

17.483 Paper Outline

1 Introduction

1.1 Scenario

Campaign analysis of a US strike in Iran within the next five years to eliminate Iran's WMD capability.

1.2 Question

Would the US be able to eliminate the Iranian nuclear threat with a surgical strike without becoming bogged down in Gulf War III?

1.3 Preliminary answer

Yes¹, with caveats²

2 Background and causes for war

2.1 The Iraq/Afghanistan factor

Would the US' continued presence in Iraq and Afghanistan be a severe hindrance?

2.2 Lessons learned in Iraq / Desert Storm

Would the US learn from past conflicts? Let's examine the evidence.

2.3 The nuclear factor, Part One

Would the US go to war to stop an Iranian nuclear program?

2.4 The oil question

Iran's substantial oil assets (fourth biggest exporter in the world³) make seizing their oil fields a desirable objective. The war will be expensive. (possibly tangential?)

¹I do need to research this

²see above

³<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0922041.html>

3 Assumptions

3.1 Timeframe

Within the next five years.

3.2 US still engaged in Iraq - pros and cons

I'm going to assume that the US is still engaged in Iraq when this conflict begins.

3.3 Iranian nuclear capability

I still haven't decided whether Iran has concrete nuclear capability in this scenario. Most likely I will go with "no".

3.4 Objective: surgical strike

This strategy would differ drastically from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Gulf War I, Iraq, and so forth.

4 US Military Assets

4.1 Land forces

Mostly still engaged in Iraq.

4.2 Air forces

A useful factor, especially with the development of highly targetable smart bombs. Needs research.

4.3 Naval presence in the Persian Gulf

Mostly carriers, as engaging in littoral warfare is not so desirable here.

4.4 Special forces

Just as important as air power, most likely.

4.5 Power projection capability

Carrier fleets in the Persian Gulf? The US has a base in Bahrain⁴.

⁴I used to live there

4.6 Training and skill

Assessment of the US military's relative training.

4.7 Intelligence

I suspect this'll be difficult to research, but it's an important factor.

4.8 Allies

Would Israel step in to help the US? What about NATO?

5 Iranian military assets

5.1 Iranian defense

How would Iran respond?

5.2 Iranian special forces

How do they compare to the US'?

5.3 Air and sea defense

Could Iran shoot down US planes? How about mining the Persian Gulf? What capabilities has Iran displayed in the past? I'd look at the Iran-Iraq war (and Desert Storm) for some clues.

5.4 Retaliatory capability

How *could* Iran respond?

6 Engagement

6.1 Initial strike

Simultaneous air and special forces strike to disable the nuclear program.

6.2 Iran's counterstrike

Would Iran strike back militarily (at Israel?) as a retaliatory maneuver?

7 Outcome

7.1 Success?

Could the US succeed in eliminating Iran's nuclear program entirely?

7.2 Fallout?

Would Iran strike back in some other way (oil embargo?)

8 Conclusion

8.1 Closing thoughts

Is this scenario a net win for the US?