Opinion
Editorial



Satellite image shows a close up view of destroyed buildings at Isfahan Nuclear Technology Center, after it was hit by U.S. airstrikes, in Isfahan, Iran, June 22, 2025. (OSV News/Handout via Reuters/Maxar Technologies)

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"My proudest legacy will be that as a peacemaker and unifier," President Donald Trump proclaimed in his inaugural address in January.

Six months later, early Sunday morning, Iran time, the U.S. military, under Trump's enthusiastic direction and without congressional approval, entered the Israeli war against Iran by launching a series of airstrikes on Iran. In close coordination with Israel, bombs caused significant damage to nuclear facilities in Isfahan, Natanz and Fordo, the Pentagon said. Utilizing B-2 stealth bombers based in Missouri, submarine-fired missiles, and bunker-busting munitions, the White House framed the operation as a bold strike to disable Iran's nuclear threat.

The assault represents a dangerous and morally reckless misstep — a betrayal of both Catholic teaching and global conscience. It made Americans less safe. Indeed, Iran responded Monday, firing missiles at U.S. service members at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest American military installation in the Middle East and the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command. Qatar's air defenses intercepted the attack.

Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia was among at least a dozen members of Congress who condemned the action, saying Trump failed to consult with Congress, as required by the U.S. Constitution, before joining Israel's war against Iran.

"Congress needs to authorize a war against Iran," Kaine said on "Face the Nation." "This Trump war against Iran, we have not. Congress should be consulted on it. We were not, and Congress needs to be notified, not after the fact, but in advance. We were not."

To be clear, Iran's ruling regime is deeply repressive and dangerous. It has long enriched uranium in excess of civil uses and in defiance of international norms. It has supported proxy militias across the Middle East, and sponsored terrorist groups that have sown chaos from Lebanon to Yemen. Its leadership routinely engages in brutal repression at home and anti-Western rhetoric abroad.

But for over three decades, five U.S. administrations — Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump (in his first term) and Biden — each faced similar provocations and still chose diplomacy, containment and multilateral pressure over launching a direct military attack.

If past is prologue, the U.S. could be in for a long haul. This is not the first time the United States has started a military action in the Middle East under the banner of

national security. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, based on the inaccurate claim of weapons of mass destruction, led to thousands of U.S. military deaths, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilian deaths, long-term regional destabilization, and the erosion of U.S. moral credibility.

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That history is neither distant nor forgotten. Its consequences are still unfolding. That experience warrants intense scrutiny for this latest decision.

Catholic teaching provides a clear moral framework. The just war tradition, far from granting unrestricted authorization for violence, imposes a significant burden: The use of force must be a last resort; the threat must be both grave and imminent; the response needs to be proportionate; and the goal must be achievable.

On all counts, Trump's Iran strikes fall short. Diplomatic efforts were still underway. There was murky evidence of an imminent threat — no proof that Iran was about to launch a nuclear attack or cross a weaponization threshold.

Even Vice President JD Vance conceded on ABC's "This Week" that U.S. intelligence cannot say where Iran's nuclear stockpile is, whether it was destroyed or even damaged. That leaves the world at risk if Iran secreted the uranium out of those bombed facilities before the strikes, taking it to new venues where the enrichment could proceed unabated and warheads could be built to be placed on missiles. We don't know what comes next.

Dropping bombs is an all-too-easy, but perilous step. Diplomacy is exceedingly difficult, but essential to ensuring world peace.

According to Catholic just war teaching, even evidence of nuclear capability does not warrant preemptive military action. The threat must not only be severe but also imminent. Fear of what might happen someday fails that moral standard.

Acting without that clarity transforms speculation into justification — and risks inviting endless wars, the very thing Trump repeatedly promised on the campaign trail to end.

Hours after the bombing, on the feast of Corpus Christi, Pope Leo XIV expressed dismay in his Angelus message, calling the escalation "alarming" and urging world leaders to "stop the tragedy of war before it becomes an irreparable abyss."

He said plainly: "War does not solve problems; it amplifies them and produces deep wounds ... that take generations to heal." He reminded us that "no armed victory can compensate for the pain of mothers, the fear of children, the stolen future."

In those words, we hear not only the voice of a pope but of a church that is increasingly rejecting war as a means to peace.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican as they join him for the recitation of the Angelus prayer and an appeal for peace hours after the U.S. bombed nuclear enrichment facilities in Iran June 22, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The administration said the United States was at war with Iran's nuclear program, not Iran. That's a distinction without a difference, "It's the same thing," Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Arizona, told NPR. And Trump contradicted his own administration's spin

machine, working overtime after he posted on social media on Sunday, essentially calling for "regime change."

Further evidence that the U.S. was entering Israel's war with Iran was how closely coordinated the attacks were with the Israeli Air Force; Axios reported that Israel, at Trump's request, took out multiple Iranian air defense systems in the 48 hours leading up to the U.S. strike on Iran's Fordo nuclear facility.

It is worth asking — at this moment, more than ever — whether the just war framework remains morally adequate in the nuclear age.

Popes from John XXIII to Francis have raised urgent caution. In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII called for the abolition of nuclear weapons entirely. Pope John Paul II stated in 1982 that in the nuclear age, war is no longer a suitable means of resolving conflict. Pope Francis declared not only the use of nuclear weapons, but even their possession, to be immoral.

These are not abstract theological musings; they are urgent reminders that modern warfare has changed the scale and speed of devastation. When war threatens to poison land, water and future generations, can we still speak of proportionality? When diplomacy is cut short in favor of preemptive strikes on nuclear sites, we fail the "last resort" test.

The Catholic Church, led by popes and informed by centuries of lived experience, is moving beyond just war theory toward a deeper ethic of Gospel nonviolence. Jesus never sanctioned violence in defense of righteousness. He healed enemies, called us to love those who persecute us, and warned that those who live by the sword would perish by it.

The church is rediscovering this radical teaching, not as passivity, but as moral clarity. Gospel nonviolence is not weakness; it represents the hardest and most faithful resistance to the logic of domination.

Trump's entry into war with Iran is not merely a policy blunder; it represents a moral failure. It overlooks history, disregards church teaching, dismisses the counsel of international institutions, and brings the world closer to open conflict in a region that already bears deep wounds.

We call on Catholics — especially those in leadership — to speak clearly and urgently. We call on Leo to dispatch skilled Holy See diplomats to the White House. We urge bishops to raise their voices. We invite theologians and pastors to teach the full cost of violence. And we appeal to all people of conscience to resist the peace-through-strength canard that peace can be built on the ashes of war.

There is another way. It is harder and slower and yet more resilient. And it is the only path consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the path we are called to walk — and to demand from our leaders.