

Bush's CIA Director: We Determined Attacking Iran Was A Bad Idea

By Josh Rogin

January 21, 2012 "FP" -- President **George W. Bush's** administration concluded that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities would be a bad idea -- and would only make it harder to prevent Iran from going nuclear in the future, former CIA and National Security Agency (NSA) chief Gen. **Michael Hayden** said Thursday.

"When we talked about this in the government, the consensus was that [attacking Iran] would guarantee that which we are trying to prevent -- an Iran that will spare nothing to build a nuclear weapon and that would build it in secret," Hayden told a small group of experts and reporters at an event hosted by the Center for the National Interest.

Hayden served as director of the NSA from 1999 to 2005 and then served as CIA director from 2006 until February 2009. He also had a 39-year career at the Air Force, which he ended as a four-star general.

Without an actual occupation of Iran, which nobody wants to contemplate, the Bush administration concluded that the result of a limited military campaign in Iran would be counter-productive, according to Hayden.

"What's move two, three, four or five down the board?" Hayden said, arguing that an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities was only a short-term fix. "I don't think anyone is talking about occupying anything."

Hayden then said he didn't believe the Israelis could or even would strike Iran -- that only the United States has the capability to do it -- but either way, it's still a bad idea.

"The Israelis aren't going to [attack Iran] ... they can't do it, it's beyond their capacity. They only have the ability to make this [problem of Iran's nuclear program] worse. We can do a lot better," he said. "Just look at the physics, the fact that this cannot be done in a raid, this has to be done in a campaign, the fact that neither we nor they know where this stuff is. [The Israelis] can't do it, but we can."

Hayden then went into some detail about how a U.S.-led strike on Iran's nuclear facilities could be accomplished, and why it would not solve the Iranian nuclear threat. There would first be a movement of aircraft carriers into the area, Tomahawk

land-attack cruise missile strikes, a diplomatic effort to get Gulf states to give access to their airspace, and "then you would pound it [with airstrikes] over a couple of weeks," Hayden explained.

But he also said that efforts to slow down the nuclear program, through mostly clandestine measures and encouraging internal dissent, is the better course of action.

"Could we go back to July 2009 and see where that could have led?" he said, referring to the Green Movement protests that raged through Iran then but ultimately failed to alter the regime's course. "It's not so much that we don't want Iran to have a nuclear capacity, it's that we don't want *this* Iran to have it ... Slow it down long enough and maybe the character [of the Iranian government] changes."

Hayden's comments track closely with the argument made by **Colin Kahl**, the recently departed head of Middle East policy at the Pentagon, who opposed a military strike on Iran in an article this week in *Foreign Affairs*.

"Even if a U.S. strike went as well ... there is little guarantee that it would produce lasting results," Kahl wrote. "[I]f Iran did attempt to restart its nuclear program after an attack, it would be much more difficult for the United States to stop it."