
GEOJURISTODAY
BOLSTERING THE INDIA WAY
SHADOWS
OF THE
CRESCENT
&
STAR
THE IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT IN HISTORICAL & STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

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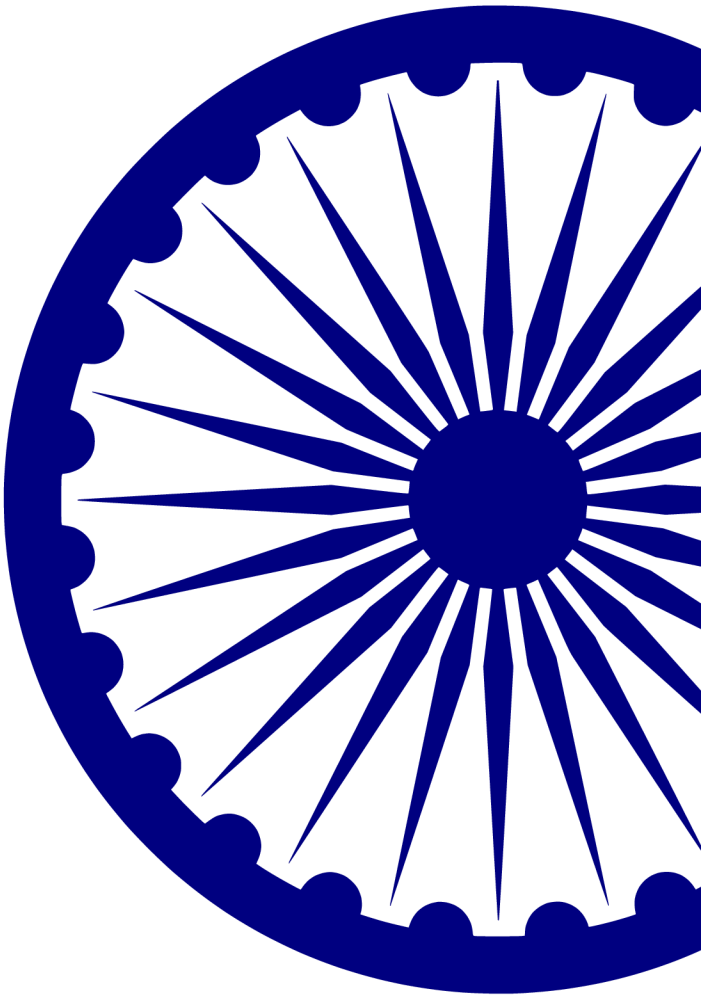

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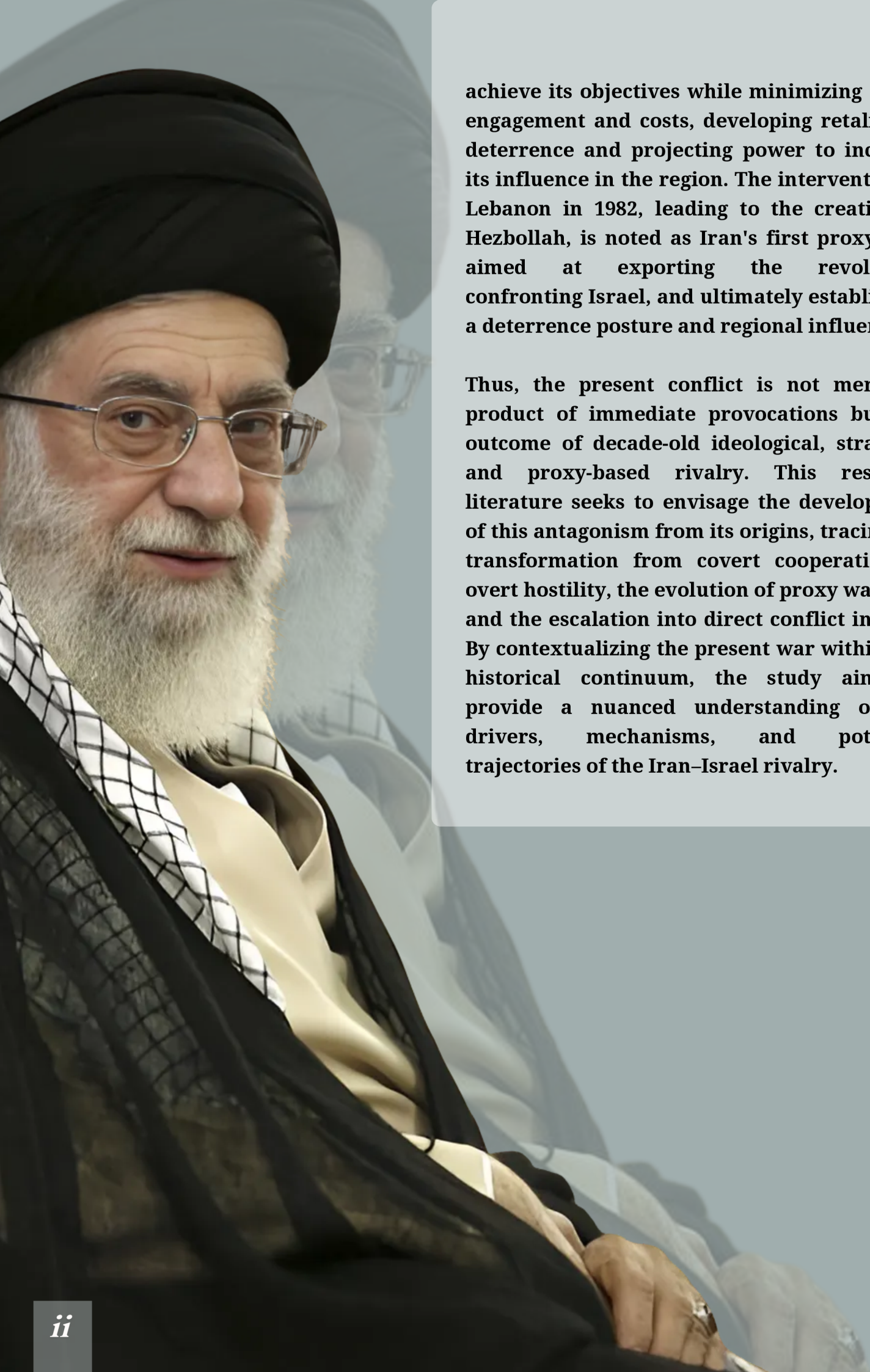
01 ABSTRACT

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran marked a profound shift in the country's foreign policy, thereby, dramatically altering its relationship with Israel. Prior to the revolution, under the Shah, Iran and Israel shared strategic bilateralism, viewing Arab nationalist states as common adversaries and engaging in cooperation on missile development, arms procurement, and security training exemplified by Project Flower and SAVAK-Mossad collaboration. This period was characterized by a pro-Western and pro-Israel stance, with quiet cooperation between the two nations.

Following the revolution, Iran's foreign policy pivoted sharply to an "anti-Western" and "anti-Israel" orientation, thus, transforming Israel from a strategic ally into an ideological enemy. The new regime declared Israel an illegal entity and actively began supporting groups that opposed it; most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian resistance movements like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. This realignment involved Iran aligning with the Arab and Muslim cause against Israel, a stark reversal of its previous strategy.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) further contextualized this shift, with regional and global powers pursuing their own interests amidst the conflict. While Israel publicly condemned Iran's anti-Zionist rhetoric, its strategic approach during the 1980s was more nuanced. The document also highlights Iran's multi-layered proxy strategy, which has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy since the 1980s. Through these proxies, Iran aims to



achieve its objectives while minimizing direct engagement and costs, developing retaliatory deterrence and projecting power to increase its influence in the region. The intervention in Lebanon in 1982, leading to the creation of Hezbollah, is noted as Iran's first proxy war, aimed at exporting the revolution, confronting Israel, and ultimately establishing a deterrence posture and regional influence.

Thus, the present conflict is not merely a product of immediate provocations but the outcome of decade-old ideological, strategic, and proxy-based rivalry. This research literature seeks to envisage the development of this antagonism from its origins, tracing the transformation from covert cooperation to overt hostility, the evolution of proxy warfare, and the escalation into direct conflict in 2025. By contextualizing the present war within this historical continuum, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the drivers, mechanisms, and potential trajectories of the Iran–Israel rivalry.



02

ORIGINS OF THE IRAN-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

The Iran-Israel conflict is rooted in a complex interplay of historical, ideological, and geopolitical factors that have dramatically evolved over the decades. The relationship between the two nations was characterized by a strategic partnership prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. During the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran and Israel, despite not having formal diplomatic recognition, collaborated on various fronts because they were both non-Arab states facing a common geopolitical challenge from hostile Arab neighbors. Their cooperation extended to military intelligence sharing, arms trade, and oil supplies, with Iran serving as a key oil provider to Israel, particularly during the Arab oil embargo of 1973.

The pivotal shift occurred when the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini transformed Iran's political landscape. The revolutionary government adopted a staunchly anti Zionist and anti-Western stance, redefining its foreign policy and regional alliances. This shift included the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel, which was then labelled as the "Little Satan," a designation that encapsulated Iran's opposition to Israel's existence and U.S. influence in the region. One of the symbolic acts of this shift was the handover of the Israeli embassy in Tehran to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), emphasizing Iran's commitment to the Palestinian cause and anti-Israel sentiment.

In the years that followed, Iran and Israel entered a phase of sustained hostility characterized by proxy warfare rather than direct military confrontation.

Iran has actively supported a range of militant organizations opposed to Israel, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and various Shia militias across the Middle East, providing them with military, financial, and political backing. This support is part of Iran's broader strategy to enhance its influence in the region and challenge Israeli and U.S. hegemony.

Conversely, Israel has viewed Iran's regional aspirations, particularly its nuclear program, as direct threats to its national security. In response, Israel has conducted a range of covert operations, including cyberattacks (such as the Stuxnet virus), targeted assassinations of key Iranian nuclear scientists, and frequent airstrikes on Iranian military installations and personnel in Syria. These actions illustrate Israel's commitment to preventing Iran from gaining a stronger foothold near its borders.

Today, the relationship between Iran and Israel adds layers of ideological fervor, historical grievances, and strategic calculations to an already complex rivalry. The interplay of their contrasting worldviews, Israel's pursuit of security and recognition as a Jewish state versus Iran's revolutionary Islamic ethos and support for resistance movements, continues to fuel tensions. The conflict is further complicated by external actors and countries, making it one of the most volatile and significant rivalries in the Middle East, with implications that extend beyond their respective borders, influencing regional stability and international relations.

Pre-1979 Strategic Cooperation Under the Shah

The relationship between Iran and Israel, once characterized by a strategic partnership, has transformed dramatically over the years. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, both nations enjoyed a cooperative alliance under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's rule, focusing on common security and mutual interests.

Their collaboration included intelligence sharing, military cooperation through joint exercises and arms deals, and economic ties where Iran supplied oil to Israel and received advanced technology in return. This pragmatic approach emphasized stability over ideological differences. However, historical events shifted the dynamics, turning the two former allies into adversaries and significantly altering the Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape.





Geopolitical Context of the Cold War and the Middle East

To understand the Iran-Israel relationship prior to 1979, it's important to consider the Cold War context and regional dynamics. Both countries, as non-Arab states, navigated a Middle East influenced by Arab nationalism and Soviet-supported regimes in countries like Egypt and Iraq, which viewed Tehran and Tel Aviv as Western imperial outposts.



Iran, under a secular monarchy, sought modernization and Western alliances, while Israel, facing hostility from Arab neighbors since its 1948 establishment, viewed Iran as a potential partner outside the Arab consensus. Shared challenges, mutual concerns about Soviet influence, and a desire for stability laid the groundwork for cooperation between them.

The Role of the Shah: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's Vision

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran from 1941 until 1979 and significantly influenced the country's foreign policy. He aimed to position Iran as a major regional power, relying on U.S. 3 support and building diverse security partnerships. His pragmatic approach focused on enhancing military capabilities, fostering economic growth, and addressing national security threats.

While Iran did not officially recognize Israel and aligned with the Arab League on Palestinian issues, it maintained a pragmatic, unofficial relationship with Israel based on practical concerns rather than ideological similarities, especially in light of pan-Arab sentiments.

Diplomatic Channels and Backdoor Communications

Iran and Israel have historically lacked formal diplomatic relations, largely due to Iran's need to maintain its status in the Muslim world and its proximity to Arab states.

Nevertheless, informal diplomatic channels were established, with Iran permitting Israel to operate a trade office in Tehran that functioned as a de facto embassy.

Intelligence and Military Cooperation

The Iran-Israel relationship was marked by significant intelligence collaboration from the 1950s to the 1970s. SAVAK (the Iranian security service) and Mossad (the Israeli intelligence agency) worked together, with Mossad training SAVAK operatives and assisting in developing Iran's security infrastructure. In return, Iran provided valuable intelligence on Iraq and hostile Arab states.

Military cooperation also thrived, as Israel helped modernize Iran's military through training, equipment, and logistical support. With Iran's oil revenues and a need for Western weapons, Israel often assisted in procuring sensitive military equipment that might have been difficult to obtain due to political reasons.

Project Flower: A Joint Missile Program

One of the most secretive and ambitious collaborations was Project Flower, a joint missile development program initiated in the late 1970s. Under this program, Iran agreed to finance and host the development of surface-to-surface missiles based on Israeli designs. The goal was for both countries to benefit:

Israel would receive funding for its military research and development, while Iran would gain advanced missile capabilities. Project Flower symbolized the high level of trust and strategic interdependence between the two countries at that time. However, the program was abruptly terminated following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the fall of the Shah's regime.

Economic and Energy Relations

While military and intelligence connections were the foundation of the relationship, economic cooperation also played a significant role. As one of the world's leading oil producers, Iran became a vital energy supplier to Israel, albeit covertly. Despite the official Arab boycott, Iranian oil reached Israel through secret channels, particularly via a pipeline built in collaboration with the Israelis.

The Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline

In 1968, Iran and Israel jointly funded the construction of the Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline, which was designed to transport Iranian crude oil from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. This pipeline provided a crucial alternative to the Suez Canal, which was often closed during Arab-Israeli conflicts. As a result, it became a vital energy supply line for Israel and a profitable venture for Iran.

In return, Israeli companies helped Iran by providing agricultural technologies, irrigation systems, and infrastructure projects. Additionally, Israeli advisors worked in Iran on various initiatives in education, health, and urban planning, supporting the Shah's broader modernization efforts.

Collapse After 1979

The 1979 Islamic Revolution significantly altered the geopolitical landscape. Ayatollah Khomeini’s regime severed ties with Israel, labelling it a "Zionist regime" and aligning with Palestinian causes and groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Israel was surprised by this shift, as the fall of the Shah ended years of cooperation, turning Iran from a key ally into a major adversary.

The Islamic Republic viewed Israel as an illegitimate state, a manifestation of Western imperialism. Ironically, many Israeli-built projects and defense technologies continued operating in Iran for years, even as their origins were increasingly hidden from official narratives

Legacy of the Pre-Revolution Alliance

The pre-1979 relationship between Iran and Israel serves as a compelling example of how strategic necessity can triumph over ideological differences. In a region marked by religious and political tensions, the cooperation between Shah's Iran and Israel emerged from shared threat perceptions and aligned strategic objectives.

This once-strong alliance also illustrates the fragility of relationships between states that lack public transparency and institutional backing. The complete reversal of this relationship following the Islamic Revolution highlights how a change in regime can fundamentally alter foreign policy. In the broader context of Middle Eastern geopolitics, the Iran-Israel partnership of the 1950s to the 1970s remains a remarkable, though often overlooked, chapter in the history of international relations. It serves as a reminder that today's enemies can once have been yesterday's allies.





The 1979 Islamic Revolution and Ideological Realignment

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran was a pivotal political transformation in the Middle East. It not only overthrew the secular monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, but it also established a theocratic regime led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This shift had significant implications for both Iran's domestic policies and its foreign relations, particularly with Israel.

Rise of Khomeinism and Anti-Zionist Doctrine

Khomeinism is a political-religious ideology based on the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini. It advocates for governance led by Islamic jurists under the system of Vilayat-e-Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist).

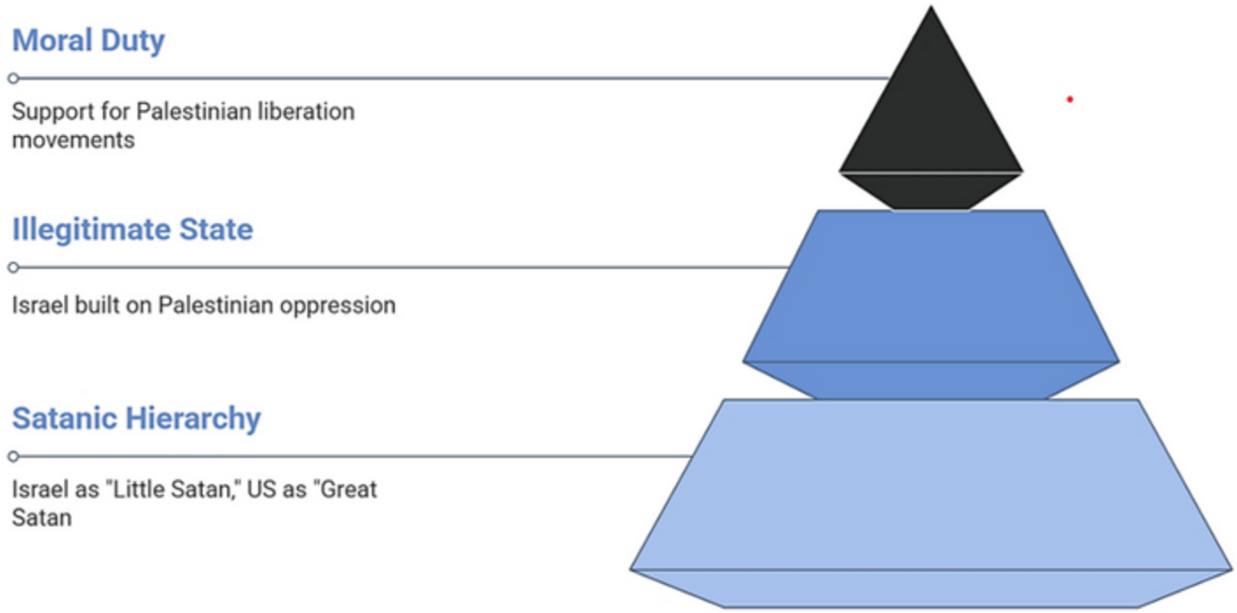
Khomeinism perceives Western imperialism, secularism, and Zionism as corrupt and oppressive forces that must be resisted by Muslims.

Anti-Zionism as a Core Principle

After the revolution, one of the first ideological pillars of the new Islamic Republic was strong opposition to the existence of the State of Israel. Khomeini condemned Israel not only as an occupier of Palestinian lands but also as an extension of Western colonialism and imperialism in the Muslim world.

This ideological shift was significant, it became a core component of Iran's domestic education, media, and foreign policy. State-controlled television, school textbooks, and religious sermons began to depict Israel as an existential enemy. This new perspective rendered any form of cooperation with Israel politically and religiously unacceptable.

Khomeini's Anti-Israel Stance



Military and Intelligence Ties Cut

All the previous military, intelligence, and economic agreements between the two countries, many of them secret, were cancelled. Iran went from being a strategic partner of Israel to becoming one of its most vocal enemies.

Realignment in Regional Politics

Before the revolution, Iran and Israel both viewed Arab nationalist states like Iraq, Egypt, and Syria as threats. After 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran aligned itself with the Arab and Muslim cause against Israel, regardless of ethnic differences.

This realignment reversed Iran's previous foreign policy strategy:

• From pro-Western and pro-Israel → to anti-Western and anti-Israel

• From quiet cooperation with Tel Aviv → to open confrontation and ideological war.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution fundamentally altered Iran's relationship with Israel. Under the Shah, Iran viewed Israel as a strategic ally in the fight against Arab nationalism and Soviet influence. 7 However, with the rise of Khomeinism, Israel shifted from being a partner to becoming an ideological enemy.

Strategic Posturing: 1980s to Early 2000s

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988): A Shifting Geopolitical Battlefield

The Iran-Iraq War was one of the longest and most brutal conflicts of the 20th century. It began when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, taking advantage of the chaos that followed the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The war involved regional and global powers, each pursuing its own strategic interests.

Although Israel publicly condemned Iran's revolutionary rhetoric and its anti-Zionist stance, its strategy during the 1980s was more complex. Despite the outwardly hostile ideology, Israel covertly supported Iran during the war, primarily because it viewed Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a more immediate threat.

Covert Israeli Support to Iran: Strategic Calculations

Israel's support for Iran during the war was influenced by a combination of realpolitik and strategic necessity. Saddam Hussein's Iraq was viewed as a more formidable and hostile power toward Israel for several reasons:

- Its military arsenal was supplied by the Soviet Union.
- It adopted an aggressive pan-Arab nationalist stance.
- It actively participated in wars against Israel in 1948, 1967, and 1973.

In contrast, post-revolutionary Iran, despite its ideological opposition to Israel, was geographically farther away and posed a less immediate threat. Therefore, Israel, with tacit cooperation from the United States, engaged in covert arms transfers to Iran, aiming to prolong the war and keep both adversaries weakened



Operation Tipped Kettle (1981-1983): The Arms Pipeline

Operation Tipped Kettle was a secret initiative through which U.S.-supplied arms, originally meant for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon, were diverted to Iran via Israel.

- **After the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) seized large quantities of Soviet-made arms from PLO caches.**
- **These arms (AK-47s, RPGs, mortars, etc.) were transferred to Iran in the early 1980s, with U.S. approval, despite the formal embargo against Tehran.**
- **This operation became one of the early instances of U.S.-Israeli cooperation in supporting Iran covertly, laying the groundwork for the broader Iran-Contra Affair in the mid-1980s.**



Hezbollah's Emergence in Lebanon: Iran's Proxy Strategy and Israel's Invasion Fallout

Context: Lebanon's Civil War and Regional Power Struggles (1975-1990)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Lebanon was severely fragmented due to its civil war, which was characterized by sectarian violence, foreign intervention, and power vacuums. The country turned into a battleground for various militias, Palestinian factions, and external influences from Syria, Israel, and Iran.

Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon: Operation Peace for Galilee



Consequences of the Invasion

• While the PLO was driven out (eventually relocating to Tunisia), the invasion backfired in many ways.

• The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) became bogged down in prolonged occupation, facing guerrilla resistance.

• The 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres (by Lebanese Christian militias with IDF complicity) caused international outrage and increased anti-Israel sentiment.

Iran's Strategic Response: Projection of Power via Proxy

In response to Israel's invasion and taking advantage of the chaos in Lebanon, Iran deployed 1,500 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, with the approval of Syria

Goals of Iranian Involvement:

- **Export the Islamic Revolution ideology**
- **Build an anti-Israel resistance front in the Arab world**
- **Counterbalance Israeli and Western influence in Lebanon**

Long-Term Consequences

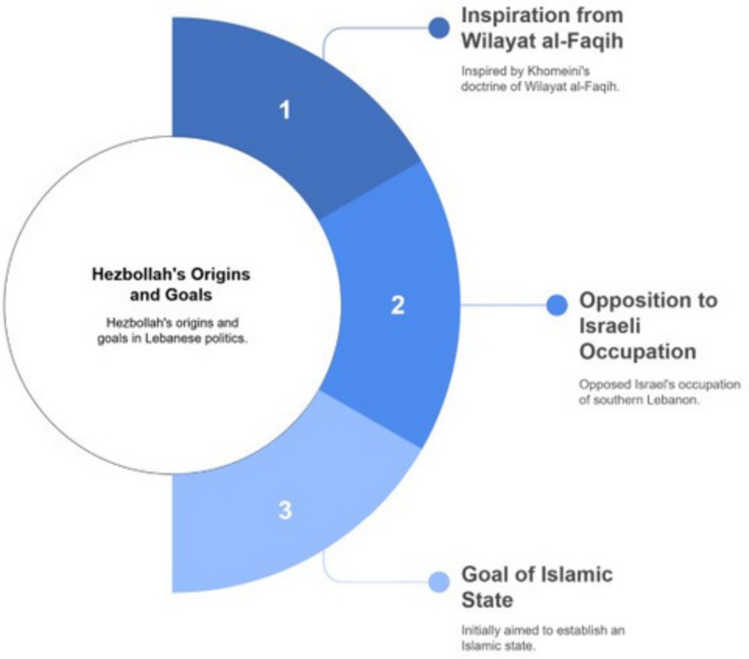
- **Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 was seen as a victory for Hezbollah and boosted its regional prestige.**
- **Hezbollah evolved into a powerful hybrid actor, a political party, militant group, and social welfare provider.**
- **Iran successfully established a durable proxy on Israel's northern border, giving it strategic depth and deterrent capability.**
- **Hezbollah became central to the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance", along with Syria and Palestinian factions like Islamic Jihad.**

Emergence of Hezbollah (1985)

Iran's support led to the formation of Hezbollah (Party of God) around 1982–1985 from various Shia Islamist groups and disaffected Lebanese Shia, particularly in the south and Beirut suburbs.

Support from Iran:

- **Financial, military, and ideological support via the IRGC**
- **Establishment of social services and schools to gain local legitimacy**
- **Training in guerrilla warfare and intelligence**



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The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon aimed to eliminate threats from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), but it unintentionally created a more powerful and ideologically committed adversary: Hezbollah. With support from Iran, Hezbollah emerged as a model for Iranian proxy warfare, effectively combining military resistance, ideological influence, and social services to establish itself as a significant regional player. The impact of this strategic approach continues to shape Middle Eastern geopolitics today.

Nuclear Shadows and Regional Realignments: Iran, Israel, and the Shifting Geopolitics of the Middle East

The threat of nuclear proliferation has long cast a shadow over the Middle East, a region already known for its volatility. While Israel remains the region's undeclared nuclear power, Iran's nuclear program began to develop in the late 20th century, causing significant concern for Israel and becoming a central issue in U.S. strategic realignment after the Cold War.

From the late 1990s into the early 21st century, the dynamics of suspicion, intelligence, diplomacy, and preemptive actions shaped regional relationships.

Early Suspicions of Iranian Nuclear Ambitions

Iran's nuclear program originated in the 1950s under the Shah, supported by the United States through the "Atoms for Peace" initiative. However, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 paused the program, as Ayatollah Khomeini initially denounced nuclear weapons as un-Islamic. By the 1990s, particularly after the Iran-Iraq War, suspicions grew in the West and among regional nations that Iran had secretly resumed efforts to develop nuclear capabilities, especially:

•Nuclear enrichment facilities were being built in secret (e.g., Natanz and Arak).
• Iran acquired centrifuge technology from the A.Q. Khan network (Pakistan).
• The lack of transparency with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised red flags.

Iran insisted its program was purely peaceful, aimed at energy production, but its heavy investment in dual-use technology (civilian and military) led to increasing scrutiny.

Israeli Intelligence Responses: Early Detection and Strategic Alarm

Israel, viewing any potential nuclear-armed rival in the region as an existential threat, was among the first to raise alarms over Iran's nuclear ambitions.
Israel's goal was clear: prevent Iran from reaching nuclear "breakout capability", the point at which it could rapidly build a weapon if it chose to.

Aspect	*Details*
Mossad Surveillance	Since the 1990s, Mossad monitored Iranian nuclear activity. By the early 2000s, it had identified secret facilities like Natanz and Arak before public disclosure.
Cyber Warfare Preparations	Israel, with the U.S., developed cyber weapons to sabotage Iran's nuclear program. A major example is Stuxnet, deployed in the late 2000s, which disrupted hundreds of Iranian centrifuges.
Strategic Warnings	Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu raised alarms globally, using forums like the UN General Assembly. In 2012, he presented a cartoon bomb diagram to dramatize Iran's nuclear threat.



U.S. Alignment and the Shifting Strategic Landscape

1990s-Early 2000s: Watchful Concern

During the Clinton administration, the U.S. was cautious but aware of Iran's growing capabilities. Sanctions were imposed, and non-proliferation became a key aspect of U.S. Middle East policy.

Post-9/11 Shift: Axis of Evil and Isolation

President George W. Bush labelled Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" in 2002, citing nuclear ambitions and sponsorship of terrorism. This rhetoric intensified Israeli-U.S. alignment on Iran:

- Joint intelligence sharing increased.
- Pressure campaigns at the IAEA pushed for inspections and reports on Iranian violations. 13
- The U.S. Congress passed multiple rounds of sanctions targeting Iran's energy and banking sectors

Cooperation and Divergence Over Time

While the U.S. and Israel remained tightly aligned in diagnosing the threat, they began to differ on how to respond:

- Israel favored preemption and unilateral action, even considering airstrikes against Iranian facilities.
- The U.S. prioritized multilateral diplomacy, especially under the Obama administration, which culminated in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), a move opposed by Israel.

A Strategic Pivot Point

Iran's nuclear program has reshaped regional alliances by strengthening Israeli-U.S. coordination and introducing new security challenges. Despite not testing a nuclear weapon, the potential for weaponization has created a regional "nuclear shadow," fueling proxy conflicts and arms races.

Israel's intelligence efforts have highlighted Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the U.S. has increasingly aligned with Israeli assessments, illustrating how perceived threats can unite allies and reshape the geopolitical landscape

The Proxy Arena (2006-2018): The Second Lebanon War and Hezbollah's Transformation

From 2006 to 2018, the Middle East experienced a significant evolution in warfare, characterized more by non-state actors supported by regional powers than by traditional state armies. A prominent example of this shift was the Second Lebanon War in 2006, which highlighted Hezbollah's transformation not only into a guerrilla force but also into a quasi-military organization closely aligned with Iranian strategy.

During this period, Hezbollah underwent a dramatic enhancement in its capabilities, tactical doctrine, and overall role, effectively turning southern Lebanon into a testing ground for Iranian proxy warfare.



Prelude to Conflict: Hezbollah's Growing Confidence

By 2006, Hezbollah had emerged as a dominant political and military force in Lebanon. Its victory in 2000, when Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon after years of occupation, bolstered Hezbollah's credibility and legitimacy among Lebanese Shia and throughout the Arab world.

However, Hezbollah's strategy became increasingly aligned with Iran's broader geopolitical goals, particularly in countering Israeli and U.S. influence in the region. With the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) acting as both a mentor and financier, Hezbollah evolved from a resistance movement into Iran's most powerful regional proxy.

The 2006 Second Lebanon War: A Turning Point

Trigger and Initial Clash. On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah initiated a cross-border raid, resulting in the death of several Israeli soldiers and the capture of two. In response, Israel launched a full-scale military operation into Lebanon. What was initially expected to be a swift campaign turned into a 34-day war, highlighting Hezbollah's military evolution.

Tactical Surprises and Strategic Stalemate

• Hezbollah's Utilization of Iranian Doctrine: Trained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hezbollah employed tactics similar to those of Iranian asymmetric warfare. This included the use of decentralized cells, extensive tunnel networks, urban ambushes, and long-range rocket fire.

• Advanced Weaponry: Hezbollah deployed sophisticated weapons supplied by Iran, such as AT-14 Kornet anti-tank missiles and C-802 radar-guided cruise missiles, including one that successfully struck an Israeli warship. • Psychological and Media Warfare: Hezbollah managed the narrative by utilizing real-time messaging and propaganda, portraying itself as the underdog, akin to David facing Goliath.

Despite Israel's significant air and ground superiority, Hezbollah managed to withstand the conflict and was even celebrated throughout the Arab world for its resistance against Israel. The war concluded with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which mandated a ceasefire and the deployment of UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon.

Iranian Training and Doctrine: The Shadow Play

Iran's role in Hezbollah's performance in 2006 was unmistakable.

Aspect	*Details*
Training Camps	Hezbollah fighters trained in IRGC-run camps in Iran, gaining expertise in anti-tank warfare, explosives, intelligence, and urban defence tactics.
Doctrine Transfer	Hezbollah adopted Iran's hybrid warfare doctrine, merging guerrilla and conventional tactics, a model later emulated by Iraqi militias, Houthis, and groups in Syria.
Weapons Pipeline	Iran provided advanced missile technology and weaponry, enabling Hezbollah to fire over 4,000 rockets into northern Israel during the 2006 conflict.

IRGC-Quds Force Influence

2006-2018: The Wider Proxy Arena

The years following the war saw Hezbollah increasingly integrated into Iran's Axis of Resistance, operating in multiple regional theatres:

• Syria (2011 onwards): Hezbollah played a frontline role in supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime, gaining experience in conventional warfare against insurgents and jihadists.

• Iraq and Yemen: Hezbollah trainers, under Iranian supervision, were reported to be advising Shia militias and Houthis, exporting tactics refined in Lebanon.

• Israeli Concerns: By 2018, Israeli defence officials described Hezbollah as the "strongest nonstate military actor in the world," viewing its alignment with Iran as a strategic encirclement threat.

The 2006 Second Lebanon War highlighted the evolving nature of warfare in the Middle East, showcasing Hezbollah's resilience and its alignment with Iran. This conflict marked a shift in how proxy forces could confront modern militaries. From 2006 to 2018, Iran advanced its strategy of using asymmetric proxies to exert influence without direct conflict, with Hezbollah becoming a key regional force. The war redefined deterrence and prompted Israel to rethink its military doctrines, solidifying Iran's role in modern proxy warfare.

The Syrian Civil War New Front: Iran's Expansion and Israel's Shadow War

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 transformed Syria from a local battleground into a regional arena for geopolitical conflict, particularly between Iran and Israel. What started as a domestic uprising quickly evolved into a complex proxy war involving multiple actors, including Iran, Hezbollah, Russia, the United States, Turkey, and Israel. For Tehran, the war provided an opportunity to strengthen a strategic corridor extending from Tehran to Beirut.

In contrast, for Israel it presented a clear and imminent threat

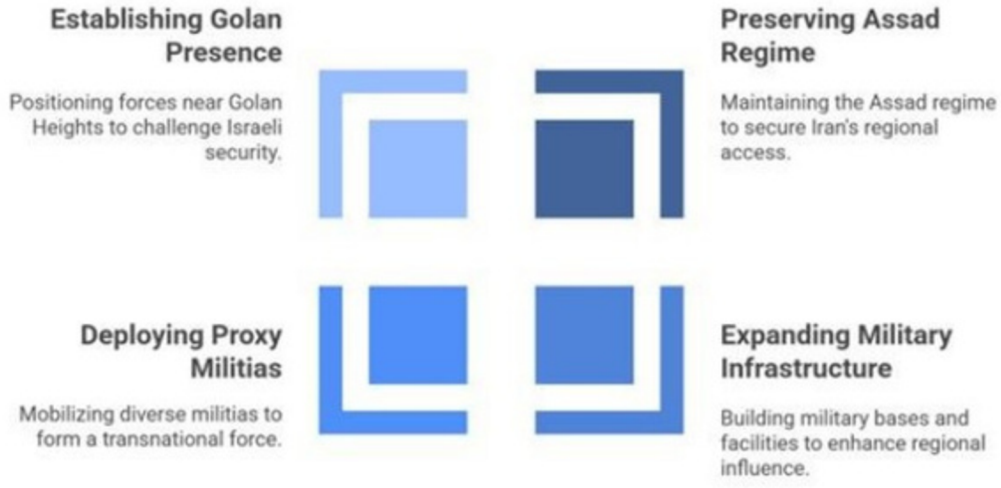
As Iran established its military presence across Syria, Israel chose not to formally declare war but instead launched an ongoing campaign of targeted airstrikes, cyber operations, and intelligence warfare, resulting in a quiet yet significant conflict.

Iranian Entrenchment Near Israeli Borders: Strategic Depth in the Levant

Iran entered the Syrian conflict early, aiming to prop up the Assad regime, its key regional ally and prevent the collapse of the so-called "Axis of Resistance," which includes Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and various Iraqi and Palestinian militias.



Strategic Objectives of Iran



This growing footprint allowed Iran to pressure Israel from a new axis, supplementing Hezbollah's presence in Lebanon with potential second front capabilities.

Israeli Airstrikes and Intelligence Warfare: The Campaign Between the Wars

Facing an evolving threat on its northern border, Israel adopted a low-intensity yet relentless military strategy to roll back Iranian influence in Syria, what Israeli officials call the "Campaign Between the Wars" (Hebrew: MABAM).

Russia's Complicated Role

After its military intervention in 2015, Russia effectively became the controller of Syria's airspace, which complicated Israeli military operations. Despite the cooperation between Russia and Iran in supporting Assad, Israel and Russia established a deconfliction mechanism to prevent direct confrontations. Moscow generally overlooked Israeli airstrikes, provided they did not pose a direct threat to Assad. This suggests a tacit approval of Israel's efforts to limit Iran's influence in the region.

Key Features of Israel's Response:

Category	*Details*
Precision Airstrikes	From 2013 onward, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes, intensifying after 2017. Targets included: • IRGC & Hezbollah command centres • Weapon convoys to Lebanon • Iranian drones and air defence systems • Munitions factories and depots Key Example: January 2019 strike near Damascus, destroying weapons depots and killing dozens of IRGC personnel.
Intelligence Superiority	Mossad and Unit 8200 provided real-time battlefield intelligence. Notable achievements include: • The 2018 nuclear archive operation in Tehran • Use of satellite surveillance, human assets, and cyber tools • Ability to monitor and pre-empt Iranian deployments with minimal Israeli casualties.
Cyber Warfare	Cyber sabotage operations were conducted covertly against Iranian infrastructure in Syria. Aims included:
	• Disrupting command chains • Slowing logistics • Introducing paranoia within Iran-aligned groups.

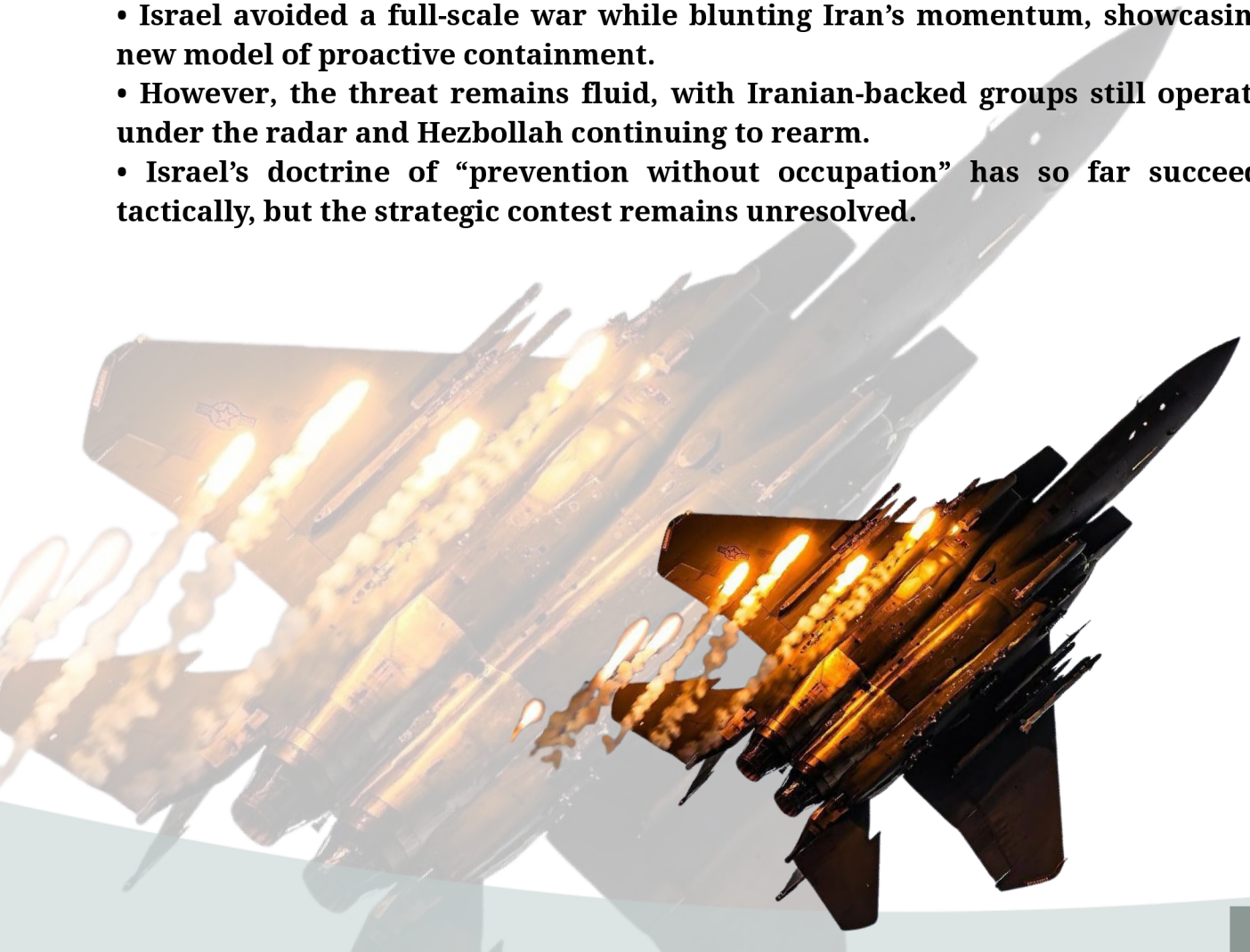
Outcomes and Strategic Implications

For Iran:

• Despite massive investment in Syria, Iran failed to establish uncontested control near the Israeli border due to persistent Israeli intervention.
• Iranian assets were forced to reposition deeper into Syria (near Deir ez-Zor or T-4 airbase) or operate with greater secrecy.
• However, Iran succeeded in keeping Assad in power and institutionalizing proxy networks in Syria.

For Israel:

• Israel avoided a full-scale war while blunting Iran's momentum, showcasing a new model of proactive containment.
• However, the threat remains fluid, with Iranian-backed groups still operating under the radar and Hezbollah continuing to rearm.
• Israel's doctrine of "prevention without occupation" has so far succeeded tactically, but the strategic contest remains unresolved.



A New Kind of War

The Syrian Civil War has ignited a new chapter in the age-old rivalry between Israel and Iran, shifting the battleground from traditional warfare to one dominated by drones, airstrikes, espionage, and satellite surveillance. Iran's growing influence in Syria represents a daring expansion of its regional reach, while Israel's formidable counter-campaign underscores its unmatched intelligence and air superiority. Despite the chaos and fragmentation within Syria, it has evolved into a strategic chessboard where Iran and Israel continuously test the limits of escalation and restraint.

This covert conflict may not always be visible to the public eye, but its profound strategic implications resonate throughout the entire region, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and action.



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03

STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHY: TERRAIN AS FORCE MULTIPLIER



MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

Iran's topography is dominated by two major mountain ranges: the Zagros Mountains in the west and the Alborz Mountains in the north. The Zagros Mountains stretch over 1,500 km from the northwest to the southeast of the country, forming a natural barrier that has historically protected Iran from invasions. The Alborz Mountains, which run parallel to the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, contain Iran's highest peak, Mount Damavand, standing at 5,610 meters. These mountain ranges have had a profound impact on Iran's internal cohesion and defence strategy. The rugged terrain has made transportation and communication difficult, contributing to the relative isolation of various regions within the country. This isolation has fostered a degree of regionalism, with distinct cultural and linguistic groups developing in different parts of the country.

DESERTS AND ARID CLIMATE

Approximately one-third of Iran's land area is covered by deserts, with the Dasht-e-Kavir and Dasht-e-Lut being the most prominent. These deserts are among the hottest and driest places on Earth, making them largely uninhabitable and unsuitable for agriculture. The arid climate of these regions has limited Iran's agricultural output, forcing the country to rely heavily on irrigation and making water resources a critical concern for the government.

The scarcity of arable land and water has also influenced population distribution, with the majority of Iran's population concentrated in the more fertile regions to the north and west of the country, particularly along the Caspian Sea and in the foothills of the Zagros and Alborz mountains. This uneven population distribution has implications for economic development and political stability, as the government must manage the needs of densely populated urban areas alongside the more sparsely populated and underdeveloped rural regions (Sugihartono, 2024).



URBAN SETTLEMENT

Most of Iran’s population is urban. After a period of rapid urbanization from the 1960s into the first decade of the 2000s, about three-fourths of Iran’s population lived in urban areas, compared to just one-third in the 1950s. Causes of this rapid shift in settlement distribution included industrialization, social and political transformations, and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). Tehran, 21 the capital and largest city, is separated from the Caspian Sea by the Elburz Mountains. Isfahan, about 250 miles (400 km) south of Tehran, is the second most important city and is famed for its architecture. There are few cities in central and eastern Iran, where water is scarce, although lines of oases penetrate the desert.

Most towns are supplied with water by qanāt, an irrigation system by which an underground mountain water source is tapped and the water channelled down through a series of tunnels, sometimes 50 miles (80 km) in length, to the town level. Towns are, therefore, often located a short distance from the foot of a mountain.

HARDENED INFRASTRUCTURE

Iran's nuclear programme began in the 1950s with US assistance under the Shah's regime, having signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at the time. However, the trigger for the clandestine programme came after Iran suffered nearly 300,000 casualties in a war launched by Iraq in 1980 which was backed by Saudi Arabia and the United States.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution and subsequent geopolitical tensions, Iran's nuclear activities raised international suspicion, particularly after an Iranian opposition group revealed undeclared facilities in 2002. This led to mediation efforts by the E3 (France, Germany, and the UK) and heightened scrutiny by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Joshi, 2025).

Israel: Narrow Strategic Depth, Iron Dome Zones, Urban Vulnerability

Strategic Depth

Strategic depth is a military doctrine that refers to the distances between the front lines and the belligerents' capital cities, industrial zones, centres of population etc. In simple terms, the greater the distance between an enemy threat and what needs to be protected, the greater the strategic depth. Israel is a small country and is ranked 46th in the world in terms of land area. Since Israel's creation in 1948 at the tragic expense of the Palestinians, the state has been worried about its lack of strategic depth as well as its antagonistic Arab neighbours.

Its internationally recognized borders leave it just 137 kms across its widest and 14 km at its narrowest points. Moreover, Israel's population is small, and it relies on reservists as their onground combatants, juxtaposed to Arab countries and their historically large standing armies. To make things worse, Israel's "population, industry, and military infrastructure are heavily concentrated and within easy reach from the borders." Due to such confines, the country fashioned an offensive approach to warfare in contrast to adopting a more defensive "attack when attacked" posture. It was actually the country's first Prime Minister Ben-Gurion that supported this security policy of "shifting combat onto enemy soil given Israel's lack of strategic depth". Israel also partook in what can be called "artificial strategic depth" where its settlements, among other things, are rtified. It also aims to win wars as soon as possible due to such strategic limitations Therefore, the country uses nuclear deterrence and advanced firepower to discourage attacks from neighbouring Arab states and attack "pre-emptively should deterrence seems to be eroding."

While Israel today might be in a relatively safer environment since its independence, with some Arab states teetering and others placated, the threats to its existence are still palpable, as evidenced by the current war. Non-state actors such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah are enemies of the state and are the de facto fighting force of the oppressed Palestinians. While Hamas and Islamic Jihad do not have any kind of tanks, aircraft, or large standing armies to invade Israel effectively, their ability to launch countless rockets into Israel means that strategic depth is limited for the state. Due to this, Israel has invaded Gaza multiple times and has pursued ignominious military operations to squash Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Besides pre-emption and swift action, Israel uses the "deliberate use of disproportionate violence against civilians" as a "core part" of its military doctrine. Statistical evidence indicates that since the Israeli war in Gaza (2008–09) up until the May 2021 conflict, 18,992 Palestinians (civilians plus combatants) have died compared to 1,563 Israeli civilians and combatants; this means that a staggering 92.39% of casualties have been Palestinian (Ishfaq, 2023).

Iron Dome Zones

Israel's Iron Dome air defence system has intercepted thousands of rockets since it went into operation in 2011, providing the country with crucial cover during times of conflict. It has been heavily relied upon to protect military and civilian sites from frequent barrages of rockets fired from Gaza and Lebanon in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. The Iron Dome is one part of Israel's multi-tiered missile defence systems and is designed to intercept short-range rockets at a distance of up to 70 kilometres (43 miles).

Each Iron Dome battery is made up of three main sections: a radar detection system, a computer to calculate the incoming rocket's trajectory, and a launcher that fires interceptors if the rocket is deemed likely to hit a built-up or strategic area. It sits alongside other missile defence systems like the Arrow, which counters ballistic missiles, and David's Sling, for medium-range rocket or missile attacks (Presse, 2024).

Urban Vulnerability

The great majority of the population, both Jewish and Arab, reside in urban areas. As the industrial and service sectors of the economy have grown, the two large conurbations of Tel Aviv–Yafo and Haifa, along the coastal plain, have come to house more than half of the country’s population. The government has made great efforts to prevent the population from becoming overconcentrated in these areas, overseeing in both the north and south the development of new towns occupied largely by the country’s most recent immigrants.

These towns serve as centres of regional settlement and fulfil specialized economic functions, such as the manufacture of textiles, clothing, machinery, electronic equipment, and computer software. One such place, Beersheba, in the northern Negev, grew from a planned new town founded on a small older settlement in the 1950s into a city, the result of waves of Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the former Soviet Union(Stone 2025).

Maritime Chokepoints: Strait of Hormuz vs Eastern Mediterranean

Choke points are strategic, narrow passages that connect two larger areas to one another. When it comes to maritime trade, these are typically straits or canals that see high volumes of traffic because of their optimal location. The Strait of Hormuz is positioned between Oman and Iran. The Strait of Hormuz acts as a connector between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, eventually leading to the Arabian Sea. Though just 33 km wide at its tightest stretch, commercial vessels follow e
ven narrower, well-regulated lanes within the strait.

This makes the short and narrow waterway route handle nearly 20% of the world`s oil trade, making it the globe's most critical energy chokepoint. According to maritime analyst David Brewster, in 2011 alone, tankers passing through the Strait carried over one-third of the world's seaborne oil, with countries like India, China, Japan, and South Korea heavily reliant on it.
Between 2009 and 2013, more oil flowed through Hormuz than through any other global route, including the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca.

The Strait of Hormuz is not just a narrow waterway; it is a confluence of history, energy politics, and international rivalry. From colonial ambitions to modern military standoffs, its importance has remained constant across centuries.

As the world becomes more energy-dependent and geopolitics more unpredictable, the Strait is set to stay at the heart of global strategic calculations (Mishra, 2025). One of world's famous corridor, The Suez Canal is artificial waterway located in Egypt for international shipping and strategic route for Persian Gulf to Europe and North America. Basically, this canal connects with Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean through Red Sea, Gulf of Suez and The Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, it extends from Port Said in North and Port Tewfik at city of Suez in South with the length of 193.30 Km. Therefore, The Suez Canal is shortest way to travel Indian Ocean to Atlantic Ocean avoiding passage through Southern tip of Africa and it reduces passage considerably by 6500Km.



The Canal has been constructed by Suez Canal Company between 1859 and 1869 and opened for shipping movements on 17th November 1869. Over the past two decades, The Suez Canal has experienced vast development in maritime trade and between 2000 to 2015, the Map of Suez Canal. 8 region's food imports through the canal have been grew by 120%. Therefore, it is evident that the Suez Canal immensely contributes to the global maritime trade as a vital maritime choke point.

The three top global chokepoints, the Suez Canal, and the straits of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb are located in the Middle East. The Suez Canal and the SUMED Pipeline are strategic routes for Persian Gulf oil and natural gas shipments to Europe and North America. Located in Egypt, the Suez Canal connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez with the Mediterranean Sea. The Bab-el-Mandeb strait is located between the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.



There is no doubt that the inability of oil to transit these major chokepoints, due to their closure, even temporarily, would lead to substantial supply delays and higher shipping costs, resulting in higher world energy prices. The alternatives to get around these chokepoints are, to date, very limited. One of these is the pipeline in Saudi Arabia, which the state-owned company Saudi Aramco recently renewed and extended; thanks to this pipeline crude oil from the Persian Gulf arrives directly in the Red Sea, and then enters the Mediterranean (Manda, 2020).



Geography of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza as Proxy theatres

Syria

Syria shares borders with Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel and Lebanon to the southwest. . This positioning situates Syria as a gateway between the Arab world and Eurasia. Historically, its location has allowed it to influence regional politics and act as a buffer zone in conflicts involving these neighbours Syria serves as a critical link in Iran's "axis of resistance" against Israel. Iranianbacked militias operate in Syria, and the country provides a conduit for arms and support to Hezbollah. This has made Syria a key battleground in the broader conflict between Iran and Israel (Amir, 2024)

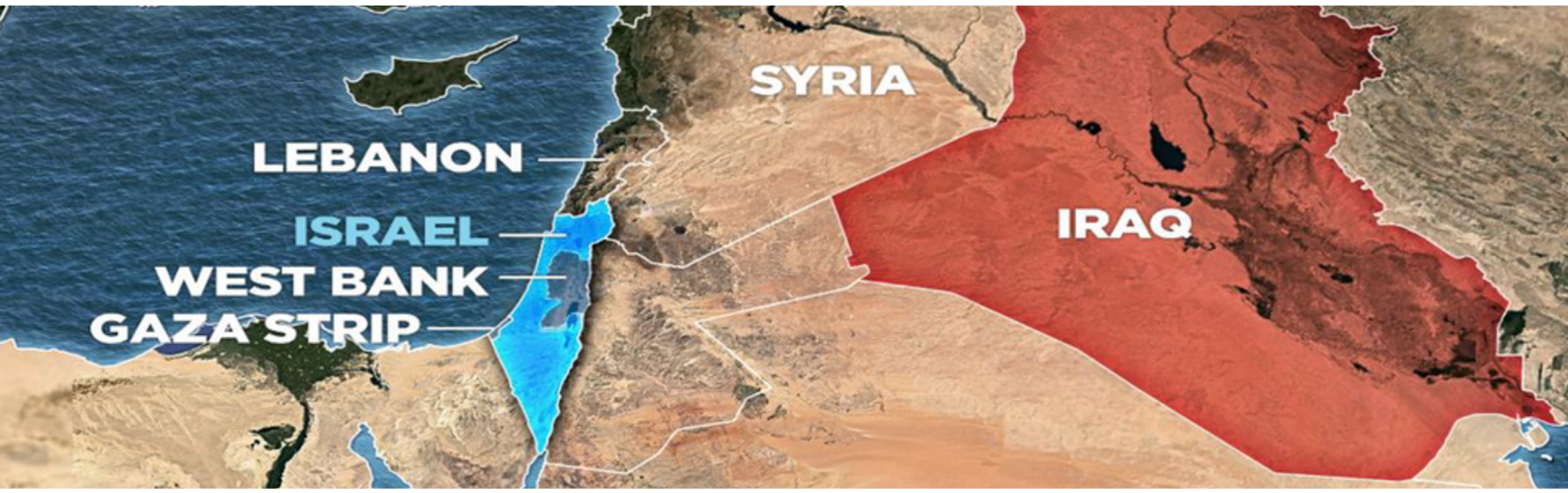


LEBANON

Lebanon's complex geography marked by narrow coastal plains, rugged mountain ranges like Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, and proximity to strategic borders with Israel, Syria, and the Mediterranean has historically made it a natural proxy theatre for regional and global conflicts. Lebanon's topography and demographic fragmentation render it a weak state with strong societies, making it vulnerable to external manipulation, Lebanon's location at the crossroads of major ideological and geopolitical fault lines Sunni-Shia, Arab-Israeli, and Western-Iranian rivalries intersects directly with its uneven terrain, allowing external powers to back local factions and militias in hard-to-reach mountainous areas, creating long-standing pockets of influence. For example, the Bekaa Valley has served as a strategic corridor for Hezbollah's operations, supported by Iran and Syria, while southern Lebanon has frequently been the site of Israeli incursions and UN deployments. Lebanon's lack of centralized territorial control and porous borders provide fertile ground for proxy conflicts, as foreign actors can operate through Lebanese allies with minimal state interference. In sum, Lebanon's geography not only facilitates but entrenches its role as a battlefield for broader geopolitical confrontations, where terrain and topography amplify sectarian fault lines and invite foreign intervention (Young,2010).

IRAQ

Iraq's strategic importance in Iran's geopolitical strategy, especially against the backdrop of its shadow conflict with Israel, remains undiminished. Iraq serves as an advanced strategic frontier for Iran, strategically positioned to counteract the presence of the U.S. military forces positioned near Iranian borders. This strategic posture aligns with Tehran's overarching regional geopolitical objectives, which include diminishing foreign military influence in its immediate vicinity.



GAZA

The Gaza Strip is situated on a relatively flat coastal plain. Temperatures average in the mid-50s F (about 13 °C) in the winter and in the upper 70s to low 80s F (mid- to upper 20s C) in summer. The area receives an average of about 12 inches (300 mm) of precipitation annually.

Living conditions in the Gaza Strip are typically poor for a number of reasons: the region's dense and rapidly increasing population (the area's growth rate is one of the highest in the world); inadequate water, sewage, and electrical services; high rates of unemployment; and, from September 2007, sanctions imposed by Israel on the region.



Airspace and Missile Corridors

Syrian Corridor: Syria's new government is facing mounting criticism at home over its failure to condemn Israel for violating its air space to attack Iran, with Syrians demanding Damascus leverage its growing diplomatic relations and call for a halt to the breaches. The Syrian government has failed to issue any official condemnations of the violations of its airspace either by Israel or Iran. This contrasts with steps taken by neighbouring Iraq, which filed an official complaint with the United Nations after Israeli aircraft crossed its airspace to strike targets in Iran. Basiri emphasised that residents in Daraa and Quneitra feel they need protection from the new government that emerged after rebels ousted the Assad dynasty on 8 December, ending the country's brutal 14-year civil war. Syria's airspace and borders are completely unguarded, adding that the nearest Syrian security forces are about nine-kilometres from the Israeli border (Suleiman, 2025).

Iraqi Airspace: Flights had been grounded since June 13, when hostilities erupted following Israeli airstrikes in Iran that killed senior military commanders and nuclear scientists. Iran responded with missile attacks on Israel and a U.S. airbase in Qatar, prompting heightened regional security concerns and the immediate suspension of flights over Iraqi territory. (Bhattacharjee, 2025).

The closure of Iranian and Iraqi airspace since June 13 has caused a major shift in global flight paths, forcing airlines to reroute flights through alternative corridors. According to Flightradar24, this has significantly increased air traffic over Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan (Mujawar, 2025).

Jordanian Buffer Zones: Jordan, long a buffer state and diplomatic bridge, finds itself once again at the crossroads of war and diplomacy. While traditionally adept at walking the line between Western alliances and Arab solidarity, the intensity of this moment, and its uncertain aftermath, risk pushing the kingdom beyond its strategic comfort zone. The conflict's epicentre may lie elsewhere, but its effects are rippling directly through Jordan. Airspace closures in April 2024 and June 2025 underscore the kingdom's concern over regional spillover. While framed as defensive, these moves have placed Jordan under scrutiny, especially from Iran, raising questions about its neutrality. At the heart of the crisis is Iran's nuclear program.

Though Tehran insists its enrichment is peaceful, its uranium levels nearing weapons grade have triggered Israeli strikes under "Operation Rising Lion" and set off a chain of military escalation-classic hallmarks of the security dilemma. One state's effort to enhance security leads others to feel threatened, prompting reactions that increase the risk of conflict. Jordan is now caught between two powerful rivals, both distrusted by much of its population. While the war in Gaza continues to dominate public discourse, the deeper strategic threat may lie in this unfolding Israel-Iran confrontation.

How Jordan navigates this high-stakes moment without being drawn in militarily or politically may define its regional role in the years ahead (Abdallat, 2025).

Overflight Routes: Sudden outbreaks of conflict between Israel and Iran erupted into open warfare have forced airlines to respond rapidly. As Iran launched a retaliatory barrage of missiles at a US base in Qatar, two dozen flights were forced to divert away from one of the world's busiest hubs, between Dubai and Doha. The incident demonstrated how the effects of unexpected strikes and airspace closures can reverberate across the world: Qantas was forced to divert two flights in mid-air, while Air India said it would suspend all flights to eastern North America and Europe due to the increasingly narrow path between those destinations and the Indian subcontinent. Hundreds more flights were cancelled altogether. The re-routings are placing a bigger burden on airlines' bottom lines and on the environment. As the paths through safe airspace distort and narrow, airlines have been forced to divert flights around conflict zones and geopolitical hotspots, while cancelling some routes altogether (Yerushalmy, 2025).

Airlines have to burden heavy losses as a result of airspaces being shut down. As Tony Stanton, consultant director of Strategic Air in Australia told CNN, "No matter the airline, flight disruptions cost money a lot of it." In order to recoup these losses, airlines are hiking the fares but this too, could hurt the aviation companies in the long run. Europe is likely to see the sharpest fare hikes, especially for routes to France, Germany and UK, Jatinder Paul Singh, global CEO of Via cation, a travel solutions provider, told the Economic Times. "Airfares to Europe have gone up by 20–35 per cent between March and July based on forward bookings data."

Apart from the cost and pricing issue, conflicts such as the Israel-Iran war and the Russia-Ukraine conflict also increases the risk of flying, stressing already overburdened air traffic controllers. For instance, FlightRadar24 clearly shows how air traffic is currently being pressed into two narrow corridors. This leads to more work for air traffic controllers, who are fitting more aircraft into smaller spaces, said experts.

Anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) Environment: According to the Congressional Research Service, anti-access "is defined as any action, activity, or capability, usually long-range, designed to prevent an advancing military force from entering an operational area. Area Denial is defined as action, activity, or capability, usually short-range, designed to limit an adversarial force's freedom of action within an operational area."

Iran possesses anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems, meaning it has developed and deployed a range of military capabilities designed to prevent or deter hostile forces from entering a specific area (anti-access) such as US naval or air assets approaching the Iranian coastline or transiting through the Strait of Hormuz and to restrict the operational freedom of those forces within that area (area denial), thereby making effective operations within the contested zone difficult or prohibitively costly. In practical terms, Iran's A2/AD posture includes medium- and long-range ballistic and cruise missiles capable of striking enemy bases, vessels, or infrastructure across the region; air defence systems intended to deter or neutralise aerial incursions; naval mines,

submarines, and fast attack craft aimed at threatening maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz; and an array of radars, drones, and electronic warfare tools used to monitor and disrupt adversary activities. To enhance its ability to use the Strait of Hormuz as a geopolitical and negotiating lever, Iran, under the Rouhani administration, inaugurated the Goreh-Jask pipeline. This strategic infrastructure transports crude oil from inland production sites directly to the Gulf of Oman, effectively bypassing the Strait. By enabling exports through waters beyond the chokepoint, the pipeline allows Iran to mitigate the impact of potential blockades on its own oil flows while preserving the option to disrupt rival shipments transiting the Strait. (Boltuc, 2025)

An A2/AD strategy is meant to prevent U.S. forces from approaching an area, such as during a hypothetical war with China, to cripple U.S. operations. Similarly, Hezbollah could use A2/AD against Israel. With these common problems, the U.S. Army and the IDF can assist each other in defeating their foes. The IDF learned many lessons from its previous war with Hezbollah in 2006. In the next war, Israel's impressive airpower capabilities might not be sufficient to suppress Hezbollah's fire. The IDF might have to launch a massive ground offensive. However, due to its high sensitivity to casualties, Israel might hesitate to conduct a large-scale ground attack. A similar concern could influence whether and to what degree the U.S. Army will launch a massive offensive to defeat its rival's A2/AD approach.



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04

U.S. - IRAN - ISRAEL STRATEGIC DYNAMICS (2018-2023)



The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) under the Trump administration marked a crucial moment in the geopolitics of the Middle East. The subsequent maximum pressure campaign targeted not only Iran's nuclear activities but also the development of ballistic missiles, regional militancy, proxy warfare, and its deep-rooted ideological rivalries with Israel. In parallel, Israel intensified its longstanding doctrine of "Forward Defence," operationalized through the Campaign Between Wars (CBW), a proactive security strategy characterized by precision airstrikes, cyber operations, and clandestine intelligence efforts designed to degrade Iranian capabilities without triggering direct conflict.

The strategic theatre expanded from cyber intrusions targeting Iranian nuclear sites and maritime confrontations in the Persian Gulf to the signing of the Abraham Accords, which realigned regional alliances and further isolated Tehran. As Iran found itself increasingly encircled, it responded with asymmetric warfare tactics while simultaneously accelerating its nuclear enrichment activities, signalling both defiance and strategic desperation. Bolstered by growing normalization with Arab states and unwavering American support, Israel gradually transitioned from covert containment to overt deterrence, often communicating red lines through visible military posture and targeted operations.

Meanwhile, European powers and the Biden administration grappled with diminishing diplomatic leverage, as attempts to reinvigorate the JCPOA floundered amid mutual distrust and shifting regional calculations.

The U.S. Withdrawal from the JCPOA (2018) and its Ripple Effects



Background

The historic 2015 nuclear agreement administered by the Obama Administration, along with the other permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (also referred to as the P5 + 1) and the European Union. The stringent provisions contained in the agreement included caps on uranium stockpile and enrichment, control over key nuclear facilities and research and development efforts, the dismantling of a key reactor, and rigorous monitoring and verification processes to ensure the above. In return, JCPOA lifted sanctions on Iran that crippled its economy and halved its oil exports.

After repeatedly expressing his contempt for JCPOA, US President Donald Trump finally announced on 8 May 2018 that he would be pulling out the US from the Iran nuclear deal and restore far-reaching sanctions aimed at severing Iran from the global economy. Trump, however, had been unconvinced of the nuclear pact, terming it 'insane.' His criticism revolved largely around the fact that the deal limited Iran's nuclear activities only for a 10 – 15 years and did not stop the development of ballistic missiles. He was not alone in his view. Israel had revealed 'secret nuclear files' which it said showed Iran had run a clandestine nuclear weapons programme before 2003 and had secretly retained the technological know-how, in breach of the agreement.



Iranian Response

Initially Iran followed the policy of “Strategic Patience”, staying with JCPOA but soon as sanctions deepened, Tehran began breaching its commitments in phases. These violations included exceeding uranium stockpile limits, enriching uranium beyond 3.67%, and installing advanced centrifuge.

Iran also increased its support to terror militias, like Hezbollah (Lebanon), the Houthis (Yemen), and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria. Iran’s application of using proxies became more assertive with attacks on tankers, U.S. bases in Iraq, and even Saudi oil facilities (e.g., Abqaiq 2019). Using this action as deterrence as tools in nuclear negotiations.

Impact on Israel

With the JCPOA dismantled, Netanyahu applauded Trump’s decision as validation for its claims against Iran and Israel started a more aggressive campaign of targeted strikes against Iranian proxies and infrastructure in Syria and Iraq. A shadow war campaign also advanced from Israeli side including Cyber-attacks (e.g., Natanz nuclear facility sabotage), Targeted assassinations, such as of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in 2020 and Airstrikes on Iranian assets in Syria and Lebanon increased significantly.

Israeli Doctrine of the "Campaign Between Wars" (CBW)

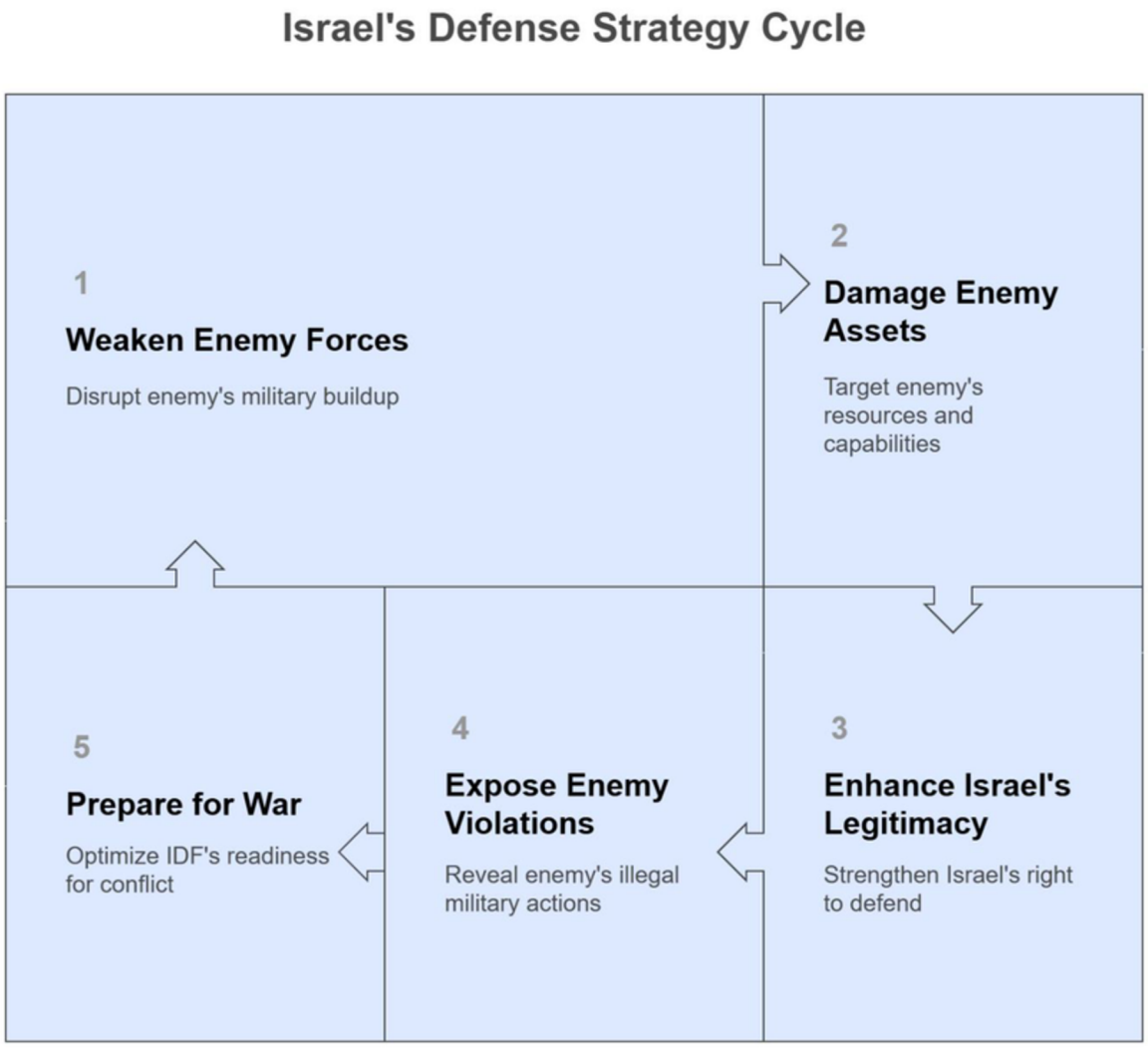
After the formation of Isarael, it has only seen 2 phases, The first was preparation for wars and the second phase concerned with the use of force during war and the support of combat efforts. And in between it has enjoyed short periods of quiet between intermittent conflicts. Most of Israel's current security challenges stem from a single threat: Iran's aspirations of hegemony over the Middle East with its proxies. To counter such threats while maximizing the state's ability to develop during times of quiet, Israel has endeavored to maintain what it regards as a reasonable security routine but more recently it has been augmented by what the Israel Defense Forces call the "Campaign Between Wars" (CBW).

Concept of CBW:

This strategy aims to weaken adversaries in the interwar period through precision strikes, sabotage, and cyber operations. Asserting deterrence without triggering a full-scale war. Though primarily aimed at Hezbollah, since 2013 the CBW framework increasingly focused on Iran's regional entrenchment.



The strategy's main goals are straightforward



Delay war and deter enemies by constantly weakening their force buildup processes and damaging their assets and capabilities.

- **Enhance Israel's legitimacy for exertion of force while damaging the enemy's legitimacy, in part by exposing clandestine military activities that violate international law.**

- **Create optimal conditions for the IDF if war finally does come.**

Accomplishment of this Campaign

The doctrine has greatly strengthened Israeli deterrence against its regional enemies, reduced threats to the state and its citizens, and improved the IDF's capabilities. Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes on Iranian-linked targets in Syria, particularly weapons depots, IRGC Quds Force bases, and arm convoys route to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The 2018 Mossad operation to extract Iran's secret nuclear archive from Tehran revealed documents showing undeclared nuclear weapons research and strikes included the 2019 bombing of warehouses at Damascus International Airport and attacks on Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) bases in Al-Qaim and Karbala.

These operations signalled Israeli redlines and its willingness to act unilaterally. In 2020 and again in April 2021 cyber strikes that Israel implicated in sabotaging Iran's Natanz nuclear facility, severely damaging centrifuge capabilities.

The CBW has enabled a robust period of security and prosperity, especially since the last major Gaza conflict in 2014. These gains are reflected in the economy, the tourism sector, and the continued development seen in Israel's southern and northern regions (Hershkowitz, 2022).



The Abraham Accords & Strategic Isolation of Iran

The signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, brokered by the Trump administration, marked a historic realignment in Middle Eastern geopolitics. The normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and key Gulf states namely the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, later joined by Morocco and Sudan was not merely a symbolic gesture of peace; it was a calculated strategic maneuver aimed at reshaping regional power balances and isolating Iran (Friedman, 2020).

Gulf-Israeli normalization

For a number of years there had been a huge emphasis on the signing of Abraham Accords to have a normalized geopolitical play between middle-east nations and also to curtail the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This normalization fostered deeper intelligence sharing, cyber collaboration, arms deals, and military exercises between Israel and the Gulf monarchies. The shared perception of Iran as an existential threat due to its expanding ballistic missile program, proxy network, and nuclear ambitions provided the strategic glue binding former adversaries into tacit allies. Israel's inclusion into the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility in 2021 further institutionalized military cooperation between Israel and Arab states under the U.S. security umbrella, effectively creating a quasi-regional coalition against Iranian aggression While the UAE's national security strategy remains focused on pushing back against regional disruptors which mainly include Iran due to the ideological play of Shia – Sunni Divisions, the UAE has shifted its approach to concentrate on developing defensive capacity and maintaining a deterrence through relations with US and Isarael.



Iran's Response

Iran is conscious that Israel and other regional states, with their proximity to Iran's borders or places of influence within them, have the potential to stoke dissent among the Iranian population. From Iran's perspective, normalization between Israel and the UAE was not unexpected. Iran has so far reacted to normalization by embracing dialogue over confrontation with Gulf Arab states, but it also continues to use the threat of instability through its proxies in Yemen or its ballistic missile programme to divide regional states. Meanwhile Iran pursued closer ties with non-Arab regional actors, especially Turkey, Qatar, and Russia, in an attempt to break the emerging regional encirclement. It also expanded economic and military cooperation with China under the 25-year strategic partnership agreement signed in 2021, which Tehran framed as a counterweight to U.S.-led alliances (El Kurd, 2023).



Iran's Nuclear Escalation and Regional Deterrence

Iranian Nuclear Steps Post-JCPOA

Iran started exceeding agreed-upon limits to its stockpile of low-enriched uranium in 2019, and began enriching uranium to higher concentrations (though still far short of the purity required for weapons). It also began developing new centrifuges to accelerate uranium enrichment; resuming heavy water production at its Arak facility; and enriching uranium which rendered the isotopes produced there unusable for medical purposes.

In 2020, Iran took more steps away from its nuclear pledges, following a series of attacks on its interests. It restricted IAEA inspections, installed IR-6 centrifuges, and restarted work at sites like Fordow to make weapon grade uranium (90% purity). These steps were framed as reversible but served to increase Tehran's bargaining power.

Israeli threat of unilateral preemptive strikes

Successive Israeli governments, from Netanyahu to Naftali Bennett, reiterated the option of military action. Israel conducted long-range air drills simulating strikes on Iran and requested U.S. refuelling aircraft and bunker-busting bombs. Though hesitant to act without U.S. green light, Israel used these threats as deterrence and domestic political signalling.



Maritime Escalations and Shadow Wars



Tanker Wars

In 2019, tensions flared in the Gulf of Oman with several tanker sabotage incidents attributed to Iranian forces. The U.S. deployed additional troops and naval assets to the region. Iran also seized the British-flagged in retaliation for the detention of an Iranian vessel off Gibraltar.

Israel-Iran Naval Confrontations

Between 2020 and 2022, a covert maritime war escalated. Israel allegedly struck Iranian oil tankers transporting fuel to Syria. Iran responded by targeting Israeli-owned cargo ships. The MV Helios Ray incident in February 2021 was emblematic of this tit-for-tat escalation.

Cyber and Naval Fusion

Reports surfaced of cyber operations aimed at disabling ship navigation systems and port infrastructure. Iran's use of drones, GPS jamming, and mini-submarines suggested an evolving hybrid maritime warfare model extending land-based tactics to sea.

"Maximum Pressure Meets Forward Defense" has indeed been a suitable title to define the regional Geopolitics during the period of 2018 – 23 in the middle eastern



region which saw the surge of many changes in the diplomatic relations in the U.S.-Iran-Israel triangle. Where we saw how the US govt. withdraw from JCPOA reviewing it affectability in the long run and applied the campaign of maximum pressure to sabotage the Iranian Nuclear Dream to dominate the Middle eastern region and also to deplete the advancement in proxies and other arms like Ballistic missiles.

On the contrary Isarel also changed its doctrine to “Forward Defence,” through the Campaign Between Wars which evolved into a sophisticated hybrid of kinetic, cyber, and intelligence operations, seeking to delay or prevent Iran’s nuclear breakout.

Iran, meanwhile, has demonstrated resilience and strategic patience, gradually eroding constraints while leveraging global multipolarity. Its nuclear advancements, proxy proliferation, and asymmetric warfare tactics suggest a shift from containment to confrontation.



05

OPEN THREATS, STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY



Iran's Full-Spectrum Proxy Network Activation

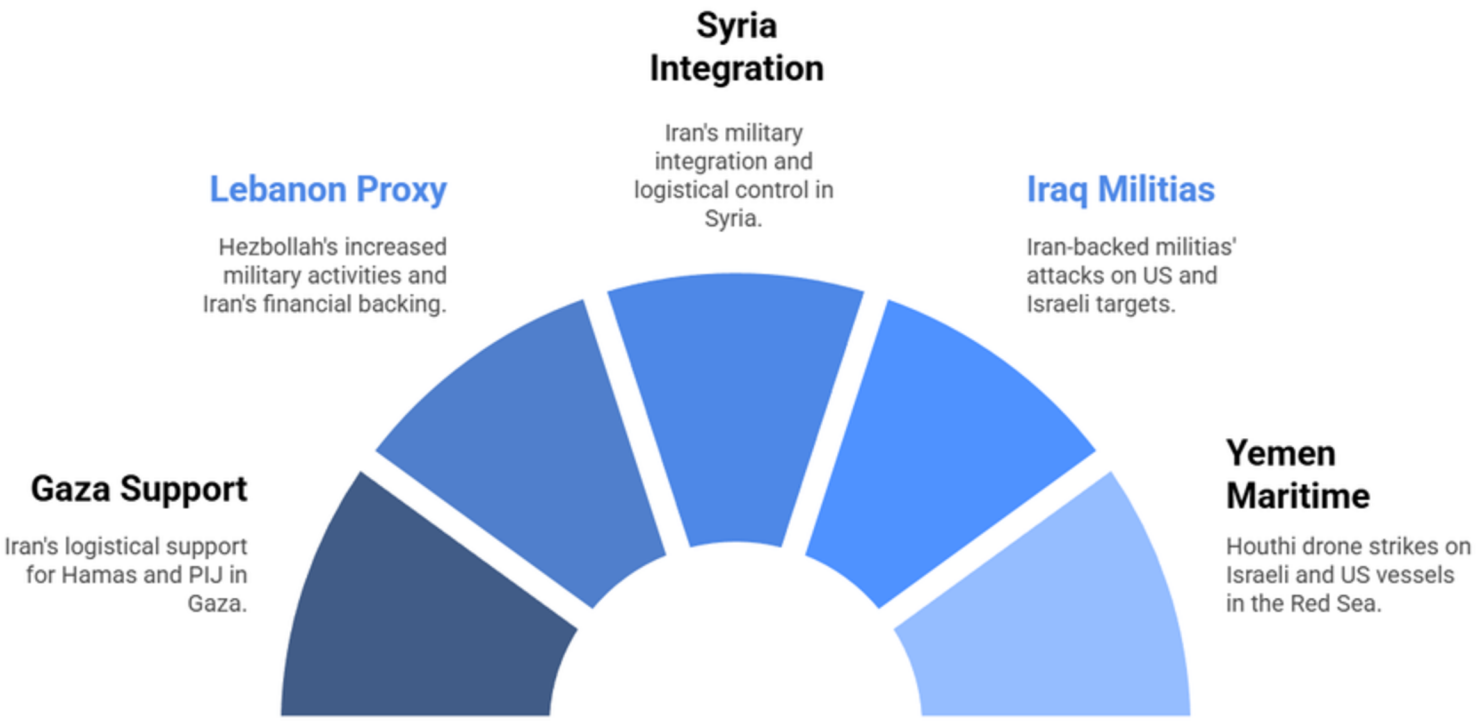
Since late 2023, Iran has fully mobilized its "Axis of Resistance", unleashing a coordinated multi-front campaign across Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. This campaign is far from ad hoc; it's a meticulously coordinated strategy executed by the IRGC Quds Force. It marks a decisive shift from shadow operations to overt proxy engagement, executing Tehran's goals via proxy warfare; a strategic escalation blurring the lines of warfare.

Geographical Spread of Proxy Operations

Gaza: Iran has significantly intensified its support for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The IRGC's logistics units, Units 700 and 190, have funnelled advanced weaponry via Syria and Sudan into Gaza, aiding militants in launching rockets and incendiary drones into southern Israel (Macron, 2025).

Lebanon: Hezbollah, Iran's most potent proxy, has dramatically increased rocket barrages and UAV incursions along the northern border. The IRGC Quds Force has steered operations, coordinating Hezbollah's actions under Tehran's strategic vision. Hezbollah's arsenal is now estimated at over 11,500 rockets and missiles. Iran annually funnels $700 million–$1 billion for training, arms, and financing turning Hezbollah into an Iranian strategic arm.

Iraq: Iran-backed Shiite militias like Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of IRGC-backed militias have consistently launched drone and missile attacks on both US bases and Israeli targets, signifying Iran's intent to engage in multi-theatre escalation.



Syria: Iran continues to supply arms and strategic counsel to Shiite militias, securing overland routes to Lebanon and Gaza. Iranian IRGC and allied militias continue deep military integration, controlling key bases, training fighters, and enabling logistical corridors to Lebanon and Gaza. This not only enhances Iran's reach but ensures operational depth across Levantine theatres.

Yemen: While sometimes described as autonomous, Houthis, formally embraced by Tehran in 2019, execute occasional drone strikes on Israeli-linked shipping and U.S. vessels in the Red Sea showcasing irrefutable proof of Iran's maritime proxy power (Ganzeveld et. al., 2024).

Role of IRGC Quds Force

The IRGC Quds Force serves as Iran's grand tactical conductor. They operate as the nerve centre of Iran's proxy architecture. Known for past coordination under Qassem Soleimani and even more so posthumously, the Quds Force directs logistics, training, and operations across the region. Logistics elite Units 190 and 700 specifically manage arms delivery with remarkable sophistication via clandestine routes, operational planning and real-time coordination of multi-front attacks, particularly in Gaza and Lebanon using covert maritime routes, humanitarian covers, and shell companies. Despite setbacks like Soleimani's death, the Force remains the key enabler of Iran's expansive regional reach.

April 2024 Direct Missile Exchange

On April 13, 2024, we witnessed a watershed moment: Iran launched over 300 drones and missiles targeting Israeli territory and the Golan Heights in "Operation True Promise" marking the first ever direct attack on Israel from Iranian territory. Synchronized strikes of April 2024, orchestrated through proxy partnerships, reveal a shift from decentralized support to centralized command (Palmer et. al., 2024).

Iranian Offensive (Operation True Promise)

On 13–14 April 2024, Iran launched a massive offensive, 300 drones and missiles, into Israeli territory and the Golan Heights, marking the first large-scale Iranian offensive directly targeting Israeli sovereign land. Launch platforms included Iran itself and allied proxies: Hezbollah (Lebanon), Islamic Resistance in Iraq, Houthis (Yemen), and unidentified Syrian cells, showcasing synergistic coordination. Attackers employed combined drone, cruise missile, suicide bombers and ballistic missile volleys aimed at overwhelming Israel's defensive systems.

Israel's Response

Israel's Iron Shield air-defense umbrella recorded an astounding 99% interception success, a tri-layered defense encompassing Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow systems. Arrow missiles destroyed ballistic threats midspace; Iron Dome neutralized rocket swarms; David's Sling addressed aerial cruise and drone threats. However, Israel suffered several losses, including the injury of a Bedouin child by shrapnel, while its airbases remained operational (Epstein, 2025).

Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, striking Iranian air-defense radar linked to the Natanz nuclear facility. Israeli counter-strikes hit IRGC nodes in Syria and Iraq, targeting leadership and logistics hubs (Epstein, 2025). Israel's tit for tat, gave push to escalation from proxy tactics to direct inter-state bombardment. It proved Israel's interception systems, that remained highly effective under persistent, massed drone and missile attacks. As well as, a new retaliatory dynamic emerged: Iran strikes directly → Israel responds with precision airstrikes on IRGC and allied key sites.

Global Response and Diplomatic Realignment



The April escalation triggered an immediate shift in global geopolitics:

United States Reaffirmation & Strategic Posture

Backed Israel's right to self-defence while restraining any unilateral Israeli response into Iranian sovereign territory. It deployed US Navy, Patriot, and THAAD systems to underpin regional air defences and deter further escalation also spearheaded ceasefire negotiations, pressing Israel toward restraint without limiting strategic deterrence.

Europe

Led by the European Union, European powers reasserted diplomatic pressure: issuing sanctions on Iran, and urging both parties toward dialogue rather than military escalation. Resurgence of EU support for Israel in this proxy war, partly, to counterbalance Gulf-Saudi costs while still calling for de-escalation. France, Germany, and the UK strategized long-term stabilization in Syria and Lebanon to dilute Iranian influence, focusing on governance rather than confrontational measures.

Russia and China

Both countries supported de-escalation in UN settings but refrained from endorsing sanctions, joint resolutions at Security Council. Russia with Syria on its turf, reassured Iran regarding Syria, leaned toward Iranian solidarity; China took a more neutral stance while urging ceasefire and diplomacy without arms provision.



United Nations

UN Secretary-General, Guterres, warned of the risk of region-wide conflict, “uncontrollable violence” during an emergency Security Council session, urging peace, while the IAEA flagged risks to nuclear sites. Security Council sessions highlighted divisions: : US/Europe versus China/Russia ; the US and EU pushed for a stronger stance, China's and Russia's vetoes limited action, veto powers forestalled decisive joint action (Brunnatrom & Chiacu, 2025).

Current and Recent Escalations (2023–2025)



April 2024: Iran's Missile Retaliation and Israeli Response

The fallout from "Operation True Promise" reverberated well beyond April:

Iran's Continued Strikes

Iran escalated further, targeting US military installations, including Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar with medium-range ballistic missiles and drones, expanding the battlefield beyond Israeli borders. In addition, Tehran's strategy involved signalling reach beyond Israel, drawing decisive U.S. pushback, to shift global security calculus and pressure U.S. involvement.

Israeli Counters

In June 2025, Operations Red Wedding & Narnia (Lieber, 2025) struck deep into Iranian territory, executed via precision airstrikes targeting nuclear personnel and IRGC leadership, aiming to neutralize nuclear scientists and military leaders. These were sharply coordinated with U.S. efforts, resulting in revisions to Israel's multi-layered missile defense, integrating next-gen Arrow 4/5 interceptors (Epstein, 2025), followed, integrating lessons from Iran/Houthi attacks.

Maritime Hostilities and the Shadow War at Sea

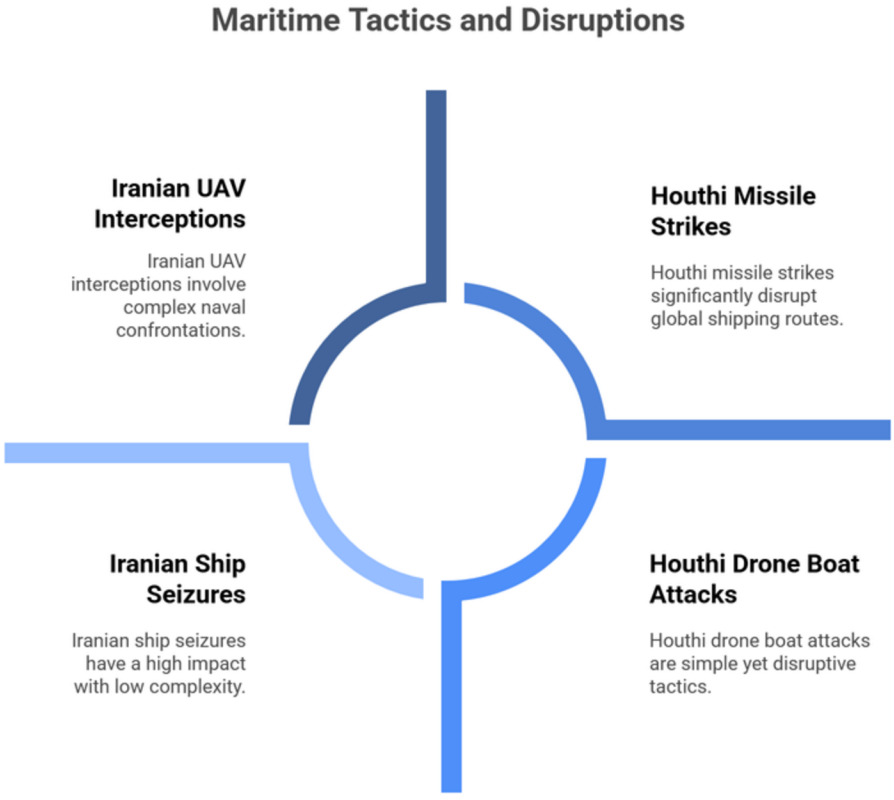
Iran's maritime tactics emerged as another front:

Houthi-Enabled Disruptions

While Houthi rebels claim local autonomy, evidence suggests alignment with Iran, conducting missile and drone strikes that threaten commercial shipping and U.S. Navy assets in the Red Sea. They continue maritime assault tactics, targeting vessels transiting commercial routes critical to global oil and trade. Along with this, they utilize mines, missiles, and drone boats, signal leveraging Iran's naval doctrine.

Seizures in Strait of Hormuz

Iranian naval units, potentially Quds Force-led, IRGC naval and Quds units seized Israeli-linked ships in the Strait, an implied blockade to pressure Israel and challenge Western naval hegemony, asserting covert maritime dominance in critical chokepoints Western navies intercept Iranian UAVs and boats at sea including frequent close encounters by Western vessels which form part of an extended "shadow war" at sea; exemplifying low-level naval warfare confrontation that disrupts logistic and energy flows.



Northern Front: Hezbollah's Expanded Role

Hezbollah remains Tehran's most effective leverage against Israel's north:

Operational Reload

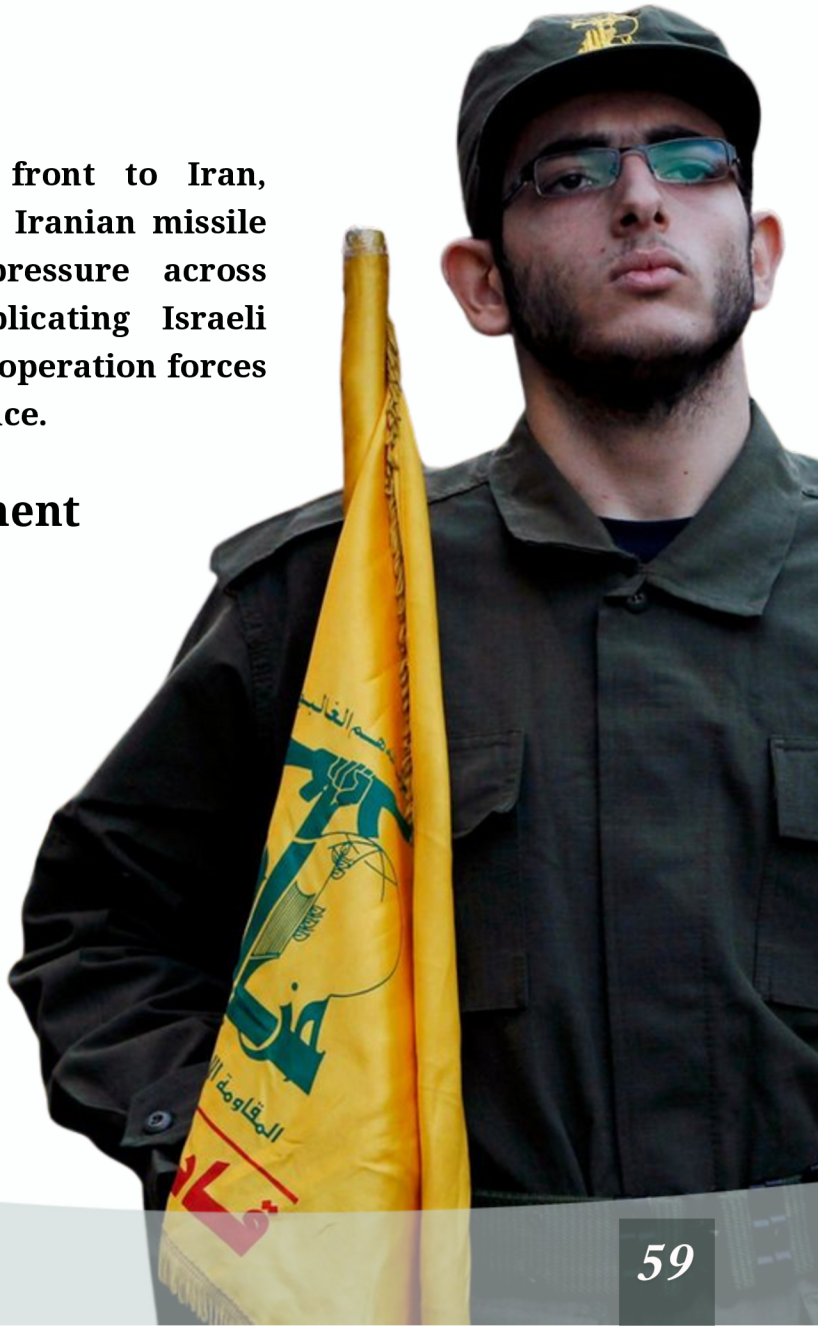
After absorbing significant losses from Israeli airstrikes across 2023–2024, including leadership decapitation and ammunition depot bombardment, Hezbollah has reconstituted its armed capabilities. In April 2024, coordinated rocket-UAV salvos from Lebanon escalated pressure on critical northern Israeli targets. Hezbollah has rebuilt missile stockpiles and drone capabilities, persistently launching rocket & UAV salvos into northern Israel. Their new arsenals have enhanced targeting precision, heightening Israel's deterrence dilemma.

Strategic Integration

Hezbollah now acts as a tandem front to Iran, synchronizing strikes often align with Iranian missile offensives, creating simultaneous pressure across northern and central fronts, complicating Israeli defense assignments. This multilateral operation forces Israel to confront multi-vector deterrence.

Potential for Deeper Engagement

Post-2025, Hezbollah's enhanced missile accuracy and UAV fleet pose existential deterrence capabilities, escalating the role of Lebanon into an active battlefield. Analysts caution that concerted Hezbollah–Iran escalation risks surpassing "grey zone" warfare, potentially triggering a broader nationalist confrontation.



Gaza and Southern Front: Hamas and PIJ Reactions



Finally, Gaza-based groups have amplified their role as regional extensions of Tehran's strategy:

Iran's Strategic Signals

Iranian support now encompasses more sophisticated weapon drops to Hamas/PIJ and the establishment of intelligence connections that dismantle long-standing siloes, often coordinated with wider Iranian strikes, thereby enhancing deterrence and creating multi-faceted threats. In addition to the financial assistance of $350 million per year (an increase from $100 million by 2023), Iran now supplies Hamas and PIJ with advanced weaponry and technical support. This sharing of intelligence connects the Gaza front with broader Iranian strategic activities.

Operational Synchronization

Hamas and PIJ now time rocket salvos from Gaza to coincide with northern and Islamic Resistance strikes, consistently coinciding with Iranian or Hezbollah attacks, showcasing a quasi-synchronized regional front and reinforcing regional anti-Israel pressure. Though Gaza remains shielded by its urban complexity, the region feels the psychological and civilian impact. Hence, Israel's countermeasures follow two goals: neutralization and deterrence.

Humanitarian & Diplomatic Fallout

Israeli retaliatory strikes in Gaza, rationalized as deterrence policy, have generated widespread international criticism, prompting intensified UN and NGO interventions and rescue operations. Gaza retaliatory strikes produced large-scale civilian impact, fuelling new summit-level diplomatic responses. The hostage crisis, post-ceasefire talks, heightened geopolitical stakes, influencing U.S. and Qatari mediation initiatives.

Regional Strategic Map: Multi-Vector Warfare

Front	*Iran-backed Actor*	*Key Activities*	*Israeli/U.S. Response*
Gaza/South	Hamas, PIJ	Rocket salvos tied to regional escalations	Blockades, airstrikes, humanitarian aid efforts
Lebanon/North	Hezbollah	Rocket/UAV strikes, missile warfare	Air campaigns, AA suppression, deterrence posturing
Iraq	IRGC militias in Iraq/Syrian cells	Base strikes, drone/missile cross-border attacks	Joint Israeli/U.S. targeted airstrikes
Gulf & Persian Seas	Houthis, IRGC naval units	Maritime shocks, shipping disruption	Naval patrols, counterstrike readiness
Iran Territory	IRGC/Quds & Iranian Army	Direct missile/drone bombardment	Spiral defense upgrades, own deep strikes



06

MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND FORCE COMPOSTION

Iranian Armed Forces and IRGC

	Artesh	*IRGC*	*Quds Force*
Structure	The Artesh has four services: the ground forces, the Navy, the Air Force and the Air Defence Force. Almost all the staff in Artesh come from the IRGC, and all working proposals go through these supreme officers. The Artesh was created to fight any invading Iraqi forces and is designed to be indoctrinated with Islamic beliefs by law. Artesh today remains the wing forced to remain apolitical and stay within the military functions of the Wing.	IRGC was founded post-1979 and runs in parallelly to the distrusted Artesh. IRGC is leads the Artesh ideologically and is more dominant politically, economically and in security in the country. They influence the decision-making in departments other than the military and report directly to the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. The branches of IRGC include: ground forces, the Basij paramilitary force, naval forces, air force and a cyber command.	Quds Force is the elite wing of the IRGC, responsible for foreign operations. This group provides intelligence, material, training, and support to Hezbollah and other militias in countries like Iraq and Syria. This group has faced several Israeli and American strikes because of their importance in Iran's military. Through Quds, the Iranian military spreads Shia Militancy all over the Middle East.

Force Strength	Ground forces with 3,50,000 men (2,20,000 conscripts) form the first line of defence. The ground forces are mostly dependent on the weapons purchased years ago by the Shah. The 18,000 men in the Navy form the first line of defence in the Gulf of Oman. With the exception of Russian-made kilo-class submarines, the navy also uses 40-year-old weapons, developing a huge gap between the assigned duties and their abilities. The Air Force, with 37,000 personnel, defends the airspace, dependent heavily on Russian weapons, which can't compete or deter modern American weapons. The Air Force suffers from quantitative as well as qualitative shortcomings.	The ground forces for the IRGC are divided into 32 parts, two for Tehran province and one for all other provinces each. The troops include a strength of more than 1,50,000 troops. The naval forces are separate from the Artesh Navy and are charged with frontline patrolling of Iran's borders, like the Strait of Hormuz. The Air Force has a strength of 15,000 and is responsible for running Iran's ballistic missile program. The cyber command works with military and commercial espionage and propaganda promotion.	Though the details about the Quds force remain hidden, the group remains at the most crucial level of Iranian defence. The Group heads the Iranian defence and involves leaders who were executed by the Israelis and Americans for involvement in supporting Iran's nuclear and military ambitions

Mobalisation Capacity	Artesh relies on conscription and is designed for conventional warfare, maintaining large ground forces and air force and navy to defend Iran's territory. The mobilisation is slower and involves a large bureaucracy. The structure and working are completely dependent on the superior officers and the IRGC.	The IRGC is a decentralised structure and is spread across Iran's provinces. The Basij helps increase the mobilisation potential. The Navy and the Air Force specialise in rapid response to regional threats and gaining dominance over the Persian Gulf.	They depend on small, highly trained operations units. They have supported the militias in other countries and have estimated 2,00,000 proxy fighters in Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. Rather than attacking, the group focuses on intelligence, sabotage and support.
Territorial Defence Doctrine	Conventional Territorial doctrine is the doctrine of Artesh. Their doctrine is to protect the territorial integrity against external threats like Israel and the US. The doctrine includes large-scale operations within Iran and prioritising the coastal and air defence of the country. The doctrine is defensive to repel attacks and protect the nation.	The doctrine is projecting influence and asymmetric defence. The IRGC has groups looking after domestic defence and also controls the ballistic programme of Iran. The group also controls the drone system used for projecting power and not controlling foreign territory. IRGC also has an active navy taking control and repelling foreign powers in their waters and using foreign militias, using them as proxy.	Quds Force is an elite operations branch involved in extraterritorial operations. Their doctrine is the use of proxy militias to carry out attacks and counter adversaries indirectly. The doctrine relies on the idea of not taking responsibility and carrying out operations.

Integrated proxy militias and forward operating networks	The Quds Force supports militias and uses these proxy militias to carry out operations in other nations. These militias are integrated and completely supported by the Quds Force. The network of militias is called the "Axis of Resistance" and includes Hezbollah, Hamas, Iraqis and Syrian militias. The Quds Force provides financial help, training, arms and intelligence to militias and groups working as proxies for the Iranian military.
	These militia groups are the forward operating networks for Iran, as the Quds force supports these groups for their operations. The Iranian military maintains proxy bases in several countries to maintain its regional influence. The hold of Hezbollah near the Israeli border acts as a forward post to take coercive action against Israel. Due to the geographical locations, hubs in Iraq are also influenced by Iran through the transfer of weapons through the border.

Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)

Israeli Defence Forces		
Composition	*Israeli Ground Forces*	The army performed the role of a primary melting pot where people from different ethnic backgrounds work together to protect the idea of Israel. From the age of 18, every Israeli Jewish male and female is required to join the army, while it remains optional for other communities. The army has 3 separate battle theatres- south, centre and north. There is also a front home command which oversees civilian military duties. Under the ground forces command, there exist 4 divisions- Armor corps command, Infantry & Para corps command, Engineering corps command and Field Intelligence corps command. Israel has a thriving domestic defence industry which manufactures the Merkava battle tank series, and various assault rifles and the Uzi submachine gun. The ground forces use robots and cameras, and AI-based technology to ensure the security of Israel.
	Israeli Air Force	The Air Defence Command includes three regiments- Northern Force Command, Central Force Command and Southern Force Command. The Air Force is divided into several groups, like the Helicopter group, the Intelligence group, the Chief Medical group, the unit control group, the Air Special Forces group, etc. The Israeli air force is mainly dependent on American weapons and aircraft for its defensive and coercive efforts. Weapons like the Iron Dome, F-16s, F-35s, etc. , are inducted by the Israeli Air Force as their frontline aircraft.

	Israeli Navy	The Israeli navy has many are divided into several bases, which include squadrons and units responsible for the security of the country. The Navy holds the Haifa Naval Base, Atlit Naval Base - holds the navy's elite commando unit, MFTAH unit- IT, processing and computing, Eilat Naval Base, Navy Headquarters in HaKirya, Tel Aviv, etc. The majority of the Israeli Navy has inducted Israeli domestic weapons and ships with the German Dolphin class and AIP Dolphin 2 class.
	Intelligence services	The services include the Military Intelligence Directorate, providing critical intelligence for decision making and like a cybersecurity arm for the military.
Doctrine		The Dahiya doctrine, or Dahya doctrine, is an Israeli military strategy which calls for massive disproportionate force and deliberate targeting of civilian areas. According to General Gadi Eisenkot, chief of Northern Command, these areas aren't civilian but military bases.
	Layered Defence	Keeping the doctrine as the base, the Israelis have shown a doctrine of non-negotiability when it came to terrorism. The Israeli leadership has set a strong precedent of striking the enemy infrastructure. But attacking and killing civilians is not the aim of the attacks, thus an early alert system if followed by the Israelis. The Iron Dome used by the Israelis is a weapon to counter air threats, tanks and remotely controlled guns for counter-ground threats and a strong cyberwarfare command.

	Decapitation Strikes	The Israelis follow a pre-emptive policy where they take pre-emptive action against any planned attack and an active role in the destruction of the enemies of the state. Attacks on Iran's nuclear reactors and the Hezbollah Pager attack the examples of Israel's pre-emptive action to ensure security. The Israeli attack on Iran's leadership shows the resilience and commitment to destroy the leadership and handicap the leadership of foreign powers. In the recent strikes by Israel, Iran's top 29 commanders have been killed, effectively breaking the backbone of the attacks on Israel. The attack also neutralised the nuclear programme as several scientists and support staff were also killed in the Israeli strikes.
Modernisation & Readiness Metrics	***Tnufa Multi-Year plan***	The IDF in 2020 approved a Tnufa Plan with the objective of increasing lethality and increasing offensive capacity through scope and higher output. Though the full cost of the operations isnt revealed, the IDF used resources at their disposal and diverted funds to prioritise the programme. The emphasis is on being multi-dimensional and multi-layer, combining all air, naval, ground, cyber and intelligence forces. The IDF also announced the aim to shorten the duration of military campaigns and turn them into decisive victories for Israel.

	Readiness	The IDF have stated their goal of retaliation and pre-emptive action to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The IDF maintains readiness anf quick action to strike a message of non-complacency towards the adversaries. To uphold the qualitative edge of the military, the military has already decided to strengthen strategic and tactical deterrence through cyber warfare, develop early warning systems to prevent damage inflicted on the nation and develop strong preemptive strike capabilities. These readiness capabilities were tested when 200-500 missiles were launched by Hamas and the IDF effectively countered the attack, destroying enemy infrastructure and neutralising incoming missiles.
	Technological advancements	The IDF has decided to strengthen cyber capabilities by the use of digital twins, assisting decision-making and broader defence efforts. The IDF has also modernised their military over time by using modern American weapons like F-35 and modern missiles. The research and development departments of the IDF have been working towards modernisation with strong developments in drones like the Harop drones and green pine radar systems, which have become the world's best in recent years.

Technology, Innovation, and Asymmetric Capabilities

Missile and Drone Warfare

Iranian Missile Arsenal		
Name	***Description***	***How has Iran used it***
Shahab-3	Medium-range ballistic missile, liquid-fuelled missile with a range of 1300 kilometres. Payload capability is 750 kgs and North Korean Nodong technology was used for the missile.	This missile has been extensively used by Iran from 1998 to August 2017. While no information is available for the use of the missile in direct combat, the upgraded versions are now being used by the military.
Fateh-110	A single-stage, short-range ballistic missile developed by Iran's Aerospace Industries Organisation. This missile can carry a 500kg warhead with a range of 200-500 kilometres. Iran has developed key variants of this missile like Fateh-110 Mod 3, Fateh Mobin, Fateh-313, etc.	This missile and its variants have been used in strikes against US assets in Iraq and Syria since 2017, and in June 2025, Fateh-110 derivatives were used in strikes on Israel.

Khorramshahr	A two-stage, medium-range ballistic missile with a range of upto 2000 kilometres. Several variants of this missile like Khorramshahr-4, were used in the recent skirmishes. Iranian sources claim that the missile is capable of multiple independent re-entry vehicles.	From June 19-22, Iran launched Khorramshahr-4 missiles towards Israel, attacking cities like Haifa.
Qaseem	The Haj Qaseem missile is a medium-range ballistic missile, named after Qaseem Sulemani. the range of this missile lies between 1400-1800 kilometres and 12 Mach speed with precision targeting.	This missile was used in the Operation True Promise-3, launching it against Israel. The strikes targeted cities like Bat Yam which led to destruction due to the high speed, as reported by Jerusalem Post.
Fattah 2	Fattah-2 is a hypersonic ballistic missile equipped with a hypersonic glide vehicle. This missile is one of the fastest in Iran's arsenal with a speed of 13-15 mach. The missile has advanced inertial navigation capable of satellite independent systems.	This missile attacked Israel breaching their air defence systems, including Iron dome and Arrow systems, as claimed by Iranians. The high speed of the missiles allowed it to penetrate the layers of Israeli defence.

Israel's missile defence triad: Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow

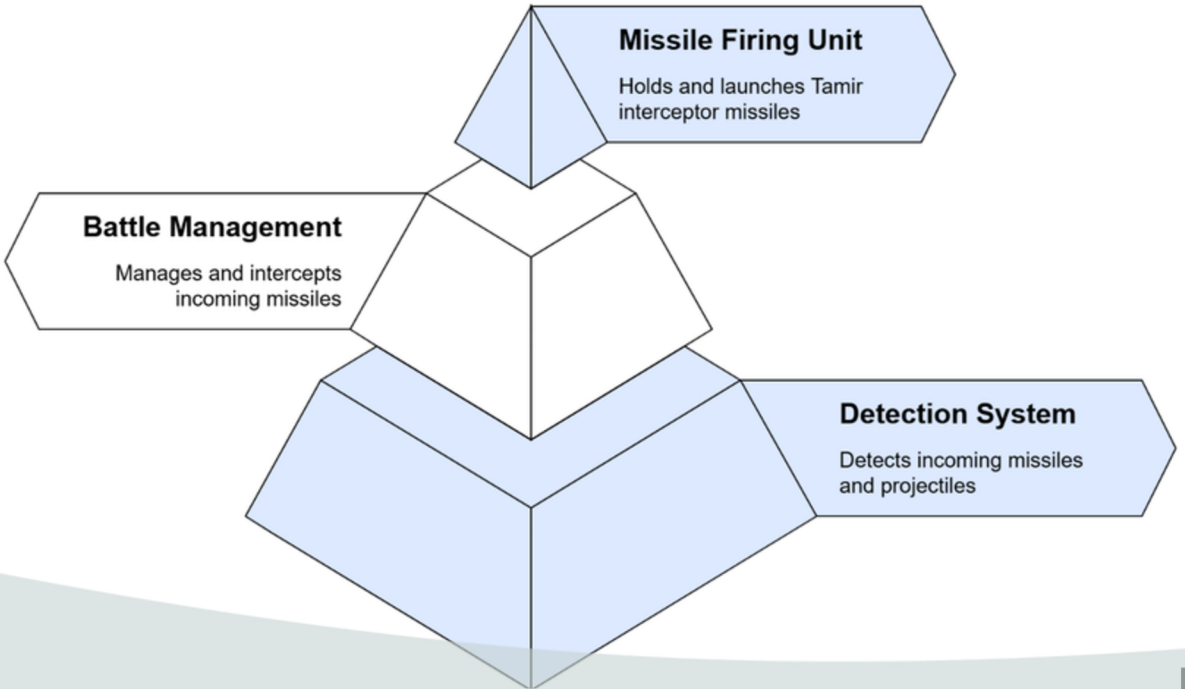
Iron Dome

In the 1990s, the Hezbollah terrorists from Lebanon used to launch rockets into Israeli territory, endangering the lives of innocent civilians. In 2004, the idea of an Iron Dome was floated, but many considered the idea doomed to fail. In 2006, during the Lebanon War, Hezbollah fired 4000 rockets in northern Israel, killing 44 civilians. Following the threat to Israeli civilians, Iron Dome was chosen to defend Israeli lives and was further jointly developed with the IDF. The Iron Dome has three central components:

1. Detection and Tracking radar system: This system was built by Elta and the IDF together to detect the incoming missiles and projectiles.

2. Battle Management & Weapon Control (BMC): This system manages and intercepts the incoming missiles. The system, with the help of advanced software, the systems detect the trajectory of the incoming missiles and intercepts them if they pose a significant danger.

3. Missile Firing Unit: This is the Unit which holds the Tamir Interceptor missiles, equipped with electro-optic sensors and several steering fins for high manoeuvrability



The Iron Dome has a 360-degree coverage with a success rate greater than 90 per cent. To date, the system has intercepted more than 5000 projectiles, defeating cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, UAVs, RAMs and PGMs. ("Iron Dome." Rafael.)

David's Sling

The interceptor is a two-stage missile, with targeting and guidance systems, a radar and electro-optical sensors. This system targets threats ranging from 40km to 300 km. This system was developed to counter medium to long-range ballistic missiles, aircraft, drones, cruise missiles, etc. This system became operational for the first time in 2017, with several interceptions since then. In June 2025, the system intercepted an incoming Iranian ballistic missile, proving its efficiency against threats.

Arrow

The Arrow is a long-range anti-ballistic missile defence system, ranging outside a range of 300 kilometres, with the capability of hitting targets inside or outside the atmosphere. This system uses the hit-to-kill technology, with Arrow 3 (Ex atmospheric) using a non-explosive warhead. The system has been in service since 2000 with Arrow 2 (Endo atmospheric), with Arrow 3 coming into service in 2017. Reports indicate that these missiles were used to intercept the incoming Iranian ballistic missiles.

The triad forms a layered defence with Iron Dome handling short-to-medium range interceptions, David Sling's medium range and Arrow's long-range interceptions. This triad ensured that Israel could protect their territory under multiple layers. The IDF reported a 99 per cent interception rate in April 2024 attacks, with the system working comprehensively to ensure safety.



UAV proliferation: Iranian Shahed-class drones vs. Israeli Hermes/Harop systems

	Iranian Shahed-class Drones	*Elbit Hermes 900*	*Harop Systems*
Description	Iranian-designed loitering munitions, also known as Kamikaze drones. This is designed to attack ground assets from a distance. The drones are used in swarm attacks.	Israeli medium-sized, multi-payload, long endurance UAV. It has an endurance of over 30 hours with a maximum altitude of 30,000 feet. The drone has a payload capacity of 300 kgs.	The Harop Loitering system combines the capabilities of a missile and an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle. After launch, the Harop drone reaches a holding area, conducting critical Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and then hitting the target in the attack phase. The Harop uses a Man-in-loop control mode where it can be controlled by a remote operator.
Range	Up to 2500 km	Significantly higher	Over 1000 km
Costs	$20,000-$80,000	Significantly higher	Likely higher than Shahed-136
How has it been used	These drones were supplied to Russia, which were then used against Ukraine during the war.	Israel deployed these in various conflicts, including Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014. It was also used during the	India used the Harop drones in Operation Sindoor targeting Pakistani Air defence systems. These drones were also used by Azerbaijan against Armenia

		Armenia-Azerbaijan skirmish and the Brazil floods to locate victims.	in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Cyberwarfare, AI, and Electronic Warfare

Key operations: Stuxnet, Israel's "soft kill" jamming systems

Stuxnet was a malicious computer worm, first uncovered in 2010. Stuxnet targeted and was responsible for substantial damage to the Iranian nuclear programme. Though Israel and the US have not openly acknowledged anything, the cyberattack was assumed to be a joint operation by both countries. Stuxnet reportedly destroyed one-fifth of Iran's nuclear centrifuges.

Stuxnet has three modules - a worm, a link file and a rootkit which holds the malicious files to corrupt the system. The Natanz nuclear facility is considered to be a target of the Stuxnet attack, as a drop in nuclear centrifuges was observed by the Federation of American Scientists.

Israel has been using jamming systems as a part of its war strategy. Driven by the threat of Hamas and Hezbollah, Israel has been developing systems since the 1980s. One of the Key jamming systems is the Scorpius EW system. This was developed by IAI and can scan assets by tracking and then jamming threats. The system also uses jamming against long-range missiles by disrupting signals.

Other jammer systems like the Iron Fist, which jams incoming anti-tank missiles employing infrared light to disrupt command lines. EoShield was also developed by Elbit Systems, targeting 360-degree targets at long range. Israel has also increased efforts in GPS jamming for drones and incoming aerial vehicles, particularly in the 2023 and 2025 conflicts.

Both Israel and Iran are engaged in cyber-attacks against each other. Instances of attacks on infrastructure have been witnessed laying emphasis on fight against such warfare and need for AI and systems to protect against cyber warfare. Instances like attacks on civilian infrastructure can be observed where Chinese-made security cameras within Israel were exploited to gather information related to military activities. In 2025, this attack was confirmed by cyber security experts after it was reported by the civilian cyber defence agency.

After the 2025 airstrikes, a pro-Palestinian group, operating from Iran's ministry of Intelligence, claimed responsibility for attacks and data intrusion on Israeli and western companies.

The Hezbollah cyber unit were also involved in an attack on Ziv Hospital. The Israeli cyber unit was successful in thwarting the attack before it could disrupt hospital operations, but some private data was leaked to the hackers.

Israel has also led several operations against Iran sabotaging their military and civilian projects. A hacking group called predatory sparrow claimed responsibility for attack on Iran's state bank Sepah. The group claimed to have destroyed all data leading to accounts being deleted and disruption in services. Another attack was on Iranian state TV, with hackers running anti-regime propaganda leading Israel's psychological operation.



Role of AI in Early Warning, Intelligence, and Targeting

AI in warfare has been a force multiplier and helps strongly in counter warfare. Israel has strongly incorporated AI in countering terrorism. Israel has used AI and their advancement in technology to counter terrorism and use effective strategies for covert operations.

Early Warning

AI absorbs a lot of information from various signals, sensor inputs, system logs, etc, and it helps to create and check for patterns. AI can also help detect patterns from signals and incoming sensor inputs to help in counter warfare using jamming attempts. AI can also be used to detect cyber warfare by detecting anomalies, enabling pre-emptive action in countering attacks.

Intelligence: AI can help in the interpretation and gathering, and processing of large datasets like open-source intelligence, satellite imagery, open signal intercepts, etc. This information can be used to create algorithms and predict and take counteractions. AI can help intercept signals and find the location of the signals, locating enemy hotspots.

Targeting: With the interception of enemy signals and pattern recognition, strike plans can be optimised to reduce collateral damage. AI will be helpful in finding high-value targets and optimising their strategies. They can predict behaviour and enemy movements with the help of algorithms and datasets.

Space, Satellite, and Intelligence Systems

Key operations: Stuxnet, Israel's "soft kill" jamming systems

Iran's space missions have grown significantly since the 2000s. The space missions have grown from limited initiatives to ambitious goals. The space programme has been a base for Iran's military ambitions to support the recent development of missiles, drones and covert warfare. The military space programme is run in parallel to the civilian programme by the IRGC. Iran's main launch complex is the Imam Khomeini Space Centre, with other launch sites near Shahrud and Mahdasht Space Centre. Iran has laid down the objective of the missions to be peaceful, self-reliant and regional leadership in space.

In September 2024, Iran launched the Chamram-1 satellite, making it the first Iranian satellite to change orbit. In December of the same year, Iran launched a spacecraft with the largest payload, testing communication and geo-positioning. Iran is also constructing a space centre in Chabahar with the first set to be operational in 2025. This is a 10-year program with the centre being capable of sending launches by 2031.

The military and civilian space missions run parallel, and countries like the US raise concerns about developing a ballistic missile programme under the guise of civilian space missions.

With the recent revelations of Iran's long-range ballistic missiles shed light on the use of space missions to develop military weapons capable of hitting long-range targets precisely. (Admin. "Iran's Space Program: A Strategic Cloak for ICBM Ambitions?" Defence Security Asia. Last modified April 2, 2025.)

Israel's Ofeq constellation and real-time ISR dominance

The Israeli space program may be modest in scale, but it has achieved remarkable objectives and outshone its capabilities. Israel became the 8th nation to launch its satellite, and today, they are known for using their advanced technology and focusing on "miniaturizing the technology."

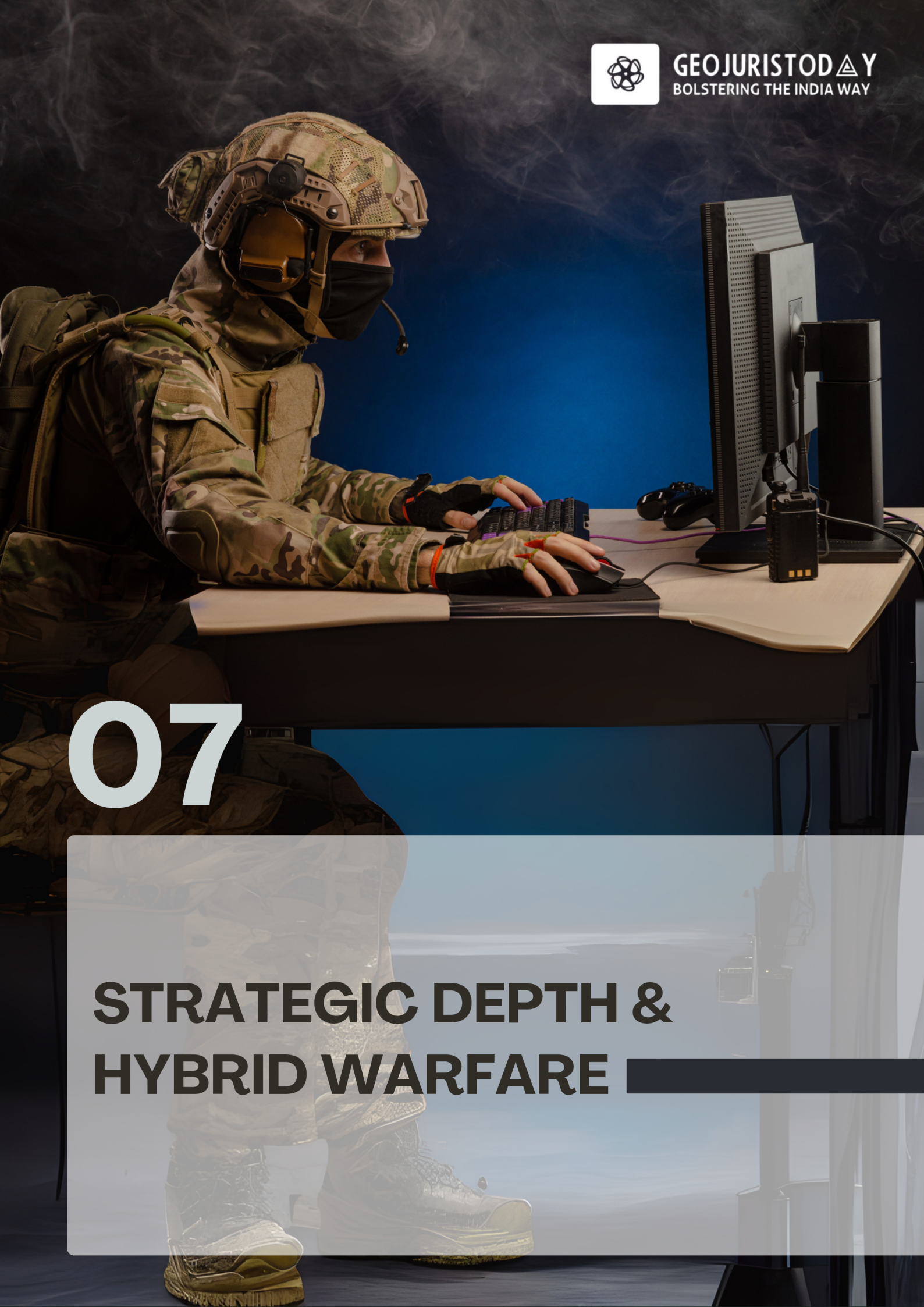
At the core of Israel's defence space operations, the 'Osef' series is the cornerstone. These are military satellites born out of the need to protect themselves from adversaries. The military satellites are used to collect satellite imagery for military and intelligence purposes. The latest publicly known launch is the Ofeq-3, which is supposed to monitor the region like Syria, Iraq and Iran. The Osef constellation helps Israel to monitor the regions in real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. This is critical for tracking enemies in real time.

The tracking of weapons and troops can help fight adversaries and other threats. The Osef sources, when tied up with other sources, like ground intelligence and drone sensors, the true image of the situation on the ground can be created. The integration enhances decision-making in military operations.

The military's space operation is driven to counter the extremism that Israel has to face. The Osef satellites play a crucial role in surveilling Iran's nuclear programme, missile sites and activities. Israel's ISR superiority is also complemented by its fusion of space assets with cutting-edge ground facilities, including the IDF's intelligence directorate (Aman) and cyber warfare, providing a multi-layered defence strategy.







07

STRATEGIC DEPTH & HYBRID WARFARE

Iran multi-Layered Proxy Strategy

Iran's regional influence is neither accidental nor solely ideological it is the product of a meticulously crafted, multi-layered proxy strategy designed to project power, deter adversaries, and establish strategic depth without direct military confrontation. Rooted in the revolutionary ideology of 1979 but evolving into a pragmatic security doctrine, Tehran has developed a network of loyal non-state actors and hybrid militias across the Middle East, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq, and various Alawite-aligned militias in Syria. This strategy allows Iran to operate through asymmetric means, leveraging terrain, sectarian identities, weak states, and porous borders to entrench influence while maintaining plausible deniability. These proxies are structured across ideological, logistical, and military lines ranging from overtly pro-Iranian groups to pragmatically aligned local forces creating a "resistance axis" that can apply calibrated pressure on regional adversaries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. In effect, Iran's proxy strategy is not merely about exporting revolution, but about embedding itself into the political and security infrastructures of fragmented states, turning instability into strategic advantage (Alfoneh,2013).

Lebanon: Iran's first proxy war was its intervention in the Lebanese Civil War in 1982. By leveraging its ideological, personal, and clerical ties with Lebanese Shia, Iran split Hezbollah from the Amal movement following the Israeli invasion in mid-1982 and provided the group with political, financial, and military assistance. With this intervention, Iran created a proxy force acting under its guidance and loyal to the Iranian leader. As stated, both by Iranian officials and in Hezbollah's 'Open Letter', Iran's initial objectives in its intervention were exporting the revolution and confronting Israel however, later the objectives transformed into creating a deterrence posture against Israel and increasing its regional influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Under the supervision and guidance of Iranian officials, Hezbollah carried out operations targeting Israel, US, and French forces in Lebanon, as well as abducting numerous Western civilians and military personnel during the Lebanese Civil War. Following the civil war in Lebanon, Hezbollah joined the Lebanese political system without disarming and has emerged as one of the most influential political actors in Lebanon. The well-equipped and experienced Hezbollah members turned into an asset for Iran and Iran used them in other theatres as advisors,

trainers, and combatants in various theatres. The use of Hezbollah has enabled Iran to engage in conflicts and hostilities with plausible deniability, thereby reducing the risk of direct confrontation. Through Hezbollah's position in Lebanese politics, Iran has increased and ensured its long-term influence in this country. Iran established a deterrence posture against Israel by equipping Hezbollah with more advanced weapons, including rockets, missiles, and UAVs. Furthermore, Iran used Hezbollah to train its Iraqi and Syrian proxies. Due to their shared language and cultural ties, Hezbollah established close relationships with Iranian proxies operating in Iraq and Syria, without encountering significant challenges. Moreover, Hezbollah's involvement has allowed Iran to effectively counter the nationalistic discourse prevalent in the Arab world that seeks to undermine its relationships with Arabs.

Iraq: In the 1980s, exiled Iraqi clerics and politicians led by Baqir al-Hakim and supported by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) formed the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its military wing, the Badr Brigade. Baqir al-Hakim and his followers rejected the traditional Iraqi Shia doctrine, instead adopting Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of the guardianship of the jurist and acknowledging the authority of the supreme leader in this context. Iran provided organizational, financial, and military support to the SCIRI and Badr. It is reported that the IRGC organized the Badr, divided it into four geographically organized axis, and provided 20 million dollars every year until 2001. In return for Iran's support, the SCIRI and Badr Brigades operated under the direct command of the IRGC throughout the Iran-Iraq War and afterwards.

Declassified Iraqi intelligence reports reveal that the Badr Brigades carried out 12 military operations between 1986 and 2000 aimed at government offices, military institutions, and targets associated with the Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organization (The Fighters of the People of Iran, MKO) in Iraq. Iran's support transformed the Badr into a highly structured and skilled force, equipped with a broad operational network within Iraq, enabling it to conduct military and smuggling activities in Iraq. Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran employed a two-pillar strategy aimed at establishing an Iran-friendly and Shia-dominated government by integrating the Dawa Party, SCIRI, and Badr into the new political order. At the same time, Iran sponsored armed resistance by supporting existing militias such as Sadr's Mahdi Army and creating new groups from existing ones, such as Kataib Hezbollah (KH), Asai's Ahl al-Haq (AAH), and later their splinter groups Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HaN).

Since 2014, Iranian proxies within the PMF have increasingly influenced the Iraqi state through non-kinetic activities such as institutional capture and lawfare. In 2018 elections, for example, AAH secured 15 seats, and alongside Badr and Nouri al-Maliki, they supported the formation of Adel Abdul Mahdi's government, which

facilitated the growth of the militias' influence in Iraq during his time in office. In 2022, Iranian proxies managed to prevent the establishment of a government under Mustafa al-Kadhimi, who has strained relations with Iran-aligned Shia militias and the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF), a loose coalition of Iran-backed Shia factions, including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), Kataib Hezbollah, and Badr. This disruption was facilitated by rulings from the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court, despite the anti-SCF bloc securing victory in the 2021 elections. From 2022 onward, Iranian proxies substantially increased their influence within Iraq's legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, effectively capturing numerous institutions. This consolidation of power allowed Iran to exert considerable influence over the decisions of Iraqi governments from within.

Syria: In Syria, Iran indirectly intervened when protests against the Assad regime escalated into a civil war in 2011. Iran employed a dual strategy consisting of both indirect and direct interventions. Initially, Iran sent military advisors to reorganize the Syrian military and pro-regime militia, providing them with financial and military support. Subsequently, Iran formed proxy groups from the Syrian Shia population, along with Afghan and Iraqi Shia residing near Sayyida Zainab Shrine. Iran also deployed Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia proxies in Syria to recruit and train new proxies and fight alongside the Assad regime.

Additionally, Iran established new proxy groups formed by Afghan and Pakistani Shiites, namely Fatemi Youn and Zainab Youn Brigades, and sent them to Syria to support the Assad regime. After 2015, Iran directly intervened by sending and rotating its conventional troops to coordinate the proxies in offensives. It is evident that Iranian conventional forces were directly involved in the offensives and suffered heavy casualties. Through its proxies, Iran prevented the early ousting of the Assad regime, allowing it to stay in power until late 2024. This action secured Syrian backing for Iran's regional interests. As a result of its intervention, Iran expanded its influence in Syria, maintained supply lines to Hezbollah through the country, and established a new front against Israel from Syrian lands until the fall of the Assad regime.

Yemen: The connection between Iran and the Houthis (Ansar Allah) dates back to the 1980s, but it was not until 2010, when the Houthis began direct confrontations with Saudi Arabia, that their relationship deepened. While the Houthis have structured their movement after Lebanese Hezbollah and hold similar anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments as Iran, they follow a distinct branch of Shia Islam called Zaydi, in contrast to Iran's Twelver Shia tradition and do not share Khomeini's political views. Moreover, before the early 2010s, Yemen was not central to Iran's regional strategy, and Iran did not provide significant support to the organization prior to their conflict with Saudi Arabia in 2010. In September 2014, political turmoil enabled the Houthis to execute a military coup and control most of Yemen's population, as well as the country's Red Sea ports. One year later, in 2015, Saudi Arabia

initiated a war against the Houthis, and Iran significantly expanded its support for them following the Saudi-led war.

Iran sent advisers to the Houthis and provided financial and military support, including shipments of advanced weapon systems such as ballistic missiles, anti-ship missiles, drones, and sea mines. Furthermore, Iran supplied the know-how to the Houthis to build a defence industry in Yemen for manufacturing drones and missiles, while also smuggling or exporting the necessary components. Iranian assistance significantly enhanced the capabilities of the Houthis. Knights noted this shift by saying, 'In 2011, the Houthis could barely fire a Katyusha unguided rocket at a target 15 km away, by 2015 they were firing ballistic missiles at Riyadh at ranges of more than a thousand kilometres.

The weapon systems supplied by Iran have significantly enhanced the capabilities of the Houthis, enabling them to execute deadly assaults on the territories of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to targeting both commercial and military vessels within the Red Sea. Furthermore, the Houthis have demonstrated their ability to strike Israel from Yemen, conducting multiple ballistic missile attacks directed at Israeli territory. According to reports from Israeli media, between March 18 and 9 May 2025, the Houthis launched a total of 28 ballistic missiles and numerous drones aimed at Israel. Iran's backing of the Houthis has had significant domestic, regional, and global implications. The Houthis have taken control of most population centres and state institutions in Yemen. Additionally, they have acquired the ability to directly strike Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and even Israel, through Iranian support. This capability not only enhances the Houthis' deterrence posture but also strengthens Iran's. The alliance of Iran with the Houthis allows it to exert influence in the Arabian Peninsula and pose threats to or attack its rivals indirectly. Furthermore, the Houthis are now able to disrupt maritime shipments in Bab al-Mandeb, and airstrikes targeting their military and economic infrastructure have had only temporary effects, failing to prevent Houthi attacks against maritime shipping. As long as Iran maintains its support, the Houthis will be able to sustain their domestic position and regional influence. Moreover, Iran will benefit from this relationship, as ties with the Houthis enable Iran to threaten and target its adversaries and to disrupt maritime shipping.

Gaza: The relationship between Iran and Palestinian groups, mainly Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), began in the early 1990s as part of Iran's strategy to increase its influence in Palestine. When Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Iran's support for the organization significantly intensified, ensuring that Hamas became Iran's most prominent Palestinian partner. However, Hamas's opposition to the Assad regime and its support for opposition groups following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria created tensions with Iran and Hezbollah, resulting in a temporary withdrawal of their support for Hamas. This withdrawal was short-lived, as Iran did not have an alternative strong partner in Palestine and Hamas was

unable to secure another source of sustainable support. Therefore, Iran and Hamas reestablished their relationship in 2017. Despite their sectarian and political differences, Iran and Hamas sustained their alliance through a shared animosity towards Israel.

Iranian support for Hamas is multifaceted, involving financial assistance, military training, intelligence sharing, and the provision of advanced weapon systems. U.S. and Israeli sources estimate that Iran provides between $70 million and $100 million to Hamas annually. Moreover, IRGC-QF officers and Lebanese Hezbollah commanders have been providing basic and advanced military training to Hamas members since the 1990s. Additionally, Iran supplied Hamas with rockets, including Grad, Fajr-5, and M-302, significantly enhancing Hamas's military capabilities and enabling it to strike Israel from Gaza. Iran also transferred the expertise to produce rockets and ammunition domestically, modelled after Hezbollah's strategy in Lebanon. Iran's relationship with Hamas brought several strategic benefits for Iran.

Initially, by supporting Hamas and enhancing its ability to strike Israel, Iran has created an additional layer in its forward defence strategy, alongside Lebanese Hezbollah, and can indirectly apply pressure on Israel. Furthermore, the Palestinian cause, coupled with Iran's backing of Palestinian factions, enhances Iran's soft power and popularity in the Islamic world. Iran's partnership with Hamas also enabled Iran to project influence in the Palestinian territories and broaden its geopolitical reach. All these strategic gains illustrate how non-state actors can effectively further Iran's regional interests (Simsek, 2025).



Israel's Multi-Theatre Response Capacity

Israel has multi-layered air defences against attacks by Iran, which has fired hundreds of ballistic missiles and suicide drones at Israel over the past two days as the Middle East rivals traded heavy blows. Israel has been honing its air defences since coming under Iraqi Scud salvoes in the 1991 War, in addition to receiving support from the US, which has provided its ally with advanced anti-missile equipment. An Israeli military official said that the defensive umbrella had an "80 or 90% success rate", but emphasized that no system is 100% perfect, meaning that some Iranian missiles were breaking through the shield.

Real time targeting system: The Israeli military has employed an artificial intelligence-driven "kill list" to select over 30,000 targets in Gaza with minimal human input, fuelling civilian casualties in the war-torn strip. Especially in the early days of the Gaza war, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) personnel ignored the AI's 10% false positive rate and intentionally targeted alleged militants in their homes with unguided "dumb bombs" despite an increased likelihood of civilian harm, according to IDF sources. The investigation sheds light on the myriad ways in which cutting-edge AI tech, combined with lax rules of engagement from IDF commanders on the ground, has fuelled staggering rates of civilian harm in Gaza.

At least 33,000 Palestinians have died due to Israel's campaign, which followed a Hamas attack that killed 1,200 Israelis last October. The AI targeting software, known as "Lavender," reportedly relies on sprawling surveillance networks and assigns a 1-100 score to every Gazan that estimates the likelihood that they are a Hamas militant. Soldiers then input this information into software known as "Where's Daddy," which uses AI to warn when an alleged militant has returned to their home.

"The doomsday scenario of killer algorithms is already unfolding in Gaza," argues Brianna Rosen, a senior fellow at Just Security and the University of Oxford who previously worked at the National Security Council during the Obama administration. The latest revelations about Israel's use of AI in Gaza, how AI is changing war, and what U.S. policymakers should do to regulate military tech. The AI systems are trained on data, and Israel has identified certain characteristics of people who they claim are Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives, and then they feed that data into the machine. But what if the features that they are identifying are overly broad such as carrying a weapon, being in a WhatsApp group with someone linked to Hamas, or even just moving houses a lot, which everyone, of course, is doing now because it's a whole country of refugees. If these characteristics are fed into AI systems to identify militants, then that's a big

concern because the system is going to take that data and misidentify civilians a great part of the time (Echols, 2024).

Decapitation through intelligence fusion: The operation successfully eliminated Iran's top military leadership, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Hossein Salami, Chief of Staff Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, Emergency Forces Commander Gholam Rashid, and several nuclear scientists. This represents one of the most successful decapitation strikes in modern warfare, demonstrating how intelligence preparation can enable surgical targeting of command structures.

The targeting methodology reflects years of intelligence preparation. Israeli officials compiled detailed intelligence dossiers on senior Iranian defence officials and nuclear scientists, enabling precise targeted assassinations while conducting a coordinated campaign to neutralize Iran's strategic missile array through airstrikes and deep-cover operations. This holistic approach combining human intelligence, technical collection, and operational preparation offers a template for future operations against peer adversaries. At the heart of Israel's military campaign is its decapitation strategy. It is a deliberate effort to remove the extremist core of Iran's leadership and stir mass uprising among its population. In fact, Israel just attacked an ongoing Houthi leadership meeting, aimed at crippling Iran's most aggressive regional proxy.

Such a decapitation strategy is often effective, eliminating top officials of a regime, creating spaces for more rational members to compromise in a zero-sum conflict, and throwing the chain of command into disarray (Populi, 2025).



GEOJURISTODAY
BOLSTERING THE INDIA WAY



08

Legal, Normative, and Civilizational Dimensions

The June 2025 escalation of hostilities between Israel and Iran has raised urgent questions about the legality of actions under international law, the proportionality of retaliatory force, and the norms protecting sensitive infrastructure. The conflict has also laid bare deep ideological rifts: Iran's revolutionary Khomeinist ideology and Israel's Zionist identity each cast the other as an existential enemy. The following analysis examines these issues in depth.

International Law and the Question of Legality

Use of Force and Self-Defense

The cornerstone of international legality is the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force by states except in self-defense or with Security Council authorization (Article 51). In June 2025, however, no UN mandate authorized either Israel's or Iran's attacks. Israeli officials openly admitted that Israel "began the hostilities with a surprise attack on Iran on June 13", and Iran responded with rocket barrages that struck Israeli cities. No Security Council resolution legitimized these strikes, and no prior Iranian military attack on Israel justified immediate self-defense. While Israel invokes the doctrine of anticipatory self-defence in response to mounting threats, the prevailing view among international legal scholars holds that such pre-emptive action is unlawful in the absence of a clear and imminent danger. In this view, Israel's pre-emptive campaign lacked legal justification under jus ad bellum. In June 2025, the Security Council held emergency meetings, and several members publicly declared Israel's actions unlawful. The Council's paralysis (Russia, China and others floated a ceasefire resolution but it was effectively vetoed) underscores the legal deadlock. UN Secretary-General Guterres warned that the bombings marked a "perilous turn" in the region and urged a halt to fighting and a return to negotiations.

Targeted Killings and Assassinations

Among the strikes, Israel targeted Iran's leadership cadre. Satellite imagery and Iranian sources reported that on June 13 Israel killed Major General Gholam Ali

Rashid (head of Iran's Joint Staff) in Tehran, and on June 17 it struck again, killing his successor Major General Ali Shadmani. From a legal perspective, the key question is whether these were "assassinations" (illegal extrajudicial killings) or lawful military targeting. Under international humanitarian law (IHL), once an international armed conflict exists, combatants and fighters are lawful targets. Iran and Israel did engage in open hostilities, meeting the threshold of an IAC. Thus, high-ranking IRGC commanders would qualify as combatants directly participating in hostilities, making them lawful military objectives. By contrast, outside of war such targeted killings would violate the UN prohibition on assassination. Here, the distinction hinges on whether one accepts that an armed conflict had begun. Israeli officials certainly treated it as war: they publicly announced that their goal was to degrade Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities and even suggested regime change. Many analysts now regard the June strikes as the opening of a war, implying that these killings were killings of combatants, not unlawful assassinations.

Proportionality and Civilian Harm

Regardless of characterizing these strikes as lawful acts of war, the principle of proportionality requires that incidental civilian harm not be excessive in relation to the concrete military advantage anticipated. In practice, both sides incurred civilian casualties. The Iranian Health Ministry reported that Israeli bombing had killed at least 224 people in Iran, including many women and children (a total death toll climbing rapidly in mid-June). Iran's strikes on Israel, about 27 ballistic missiles launched on June 22, injured dozens and "flattened buildings" in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Human rights groups decried the use of large ballistic rockets in dense population centres. From Israel's perspective, protecting its citizens is paramount; yet from a legal standpoint, firing unguided missile salvos over cities poses grave IHL concerns. Iran's strikes strikingly violated distinction (Israeli officials acknowledged that many victims were civilians). Similarly, any Israeli strike causing undue civilian death or damage would breach IHL. Both governments were urged to ensure that "civilians in both countries do not further pay the price of reckless military action".

Targeting Nuclear Infrastructure under IHL

A defining feature of the June 2025 conflict was attacks on nuclear sites. Israel and later the U.S. bombed Iran's uranium enrichment and research facilities (Fordow, Natanz, Isfahan), claiming to eliminate military nuclear potential. This raises specific IHL issues. Nuclear facilities are generally civilian in nature and carry enormous humanitarian risk if damaged. Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (1977) provides special protection for nuclear power

plants: Article 56 expressly forbids attacks on "nuclear generating stations" due to the grave danger of radioactive contamination. Although Iran's enrichment sites are not power plants per se, the same logic applies: any nuclear site contains "dangerous forces" that could unleash widespread environmental catastrophe if breached. The ICRC's commentary underscores that nuclear facilities are to be presumed civilian unless unmistakably repurposed for war-making. Thus, absent evidence that Iran's nuclear facilities were used as weapons depots or military bases, they should have been protected.

In late June, the U.S. confirmed it had "completely and totally obliterated" the three nuclear sites, reportedly using massive bunker-buster bombs. Satellite imagery indeed showed severe damage deep underground. Iran, for its part, quickly reported no detectable radioactive leakage, but the mere risk of reactor breach is chilling. The UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) noted it saw no off-site radiation rise yet, but it warned that the true extent of damage would take time to assess.

From a normative standpoint, such attacks appear to violate IHL's protections for nuclear installations. Legally, attacks on nuclear sites would only be lawful if they were being used for military purposes. Iran denies any military use, and as of June 2025 its nuclear program was ostensibly civilian (the JCPOA signatories envisaged only civilian enrichment).

Even if one were to grant that Iran's centrifuges advanced its latent weapons capability, Article 56 and customary law impose a heavy presumption against attack. Any such strike must also meet proportionality and precautions. Given the heavily fortified, buried nature of these facilities, an attacker arguably had no choice but to use extremely powerful munitions. But such force, by definition, risks massive collateral impact. In summary, while enrichment facilities such as Fordow and Natanz are not explicitly protected under Article 56 of Additional Protocol I, which primarily safeguards nuclear power plants, their dual-use nature, proximity to civilian populations, and potential for widespread environmental harm place them within a legal grey zone, raising significant concerns under international humanitarian law.

UN, JCPOA, and Multilateral Legal Deadlocks

The conflict also laid bare the paralysis of international diplomacy. For years the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) sought to constrain Iran's nuclear program through an international treaty framework (endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 in 2015). By June 2025, however, the JCPOA was a ghost of its former self, the U.S. had re-imposed sanctions in 2018 and Iran had resumed nuclear activities. In June 2025, European powers were still pressed to revive negotiations. A week into the war, EU foreign ministers held talks in Geneva to chart a diplomatic return to the nuclear agreement. But Iran's negotiators refused to engage while bombed, insisting "there was no room for negotiations… until Israeli aggression stops".

This mirrored the Russian view, Moscow's deputy foreign minister announced that in the midst of war there was "little chance at the moment" of restoring the JCPOA. In effect, the conflict killed the last prospects for a legal nuclear deal.

At the UN, the situation was similarly gridlocked. The Security Council convened an emergency session on June 13, where Israeli and Iranian diplomats traded accusations. A draft resolution calling for an "immediate and unconditional ceasefire" was floated by Russia and China, but it never advanced due to opposing U.S. pressure. Instead, the Council issued a lame appeal to "exercise restraint" (after the U.S. vetoed any binding measure). Iran's UN mission denounced the airstrikes as illegal under international law, invoking the UN Charter. The Secretary-General warned of a regional spiral. Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency quietly noted that its safeguards inspectors could not operate amid fighting, further eroding the JCPOA framework.

In sum, the war revealed a multilateral deadlock: formal legal instruments – the UN Charter, Security Council resolutions, and the JCPOA, offered no practical check on the violence. No new UN-based legal process addressed the crisis, and Russia openly remarked that ending the hostilities was the "clear pre-condition" to any return to negotiations. The competing demands of great powers (and of Iran and Israel) turned law into words only.

Religion, Identity, and Revolutionary Ideologies

Beyond legalities, the conflict is profoundly shaped by identities and ideologies. Iran's governing ideology (often called Khomeinism) and Israel's Zionist ideology provide mutual existential frameworks. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's regime has enshrined opposition to Israel as a core tenet. Revolutionary rhetoric treats Israel as illegitimate and oppressive. Ayatollah Khomeini portrayed Zionism as a foreign conspiracy undermining Islam, and cast the liberation of Jerusalem and destruction of the "Zionist regime" as redemptive for the Islamic world. Khomeini's anti-Zionism remains central to Iran's identity. Iranian leaders invoke Islamic eschatology: for example, Iran's supreme leader once called Israel a "cancerous tumor" that "undoubtedly" would be removed, reflecting a narrative that Israel's eradication is preordained by divine destiny. In practical terms, Iran channels this through an "Axis of Resistance" strategy, supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and other proxies but the ideological undercurrent is the portrayal of Iran as a leader defending Islam against a Western-aligned Jewish state.

Israel's own ideological underpinning, Zionism, is no less potent in framing the conflict. Zionism holds that Jews constitute a nation entitled to their historic homeland, and Jewish security is paramount. In Israeli political culture, national survival is constantly invoked. Ever since Israel's creation in 1948, defence capability and national security have been part and parcel of its identity. Israeli leaders, especially Prime Minister Netanyahu, have repeatedly

framed Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat to the Jewish state. Netanyahu's speeches employ apocalyptic language: for instance, he has depicted Iran's nuclear program as requiring "immediate and decisive action" or face "complete destruction". In domestic politics, the spectre of annihilation is used to rally public support for military measures.

These ideological worldviews reinforce mutual demonization and amplify fears. Many in Israel see Iran not just as a regional rival but as a messianic regime bent on Holocaust-level destruction in part because Iran's leaders occasionally voice such ambitions. Conversely, many in Iran view Israel not merely as a neighbour but as an occupier that must be confronted. The result is a "clash of civilizations" framing: some observers characterize the war as Iran (representing a revolutionary Islamic vision) versus Israel (a Western-aligned outpost). In this view, Iran's anti-Western, anti-imperialist narrative stands against Israel's claim as a modern democracy secured by Western backing.

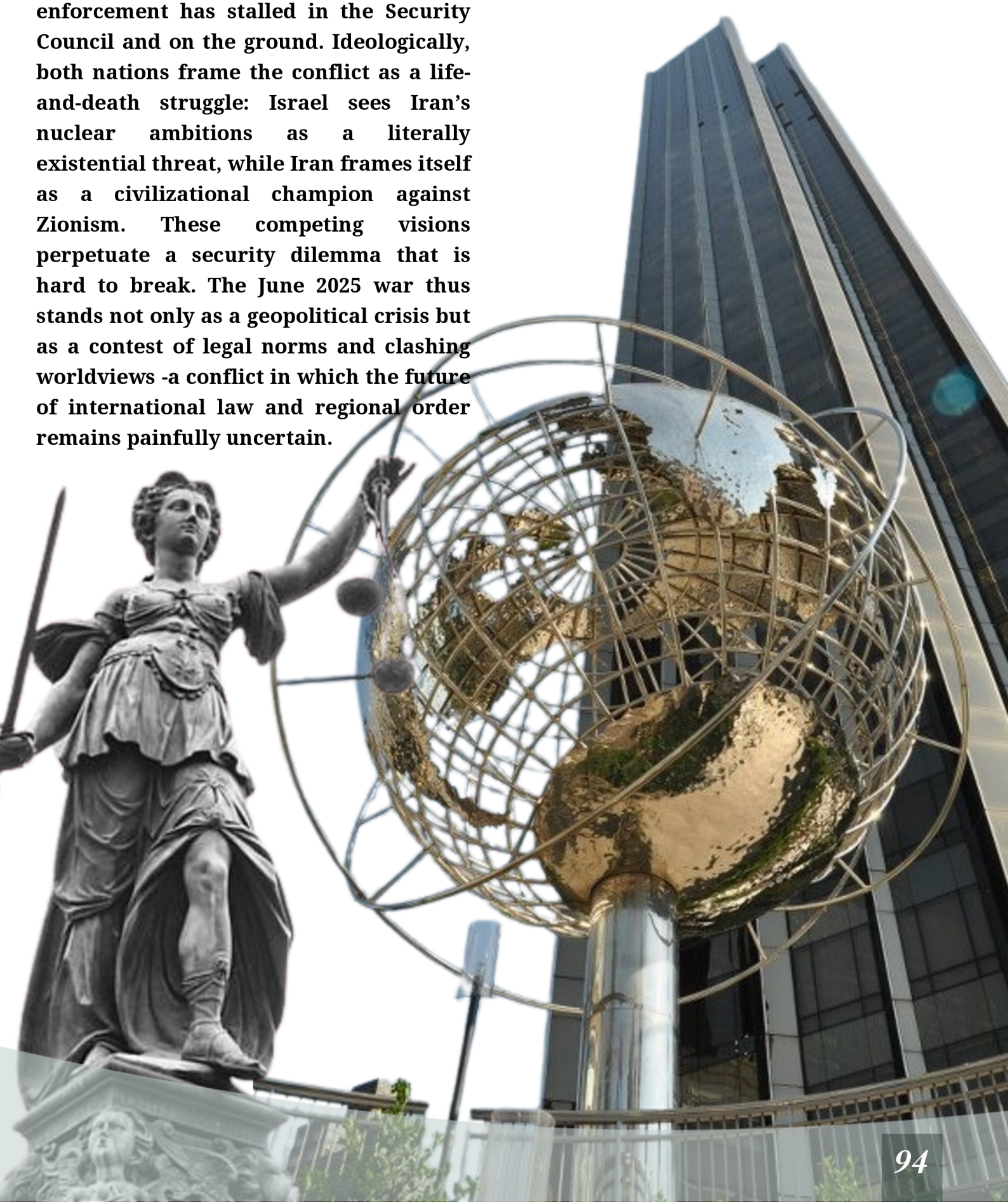
Civilizational Self-Perceptions

At the deepest level, both societies perceive the war through the lens of survival. For Iran, a theocratic state with memories of Western intervention (1953 coup, Iran-Iraq War), the conflict is existential: the regime argues it is defending itself against a hostile "Zionist regime" backed by American power. Iran's propaganda often invokes religious symbolism (for example, framing fallen commanders as martyrs) and speaks of historic resistance. By contrast, Israelis recall the Holocaust and repeated invasions; their entire national ethos has been shaped by vulnerability. Zionist and particularly right-wing religious Zionist ideology even interprets military success as divinely ordained. Indeed, during the conflict an Israeli minister invoked a "time of miracles" for settlement expansion, reflecting a belief that God is on Israel's side. Such civilizational narratives mean that each side often sees the other's acts not simply as strategic choices but as existential threats. As a result, Israeli politicians and media hound the government to act forcefully to "eliminate" Iran's threat, while the mainstream Iranian leadership portrays any compromise as betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

Thus, the June 2025 Iran–Israel war cannot be understood purely as a geopolitical struggle; it is also fuelled by irreconcilable identities. The ideological chasm Khomeinism versus Zionism imbues every military move with symbolic weight. Each state's existential security narrative demands a robust response to the other's moves. This dynamic has made diplomacy extraordinarily difficult: neither side can readily stand down without undermining the ideological imperatives of its own narrative. In such a context, legal constraints and multilateral frameworks struggle to hold sway.

The June 2025 conflict represents a convergence of legal, normative, and ideological fault lines. Legally, Israel's preemptive strikes on Iranian territory and Iran's counter-strikes raise acute questions

under the UN Charter and the law of armed conflict. Normative bodies have underscored that many of the military actions (especially strikes on nuclear and civilian targets) likely violate international humanitarian law. Yet enforcement has stalled in the Security Council and on the ground. Ideologically, both nations frame the conflict as a life-and-death struggle: Israel sees Iran's nuclear ambitions as a literally existential threat, while Iran frames itself as a civilizational champion against Zionism. These competing visions perpetuate a security dilemma that is hard to break. The June 2025 war thus stands not only as a geopolitical crisis but as a contest of legal norms and clashing worldviews -a conflict in which the future of international law and regional order remains painfully uncertain.



GEOJURISTODAY
BOLSTERING THE INDIA WAY

The mathematical study of strategies for dealing with competitive situations where the outcome of a participant's choice of action depends critically on the actions of other participants



09

Strategic Futures: Scenarios and Game Theory in the Iran-Israel Conflict

For years, the conflict between Israel and Iran had unofficial but fairly clear rules, allowing the enemies to maintain an uneasy equilibrium in the Middle East. Neither wanted all-out war, so both kept within certain boundaries. At times of rising tension, they stepped back from the brink. Scholars of game theory say this is a common pattern. In conflicts that simmer over many decades, tit-for-tat actions and reactions often develop into mutually understood "rules of the game" that deter open warfare, said Daniel Sobelman, a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Israel's successful attacks on Iran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, and the volley of ballistic missiles that Iran launched against Israel on Tuesday night, have demonstrated that the old rules no longer apply. To sum up, the theory of games has got maximum relevance in economics and substantial importance in political science in general and international politics in particular.

The Iran-Israel conflict, one of the most volatile confrontations in contemporary geopolitics, is shaped by layers of ideological enmity, regional rivalry, proxy warfare, and nuclear brinkmanship. While direct state-on-state confrontation has been largely avoided, the region is entangled in a shadow war, spanning cyberspace, asymmetric battlefields, and clandestine operations. Given the multiplicity of actors and stakes involved, examining possible strategic futures through the lens of game theory offers a powerful analytical tool to assess incentives, risks, and potential equilibrium states.

Thus, this literature explores four plausible future scenarios for the Iran-Israel conflict: (1) Frozen Conflict with Proxy Firewalls, (2) Full-Scale Regional Conflagration, (3) External Mediation and Deterrence Balance, and (4) Nuclear Threshold Crossing and Red Line Ambiguities. Each scenario is assessed using game-theoretical models such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, Chicken Game, Stag Hunt, and Signalling Games, offering insights into stability, risks of escalation, and the tools of deterrence.



Scenario 1: Frozen Conflict with Proxy Firewalls

In this scenario, the Iran-Israel conflict continues to unfold through proxy actors and indirect confrontations, with both states avoiding full-scale direct war. Iran maintains its strategic posture through its alliances with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shi'a militias in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Gaza. Israel responds through airstrikes in Syria, cyber operations inside Iran, and precision targeting of key figures in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its allied groups.
While each side engages in hostile action, they maintain a tacit understanding that open warfare is mutually destructive. This scenario reflects a durable, if volatile, equilibrium that has largely persisted since the 2006 Lebanon War and the emergence of Iran's regional "Axis of Resistance."

Game Theory Application: Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma

This scenario fits the model of an iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, where two actors repeatedly interact and must choose between cooperation (restraint) and defection (aggression).

- Cooperation (e.g., avoiding provocations, backchannel communications) offers low but stable payoffs.
- Defection (e.g., assassinations, proxy attacks) may yield immediate strategic gains but risks retaliation and escalation.

Over time, a "tit-for-tat" strategy becomes dominant: if one defects, the other retaliates in kind, reinforcing mutual deterrence through limited escalation.



Implications

Dimension	*Description*
Stability Level	Medium , stability is sustained by mutual recognition of escalation risks.
Risk of Escalation	Moderate , local flashpoints (e.g., Gaza, Golan) remain volatile.
Strategic Tools	Cyberwarfare, Intelligence operations, Drone strikes, Financial sanctions
Human Cost	High among civilian populations in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza, where the proxy battles are fought.

This scenario is likely to continue unless a black swan event , such as a major miscalculation or unintended civilian catastrophe , forces either party to re-evaluate its deterrent strategy.

Scenario 2: Full-Scale Regional Conflagration

In this scenario, a trigger, such as an Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, an Iranian missile attack on Israeli territory, or the killing of a senior leader, unleashes a full-scale war.

Unlike prior skirmishes, this war involves multiple theatres: Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, the Red Sea, and possibly the Persian Gulf. Iran mobilizes Hezbollah and its regional militias. Israel responds with overwhelming force, backed by the United States. Gulf Arab states are drawn in economically or militarily, while great powers like Russia and China may enter diplomatically or technologically.

Game Theory Application: The Chicken Game

This situation maps onto the Chicken Game, where two players speed toward each other, hoping the other will swerve to avoid mutual destruction. In this high-stakes environment, credibility and perceived resolve are key.

- **If both "swerve" (de-escalate), credibility suffers.**
- **If one swerves and the other holds firm, the firm actor wins prestige and strategic dominance.**
- **If neither swerve, the result is catastrophic for both.**

Schelling's theory of deterrence applies here: actors must convince adversaries that they are willing to escalate even at their own risk to avoid being perceived as weak.

Implications

Dimension	*Description*
Stability Level	Very low , risk of miscalculation is extreme.
Risk of Escalation	High , once triggered, difficult to contain.
Strategic Tools	Long-range missile systems, cyberattacks on infrastructure, mass mobilization.
Regional Fallout	Mass civilian displacement, economic collapse, refugee crises.

This outcome is often viewed as the "doomsday scenario." While both Iran and Israel are rational actors, mutual distrust, zero-sum calculations, and domestic political pressures could still push them into this destructive path.

Scenario 3: External Mediation and Deterrence Balance

This optimistic scenario envisions a revived international effort, either through American diplomacy, EU engagement, or even Chinese and Russian mediation, to de-escalate tensions and institute a regional security framework. It may include a re-entry into or renegotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), establishment of deconfliction hotlines, and possible agreements on arms control or cyber operations. Both Iran and Israel reduce hostile actions in exchange for political, economic, or security incentives.

Israel may continue normalization with Gulf Arab states (under the Abraham Accords), while Iran seeks legitimacy and economic relief. This could result in a de facto cold peace based on mutual deterrence and international monitoring.

Game Theory Application: Stag Hunt (Coordination Game)

In a Stag Hunt, players can cooperate (hunt the stag for a big reward) or defect (hunt a rabbit for a smaller but guaranteed payoff). The highest collective benefit comes when both trust each other and cooperate.

- **Cooperation = peace dividends, regional stability.**
- **Defection = short-term advantage, but loss of long-term trust and prosperity.**

Third-party mediators reduce transaction costs, increase transparency, and help enforce cooperation, shifting the Nash equilibrium toward mutual restraint.

Implications

Dimension	*Description*
Stability Level	High, contingent on sustained diplomacy and verification.
Risk of Escalation	Low, communication channels increase predictability.
Strategic Tools	Sanctions relief, backchannel talks, Track II diplomacy, regional arms control.
Challenges	Domestic hardliners on both sides, Israeli scepticism of Iranian intentions, and Iran's distrust of Western motives.

This outcome requires sustained diplomatic investment and the presence of credible enforcement mechanisms, conditions that are possible but not easily maintained in the Middle East's fractious geopolitical environment.

Scenario 4: Nuclear Threshold Crossing and Red Line Ambiguities

Here, Iran successfully enriches uranium to near-weapons-grade levels and develops the capacity to assemble a nuclear weapon, though it may or may not test it. Israel, which adheres to a policy of strategic ambiguity regarding its own nuclear arsenal, now faces a red-line dilemma. Israeli leaders have long vowed that a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. This leads to the possibility of a preventive strike, international crisis, or the solidification of a new nuclear deterrence paradigm.

Game Theory Application: Signalling Game & Deterrence Theory

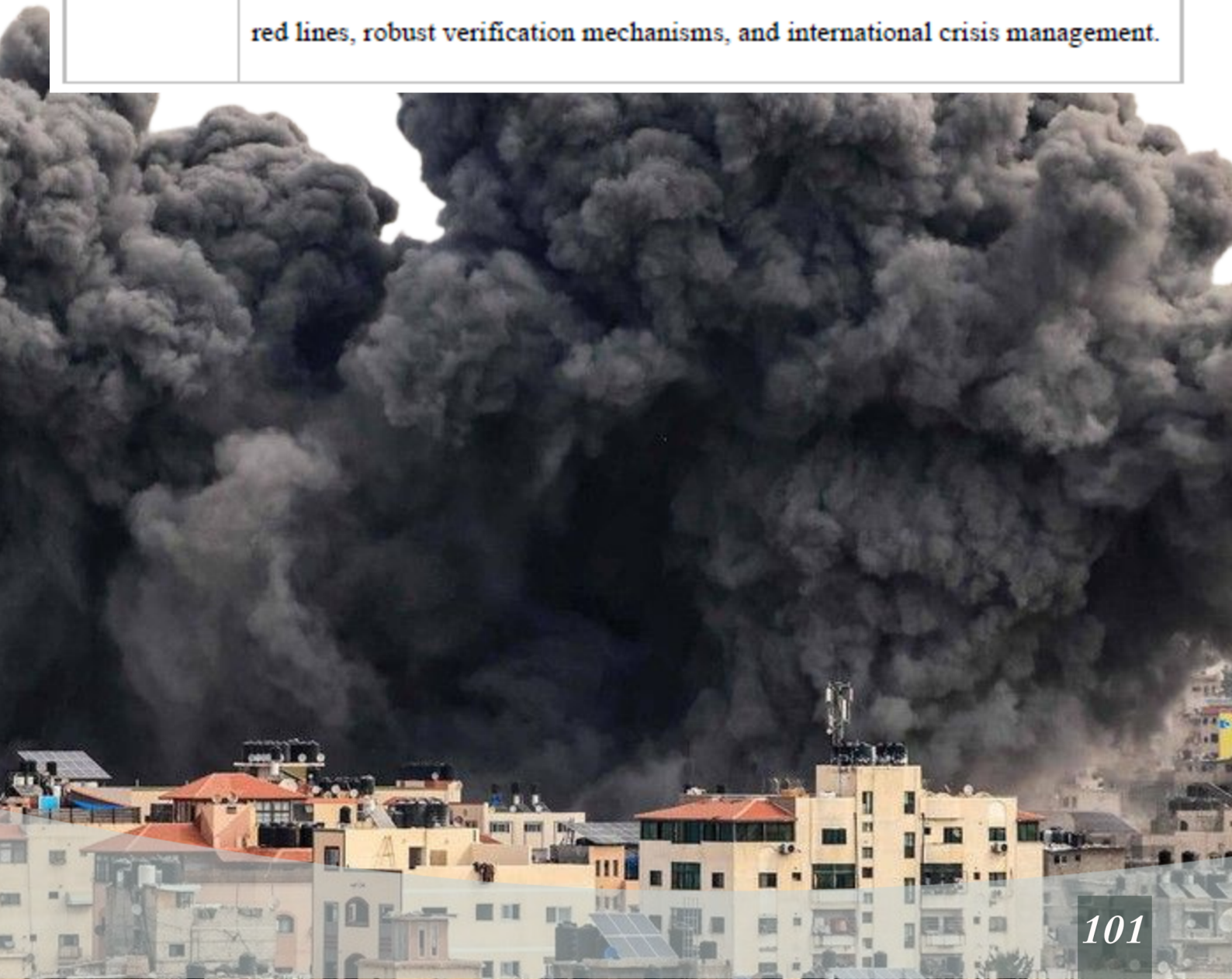
This scenario is best understood through Signalling Games and Deterrence Theory. Both sides engage in symbolic acts , missile tests, military exercises, leaked intelligence, to influence the opponent's behaviour.

- **Iran might use strategic ambiguity: hinting at nuclear capacity without confirming it.**
- **Israel signals readiness to strike but also sends messages through diplomatic and intelligence channels.**
- **Credible commitment problems arise when neither side trusts the other's promises not to escalate or retaliate.**

A Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) framework could emerge, but unlike the Cold War, the absence of clear second-strike capabilities and the presence of volatile proxies make such deterrence highly fragile.

Implications

Dimension	*Description*
Stability Level	Medium , depends on whether Iran overtly crosses the threshold.
Risk of Escalation	Very high , ambiguity invites pre-emption.
Strategic Tools	Nuclear posture, missile defence, strategic alliances, sabotage operations.
Broader Impact	Regional nuclear proliferation (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt), erosion of the global non-proliferation regime, potential arms race. This scenario underscores the high-stakes nature of nuclear brinkmanship and the importance of credible red lines, robust verification mechanisms, and international crisis management.



Mapping the Futures

Scenario	*Game Theory Model*	*Stability*	*Escalation Risk*	*Strategic Instruments*
Frozen Conflict with Proxy Firewalls	Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma	Medium	Moderate	Proxies, Cyber, Intelligence
Full-Scale Regional Conflagration	Chicken Game	Very Low	Very High	Missiles, Alliances, Conventional War
External Mediation and Deterrence Balance	Stag Hunt (Coordination)	High	Low	Diplomacy, Agreements, Sanctions Relief
Nuclear Threshold Crossing and Red Lines	Signalling Game / Deterrence	Medium	Extremely High	Strategic Ambiguity, Pre-emption, MAD Logic

The Iran-Israel conflict is not static but highly dynamic, influenced by a mix of rational calculation, historical grievances, and domestic political currents. Game theory allows us to abstract and model the strategic incentives at play in four critical scenarios.

These strategic futures are not mutually exclusive; the region may oscillate between them depending on domestic developments, global shifts, or sudden crises. However, understanding these paths can help policymakers, analysts, and peacebuilders anticipate outcomes, craft deterrence mechanisms, and pursue pathways to de-escalation. Ultimately, whether the Crescent and the Star remain locked in perpetual shadow conflict or find a path toward cautious coexistence will depend on their ability to navigate these strategic dilemmas with foresight, restraint, and, above all, political courage.



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10

Indian Strategic and Diplomatic Engagement

It is pertinent to observe that India's core interest amidst the Iran-Israel war is to ensure that this protracted regional instability does not undermine her energy security, expatriate welfare, diplomatic ties, and broader economic and strategic projects in West Asia. Foreign Ministry has stated that "India urges both sides to avoid any escalatory steps" and to resolve disputes "through dialogue and diplomacy" (Shukla 2025). Likewise, India refrained from joining the China-Russia led SCO condemnation of Israel's strike on Iran, highlighting neutrality in conduct. As a result, commentators and political analysts describe New Delhi's strategy as a "calculated, nuanced and mature approach" acting as a robust mechanism to serve national interests and assert strategic autonomy (Krishnan, 2025).

Vishwaguru as the Mediator

Building on this pragmatic balancing act, India's evolving role as a potential "Vishwaguru" and mediator in the Iran-Israel conflict calls for a more structured and assertive approach. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has publicly reiterated that "this is not an era of war," is not just rhetorical, rather, it encapsulates the doctrine that prioritizes dialogue, restraint, and multilateralism over confrontation. It is noteworthy that this readiness to 'play its part' in ensuring long-term regional stability is consistent with India's foreign policy principle of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, consequently, allowing New Delhi to maintain constructive, even if sometimes delicate, relations with both Iran and Israel, alongside the United States and Gulf countries. Likewise, India's consistent call for "words" over war should be echoed in all forums it participates in – ranging from the United Nations to the regional groupings such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (Baradhan, 2025) .

Therefore, scholars suggest that New Delhi should consider institutionalising mediation efforts beyond ad hoc interventions. Given its historic ties and strategic investments in Iran, seconded by considerable leverage in Washington and close partnerships with Israel; this diplomatic capital serves as an honest broker. Thus, India could possibly offer to host back-channel talks or support third-party mediation or alternatively work in tandem with conciliatory entities and provide a platform for discreet dialogue. (D'Souza, 2025).

- ***Strategic, Economic and Energy Perils***

The backdrop of the Israel-Iran conflict has re-ignited debates on energy insecurity, global interdependence, and supply chains left at the mercy of regional volatility. India has traditionally relied on Gulf oil, thereby, making stability in West Asia extremely vital for economy. Thus, India must also safeguard its tangible by defending crucial infrastructure initiatives and projects. Nearly half of India's oil imports originate from the region, making any escalation a direct threat to our energy efficacy. In this context, India has expressed willingness to Eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation with Cyprus's offshore gas fields, which could diversify our sources. As a result, New Delhi should aim at finding reliable

partners in key geopolitical locations, and a welcoming development has already taken place in this direction. The Adriatic Coast has emerged as a potential maritime gateway to the continental Europe and navigating westwards, while circumventing the unstable regions. Thus, on one hand where the accessibility to the Strait of Hormuz is threatened by the escalating Iran-Israel conflict, New Delhi's invigorating engagements with Croatia and Cyprus could provide us with a strategic rescue.

Simultaneously, the ambiguous future of hefty investments in Chabahar and Haifa has compelled New Delhi to seek an alternative route to Asia. For instance, Chabahar was designated to link India to the landlocked neighbours offshore the Arabian Sea via Iran, bypassing our northwestern adversary, Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi himself pushed this flagship cooperation as a "vital trade artery connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries." If the Gulf routes are stranded, the Adriatic-Mediterranean lines still remain open. Thus, investing in European and Southeast EU partners hedges India's supply risk, making these visits prudent diversification.

Additionally, owing to a vast diaspora in the Middle East, particularly in the Guld countries present a case of twin-caution. Firstly, the safety of Indians becomes the exclusive prerogative of Indian government, and secondly, the remittances that flow via these citizens is of merit in terms of improved standard of living. For example, Thus, India should accelerate "Operation Sindhu" evacuations of Indian nationals ensuring the safe repatriation of students and workers. This will prevent a humanitarian crisis at home and also demonstrate India's capacitance to diplomatically engage and secure her needs.

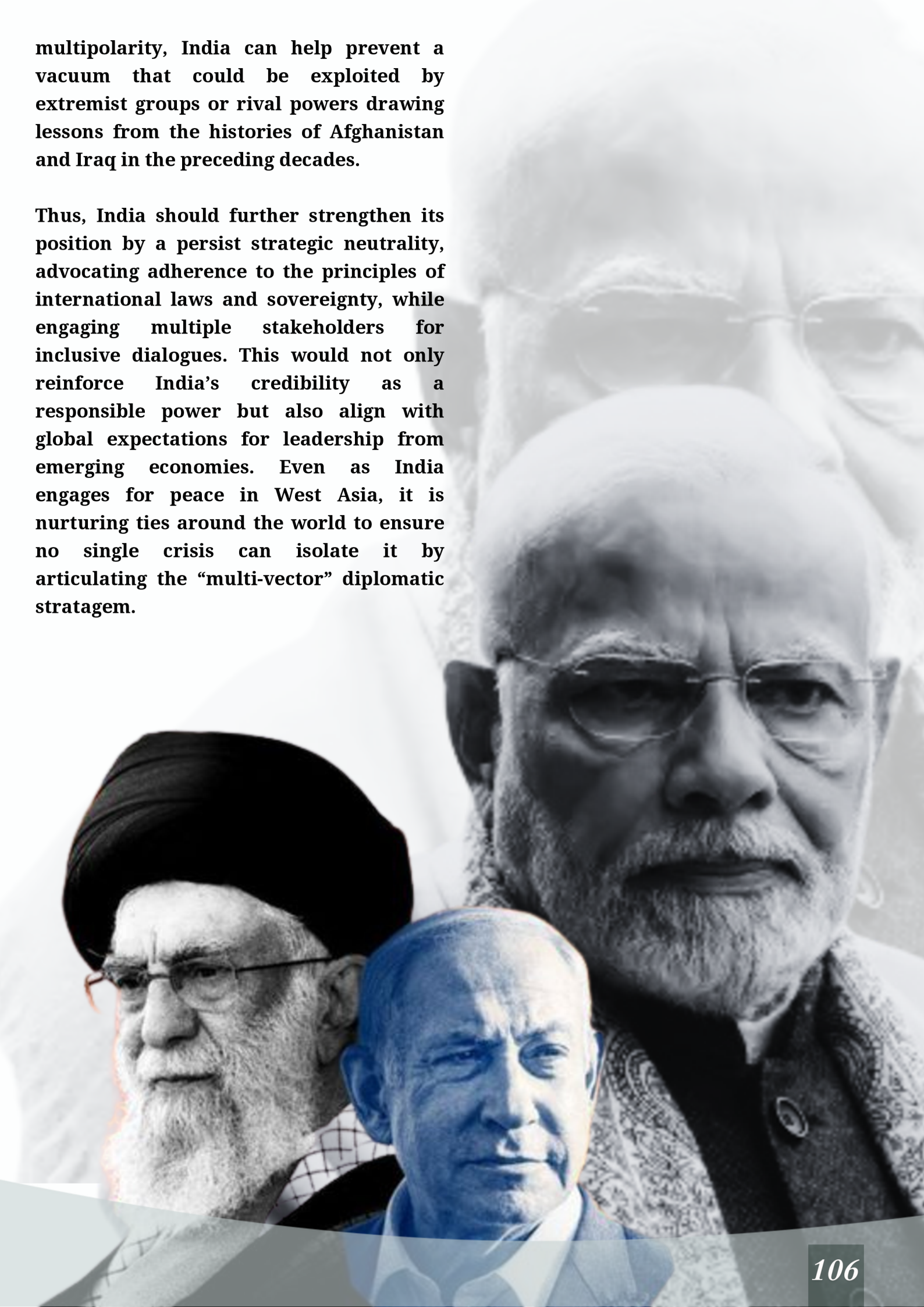
- ***Great Power Ambitions***

Beyond immediate economic and security concerns, India's Middle Eastern approach is shaped by broader geopolitical "hedging." The potential overthrow of the Iranian regime (in the face of no clear regime succession alternatives as suggested by popular narratives) or a shift toward US-led unipolarity in the region would ultimately diminish New Delhi's strategic manoeuvrability while reducing its ability to expand its influence in the region. Therefore, a "multipolar" Middle East, in contrast, offers India greater opportunities for engagement and leverage.

India is also mindful that this prolonged conflict in West Asia could draw US attention and resources away from Asia; thus, inadvertently strengthening China's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. China has already advanced in hosting a trilateral meeting with Islamabad and Dhaka in Kunming. Although, this might not be a direct consequence of the Iran-Israel war, scholars note that this event could prove to be a strategic realignment on our north-western and eastern frontiers. Henceforth, by advocating for regional restraint and

multipolarity, India can help prevent a vacuum that could be exploited by extremist groups or rival powers drawing lessons from the histories of Afghanistan and Iraq in the preceding decades.

Thus, India should further strengthen its position by a persist strategic neutrality, advocating adherence to the principles of international laws and sovereignty, while engaging multiple stakeholders for inclusive dialogues. This would not only reinforce India's credibility as a responsible power but also align with global expectations for leadership from emerging economies. Even as India engages for peace in West Asia, it is nurturing ties around the world to ensure no single crisis can isolate it by articulating the "multi-vector" diplomatic stratagem.



UN, NAM, and the Global South: Strategic Diplomacy

We are not drifting toward crisis – we are racing toward it

On the lines of the Iran-Israel war, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has already warned that the region stands "on the brink of a deadly downward spiral," thus, highlighting the urgency of the international community to address the escalating affairs between the two rivals in the Middle East (Baradhan, 2025). Today, where economic integration and cultural interconnectedness have transformed the world into a "global village," the imperative for robust, multilateral engagement is greater than ever. Regional and multinational organizations, alongside non-state actors, now play indispensable roles in shaping outcomes that transcend national borders.

The United Nations: Reinvigorating Multilateralism

The United Nations, one of the premiere most international body has an indispensable character in containing such instability. In light of this, the UN Security Council, despite being paralysed by the veto deadlock, should pursue the requisite available means to de-escalate the crisis, including affirmations of ceasefire and humanitarian rescue. Commentators have observed that, alternately, the UN General Assembly or Emergency Special Sessions could also pass resolutions urging an immediate ceasefire. Moreover, the UN's specialized agencies, such as the IAEA and UNHCR, should be mobilized to monitor nuclear facilities, document violations of humanitarian law, and coordinate emergency relief.

However, the history stands as a witness testifying the inability of the United Nations in preventing, de-escalating or resolving major conflicts of the 21st century. The P5, originally designed as a safeguard to ensure great-power consensus; the veto has too often served narrow national interests at the expense of global peace and security. The Syrian civil war is perhaps the most devastating recent example. Since 2011, Russia and China have vetoed at least 16 resolutions addressing everything from chemical weapons investigations to humanitarian corridors and referrals to the International Criminal Court. Similarly, the United States has used its veto power repeatedly to shield Israel from censure regarding settlement expansion and military actions in Gaza, contributing to the protracted nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

And it is equally important to note that veto's negative impact extends beyond these headline cases. The UN's failure to act and timely address the crisis in Rwanda (1994), Srebrenica (1995), and Darfur (2003) are frequently cited as emblematic of its inability to fulfil its primary objective, i.e. protecting civilians, maintaining peace and deterrence. Yet, the UN's story is not one of failure alone. In contexts of East Timor and Liberia, UN has played a crucial role in mending fractured societies, post-conflict stabilization peacebuilding, thus, demonstrating that despite the aforementioned structural limitations, the organization can be effective when political will and coherent mandates align. Thus, scholars argue that the Security Council and the overall UN structural design, rooted in post-World War II power dynamics, is increasingly anachronistic in a multipolar world (Luck, 2006). The urgent need for reform is widely recognized in both policy and academic circles. These reformatory proposals include; expansion and democratization of UNSC, Veto restraint in sensitive/humanitarian situations, UNGA empowerment and legal abidance of resolutions, transparency and accountability, etc. (Weiss, 2016) (Trahan, 2020).

The Non-Alignment Movement

The diplomatic ethos of the Global South traces back to the 1955 Bandung Conference, which enshrined principles of political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, and non-interference (Acharya, 2016). Rising from newly decolonized states as a collective voice to assert national interests and development over the global bi-polarity, NAM has demonstrated its potential and merit in championing issue-based and pragmatic multilateral approaches to global governance. Hence, with this collective potential and historical legacy, NAM countries have repeatedly called for "peace, stability and justice (Prashad, 2007)."

This historical legacy endows NAM with both the legitimacy and responsibility to respond proactively to contemporary crises. For instance, Indonesia has condemned Israel's strike on Iran as a "serious violation of international law" and called on UN members, "particularly regional and NAM member states … to condemn aggression. (Razak, 2025)" Scholars suggest that NAM countries including South Africa, Indonesia, Nigeria, etc. should convene an urgent meeting or issue a joint statement reaffirming the NAM principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. They can also press for a ceasefire resolution, and emphasize diplomatic solutions. Such a collective stance would not only reinforce NAM's normative leadership but also provide a platform for constructive engagement with both regional and global actors. Furthermore, NAM states could introduce or co-sponsor a ceasefire resolution at the United Nations, leveraging their numbers and moral authority in the General Assembly to press for an immediate halt to hostilities and the initiation of diplomatic negotiations.

Beyond crisis management, NAM and allied

blocs like the G77 should actively seek to reopen nuclear diplomacy, including advocating for the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as a pathway to de-escalation (DPPA, 2025). This would reflect NAM's longstanding commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and demonstrate its capacity to shape substantive policy outcomes in areas of global concern (Thakur, 2017). India, given its historic leadership role in both NAM and the G77, is particularly well-placed to guide consensus within the Global South. As Ambassador Malhotra's observation that India's diplomatic experience "qualifies it to guide Global South consensus" (Ghosh, n.d.) is especially pertinent at this juncture.

Global South

Broadly, the Global South, encompassing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, approaches Middle East conflicts through the prism of post-colonial solidarity, developmental priorities, and acute energy security concerns (Alden & Vieira, 2005). While many of these states maintain significant Muslim populations or historical, economic, and political ties to the region's principal actors, their overarching interest lies in averting the emergence of a new Cold War dynamic on their periphery. This is particularly salient given the destabilizing legacies of external interventions and proxy wars that have historically undermined the sovereignty and developmental trajectories of Global South states (Prashad, 2007).

In this context, regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are uniquely positioned to promote de-escalation and humanitarian relief without being drawn into the polarizing logic of great-power rivalry. Likewise, the India–Brazil–South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum and the Non-Aligned Movement (as elaborated before) can play a catalytic role by jointly advocating for the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian assistance and by leveraging their collective voice at the United Nations and other multilateral fora (Garcia, 2025).

Given the cumulative strain on international peace from crises in Syria, Gaza, and now the Iran-Israel conflict, it is imperative that Global South leaders convene, perhaps on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, to articulate a unified appeal for the cessation of hostilities. Such a move would not only reinforce the Global South's normative commitment to peace and justice but also signal its agency in shaping global responses to regional crises (Acharya, 2016).

While the architecture of collective security remains confined by the politics of the veto, collective diplomacy is both possible and necessary. The "Global South" Bloc representing the majority of the world's population, has a vested interest in stabilizing energy markets, safeguarding food security, and containing refugee flows resulting from Middle East instability

(Alden & Vieira, 2005). Political analysists warn that 'If the NAM countries and other Southern governments remain passive, they risk marginalization in an era of renewed great-power confrontation.' Instead, these states should assertively affirm, in the UN and other coalitions such as the G20, OIC, etc., that any durable solution must respect the territorial integrity and security of all states, consistent with the foundational principles of the UN Charter.



For Multilateral Institutions and the "Brains" of Civil Society

The overarching significance of non-state actors as peace mitigators and policy influencers cannot be undermined. As they provide the "brains" to the civil society while the academia engages in meaningful articulation of the global worries; think tanks, research institutes, advocacy groups, NGOs, and other multilateral bodies are increasingly critical in shaping pathways out of crisis. They offer independent analysis, facilitating dialogue, and proposing innovative solutions. Their impact is evident both historically and in current crises, where official diplomatic channels are often constrained by political or security considerations.

Independent Analysis and Evidence-Based Policymaking

Institutions like SIPRI provide crucial data on arms flows and military balances, as seen in their 2025 report highlighting Israel's status as a major arms importer and Iran's limited imports due to sanctions. Such data-driven insights help policymakers understand the risks of escalation and arms proliferation, much as SIPRI's reports informed debates during the Ukraine crisis and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. Drawing on these resources, governments can better calibrate responses to shifting regional power dynamics (SIPRI, 2025).

Track-II Dialogues and Confidence-Building

Track-II diplomacy; unofficial, informal exchanges among academics, experts, and former officials has proven valuable in recent decades. Past successes include its role in the groundwork for the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) and in fostering Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. These dialogues, often convened by think tanks or international research institutes, allow for creative problem solving and trust-building away from the pressures of formal negotiations and bureaucracy. For example, the Middle East Institute and Chatham House have hosted such workshops, while Indian institutions like ORF could convene regional Track-II efforts, bringing together Israeli, Iranian, Arab, and South Asian voices to identify confidence-building measures such as humanitarian corridors or prisoner exchanges (Chatham House, 2024).

Innovative Institutional Solutions

Think tanks can also propose new mechanisms for peace and oversight. For instance, the idea of a Middle East Peace Commission under UN auspices, modelled on the OSCE, could help monitor ceasefires and mediate disputes. Research centres have previously contributed to the design of arms control frameworks and joint investigation mechanisms, drawing on

international law and IAEA guidelines, much as the IAEA's monitoring was key during the Iran nuclear negotiations.

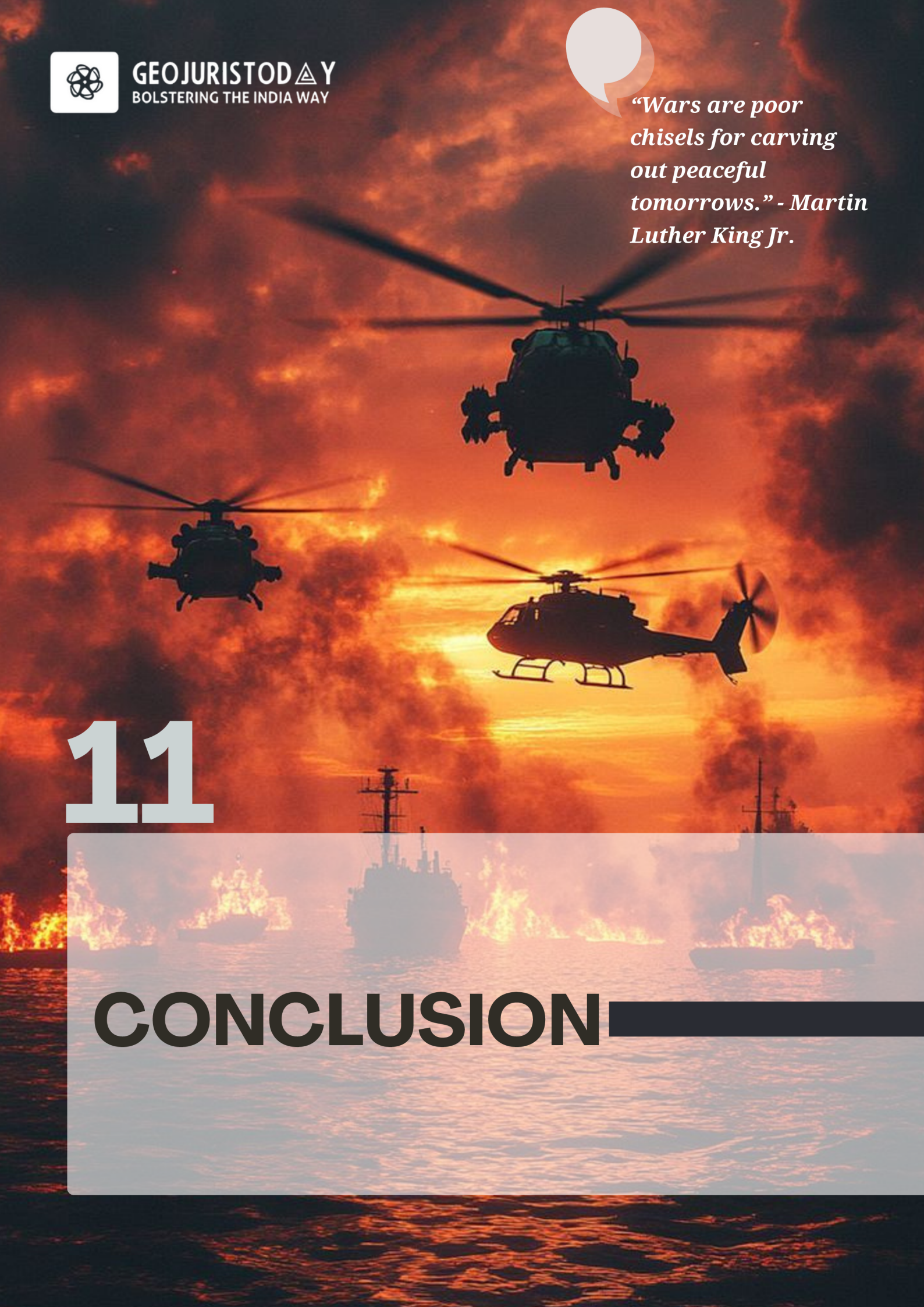
Norm Promotion and Scenario Planning

Academic and policy networks play a vital role in reinforcing humanitarian norms, as seen in advocacy for the Geneva Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during the Syrian and Gaza crises. Publications in leading journals and scenario planning exercises, such as those by RAND or CSIS for Ukraine, help governments anticipate the consequences of escalation and make risk factored and informed choices about restraint and engagement.

By combining rigorous research with proactive dialogue, multilateral institutions and think tanks can turn crisis into an opportunity for cooperation. As IR scholar Bull (1977) argued, even in an anarchical society, shared norms and institutions can provide order. India and its partners should tap this intellectual infrastructure. In practice, that means leveraging organizations like the UN, IAEA, and OIC, and enlisting think-tanks from Delhi to Geneva to Washington, to mediate an orderly end to hostilities. This networked approach – where ideas and norms flow from research into policy, is the only surefire way to convert India's call for "dialogue and the restoration of stability" into tangible peace making.



"Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows." - Martin Luther King Jr.



11

CONCLUSION

This is not just a conflict between governments. It is s a conflict that manifests in day-to-day lives of people; in the bomb shelters of Tel Aviv, the rubble of Beirut, the broken homes in Gaza, and the tense silence of young Iranians wondering what the future holds for them. It is a conflict that has outlived generations, one in which the children of war have grown up to become its fighters, its mourners, and its quiet witnesses.

This research began with a paradox: Two friends turning into bloodthirsty enemies. Iran and Israel, now locked in open hostility, were once allies, trading oil, intelligence, and military expertise in the shadows of the Cold War. However, the erstwhile partnership was shattered in 1979, which not only severed bilateral ties, but rather, transformed into a deeply personal, ideological enmity. Therefore, what followed was not merely a geopolitical rift, but the gradual unfolding of a human tragedy – one carried out via the proxy battles, precision strikes, infiltration and words of hatred echoed in classrooms, media, academia, and the political rhetoric.

At a strategic level, Iran and Israel have become skilful players in this game. Iran's use of proxy groups has created a web of stimulus, extending across the region; from Hezbollah's bunkers in Lebanon to Shia militias in Iraq and Hamas on the streets of Gaza. Israel, on the other hand, has responded with airstrikes, cyberattacks, assassinations, and a state-of-the-art missile defence network. There was no open battle, but they were constant and fought in silence, in code, in the sky, and underground.

And yet, for all the weapons and war games, some wandering questions remain unanswered: What does security really mean? Whose safety is being defended? And what is the cost of deterrence when children are growing up knowing nothing but fear? Alas, there are no easy answers. But the future is not sealed. If this history has shown anything, it is that alliances shift, narratives change, and people, if given the space and righteous direction, can choose peace over power. The Abraham Accords proved that diplomacy, even between long-standing enemies, is still possible. The silent efforts of Track-II diplomacy, civil society engagement, and grassroots dialogue continue to plant seeds where politicians hesitate.

India's potential role as a neutral mediator, the shifting sands of U.S. foreign policy, and the changing priorities of younger generations in both countries;

these are not magical solutions, but they are cracks in the wall, places where hope can enter. This conflict has become a machine, grinding forward with each new missile, each new election, each broken ceasefire. But machines can be switched off. The gears can slow down, the cycles interrupted. Thus, as we conclude our expedition, we collectively observe that: Peace begins not in policy papers, but in the decision to change the status-quo, with political willingness and civilizational cohesion.

The crescent and the star once stood beside each other in secret. Perhaps, one day, they can do so again in the open, not as shadows of war, but as symbols of a shared desire for peace.



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