

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Faith leaders call for diplomacy, not war, with Iran.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

—*Matthew 5:9*

Jesus' words "children of God" are directed not to those who merely proclaim their opposition to violence and war, but to those who seek better, life-saving ways to resolve inevitable human conflicts.

A United States war with Iran would be an unmitigated disaster, morally and religiously indefensible.

U.S. faith leaders must be among the first to rise up, say "No!"—and call for better, more effective, life-saving ways forward.

Given the escalation of confrontation between the United States and Iran, it is time for leaders from our faith communities to point to more effective ways to transform conflict and to speak strongly against military action that could have enormous human and financial costs, and which could easily and broadly escalate.

With tensions rising over attacks on chemical tankers, the shooting down of a pilotless U.S. surveillance drone, and threatened retaliatory air strikes, urgent action is needed now, particularly in the context of an unraveling Iran nuclear deal from which the U.S. irresponsibly withdrew.

Therefore, we as U.S. faith leaders demand that our political leaders seek real diplomatic and humanitarian solutions to the current crisis and refrain from military confrontation with Iran.

While we agree that Iran should repudiate terrorism and not resume uranium enrichment, we stand as religious leaders to say that war is not the answer with Iran and is unjustifiable on moral and religious grounds. Such war would likely have disastrous human and environmental consequences, would be strategically unnecessary, and would lead to regional destabilization, increased terrorism, and unsustainable financial burdens.

Since the start of the war in Iraq, the cost of wars in the Middle East has been almost \$6 trillion and 500,000 lives lost. As people of faith, we are motivated by the humanitarian needs and suffering of all people, including the Iranians, who are already afflicted by severe sanctions and who would be the principal victims of military confrontation. We urge our political leaders to learn from the failed policies of the past. Preventing another costly and unjust U.S. war in the Middle East is a moral imperative.

It is time for a different approach.

1The United States should offer to return immediately to the Iran nuclear deal and use the resulting discussions with Iran to engage in an effective diplomatic process for enhancing regional security. In the meantime, we urge the United Nations and governments in Europe and beyond to create a new forum for diplomacy with Iran, an international platform that could help restore the positive momentum created by the Iran deal and address the multiple geopolitical issues at the roots of the current confrontation, some of which were not covered in the agreement.

2The United States should end its policy of harsh and punitive trade sanctions against the Iranian people. Some targeted sanctions may be appropriate to counter Iranian support for armed militancy and weapons proliferation in the region, but these measures should be multilateral in nature and targeted against Iranian officials, not against the entire economy or the general population.

3If necessary, establish safeguards for commercial shipping in the Gulf. The international naval patrols that have helped to stem piracy off the coast of Somalia may provide a model. This would require agreement from multiple countries and a willingness by the United States to cooperate with other states in coordinated operations. In an atmosphere of close confrontation, blunders or isolated incidents must not be used as a pretext for escalating military conflict.

In all these actions, we pray that our government will step back from military acts as an option in this crisis and instead be guided by political wisdom, international legal standards, and the ethical principles of peacemaking, humanitarianism, and civilian immunity. Threats, tearing up diplomatic agreements, and punishing the Iranian people have not worked and are making matters worse.

We call for a different way. Our scriptures instruct us to avoid war and to live as peaceably as possible with all. We call on all our religious leaders, theologians, clergy, and laypersons to speak out against the option of war with Iran. Loving peace is never enough; we must stop making war and do the hard work of learning to make peace, which will require courage, calm resolve, and responsible leadership.