

The Drumbeat of

## What War With Iran Might Look Like

by [Philip Giraldi](#), January 12, 2012

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Back in September 2007 I wrote an article for Antiwar.com called “[What World War III May Look Like](#).” The article, which presumed that an incident involving U.S. troops on the border between Iraq and Iran could easily escalate into what would eventually become a global conflict, was widely replayed in the alternative media and even in the [mainstream](#). Well, I am pleased to report that no such war has yet started, though there has been a disturbing expansion of U.S. military activity through the deployment of drones to hit targets in assorted countries without having to worry about American casualties or niceties like declarations of war. Other geopolitical elements that figured in my 2007 analysis have also changed, so I believe that the time has come for an update.

Iran is clearly the target of choice, just as it was in 2007. Despite President Barack Obama’s assertion that he would open up avenues to talk to the Iranians, he has failed to do so, he has rejected Iranian initiatives to start a dialogue, and he is showing every sign of unwillingness to negotiate on any level. Congress has even moved to [block any contact](#) between American and Iranian diplomats. The sanctions that recently took effect against the Iranian banking system can be construed as an act of war, particularly as Iran has not provided any *casus belli*. Further sanctions that will restrict energy imports are impending and will bring the country’s economy to a halt. There are already signs that the Iranian government feels itself compelled to demonstrate to its people that it is doing something about the situation. That “something” might well be a [confrontation](#) with the U.S. Navy that will have unfortunate results. In light of all that, it might be useful to imagine just how war with Iran could play out if the Iranians don’t roll over and surrender at the first whiff of grapeshot.

It might start with a minor incident, possibly involving an Iranian armed small craft manned by the Revolutionary Guard. Though the Strait of Hormuz is generally considered an international waterway, the Iranians claim that half of the strait is within their territorial waters. Tehran, in response to intensified sanctions, declares that it can determine who can use the strait and says that it will take steps to keep American warships from entering. The frigate USS *Ingraham*, patrolling off of Bushehr, is confronted by the small craft and ordered to heave to, an order it rejects. The Iranian commander, ignoring instructions to back off when confronted directly by the U.S. Navy, opens fire with rocket-propelled grenades. The frigate’s Phalanx rapid-fire battery immediately responds by blasting the Iranian boat, killing the entire Revolutionary Guard crew, but two American sailors are also killed in the exchange and four are wounded.

Fighters from the aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis* are immediately launched under standing orders, and they devastate the naval base that the Iranian boat departed from. President Obama holds a press conference and calls the incident an act of war and vows to do everything necessary to support U.S. forces in the region, but he stops short of a commitment to stage a full-scale attack on Iran. A hastily called meeting of the U.N. Security Council results in a 17–1 vote urging the United States to exercise restraint, with only Washington voting “no.” In the General

Assembly, only the United States, Israel, Micronesia, and Costa Rica support possible military action.

The United States is effectively alone, but Israel takes advantage of the growing war fervor in the United States to launch an attack against Iranian nuclear facilities. The recently completed nuclear reactor at Bushehr is destroyed, killing 13 Russian technicians working on the site, and the aboveground buildings at the Natanz nuclear research facility are leveled. Russian-supplied Iranian air defenses shoot down six Israeli aircraft. Washington receives no prior warning of the Israeli attack, though it does pick up the signal traffic that precedes it and knows something is coming. It makes no effort to stop the Israelis as they fly over undefended Iraqi airspace.

Congress and the media rally behind the Israelis and demand war. A bill in the House of Representatives calling on the White House to take military action in support of Israel passes 431–4. A similar bill in the Senate receives only two nays. President Obama hesitates but then approves a limited offensive, directed against Iran’s military, its nuclear sites, and, most particularly, its Revolutionary Guard installations. In the first few days, overwhelming American air and naval superiority destroys Iran’s principal air, naval, and army bases. Iranian Revolutionary Guard facilities are obliterated, as are the known Iranian nuclear research and development sites. The limited offensive soon becomes anything but that, with strategic bombers dropping 30,000-pound Big BLU bunker-buster bombs to strike underground labs and processing centers. Population centers are avoided, though smart weapons are used to destroy communications centers and command and control facilities. There are nevertheless large numbers of civilian casualties as many of the targeted nuclear sites are close to or within cities and large towns. Infrastructure is also hit, particularly bridges, roads, and power-generation stations close to known nuclear research centers and military sites.

There is a pause in the attacks, and Iran strikes back. With nearly 10 years to prepare, Tehran has successfully hidden and hardened many of its military and nuclear facilities, a large percentage of which are undamaged. The aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis* operating in the Gulf of Oman is hit by a lucky strike by a Chinese Silkworm cruise missile that comes in low and successfully evades countermeasures. The *Stennis* retires to port in Bahrain. Three other support vessels are also hit and severely damaged when they are attacked by waves of small craft manned by suicidal Revolutionary Guards, not unlike the kamikaze attacks in the Second World War. The Iranian attackers are annihilated, but the Pentagon refuses to say how many American sailors have been killed in the exchange.

Pro-Iranian riots break out in Beirut. In the south of Lebanon, Hezbollah fires salvos of rockets into Israel, striking Tel Aviv and killing several hundred Israelis. Israel responds by bombing Lebanon and Syria, which it blames for supporting the attacks. Upgraded Iranian Shahab-3 missiles also strike Israel, killing more civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces are fully mobilized, and troops are sent to the northern border. Syria and Lebanon also mobilize their forces. Rioters in Baghdad attack the American embassy, which demands that the Iraqi government “do something” to protect it, but Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki shrugs and says that the situation is out of his control. Large public demonstrations demand that Iraq support Iran in a fraternal struggle against the United States.

Shi'ites sympathetic to Iran sabotage Saudi Arabian eastern oil fields. Hundreds of alleged saboteurs are shot dead by Saudi security forces. An oil tanker out of Kuwait is hit by a Silkworm and runs aground to keep from sinking. Another hits a mine. Insurers at Lloyd's of London refuse to cover any tankers transiting the Persian Gulf, claiming that damage incurred during a state of war is not covered by the policies. Oil shipments from the region, one quarter of the world's supply, stop completely, and oil goes up to \$300 a barrel. Wall Street suffers its biggest loss in 20 years, with the Dow Jones index plummeting more than 900 points.

The United States offers Iran a cease-fire, which Tehran rejects. Two days later, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan is assassinated by a Shi'ite bodyguard under orders from Tehran. Pakistan declares that it is neutral in the conflict and orders the U.S. embassy to reduce its staff by 50%, including the CIA station chief and his deputy. Order breaks down in both countries, and the Pakistani army declares a state of emergency, closing the border with Afghanistan. NATO calls an emergency meeting and decides to begin the evacuation by air of the multinational force trapped in Afghanistan, leaving many weapons and heavy equipment behind.

In the power vacuum, NATO troops withdraw to their bases while Taliban-backed militias take over much of Kabul and Kandahar. Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif, which is largely Shi'ite, declares itself a part of Iran. The government resigns in Beirut, and Hezbollah forms a new one. A salvo of Iranian Silkworm missiles sets the Saudi Arabian eastern oil fields ablaze. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates send an urgent diplomatic message to Tehran declaring that they will be "neutral" in the fighting and will not assist the United States in any way. Kuwait sends the same message, while Egyptian volunteers gather along the border with Israel in Sinai, demanding that Cairo take steps in support of their Arab brothers in Lebanon. Kuwait refuses to allow the United States to use its men and supplies at Camp Doha against Iran. In Bahrain, rampaging Shi'ite crowds depose Sheikh Khalifa al-Khalifa and set up an Islamic Republic, forcing the U.S. Fifth Fleet to abandon its only secure base in the region. The Dow Jones index loses another 1,000 points.

The United States attempts to get China and Russia to mediate with Iran to end the fighting, but they refuse to do Washington any favors, noting that they had opposed the attack in the first place and also citing their countrymen killed in the U.S. attacks. Suicide bombers attack in London, Washington, New York, and Los Angeles. The attacks are poorly planned and inflict only a few casualties, but panic sets in and the public demands that the respective governments do something. The United States tells the Iranian government that unless resistance ceases, nuclear weapons will be used on select targets. India and Pakistan are alarmed by the U.S. threat and put their own nuclear forces on high alert, as does Israel. Russia and China also increase their readiness levels to respond to the crisis.

Iran refuses to concede defeat, and the Iranian people rally around the government. The U.S. public is clamoring for action. Oil prices continue to surge, and the long-term viability of petroleum supplies is in question as the Strait of Hormuz continues to be closed. Another U.S. ship is badly damaged by suicide attackers in the Persian Gulf. American embassies throughout the region are attacked. Anti-American rioting takes place in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Mindanao, and in Dhaka. The United States consulate general in Karachi, Pakistan, is sacked and burned. Forty Americans die along with scores of Pakistanis when the Marine guards open fire.

There are frequent terrorism scares in a number of American cities, which are under red-alert security lockdown, though there are no new attacks. Domestic air travel declines by more than 50%. As a preventive measure, there are mass arrests of American Muslim leaders. Some antiwar activists are detained at military prisons, including Guantanamo, under the provisions of the Military Commissions Act and the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012. Israel continues to be bombarded from inside Lebanon. Its air attacks inflict massive damage on civilians but are unsuccessful in stopping the rockets. Its government falls and is replaced by a hard-right regime headed by former Foreign Secretary Avigdor Lieberman. Rioting rocks the West Bank and Gaza, forcing Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to resign and flee to Paris. Hamas forms a provisional government. India threatens to attack Pakistan if there is any question about the security of Islamabad's nuclear arsenal.

The United States uses a neutron-type bomb against the main Iranian nuclear research center at Natanz, which both Washington and Israel had already bombed conventionally and destroyed. It vows to bomb again if Iran continues to resist. Iran is defiant and fires another wave of Silkworms at U.S. ships, hitting one. Russia and China place their nuclear forces on high alert. Pakistani militants assume control of the government, aided by radical elements in the army and the intelligence service. India launches a preemptive strike against the main Pakistani nuclear centers at Wah and Multan, where the country's arsenal is believed to be concentrated. Pakistan has some of its nukes moving around on trucks to avoid such a scenario, however, and is able to strike back by bombing New Delhi.

A minor engagement between American and Iranian forces in the Persian Gulf has ignited World War III.