STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

What actions can the USA can take against Iran? What would be the consequences?

International Relations

26 Jan 2014

The United States, under President Donald Trump, is actively reviewing military and non-military options against Iran amid escalating tensions. This stems from Iran's ongoing crackdown on domestic protests (sparked by economic woes and women's rights issues), its support for regional proxies (e.g., in Yemen, Syria, and against Israel), and nuclear program advancements.

The discussions intensified following Trump's January 13, 2026, announcement of 25% tariffs on countries trading with Iran, aimed at economic isolation.

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Key Military Options Being Studied

Based on reports from US officials and experts, the Pentagon is preparing scenarios ranging from limited to more aggressive actions. These include:

1. **Limited Airstrikes**: Precision attacks on specific targets like nuclear facilities (e.g., Natanz or Fordow), military bases, or leadership compounds to deter aggression without full invasion. This could aim to degrade Iran's capabilities while minimizing escalation.
2. **Sustained Air Campaign**: A broader bombing effort targeting multiple sites over days or weeks, similar to past operations against Iraq or Syria, to weaken the regime's military infrastructure.
3. **Special Forces Operations**: Covert insertions by Navy SEALs or Delta Force for sabotage, intelligence gathering, or targeted assassinations (e.g., of IRGC commanders), drawing from the 2020 Soleimani strike.
4. **Cyberattacks**: Disrupting Iran's power grids, financial systems, or nuclear command-and-control via US Cyber Command, building on past operations like Stuxnet.
5. **Influence Operations**: Online campaigns to amplify protests, spread disinformation against the regime, or support dissidents, potentially coordinated with allies like Israel.
6. **Diplomatic Alternatives** : Trump is also exploring backchannel talks, potentially via Oman or Qatar, to revive nuclear deal elements or ease sanctions in exchange for concessions on protests and proxies. This dual-track approach (diplomacy alongside threats) mirrors his "maximum pressure" strategy from his first term.

Iran's Response and Readiness

- Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned on January 13, 2026, that Tehran is "ready for war" if tested, but hopes the US chooses a "wise option" like diplomacy.
- Iranian officials claim their military could target US bases across the Middle East as "legitimate" in retaliation. Iran's options include missile strikes, proxy militias (e.g., Houthis, Hezbollah), or closing the Strait of Hormuz to disrupt global oil flows.

Potential Impacts

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1. **Global**: Oil prices could spike (already up 3-5% since tariff announcement), affecting allies like India and Europe.
2. **US Allies**: Israel supports strikes but warns of risks; European NATO partners urge restraint to avoid refugee crises or energy shocks.
3. **Domestic US**: Public opposition to war is high (polls show ~60% against intervention), and legal hurdles (e.g., War Powers Act) could limit unilateral action.