deployment of defensive anti-missile shields. Two things about these programs are notable. First, they are joint initiatives. Just as Israel gains US financing, the US gains Israeli technology that it would otherwise lack. Second, as Globes reported last week, Obama has actually scaled back US funding for these programs. For instance, funding for the Arrow 3 anti-ballistic missile program – intended to serve as Israel's primary defensive system against Iranian ballistic missiles — was cut by \$50 million.

The defensive character of all of these programs signals an absence of US support for maintaining Israel's capacity to preemptively strike its enemies. When the Pentagon's refusal to permit Israel to install its own avionics systems on the next generation F-35 warplanes is added to the mix, it is difficult to make the argument that the US supports Israel's qualitative edge over its enemies in any tangible way.

An assessment that the US has abandoned its commitment to Israel's qualitative edge is strengthened by the administration's announcement this week of its plan to sell Saudi Arabia scores of F-15 and F-16 fighter jets for an estimated \$30 billion. While the US has pledged to remove systems from the Saudi aircraft that pose direct threats to Israel, once those jets arrive in the Kingdom, the Saudis will be able to do whatever they want with them. If one adds to this equation the reduced regional stature of the US in an Iranian nuclear age, it is clear that these guarantees have little meaning.

Obama's moves to reduce Israel's offensive capacity and slow its acquisition of defensive systems goes hand in hand with his rejection of Israel's right to self-defense and dismissive attitude towards Israel's rule of law. These positions have been starkly demonstrated in his administration's treatment of Israel in the wake of the IDF's takeover of the Turkish-Hamas Mavi Marmara terror ship on May 31st.

In the face of that blatant display of Turkish aggression against Israel as it maintained its lawful maritime blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza's coastline, Obama sided with Turkey and Hamas against Israel. Obama demanded that Israel investigate its handling of the incident. Moreover, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claimed that Israel was incapable of credibly investigating itself and so required Israel to add non-Israeli members to its investigative committee.

Yet even Israel's acceptance of this US humiliation was insufficient for Obama. His UN envoy Susan Rice then demanded that Israel accept a UN investigative panel that is charged with checking to see if the Israeli committee has done its job. And if the UN panel rejects the Israeli commission's findings, it is empowered to begin its own investigation.

As to the UN, as former Obama and Clinton administration officials Ray Takeyh and Steven Simon explained in an article in the Washington Post last week, Obama's national security strategy effectively revolves around subordinating US national security policy to the UN Security Council. In the remote scenario that Obama decided to use force against Iran, his subservience to the UN would rule out any possibility of a surprise attack.

Although in theory the US military's capacity to strike Iran's nuclear facilities is much greater than Israel's, given its practical inability to launch a surprise attack, in practice it may be much smaller.

All of these factors constitute overwhelming evidence that there are no conceivable circumstances under which Obama would order a US strike on Iran's nuclear installations to forestall Iran's development of nuclear weapons. And this reality should lead Israel's leaders to three separate conclusions.

First, and most urgently, Israel must attack Iran's nuclear installations. Iran's nuclear ambitions must be set back at least until 2017, the latest date at which a new — and hopefully more rational — US administration will certainly be in office.

Second, given the fact that the US will not take action against Iran's nuclear installations, there is no reason for Israel to capitulate to US pressure on lesser issues. The Obama administration has nothing to offer Israel on this most important threat and so Israel should not do anything to strengthen its position. Among other things, this conclusion has clear implications for Jewish construction in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, Israel's future responses to Lebanese aggression, as well as for Israel's continued cooperation with the UN probes of the Turkish-Hamas terror ship.

Finally, Obama's behavior is a clear indication that Israel was wrong to allow itself to become militarily dependent on US military platforms. Former defense minister Moshe Arens wrote recently that Israel should strongly consider abandoning plans to purchase the F-35 and restore the scrapped Lavi jetfighter to active development. Arens suggested that in doing so, Israel may find willing collaborators in the Indians, the French and even the Russians.

No, the US has not become Israel's enemy — although the Obama administration has certainly struck an adversarial chord. Polling data suggests that most Americans disagree with Obama's treatment of Israel and recognize that Iran is a threat to the US.

But polls aside, the answer to Israel's desperate queries is that it is up to us. If the Obama administration teaches us anything, it teaches us that we must rely first and foremost on ourselves.