

What Richard Cohen got wrong about my Iran views

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I hope that Richard Cohen's characterization of my opposition to Israel's use of U.S.-controlled airspace over Iraq as a policy of "we shoot our friends to defend our enemies" is a case of unintentional or exuberant distortion [[op-ed column](#), Feb. 23]. What I have said repeatedly is that an Israeli attack on Iran through U.S.-controlled airspace would make the United States complicit, and the United States would then become the target of Iranian retaliation.

That is why the United States should make it clear that its airspace is not available for a unilateral Israeli attack, and that a violation of it could lead to an incident reminiscent of the attack on the USS Liberty, about which I added "it is nothing to be wished for."

One should not lose sight of the larger issue involved in loose advocacy of an Israeli attack on Iran that would implicate the United States in an act of war. Those advocating such an attack not only overlook the fact that such an incident might be designed to draw the United States into war with Iran but, even worse, the fact that U.S. acquiescence would mean nothing less than abdicating to Israel the decision on whether to go to war. Such an abdication is hardly in America's interest, and it is not the way that decisions involving American lives should be made.

Mr. Cohen also urged President Obama "to borrow a tactic from Richard Nixon and fight crazy with crazy." One might recall here that Nixon initiated in that spirit the bombing of Cambodia in a desperate effort to win the war in Vietnam. The results were not particularly beneficial to the United States. Instead of acting "crazy," one should calculate on the basis of political realities, strategic experience and, above all, America's interests.

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France once put it correctly: An Iranian bomb would be a disaster, but an attack on Iran would be also a disaster. The challenge for the United States is to avoid yet another war that would not only further isolate America in the world, to the benefit of its ill-wishers; the challenge is also to isolate Iran, make it pay a price for its intransigence, and assure Iran's neighbors that U.S. nuclear deterrence is credibly available for their protection.

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