A high-stakes July 20, 2014 deadline looms. Will Iran's rulers reach a negotiated agreement with the United States and other powers? If not, is a preemptive military strike by Israel or the United States wise? SSN teams up with the "Bridging the Gap" project to offer contrasting analyses by Matthew Gratias, Matthew Kroenig, and Steven Weber.

Recently, yet another round of nuclear nonproliferation negotiations was held between Iran and the "P5 + 1 group," which consists of Germany plus the United States, Russia, China, France, and Great Britain (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council). Talks in late June did not break down, but they did not resolve the toughest issues either. A July 20, 2014 deadline looms for an internationally verifiable agreement – with tense negotiations resuming in early July.

Nuclear nonproliferation has never been the only issue in the difficult relationship between the United States and post-1979 Iran. But it is the issue at the heart of the highest profile international debates, because failure could lead to armed conflict in the already volatile Middle East. If an acceptable agreement is not reached, what could or should the United States – and its Israeli ally – do? Are preemptive military
strikes against Iran's nuclear program a good idea, likely to lead to optimal outcomes?

Drawing on extensive scholarship, three experts – Matthew Gratias of the University of Southern California, Matthew Kroenig of Georgetown University, and Steven Weber of the University of California, Berkeley – offer three very different points of view on these difficult issues, in a set of briefs developed through collaboration between the Scholars Strategy Network and the Bridging the Gap Project.

As featured in an August 2013 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, both SSN and Bridging the Gap are devoted to helping university-based scholars more effectively influence public and policy debates on major issues. SSN members boil down key research findings and arguments in readable short briefs. The Bridging the Gap Project is based at the American University School of International Service and supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It supports policy-relevant scholarship and the development of new professional skills in order to strengthen relationships between scholars studying international relations and comparative politics and broader communities of policymakers and leaders concerned about foreign policy issues.

The set of briefs offered here nicely exemplifies the quality of discussions both SSN and Bridging the Gap aim to foster.

Bruce W. Jentleson, Duke University, member of the Bridging the Gap leadership team and member of the Scholars Strategy Network

As Iranian Negotiations Come to a Head, What are the Best Options for the United States and Israel?

History Shows that President Obama is Wise to Retain a Military Option to Cripple Iran's Nuclear Facilities

Matthew Kroenig, Associate Professor of Government, Georgetown University
Critics claim that military strikes to cripple Iran’s nuclear weapons program would be ineffective and unwise, but the historical record shows that preventive military action has repeatedly helped to prevent dangerous powers from developing nuclear weapons. Military action worked in Nazi Germany at the end of World War II, in the early 1980s in Iraq and Iran, and in 2007 in Syria.

> Attacking Iran's Nuclear Facilities Would Likely Radicalize the Islamic Republic's Government and Politics

Matthew Gratias, PhD Candidate in Political Science and International Relations, University of Southern California

Preemptive military strikes would almost certainly empower hard-line elites in Iranian politics, elites who want to crush popular dissent and revive a militant, militarily aggressive revolutionary style of rule. Unpredictable consequences would follow, and a renewal of Islamic revolutionary radicalism could undercut regional stability and fundamentally harm U.S. interests.

> In Dealing with Iran, the Best Option for Israel is to Strike First – Diplomatically

Steven Weber, Professor of Political Science, The Information School, University of California, Berkeley

And what about Israel? In the event that an agreement with Iran fails or is deemed unacceptable, Israel’s best option is not a military strike. Instead, Israel would be better advised to mount a “diplomatic first strike” – to put itself at the center of a powerhouse alliance of rising economic and technological nations in the Middle East.

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