Statement from the Executive Director on US-Iran Tensions
Jan. 17, 2020

Last week, at the moment of immediate crisis between the United States and Iran, I released the following statement:

“As tensions between the United States and Iran grow, this is a time of intense prayer for our world leaders, and of deep reflection, especially in this Christmas season, on the Prince of Peace. We are committed to continue to pray, advocate, and teach the way of peace. As men religious dedicated to living out the Gospel, we do not believe that violence is a deterrent to violence. Rather, we call for our leaders to model nonviolent engagement. As Pope Francis has said, ‘Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare.’”

Rev. Mark Padrez, O.P.
Executive Director

In light of the ongoing tensions in our world, I now offer this more extensive reflection and a call to action, developed with the Justice and Peace office.

As Catholic men’s religious leaders, we seek to live a life in accord with Jesus: human dignity, priority for those on the margins, nonviolence, and just peace. We are relieved that the U.S. President appears to be backing down from military escalation for now. We also grieve for all those who have died and for their families in this latest episode of violence, including the 176 persons killed in the Ukrainian passenger plane in this escalation of fear and distrust.

We are also particularly concerned about two embedded assumptions that regularly lead the United States into violent action, and three ongoing policies toward Iran and Iraq.

The first assumption is that military violence “deters” others from being violent. Whether it is nuclear weapons, the death penalty, killing, or war, research shows that these strategies do not ultimately function to “deter” but overwhelmingly yield cycles of spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, relational, structural, and cultural violence. That is who we become when we react to conflict with assassinations and missiles. It is a path of mutual destruction.

The second assumption is that “weakness yields aggression” by U.S. adversaries. Passivity is not the only alternative to a military response. Instead, injustice and violence can still be challenged but without succumbing to the same logic. Our society can model the strength not to stoop to simple tit-for-tat violence, to take independent initiatives to build trust, to acknowledge our responsibility for harm, to invest in, train, and support nonviolent resistance movements to the

So, yes peace through strength, but not through military strength. As Pope Francis said, “Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare.” (\textit{June 8, 2014}) He also said, “violence is not the cure for our broken world.” (\textit{Jan. 1, 2017})

Policies

Regarding specific policies, we also strongly object to the policy of focusing on stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon without also working to reduce and ultimately no longer possess nuclear weapons in the U.S. Pope Francis has been very clear that it is immoral to possess such weapons. Further, we disapprove of the increased threats of economic sanctions that normally harm ordinary people and simply maintain levels of bitterness and distrust. Finally, we urge the U.S. to follow the request of the Iraqi parliament and remove all U.S. troops from their country.

As Catholic religious, we will continue to pray, advocate, and teach the nonviolent way of peace.

Action

Contact your Congressperson and the President \url{here} to advocate for a just peace vision not violence with Iran.