

## Why a US War with Iran Would be a Catastrophe

Hawkish voices in Washington calling for pressure-only policies on Iran further risk an escalation that could entrench the US in another 'forever' war

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*In September 2002, then Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) testified in front of Congress to support the Bush administration’s push for a US invasion of [Iraq](#).*

At the time, Netanyahu claimed that there was no doubt that Iraq was developing nuclear weapons and erroneously [stated](#): “If you take out Saddam, I guarantee you that it will have enormous positive reverberations on the region.”

Six months later, the [United States](#) illegally invaded Iraq, found no [weapons](#) of mass destruction, and unleashed decades of violence and war in the region.

Now, [Israel](#) is using the same playbook to [push](#) for a military buildup against [Iran](#), led by the US.

At the same time, hawkish voices in the US are [pressing](#) President Biden to break a campaign promise of accountability for Saudi Arabia and pursue greater security pacts contingent on “normalising” relations with Israel. Yet, this strategy ignores the need to include Iran - a central power within the region - in its security architecture and overlooks the important [ongoing dialogue](#) between these state actors and the progress made.

Rather than seeking an actual peace, these calls for pressure-only policies on Iran further risk an escalation that could entrench the US in another “forever” war.

Nearly 20 years after the invasion of Iraq, it is commonly understood as a [historic mistake](#) of US foreign policy. However, we do not need hindsight to understand that a war with Iran would be a far worse blunder, not only for its fallout but also because a clear peaceful alternative exists.

## Stoking fears

Much like the case of Iraq, hawks in the US and Israel have tried to stoke fears of Iranian nuclear weapons in order to justify a possible war.

In fact, the public has been told that Iran is on the verge of building nuclear weapons for decades. Still, the supposed threat of Iran developing nuclear weapons was finally resolved through diplomacy.

Despite strong opposition from Israel and proponents of war in the US, under the Obama administration the US and Iran, along with the international community, reached a landmark agreement in 2015 known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the [Iran nuclear deal](#).

The JCPOA delivered unprecedented international oversight and access to Iran's nuclear programme and imposed strict limits to guarantee Iran could not weaponise its programme, in exchange for economic relief from sanctions for Iran.

Not only did the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) repeatedly [report](#) that Iran was complying with the deal – even after the Trump administration backed out of the deal in May 2018 and violated it by reimposing sanctions – but President Biden also [attested](#) to the merits of the deal as a candidate in 2020 and emphasised that it was Trump that walked away from the deal, not Iran.

Despite this admission and the years Biden spent lambasting the former administration's failed Iran policy, his administration has essentially maintained the policies of his predecessor, including sanctions that continue to [impede](#) the flow of humanitarian goods in a pandemic and the [designation](#) of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) on the US list of foreign terrorist organisations (FTO).

## Another disastrous war

While as a presidential candidate Biden promised to repair the JCPOA, his administration squandered an early opportunity to restore the agreement before Iran's June 2021 election. It ushered in a new hard-line administration in Iran and the US remains outside of the deal.

With Biden failing to restore the historic deal, Iran has continued to grow its nuclear programme by enriching uranium and producing a stockpile far beyond the limits they maintained under the JCPOA.

It is a point of irony that the very groups and individuals who worked to undermine the deal have [used](#) it in recent weeks as a measure of Iran's expansion. Though opponents of the deal often claimed to want a "better deal", the [push](#) for another disastrous war in the Middle East [appears](#) to be the real intention of hawkish voices.

The urgency of the current situation is stressed by recent IAEA reports [stating](#) that Iran, for the first time, now has enough medium-grade fissile material for one bomb. It is important to note that Iran would have to make the political decision to pursue a weapon and that this process would take one to two years itself.

However, the present circumstances will likely magnify calls for military action, especially

once diplomacy is taken off the table. Given this prospect, Biden's Iran policy and his administration's posturing on the JCPOA is dangerously shortsighted.

Just consider the current war in Ukraine.

While US officials have consistently [employed](#) the rhetoric of international law to rebuke Russia's illegal campaign, escalation to military conflict or bombing Iran would violate the same rules-based order and evoke the memory of a preemptive strike against Iraq.

Witnessing the death and devastation in Ukraine and concerns over nuclear escalation with Russia, it is all the more crucial to weigh the consequences of war.

This is not to mention the global impact of such conflicts, as can be seen in [rising food and energy costs](#), a looming [global food crisis](#) that will starve many already facing food insecurity around the world, and [inflation](#) in the United States that is heavily impacting the lives of American workers.

A war with Iran will likely worsen these conditions, especially the significant flow of oil through the [Strait of Hormuz](#) in the Gulf. Under such dire circumstances, the last thing we can afford right now is escalation or war with Iran.

## A historic blunder

In fact, American public opinion is against more wars, which is why both the Biden and Trump administrations promised to "end endless war" in what has become a popular catchphrase in US political discourse.

Even in a war effort that Americans support, like Ukraine, the majority do not want the US to [risk war with Russia](#). Additionally, a majority of Americans continue to [support the 2015 Iran nuclear deal](#).

This is not surprising given the failures of US militarism – most notably the swift takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban after 20 years of war – and the enormous cost of these conflicts to American taxpayers as many struggle at home.

A war with Iran – a country with a larger population than Iraq and Afghanistan combined and a stronger position in the region in the wake of US wars – would be another historic blunder with far worse outcomes than what we have already seen.

The merits and nonproliferation benefits of the JCPOA speak for themselves. However, the costs of the failure to restore the deal and the potential for conflict go beyond the limitations placed on Iran's nuclear programme.

In a recent [speech](#) about the war in Ukraine by former President George W Bush, an ironic slip of the tongue revealed the truth of his own legacy: "...[T]he decision of one man to launch a wholly unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq."

Though he immediately corrected himself to say "Ukraine", under his breath he added, "Iraq too", prompting laughter from the audience. If Biden does not correct his current course on Iran soon – which undermines the successes of the administration he served for as vice president – his legacy may also be a war of his own making.

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