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The Roulette Wheel is Spinning on a U.S.-Iran War

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Anyone want to put money down on a war with Iran? A few odds-makers in Las Vegas might give you even money that a war between Iran and the United States will erupt before next spring. Bookies in the Middle East, and maybe even a few experts, might give you even better odds.

Let's hope U.S. President George W. Bush is not a gambling man—he's playing for keeps. "I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War Three," he said, "it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon."

Leading candidates in the coming U.S. election, including Democratic-hopeful Hillary Clinton, are saying that "all options are on the table" to prevent Iran from obtaining nukes. What they mean is that the U.S. would be—will be—prepared to use its nuclear arsenal.

Russian President Vladimir Putin made it clear on a recent visit to Tehran that Russia will not accept any military action against Iran. According to Dr. Bruce Blair, the president of the World Security Institute, the U.S. and Russia have about 2,000 nuclear warheads on high-level alert, ready to go. Each warhead carries far greater destructive power than the bombs that crushed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War.

The U.S. Navy has three aircraft carriers in or near the Middle East. When last reported, a fourth, USS Abraham Lincoln, was "surge deployed," that is, prepared to join the other behemoth warships in the Middle East.

What could result from air strikes by U.S. planes and cruise missiles on Iranian nuclear power bases? Here is one plausible scenario:

Iran would declare a state of war with or against the United States. It would then alert its allies to engage in whatever ways they could to attack U.S. military sites, and military personnel and civilians. The U.S. government would impose even tighter restrictions on its citizens' rights than they currently enjoy. Most nuclear power plants in Iran would be destroyed or badly damaged, causing major spills of high level radioactive waste, and endangering hundreds of thousands of lives, not only in Iran, but also neighbouring countries.

The longer range effect from radioactive clouds would extend across Asia, possibly to North America. The economic, social, and military costs of such an exchange for the world would be incalculable. Furthermore, a number of oil wells in Iran would be damaged or lost, either by Iranian or U.S. action, leading to a major long-term depletion of oil for the rest of the world. This would likely have a major negative impact on the global economy and a disastrous one on the globe's ecology.

We would all watch on television this spring—not hockey games involving the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators, or basketball between the Toronto Raptors and Boston Celtics, but a desperate game of American versus Russian roulette, in which all of us would be the final losers.

In the words of Indian novelist Arundhati Roy: "The nuclear bomb is the most anti-democratic, anti-human, outright evil thing that mankind has ever made.... This world of ours is four thousand, six hundred million years old. It could end in an afternoon."

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