

Using nuclear weapons against Iran? 1:42 PM ET, Saturday Feb 4, 2006
Jurist Hotline at <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/hotline/>

Anthony D'Amato [Northwestern U. School of Law]: "Today, February 4, 2006, Senator John McCain speaking in Munich said that military action against Iran must remain an option if it did not bow to international demands to halt its nuclear activities. This is a major foreign policy statement, but why a person not in the Executive Branch was chosen to state it is anyone's guess. In any event, what kind of "military action against Iran" would it be? For the following reasons, it can only be an action involving the use of, nuclear weapons.

A combined US-Israel strike against Iran would have to employ tactical nuclear weapons, and there were signs a month or two ago that the United States was gearing up its military specialists for just such an option. As you will recall, the advance rhetoric was very hot: Iran was obtaining nuclear weapons technology, it broke the seals on yellowcake containers that had been sealed by the UN Inspection Team, it threatened to open a bourse for buying and selling oil in euros, and it announced that Israel should be wiped off the map. Unlike the case with Saddam in Iraq in 2003, Iran in 2006 has numerous long-range ballistic missiles positioned to fire at Israel, France, Germany, and American ships in the Persian Gulf, even after absorbing a surprise military attack. Its missiles are mobile, usually mounted on trucks. It would be impossible to take them out with conventional weapons. The only way to disable and destroy them would be by issuing above-ground "tactical" nuclear weapons, which can of course reach a wide area and destroy everything in it, especially the electronics used in launching missiles.

The tense situation was considerably de-fused in January when President Putin offered to process Iran's nuclear enrichment program in Russia. Iran did not refuse, commenting that the Russian plan was constructive. The United States was apparently taken by surprise, but President Bush also praised Russia's plan.

Although Russia seems to be increasing its ties with Iran, it is hard to imagine that Putin would be indifferent to Iran's becoming a nuclear power. In fact, there are signs now that Russia and China may be re-prioritizing their foreign policy to place nuclear nonproliferation at the top of the list. A nuclear strike against Iran would have a huge exemplary effect upon North Korea and all future would-be nuclear powers.

I hope I'm right in thinking that nonproliferation is number one on the foreign policy list of China and Russia. I fear that it is only number two on America's list. Our first

priority, reading between the lines, is to safeguard the dollar as the world's reserve currency. If so, our principal goal would be to stop Iran from opening its petro-euro bourse. The bourse is scheduled to start business on March 31, 2006. Russia would like the bourse open so as to present a grave, maybe fatal, challenge to the US dollar. China tends to side with the petro-euro plan, but China does not appear to be particularly sophisticated in its foreign financial policy. However the United States, with its massive foreign debt, is horrified at prospect of the euro replacing the dollar.

A military strike against Iran would involve the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the sparsely populated areas where the mobile missiles are located. As for command-and-control, the military strike undoubtedly involves precision bombing of government and military headquarters. I would predict a strike against the new bourse, perhaps on the theory that it might contain an underground military control center.

Nuclear weapons have not been used in warfare since 1945, and again it may be the United States that first uses them."

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