

Harsh sanctions are needed to avert Iran war

by *The Detroit News*

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last year predicted it was "unlikely" the United Nations would take serious action to block its nuclear programs. But unless all nations prove him wrong by enforcing the harshest sanctions, military action is unavoidable.

The maniacal leader of Iran, who has said Israel should be wiped off the map, has played the international community for fools and used the time during the United Nations' inaction to further develop his arsenal. There is little reason to think he'll change his ways without severe punishment.

The U.N. passed new sanctions over the weekend, including a ban on Iranian arms exports and the freezing of assets of 28 groups and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear and missile programs. Iran immediately balked and announced a partial suspension of its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We saw in Iraq what happens when a few nations wink at sanctions and continue to do business with the shunned nation. It leads to the necessity for more aggressive action.

It is essential that all nations - including Russia and China - agree on zero tolerance for Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Nations like Qatar have tried to let Iran off the hook by proposing that all of the Middle East be declared a nuclear-free zone - a slap at Israel, which likely has had nuclear weapons for decades and not used them. This sort of gamesmanship makes it harder to apply the necessary pressure on Iran.

Iran responded to December sanctions by expanding its uranium enrichment program, showing it doesn't believe the U.N. means what it says.

Nor does the country believe the international community will act strongly against it for other cavalier acts, including the taking of 15 British sailors and marines hostage.

Clearly sanctions and international pressure mean nothing. Stronger enforcement against the rogue nation is necessary and it must be applied with universal support.

Iran can't be allowed to arm itself with nuclear weapons or take hostages again. By continuing down its current path, Iran is inviting strikes against its weapons-making facilities and perhaps even broader action.

Better the U.N. act now against Iran with the harshest of sanctions and a diligent enforcement than to see yet another bloody conflict erupt in the Middle East.

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