

An attack on Iran will only cause damage

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"Time is not working in Israel's favor," warned Edward Djerejian, who served as the U.S. ambassador to Syria and Israel. According to Djerejian, "Due to economic and military superiority, you can in the meantime keep the status quo, but in the long term, I believe that if the Palestinian problem is not solved, this will constitute an existential threat to the concept of a Jewish Democratic state."

It is worthwhile to listen to Djerejian, if only because in Washington his views are given audience, and due to the possibility of his recommendations and assessments serving as a basis for the Middle East policy that President Barak Obama will consolidate for his second term. Today, Djerejian serves as the head of the Baker Institute in Houston, an institute which is thought to have a significant influence on American policy. He served in a number of roles, since the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s, until President Clinton's administration. He is considered to be an expert on Middle East issues, and two years ago served at the head of a working group that prepared a report entitled, "Getting to the Territorial Endgame of an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Settlement".

Djerejian came for a short visit to Israel, and my conversation with him took place following his participation in a round table discussion organized by the Strategic Dialogue Center at Netanya Academic College. Approximately a month ago, an American report was completed which dealt with the possibility of a military strike against Iran's nuclear installations. Djerejian was one of 36 signatories on the report which summarized the research, entitled, "Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action against Iran." The team that took part in preparing the document included strategic experts, diplomats, military personnel, and a few senators. Among these include Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor, Richard Lee Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Thomas Pickering and Dan Kurtzer, who served as ambassadors to Israel, former member of the House of Representatives, Lee Hamilton, General Anthony Zini, and other notable figures.

The research concludes that if the United States were to attack Iran, its nuclear program would be delayed by four years. On the other hand, if Israel were to attack, there would be a delay of only two years. In other words, even a massive attack would not destroy Iran's capability to construct a bomb. A military attack will not result in the Ayatollahs in Iran to relinquish their nuclear program, the researchers conclude, but the opposite, they will accelerate the development of nuclear weapons.

Regarding the implications of an attack on Iran, according to the Djerejian, they will be excessively negative. The Iranians would almost certainly close the Strait of Hormuz, even if the American Navy would open them after some time. In the meantime, the price of oil would rise drastically, and the global economy, which is already suffering from a crisis, would be further damaged. A war in the gulf would have a global effect. Iran would also attack American allies in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It would activate

Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel, and in general, Iran can utilize many dangerous initiatives as a response to a military attack in its territory.

As an experienced diplomat, Djerejian abstains from explicitly stating his opinion of an Israeli attack on Iran, but from his words and analysis it can be understood that he believes that such an attack would not achieve the goal that Israel seeks, while its implications would be negative and would damage American interests in the region.

Djerejian surprisingly claims that he is envious of Israel, in which an active public debate is taking place on the topic of a military attack in Iran. "In America, there is no open and serious discussion about American military action in Iran, despite the fact that this will be one of the important decisions that Obama makes," he claims. According to his assessment, 2013 will be a critical year during which a decision will be made. One of the conclusions of the study is that if Iran retains its membership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while deciding to actually produce a nuclear bomb, it will require approximately four months to produce enough fissionable material, the period during which the American President will have to decide whether to attack Iran.

Djerejian hopes that there will be no need to attack, and thus he supports continued negotiations with the regime in Iran. According to his assessment, the sanctions on Iran are quite effective, but he is aware of the fact that sanctions on their own cannot be a policy. Nonetheless, if, during the next year, it becomes clear that negotiations combined with sanctions do not lead to an Iranian decision to renounce the development of nuclear weapons "this could lead to seriously considering a military attack," he states.

As former ambassador to Syria, he is worriedly following events there. According to Djerejian, the Syrian regime was living under the illusion that it is connected to the Syrian people, but in essence, it is disconnected from them. Assad deluded himself into thinking that the Arab Spring would skip his country. It is unclear how or when the fighting in Syria will end, but according to Djerejian, it is clear that in the future the Sunnis will rule Syria, as they comprise 74% of the population. This will also result in a lessening of Iranian influence in the Arab world, which greatly leans on the Assad regime. Hezbollah will also be weakened, as it is part of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis.

At the Baker Institute, which he heads, Djerejian is formulating with his team a plan for advancing a political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This team intends on presenting before the Obama administration recommendations for the design its policy with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Djerejian hopes that the President will adopt the plan and will test the willingness of Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas to advance the two-state solution, which has been supported by both. "The joint goal of the United States and Israel must be strengthening the moderates in the Middle East while attempting to weaken the power of extremists".