

The Iran-Israel Conflict: A New Chapter in Middle Eastern Geopolitics.

Outline

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Thesis Statement:

From covert allies to open enemies, Iran and Israel now wage a conflict shaped by history, ideology, and nuclear peril, yet amid rising chaos, only bold diplomacy and regional recalibration can rescue the Middle East from tipping into uncontrollable collapse.

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The Middle East has long stood as a focal point of global tensions, shaped by deep-rooted rivalries, ^{competition over} resource ~~and~~ and fierce contests for power and influence. It is a region that has almost always remained unstable, where diplomacy often coexists uneasily with conflict and where regional disputes carry global consequences. Among the most enduring and volatile rivalries in this landscape is the one between Iran and Israel - a conflict that has grown from political hostility into a dangerous confrontation with potentially far-reaching implications. What was once a cold, calculated rivalry fought through intelligence operations, cyberattacks and regional proxies has now entered an alarming new phase. In 2025, the strategic balance that had long kept direct warfare at bay gave way to open military strikes and retaliations, signalling a collapse of restraint. The escalation not only reflects decades of mutual distrust and ideological opposition but also introduces a perilous nuclear dimension. With Iran's controversial nuclear enrichment program advancing and Israel maintaining a widely acknowledged nuclear arsenal, the stakes have risen from regional dominance to existential threat. The presence of nuclear capabilities, whether real, suspected, or undeclared has transformed the nature of this conflict. It is no longer a matter of territorial influence or political defiance alone; it is a contest occurring under the shadow of weapons of mass destruction. The fear that a miscalculation or provocation could spiral into a nuclear confrontation adds urgency to the need for diplomatic resolution and strategic foresight. From covert allies to open enemies, Iran and Israel now wage a conflict shaped by history, ideology, and nuclear peril, yet amid rising chaos, only bold diplomacy and regional recalibration can rescue the Middle East from tipping into uncontrollable collapse.

The current crisis cannot be fully understood without tracing its roots. A look into the historical backdrop of Iran-Israel relations reveals not only the shifting dynamics of power and ideology but also the complex web of regional alliances and strategic calculations that have shaped this enduring conflict. Before 1979, Iran and Israel maintained discreet but strategic ties, rooted in mutual regional interests. Under the Shah, Iran recognized Israel de facto, cooperated on intelligence matters, and served as a major oil supplier. The two countries shared a common goal: countering Arab nationalism and Soviet influence in the region. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran marked a dramatic turning point. The new theocratic regime started calling Israel, "Little Satan", denounced it as the usurper of Palestinian land and severed all diplomatic ties. Iran's foreign policy became overtly anti-Zionist, with support extended to armed groups opposing Israel, including Hezbollah, Houthis and Hamas. In response, Israel began viewing Iran not just as a rival, but as an existential threat - especially amid growing concerns over nuclear weapons. As noted in The World Journal, "50 years ago they were allies - now locked in a war of attrition." This transformation from overt allies to open adversaries laid the foundation for the decades of hostility that followed.

Following decades of cold hostility, the Iran-Israel rivalry has now crossed a dangerous threshold. For decades, Iran maintained a posture of strategic ambiguity towards Israel - defined by indirect resistance, proxy warfare and cyber operations, under the informal "No War, No Peace" doctrine. This allowed Tehran to confront Israel indirectly without inviting full scale retaliation. However this equilibrium began shattering in October 2024, when Israel launched Operation "Days of Repentance" - a series of precision airstrikes targeting Iranian missile factories, nuclear research facilities near Parchin and air defense systems. In response, Iran retaliated with "Operation True Promise II", firing nearly 200 ballistic missiles

at Israeli airbases, marking one of the most visible Iran responses in decades. ②

The doctrine collapsed completely in mid-2025, when Israel launched "Operation Rising Lion", a bold military campaign targeting Iran's nuclear facilities in Isfahan, Natanz and Fordow, Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) command structures, and key military infrastructure. Symbolically drawn from a biblical verse (28:1) "The righteous are bold as a lion" - the operation reflected Israel's intent to assert moral legitimacy and military dominance, ~~and~~ taking help from the United States of America. Iran responded with "Operation True Promise III", launching over 150 ballistic missiles and causing great damage in Israel.

As a result US conducted an operation named "Midnight Hammer", targeting three nuclear facilities of Iran, in response to which, Iran executed Operation Glad Tidings of Victory targeting Al Udeid airbase in Qatar, a key hub for US operations. As the Financial Times has noted, "Tehran's posture has imploded - forcing it to either retreat or retaliate". Analysts at Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) described this moment as "the end of strategic ambiguity".

This breakdown of strategic ambiguity did not occur in a vacuum; rather, it was driven by a convergence of deeply entrenched rivalries and evolving security threats. At its core lies the enduring ideological and strategic hostility between Shia-majority Iran and the Jewish state of Israel. It may also be called as a conflict over hegemony in the Middle East, where Iran is the only muslim state that has been developing its nuclear facility, that makes Iran superior to all the other states. ~~But~~ This may not be termed as a purely theological conflict but embedded in competing regional visions. Iran's self-styled "Axis of Resistance" - comprising Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and allied militias - seeks to undermine Israeli and Western influence across the Middle East. Israel, perceiving this as an existential threat, has

institutionalized a doctrine of pre-emptive action to disrupt Iran's regional entrenchment. Strategic analysts describe this dynamic as a "multi-front strategic collision", where each side's ideological convictions fuel escalating military postures.

Compounding this is the growing anxiety over Iran's nuclear ambitions. In June 2025, Israel, with tacit US support, launched coordinated airstrikes on Iran's three nuclear facilities, employing deep-penetration bunker-busters (B2 missiles) in a bid to cripple centrifuge capabilities. These strikes, according to The Washington Post, marked one of the most direct and open assaults on Iran's nuclear program to date. Israeli officials have long insisted that "if Iran goes nuclear, it is a point of no return," making pre-emptive strikes a central tenet of its security doctrine. Yet while these operations have disrupted enrichment timelines, nuclear experts warn that Iran still retains much of its uranium stockpile - indicating that deterrence by force may only delay, not eliminate, the nuclear threat.

Equally critical is Iran's expanding regional footprints through proxies, which has heightened Israel's sense of encirclement. Tehran continues to bolster militias across Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, not only supplying weapons and funding but also deploying elite IRGC units like the Quds force and Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis. These proxies serve to project Iranian influence, while maintaining plausible deniability. In response, Israel has moved from covert sabotage - such as targeted assassinations and cyberattacks - to overt cross border operations. According to a report in Al-Jazeera, this tit-for-tat escalation has now entered a dangerous feedback loop, where every strike demands a more forceful reply, thereby eroding the remaining space for diplomacy and restraint.

In the light of the escalating tensions outlined earlier, the strategic responses of global actors have taken ^{the} centre stage, each shaping the trajectory of a rapidly evolving conflict. The world's only superpower

the United States, has deepened its military cooperation with Israel, supplying³ vital intelligence, advanced weaponry, and aerial refueling capabilities that underpinned the Operation Rising Lion campaign. US forces even conducted airstrikes on Iranian nuclear sites in June 2025, with stealth bombers delivering bunker-buster munitions to complement Israeli airpower as noted in the Washington Post. Publicly, however, Washington quickly shifted to a diplomatic posture — brokered a fragile ceasefire after 12 days of intense exchanges, pressed for resumption of nuclear talks with Iran, and emphasized a return to dialogue rather than extended warfare. Analysts ~~do~~ have described this dual-track approach "strike hard, then seek peace" as emblematic of US efforts to avoid prolonged entanglement while preserving regional leverage.

Similarly, China and Russia have called for urgent de-escalation. Beijing's leadership warned that continued instability in the Middle East could threaten global energy markets and economic growth, stating bluntly, "If the Middle East is unstable, the world will not be at peace." China (along ^{with} Russia) joined the chorus condemning Israel and US strikes as "unprovoked", cautioning such precedents could invite wider conflict. (Aljazeera). While maintaining close economic ties with Iran, both powers stopped short of direct intervention. Instead, they have leveraged diplomatic platforms, such as the United Nations Security Council to urge ceasefire enforcement and revive multilateral nuclear oversight efforts.

At the international level, the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have stressed the legal and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. The UNSC General Secretary has also raised alarms over possible breaches of international law and the specter of nuclear proliferation. OIC member states have ^{also} demanded

access for humanitarian aid in Gaza, and the restoration of diplomatic channels, fearing the conflict could inflame sectarian tensions across Muslim-majority countries. Both institutions continue pressing for a sustainable ceasefire and increased humanitarian relief.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has responded with ^a measured concern.

Islamabad formally condemned the strikes on Iranian territory, sealed its shared border, and called for restraint - fearing a surge in militant movement and cross-border instability. Domestic think tanks like CISS (Center for International Strategic Studies) labelled the

Israeli attacks "unprovoked" emphasizing the need for measured diplomacy rather than regional rivalry and highlighting emerging public and policy anxiety over economic and security fallout in Balochistan.

While the Iran-Israel showdown continues to reshape the regional order, Pakistan finds itself beset by a web of strategic, economic, and security dilemmas. As a recipient of vocal diplomatic backing from Tehran and raging Gulf alliances enabled by US support, Pakistan has stepped into a precarious balancing act - deepening relations with Iran even as it relies on Saudi-backed financing and remittance flows. Islamabad's claims of neutrality has been severely tested: Reuters reports that Pakistan sealed its border with Iran to prevent militant spillover from destabilized Western territories. Meanwhile analysts from IPR and MEI argue that any disruption in bilateral trust could derail critical connectivity projects such as the stalled Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline - now threatened by arbitration - and elements of CPEC that rely on stable Western flank. Compounding these concerns is the surge in cross-border smuggling, as Iranian order disintegrates, risking illicit fuel flows into Balochistan and empowering militant groups. Sectarian tensions also loom large; with Pakistan hosting the world's second-largest Shia population, experts at The Diplomat and have previously warned that external sectarianization can trigger internal fractures, particularly if external powers use demographic narratives to their advantage. Ultimately, Islamabad's challenge is clear: navigate a high-stakes diplomatic maze, protecting domestic security and economic assets without surrendering its autonomy or becoming a proxy battleground in a struggle not its own.

As global stakeholders scramble to navigate the diplomatic and military fallout, the conflict's economic and strategic repercussions have begun to ripple across international systems. One of the most immediate concern is the looming disruption of global energy markets. Following the

June 2025 Israeli airstrikes on Iranian nuclear sites, Iran's parliament passed a resolution authorizing the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint through which nearly 20% of the world's oil supply transits daily. While Tehran has not yet enforced a complete closure, the threat alone has sent crude oil prices soaring to their highest levels since 2022, triggering panic in energy-dependent economies. Analysts at the World Journal describe this move as "Tehran's last economic lever," warning that a prolonged blockade could spark global inflation, fuel shortages, and energy insecurity - particularly in Asia and Europe.

Spilling over from the Persian Gulf, the strategic ramifications of the conflict are also manifesting across the broader Middle East.

With Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Syria and Iraq now on high alert, the threat of a multi-front conflict remains

dangerously real. Skirmishes along the Israel-Lebanon border have already intensified, and regional air defenses have been reinforced in anticipation of further missile exchanges. Al Jazeera reports that Gulf states including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have convened emergency security meetings amid fears of retaliatory drone attacks. The rising tempo of these developments is also accelerating a regional arms race, with Gulf states fast-tracking defense procurements, and Iran strengthening ties with Russia and China for missile and drone technology. Experts at ISSI and CISS caution that this volatile buildup could destabilize the region well beyond the current battlefield, extending into fragile zones like Afghanistan and the Red Sea corridor.

Beyond the battlefield, the goeonomic landscape is undergoing rapid recalibration. As military tensions deter investment and sanctions squeeze Iran's economy, key global trade corridors are being disrupted. The United States has not lifted its sanctions even after the ceasefire; instead, it has tightened enforcement on Iranian oil, banking and defense sectors, while signalling that limited relief especially on oil exports - may be possible if Tehran demonstrates restraint and resumes nuclear compliance. President Trump recently stated that Iran must "act peacefully" before any meaningful rollback could occur, through some interpreted his comments as tacit acceptance of China's continued oil imports from Iran (New York Times). Meanwhile, China's Belt and Road routes are being rerouted to ~~also~~ avoid Iranian airspace, and maritime shipping costs in the Arabian Sea have spiked, with insurance premiums for tankers tripling. According to International Energy Agency, this economic disruption disproportionately affects developing economies reliant on oil imports - such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and several African nations - raising fears of inflation, fiscal strain, and regional economic instability. Adding further complexity, the crisis is also reshaping strategic alliances and global diplomatic norms. As the United States reaffirms its commitment

to Israeli defense and Russia backs Iran's sovereign right to respond, the bipolar echoes of the Cold War-era bloc politics are resurfacing. Regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are under pressure to redefine their neutrality, while the UN faces criticism for failing to enforce ceasefire compliance. Simultaneously, non-state actors like Hezbollah and the Houthis have seized the moment to elevate their legitimacy as "frontline resistance", fueling asymmetric warfare and weakening the traditional state-based deterrence models. As one IPR analyst warned, "We're witnessing the beginning of a new strategic architecture - defined less by treaties and more by deterrence through escalation."

Following the immense geopolitical and economic turbulence triggered by the Iran-Israel conflict, the most perilous path forward remains a descent into nuclear brinkmanship. Despite Israeli and US airstrikes in June 2025 on key Iranian nuclear facilities, intelligence estimates cited by The Financial Times and The Washington Post suggest that ~~Iran~~ according to IAEA, Iran retains much of its enriched uranium and could resume weaponization with alarming speed. This latent capacity has pushed Israeli defense planners to revive the doctrine of "calculated preemption", prompting further threats of strikes should Iran accelerate enrichment. Tehran, in turn, views these moves as an assault on its sovereignty and has hardened its strategic posture. Analysts from ISSI warn that continued pressure without parallel engagement could collapse Iran's strategic restraint altogether, leading to irreversible proliferation. The risk here is a security paradox: Israel's deterrence may paradoxically, provoke the very nuclear sprint it seeks to prevent.

Yet a full-scale nuclear confrontation is not the only plausible outcome. An equally dangerous scenario is the gradual entrenchment of a prolonged proxy war, with asymmetric retaliation replacing direct engagement - in the weeks following the June offensive, the IRGC's

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Rhetoric has shifted towards framing the conflict as a "people's resistance" rather than a state-level war. This framing allows groups like Hezbollah and Houthis to escalate attacks semi-independently, complicating Israeli response options. The IPRI notes that these asymmetric dynamics expand the conflict zone across multiple unstable theaters - like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, intensifying the region's strategic fragmentation. Israel's military capabilities, while unmatched, are stretched thin in containing multiple proxy threats simultaneously, particularly under the pressure of international scrutiny. History shows that prolonged proxy wars rarely produce strategic clarity and often spiral into attritional quagmires, where victories are tactical but instability becomes structural.

Amid these destabilizing forces, a fragile diplomatic window has emerged, shaped by the US brokered ceasefire in June 2025. While short-lived, the truce marked the first mutual pause in hostilities and signalled that even hardened actors are open to recalibration under pressure. President Trump's administration has used this lull to float the possibility of a broader regional dialogue, linking de-escalation in Gaza and nuclear compliance to limited sanctions relief. However, this diplomatic gambit faces skepticism. Iran insists that Western guarantees must be binding and UN-certified, while Israel continues to demand unconditional dismantling of Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Regional think tanks like ISSI and IPIIS have called for a parallel Track-II approach, wherein informal dialogue platforms fill the trust deficit that formal negotiations have failed to overcome. Without durable mechanisms and regional ownership, the ceasefire risks becoming another tactical pause in a long war of attrition.

For diplomacy to mature into resolution, it must be supported by an enforceable architecture that addresses both the nuclear file and the ideological-political rifts sustaining conflict. Reviving the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) with more rigorous verification backed by

IAEA real-time inspections and graduated sanctions relief, is a necessary but insufficient condition. What is equally critical is a multilateral security dialogue led not only by Western powers, but by the OIC, Arab League, and the influential regional actors. These platforms can create shared diplomatic space where crisis management becomes possible even amid distrust. ~~IPRI~~ IPRI and CISS have proposed actionable confidence-building steps like shared intelligence pools, bilateral military hotlines, and even third-party hosted backchannels to defuse immediate flashpoints. As the conflict's escalation has shown, the absence of institutionalized de-escalation tools makes every miscalculation a potential spark for a wider war. In this delicate balance between war and diplomacy, structured engagement - not tactical improvisation is the only sustainable path forward.

In a nutshell, the conflict has transitioned from covert containment to overt confrontation, threatening to redraw the security architecture of the Middle East. What began as shadow wars and ideological rivalry has now escalated into a multidimensional crisis spanning nuclear brinkmanship, asymmetric proxy warfare, and global economic disruption. The military calculus on both sides has produced tactical gains but at the cost of strategic uncertainty, drawing in global powers and multiplying the stakes for the wider region. Yet within this volatile landscape lies a narrow window for resolution. The recent ceasefire, however fragile, demonstrates that diplomacy still holds currency. Even among adversaries hardened by decades of mistrust, if regional and international actors can move beyond zero-sum posturing and invest in multilateral dialogue, confidence-building measures, and institutional deterrence, a path to de-escalation remains possible. Ultimately, the choice ahead is stark: an endless cycle of provocation and retaliation or a hardwon but sustainable peace anchored in verification, restraint and regional ownership. The region must choose wisely, for the costs of failure are no longer theoretical - they are unfolding in real time.