



Implications of the US-Israeli Offensive on Iran for the Future of Iran's Regional Standing



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Implications of the US-Israeli Offensive on Iran for the Future of Iran's Regional Standing

Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay¹

Introduction

On 13/6/2025, Israel launched a military offensive targeting Iranian sites, with a particular focus on nuclear facilities and certain units of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Iranian army. During the initial days, Israel assassinated several military commanders as well as a number of elite nuclear scientists. On 22/6/2025, the US joined the operation, attacking three Iranian nuclear facilities; Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Two days following the US involvement, a ceasefire was declared between the parties.



The conflicting parties claimed victories in that confrontation. The US assessment, expressed by President Trump and some US military officials, stated that the Iranian nuclear project had been “obliterated.”² Israel claimed that Iranian losses were significant in its nuclear programs, air defenses, missile facilities and nuclear scientists.³ Meanwhile, Iran, through its Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and several of its military commanders, asserted that Iran “country emerged victorious over Israel,” and that Israeli losses were greater than officially acknowledged, particularly the strikes targeting areas in Tel Aviv, some security institutions, scientific facilities such as the Weizmann Institute and Ben-Gurion University, oil refineries in Haifa, and the headquarters of certain Israeli security agencies.⁴ This was subsequently confirmed by Israeli admissions days after the confrontation.⁵

This confrontation has raised several questions that we aim to address by examining assessments published by non-Arab research centers. Our goal is to identify the causes, outcomes and future implications of this confrontation for Iran's regional standing. We deliberately selected a diverse range of centers from the US, Europe and Asia, each offering a distinct perspective on the events in question. Finally, we analyzed areas of convergence and divergence among these centers to better understand the potential long-term repercussions.

It is essential at the outset to define the concept of *regional status* for any given state—particularly the notion of a *core country* within its region. The European Consortium for Political Research defines a regional power as “a state belonging to a



geographically defined region, dominating this region in economic and military terms, able to exercise hegemonic influence in the region and considerable influence on the world scale, willing to make use of power resources and recognized or even accepted as the regional leader by its neighbors.” Meanwhile, the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) defines it as a state capable of exerting “decisive influence on the geographic extension of the region as well as on its ideological construction,” “defining the regional security agenda to a high degree” through superior capabilities, and being “appreciated as a regional power by other powers in the region and beyond, especially by other regional powers.”⁶

It is well known that in 2005, Iran adopted a strategic plan to establish itself as a core regional power, particularly in West Asia, of which the Middle East forms a central part.⁷

First: Causes and Consequences of the US-Israeli Attacks

Iran’s relationship with both Israel and the US has been adversarial since 1979. The US-Israeli alliance is a strategic one, rooted in the shared objective of undermining Iran’s aspiration to become the “regional core,” as outlined in its own strategic doctrine. Within this context, the recent attack on Iran should be seen as yet another episode in a long-standing conflict.



To obstruct Iran from achieving its goals, the US and Israel have defined three main objectives:

- ▶ 1. Regime change in Iran.
- ▶ 2. Preventing Iran from advancing its nuclear program.
- ▶ 3. Undermining Iran’s bid to become the dominant regional power.

Accordingly, the 2025 US-Israeli military strike on Iran sought to achieve some or all of these aims. But did the outcomes align with the intended goals?

This is the question we aim to explore by reviewing a range of academic evaluations of the results, in order to formulate a forward-looking vision of Iran’s regional standing, one grounded in the common threads found across these assessments.

Second: The US Assessment of the Outcomes

In its evaluation of the outcomes of the Israeli–US offensive and its future ramifications, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace⁸ highlights the importance



of distinguishing between two dimensions of the recent confrontation: infrastructure damage and capability elimination, particularly with regard to Iran's nuclear program. While military action can destroy equipment and facilities, it cannot eliminate knowledge or dismantle widely dispersed material, especially in a country spanning over 1.648 million square kilometers. Nor can it eliminate the “underlying strategic drivers of nuclear weapons development.” By reportedly relocating its most sensitive materials ahead of the strikes, Iran appears to have safeguarded the core of its enrichment program, while intact bunkers may still provide a springboard for reconstruction.⁹ Satellite imagery, according to Carnegie, confirms that:

- ▶ 1. “Strikes at Fordow and Natanz penetrated the surface installations and sealed key underground access points. At Fordow, at least six distinct craters appear on the ridge above the buried centrifuge halls... The bombs—GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrators—likely continued through the rock into the centrifuge halls and other sensitive areas before detonating, potentially causing far more extensive underground damage than surface imagery can reveal.”
- ▶ 2. “Natanz, already compromised by Israeli missiles, appears to have suffered additional devastation, as the U.S. strikes likely penetrated directly into remaining centrifuge cascades and critical infrastructure areas. And even before the United States struck, Natanz had suffered complete destruction of its electrical infrastructure, as major substations, emergency generators, and power feeds were destroyed, rendering the remaining centrifuge cascades inoperable.”
- ▶ 3. At Isfahan, the extensive surface damage visible in satellite imagery appears primarily attributable to earlier Israeli strikes that eliminated Iran's primary uranium hexafluoride production facility and uranium metal production capability. U.S. Tomahawk missiles targeted what remained of the complex, including entrances to underground highly enriched uranium (HEU) storage facilities—though Iran likely had relocated these sensitive materials.¹⁰

Carnegie adds that “this physical destruction of nuclear infrastructure may impede immediate operations, but it does not eliminate the risk of proliferation. Notably, [International Atomic Energy Agency] IAEA inspectors last verified Iran's nuclear material inventories just days before the Israeli strikes began on June 13, raising the possibility that Iranian authorities preemptively relocated key stocks of HEU from declared facilities to undisclosed locations. Satellite imagery from June 19–20 shows dump trucks and bulldozers near tunnel entrances at Fordow, with analysts suggesting that dirt was being brought in to seal the tunnels



rather than remove contents—though the presence of other unidentified trucks leaves open the possibility of material relocation.”

“At Natanz, an estimated 15,000 centrifuges were likely rendered inoperable due to abrupt power loss, with the IAEA confirming two missile impact holes above the underground enrichment halls that likely led to localized radioactive contamination and chemical hazards. The scale of damage suggests that Iran is unlikely to recommission these heavily compromised and now-vulnerable sites. Reconstitution would likely require constructing entirely new facilities, rather than simply excavating and repairing the tunnels.”



As for “the damage to the uranium conversion infrastructure at Isfahan..the full extent of the disruption remains under assessment. In addition, a not-yet-completed enriched uranium metal processing facility—widely regarded as a key component in nuclear weaponization—was reportedly destroyed at the research complex. Although this could create a bottleneck in weapons development, the underlying uranium metal conversion processes are relatively simple chemical operations that could, in principle, be rebuilt in parallel with enrichment restoration, limiting long-term delays to a potential weapons program.”

Iran’s nuclear infrastructure, though damaged, retains substantial reconstitution potential across multiple dimensions:

- ▶ 1. “Iran’s existing 60 percent enriched uranium stockpile, if successfully relocated as suspected, retains its proliferation potential, regardless of infrastructure damage.”
- ▶ 2. “Iran’s stockpile of uninstalled centrifuge components presents another reconstitution factor. The country has manufactured advanced centrifuges for years that have not been under IAEA monitoring since the nuclear deal collapsed [May 2018], creating a reserve that could support rapid program rebuilding.”
- ▶ 3. “Meanwhile, strikes have extensively damaged the above-ground centrifuge research and development facilities at Karaj, the Tehran Research Center, and Natanz. That being said, it is unclear whether the underground centrifuge infrastructure still remains operational.”
- ▶ 4. The US-Israeli strikes have not eliminated the core elements that have sustained the Islamic Republic’s nuclear trajectory for over two decades:
 - a. A broad and distributed infrastructure.
 - b. A deep bench of technically trained personnel.



- c. Extensive domestic supply chains.
- d. A resilient political will to achieve the nuclear objective (the declared peaceful program). “Iran’s shift toward a hardened nuclear posture is now being formalized through legal and political instruments designed to sever oversight and assert full national control.” On June 25, 2025, the Iranian parliament overwhelmingly passed a law suspending cooperation with the IAEA, conditioning future inspector access on approval by the Supreme National Security Council. Parliamentary Presidium member Alireza Salimi explained that the bill bars IAEA inspectors ‘unless the security of the country’s nuclear facilities and peaceful nuclear activities is guaranteed,’ and imposes penalties on any individuals who facilitate unauthorized inspections. The vote was 210 in favor, with only two abstaining.” This was followed by a decision to halt the IAEA inspectors’ access, without Iran’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), though only a threat of withdrawal was made. This came alongside the Iranian Guardian Council’s approval of the Parliament’s position and the subsequent IAEA decision to withdraw its inspectors.¹¹



Alireza Salimi

- ▶ 5. “Without IAEA oversight, Iran gains operational space to pursue covert reconstitution efforts while the international community loses crucial oversight on Iran’s nuclear activities.”

- ▶ 6. The Future of Iran’s Nuclear Program: Carnegie’s report outlines the future of Iran’s nuclear program based on several key determinants:

- a. The full extent of the damage to underground infrastructure remains unclear. Most assessments, however, suggest the damage is greater than Iran claims, though less severe than what US President Donald Trump or Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu have alleged.



**Benjamin
Netanyahu**

- b. Iran’s assessment of ongoing military threats, particularly those targeting the state, the regime and the program itself. The higher the perceived risk, the more forceful and swift Iran’s drive to restore its nuclear capabilities is likely to be. Current indications suggest these threats remain significant.
- c. Available resources to Iran. Developments in the previous period suggest that Iran is relatively capable of mitigating the impact of sanctions.
- d. Any visible steps toward reconstitution or a further curtailment of IAEA oversight will almost certainly invite additional Israeli—or US—preemptive strikes, heightening the risk of regional instability in the near term.



A second report by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), focused on four key aspects:¹²

► **1. The extent of damage to Iran’s nuclear program from Israeli and US strikes:**

The report relies on several sources to assess the impact on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed that the Fordow facility sustained significant damage. The “US bunker-buster bombs sealed entrances to two unspecified nuclear sites but failed to “collapse their underground buildings.” “The Institute for Science and International Security [ISIS], a nuclear nonproliferation think tank that has long studied the Iranian nuclear program, assessed that it was very likely the strikes destroyed or damaged most of the centrifuges at Fordow on the basis of the impact locations and the effects of the blast waves.” Meanwhile, “The Israel Atomic Energy Commission separately assessed that the US strike on Fordow destroyed the site’s critical infrastructure and ‘rendered the enrichment facility inoperable.’ ”

ISW continued that “A US nuclear weapons expert stated on June 24 that US and Israeli strikes likely destroyed 20,000 centrifuges at Natanz and Fordow and severely damaged weaponization infrastructure,” and that the “Iranian military officials have delivered false situation reports to senior Iranian leaders to downplay the extent of the damage.”

Iranian sources stated that “Iran relocated its enriched material to a secure location to prevent it from being destroyed,” while ISIS reported that “Iran still retains stockpiles of 3 to 5 percent, 20 percent, and 60 percent enriched uranium.”



► **2. Implications of Iran’s Suspension of Cooperation with IAEA:** Iranian officials have repeatedly raised the possibility of withdrawing from the NPT and suspending the country’s IAEA membership. The Iranian Parliament eventually passed a bill to suspend all cooperation with the IAEA, which was later adopted by the government. The Institute notes that Iran has made similar threats on previous occasions. It also highlights that IAEA report found Iran’s cooperation with the IAEA “less than satisfactory.”

► **3. Stability of the Political Regime Following the US-Israeli Attack:** ISW notes that the regime’s response focused on three main dimensions. First, it concentrated on the Kurdish regions in northwestern Iran. Second, it deployed forces along the borders with Pakistan, Iraq and Azerbaijan, fearing the infiltration of armed groups into Iranian territory. Third, a wave of assassinations targeting military commanders and prominent nuclear scientists heightened the regime’s awareness of internal threats,



prompting it to arrest hundreds and seize workshops involved in the production of military equipment.

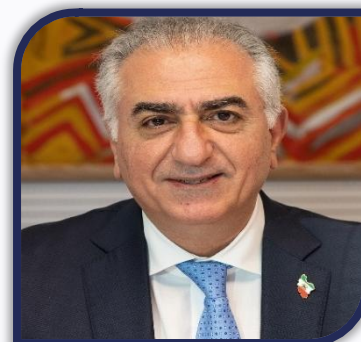
- **4. The Role of Iran's International Relations:** ISW estimates that Iran is less satisfied with its relationship with Russia than with China. The anticipated support from Russia appears to have fallen short of Iranian expectations, whereas China seems more forthcoming. On 25 June, Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh visited the People's Republic of China (PRC), his first foreign trip since Israel launched its aerial campaign against Iran. He attended "a two-day meeting for the defense ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) countries in Qingdao." The visit sought China's support in rebuilding Iran's military and economic infrastructure, which has been damaged by the war. "PRC-based entities have historically provided military or dual-use products to Iran, including shipping precursor material to support the replenishment of Iranian solid-fuel ballistic missile stockpiles." Moreover, the "PRC also offers a critical economic lifeline for Iran by purchasing around 90 percent of Iran's oil exports, and Iranian officials are likely eager to secure Iran's economic partnership with the PRC in the aftermath of Israel's recent strike campaign."



Third: French Institute of International Relations (Ifri)

Ifri focused its analysis on two main dimensions:¹³

- **1. The Iranian Opposition and Its Future Prospects:** Ifri's analysis underscores the slim chances of restoring the monarchical (*Shahinshah*) regime in Iran. It considers former Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, son of the late Shah, as the most prominent figure in this current. However, the report concludes that the opposition's fragmentation, Pahlavi's limited contact" with opposition groups inside the country, and his reliance on rhetoric that appeals to those nostalgic for civil or secular rule under his father, all point to an unlikely near-term success for the opposition.
- **2. Iran–Azerbaijan Relations:** Ifri assesses that tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan are likely to reemerge. This projection stems from longstanding disputes over the Azerbaijani minority in Iran, comprising 16% of the population, as well as



Reza Pahlavi



Iran's alignment with Armenia in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict. Moreover, the growing relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel constitutes a significant source of concern for Iran.¹⁴

Fourth: ThinkChina website

A study published by this Singapore-based website, specializing in Chinese affairs and includes leading Chinese researchers,¹⁵ finds that the recent US-Israel confrontation with Iran reveals indicators that may shape Iran's future direction:

- ▶ 1. The US and Israeli attacks revealed a technical vulnerability in Iran's defense systems, which rely heavily on Russian technology. This may prompt Iran to pivot toward China, particularly due to the perceived success of China-equipped Pakistan in deterring and repelling India. Notable areas include drones, missiles, early warning systems, cyber capabilities and surveillance equipment. These developments suggest a potential acceleration and deepening of Chinese-Iranian cooperation, possibly at the expense of certain aspects of Russian-Iranian relations.
- ▶ 2. North Korea's experience informs Iranian nuclear strategy, showing that possessing and demonstrating readiness to use nuclear weapons holds more sway in negotiations than merely having the capability to develop them. This may push Iran to abandon strategic ambiguity—which failed to deter aggression—and adopt the North Korean model to prevent future strikes.

- ▶ 3. Iran's struggling economy faces severe pressure. The war damaged critical energy infrastructure like refineries and seaports, worsening local energy shortages and sustaining restrictions on traditional oil revenue channels. This has accelerated Iran's pivot toward China, marked by the first direct Chinese freight train arriving at Iran's Aprin Dry Port in late May 2025, as part of a broader strategy to anchor Iran within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) via Pakistan and Central Asia. China's BRI, particularly its western corridor through Pakistan and Central Asia, offers Iran a potential lifeline: infrastructure financing, trade connectivity and limited sanctions insulation. This aligns China's aim for political stability in a vital region with Iran's need to bypass the blockade on key sectors, paving the way for Iran's deeper integration into the broader Eurasian economy.



- 4. China's pragmatic approach to international relations requires Iran's careful attention. While recognizing China's rising power and its role in vetoing punitive Security Council resolutions against Iran, China's strategy likely hinges on two aspects:



- a. Leveraging benefits from its relationship with Iran, where Beijing views it as a strategic asset: a gateway to energy and mineral resources, a market for expansion, a client in need, a node among many in its wider Eurasian strategy, an entry point into Middle East's geoeconomics and broader Asia-Europe connectivity, and as a tool to distract and dilute US focus from the Indo-Pacific, a key area in China's grand strategy.
- b. Despite China's prior pragmatic approach to Iran, it is unlikely to offer joint defense commitments or engage in Middle Eastern sectarian, political or military conflicts. China is also expected to hesitate in accepting Iran crossing the nuclear weapons threshold. Given this, Iran's future appears risky, especially if uranium enrichment resumes in a way that suggests continued pursuit of nuclear weapons, which may lead China to withhold explicit support for Iran's actions.

- 5. The Strait of Hormuz Issue: Given Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz, China does not rule out the possibility of the strait being closed if the conflict in the Middle East escalates. Therefore, anticipating the consequences of such a closure, Beijing has adopted a proactive strategy centered on the following:



- a. China has not placed all its energy eggs in the Middle Eastern basket, shown by China's growing reliance on Russia, Central Asia, Brazil, Angola and Australia, alongside its continued ties with Iran.
- b. China pursues diversification by seeking alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz, including land pipelines or maritime routes such as the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline, the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline, and growing Russian Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports via the Arctic.
- c. Beijing has quietly built up a stockpile of around 100 days' worth of crude oil. Its natural gas storage capacity still covers about 35 days of demand.
- d. It has reduced its reliance on imported oil in overall energy consumption, as reflected in its increasing shift toward alternative energy sources. In 2024, 18.2% of



its total primary energy consumption came from oil (70% of which was imported), and 8.9% from natural gas (40% of which was imported).¹⁶

- ▶ 6. China is aware that any regime change in Tehran could undermine its efforts to stabilize Middle East. Despite condemning Israel's attack on Iran, it adopts a mediating role between rival parties and avoids aligning militarily with Iran. This mediation strategy appears to shape its regional engagement, as reflected in its initiatives between Iran and Saudi Arabia, among Palestinian factions, and potentially between Iran and Israel.

Fifth: Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations

A recent assessment by Victoria Zhuravleva, Deputy Director of the Russian Primakov Institute,¹⁷ attributes the motives behind the latest US-Iran confrontation “primarily to political purposes.” She argues that the US strike on Iranian nuclear facilities was driven largely by former President Trump’s desire to claim victory, both for domestic and foreign audiences. “This this move stands in direct contradiction to the promises he made to US voters in 2024. He had pledged to avoid any new military campaigns—arguably the only issue that unified Americans during the last presidential election. Over 60% of the US public believes the country should not be drawn into the conflict between Iran and Israel.” In an effort to reconcile his actions with his earlier pledges, Trump described the strike as “limited localized operation” with no intention of further escalation, while emphasizing claims of success and asserting that Iran’s nuclear program suffered substantial damage.

Zhuravleva also argues that Trump capitalized on prevailing hostility within US society toward Iran. “According to polls, 61% of the US public views Iran’s nuclear program as a direct threat to national security, and 50% consider Iran an enemy of the US. At the same time, Israel is traditionally seen as a reliable ally and partner in the Middle East—an image firmly upheld by the bipartisan political elite.”



Donald Trump

According to Zhuravleva, electoral calculations in the US have influenced the way the strike on Iran has been framed. Despite demonstrations in support of the Palestinians—particularly from the progressive wing of the Democratic Party—the relationship with Israel remains a highly sensitive issue that transcends the popular American tendency to prioritize individual interests.



Her assessment identifies several indicators that warrant close attention, as they appear increasingly likely:

- ▶ 1. The possibility that Iran will resume its nuclear program in the near future.
- ▶ 2. The possibility that the US will engage in military action against Iran once again.
- ▶ 3. Efforts, by Democrats and some Republicans, to strengthen the requirement for congressional approval of military action. The political impact of the operation against Iran is expected to affect the Republican Party, positively or negatively, more than Trump himself, who is no longer eligible to run for another term.

Sixth: Israel's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)

An INSS report addressed Chinese-Iranian relations¹⁸ from a perspective that contrasts with the view presented by ISW. The report highlights that under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has launched a series of global initiatives reflecting its aspirations for a greater international role. These began with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), followed in recent years by the Global Development

Initiative (GDI, 2021), the Global Security Initiative (GSI, 2022), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023). Along with the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind," these initiatives form part of a broader strategy to reshape the international environment and promote China's vision for the global order.



However, the report indicates that Israel, under this vision, faces a series of challenges:

- ▶ 1. Regional influence: China's sponsorship of the diplomatic rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, alongside its engagement in the Palestine issue through GSI, including largely symbolic mediation efforts among Palestinian factions, reflects increasing Chinese involvement in matters sensitive to Israel. This calls for a careful assessment by Israel of how such involvement may affect the regional strategic balance and its implications for Israeli security.
- ▶ 2. Rising competition among major global powers: The intensifying rivalry between the US and China is fostering a more polarized international system, marked by growing tensions and disputes in global forums. This dynamic makes Israel's decision-making process more complex, particularly in maintaining sufficient room to maneuver independently in key areas, and in advancing new international agendas aligned with its strategic interests.



- ▶ 3. US pressure: Israel must balance its strategic alliance with the US against China's role as a major trade partner. US pressure is likely to mount, especially regarding Chinese investments in Israel's critical infrastructure and advanced dual-use technologies, due to mounting concerns over security and espionage.



From Israel's perspective on China's approach, a connection is drawn to the Iranian nuclear program. Accordingly, INSS presents an assessment¹⁹ of the recent confrontation's outcomes; both the potential resumption of the Iranian program and its broader implications for China's role.

It states that the strikes have "severely damaged most of Iran's fissile material production infrastructure. Iran's uranium enrichment capability has been heavily compromised (with the exception of the Fordow site). Minimal recovery is expected to take many months. In the weapons group domain, critical knowledge infrastructure was also damaged due to the targeted killings of the scientists, in addition to the physical infrastructure." It adds that "The regime will likely relocate additional workshops to underground facilities and increase energy production at secondary sites. Critical development teams may be dispersed to multiple locations." In addition, Israel will avoid "strikes on active reactors allows Israel to maintain a narrative of precision targeting and helps reduces the risk of immediate involvement of global powers," including China and Russia.

As for the IAEA inspection challenges, the "continued attacks are likely to disrupt the ability of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to maintain inspections at Iran's nuclear sites. Iran may also attempt to relocate residual capabilities to covert sites beyond the IAEA's supervision."

This indicates that Israel's policy is aimed at continuing to disrupt the Iranian program, while avoiding escalation that could compel Iran's strategic partners to intervene more forcefully to restrain Israel.

Seventh: General Indicators of the Reports

At the beginning of this report, we outlined three central themes regarding Iran's future and their impact on its international and regional standing. Drawing on shared perspectives in non-Arabic literature, we now seek to identify the most likely scenario for Iran as follows:



Change of the Political System in Iran

The collapse of the political system in Iran, in light of the repercussions of the US-Israeli attack on Iran, represents a central goal for Israel and the US. Some Iranian factions have adopted this approach based on the following considerations:²⁰

- ▶ 1. Relying on statements by the so-called Iranian Crown Prince and one of the leaders of the Iranian opposition in exile, Reza Pahlavi (son of the former Shah of Iran), who said, “Sources inside Iran say that the regime’s command and control structures are collapsing at a rapid pace. Meanwhile, the international community is beginning to realize that the Islamic Republic has no future. Our discussions about a post-Islamic Republic Iran have begun.” This assessment by an Iranian opposition figure appears to be much further from the objective evaluations found in academic research centers.
- ▶ 2. There are six scenarios that outline various possible futures for the Iranian regime:
 - a. A rift between the IRGC and the army: In this scenario, some IRGC commanders align themselves with growing discontent within the army. This alliance between disillusioned elements in both institutions could pave the way for a regime change from within.
 - b. The return of recently released local opposition leaders: Certain figures who were recently freed by the regime might resume their former roles, reorganize their ranks, and seek to regain public support. By capitalizing on political, economic and social turmoil, they could attempt to mobilize the Iranian street in pursuit of regime change.
 - c. A nostalgia-driven return to monarchy: This scenario centers on a collective longing for the pre-revolutionary monarchy, championed by segments of the local elite and supported by regional and international actors.
 - d. An alliance between minorities and Persian opposition: Here, various ethnic minorities, such as the Ahwazis, Balochis, Azeris and Kurds, join forces with Persian opposition groups to challenge the regime. However, the dominant Persian population (constituting around 55%) often views these minorities as separatists, which complicates prospects for cooperation.
 - e. A leadership vacuum after Khamenei: This scenario involves internal disputes over succession in the event of Khamenei’s departure from the political scene, potentially destabilizing the regime.



- f. Regime continuity: In this case, the regime survives, but survival alone raises further questions: Will it continue along its current path, adopt a more militarized character, or move toward an even more rigid theocratic model?

Eighth: Future Scenarios Between the Iranian Perspective and Current Conditions

A report issued by an Iranian research center, roughly two months before the latest US-Israeli offensive on Iran,²¹ analyzed Trump's potential policies in a second term. It clearly reflected that the Iranian strategic mindset remained deeply uneasy about US regional policies. The report identified three main factors shaping US behavior in the Middle East: Israel—particularly Netanyahu's pursuit of a "New Middle East"; Trump's personal character; and the role of the US establishment. The report concluded decisively that "The United States under a Trump presidency will make the Middle East more vulnerable, and the security situation in the region may become even worse." This suggests that Iran had already anticipated the possibility of confrontation, which in turn explains its heightened caution, especially with regard to its nuclear program.

Accordingly, Iran's regional standing will be determined by three key factors that form the basis of future scenarios:

1. Domestic Situation in Iran

Iran's internal situation can currently be evaluated using several key indices:²²

- a. Political Stability: Iran's political stability index declined from -0.32 in 1996 to -1.69 in 2023, ranking 177th out of 193 countries. The average for the 1996–2023 period stands at -1.12.
- b. Gini Index and Wealth Distribution Equity: Iran ranks 113th out of 193 countries on the Gini index, with a score of 35.9, indicating a relatively equitable distribution of wealth. The country's nominal GDP per capita is slightly below \$5 thousand annually, placing it 55th globally. Although this figure declined by around 20% over the past two decades, it has shown signs of recovery over the past two years.
- c. Democracy: Iran's democracy index stands at 1.96 out of 10, ranking it 154th globally and classifying it as an authoritarian regime.
- d. Global Peace Index (2024): In the 2024 Global Peace Index, Iran scored 2.682 out of 5, ranking 133rd worldwide. Israel ranked 155th, with a score of 3.115.



- ▶ e. Scientific Standing Based on Number of Scholars and Research Output: Iran holds a strong position in this area, ranking 15th globally in scientific publications and 23rd in the number of researchers.
- ▶ f. Military Spending as a Percentage of GDP: Iran's military spending accounts for 2% of its GDP (amounting to \$7.9 billion), placing it 34th globally. In comparison, Israel allocates 8.8% of its GDP to military expenditure, totaling \$46.5 billion and ranking 12th worldwide. However, Israel ranks first globally in military spending relative to GDP.
- ▶ g. Globalization: Iran's globalization index improved by ten positions between 2000 and 2022. Notably, political globalization, reflected in increased international engagement, has risen, while economic globalization remains the weakest dimension.



The previous structural indices reveal that those of a political nature clearly tend toward negativity, while the scientific development index shows a distinctly positive trend. The economic and military indices fluctuate between these two extremes.

Another dimension concerns the post-current Supreme Leader phase. Khamenei is 86 years old, about 11 years older than Iran's average life expectancy. It remains unclear who will succeed Khamenei. According to some reports, the competition is expected to be between Mojtaba Khamenei (the Supreme Leader's son) and Hasan Khomeini (the grandson of Khomeini), without excluding others such as Sadegh Larijani (head of the Expediency Discernment Council), Mohsen Araki (a member of the Expediency Discernment Council), or Alireza Arafai (a cleric and former president of Al-Mustafa University).²³

This indicates that Iran may face some internal unrest or external infiltration of certain domestic groups, as reflected in recent arrests within specific factions. However, a regime change of the kind sought by Israel and the US is unlikely in the near term (within 1 to 3 years). This assessment is further reinforced by:

- ▶ a. The prudence shown by the Iranian opposition from within the regime, particularly the reformist current, was evident in its handling of the crisis. It approached the issue based on Iran's right to nuclear technology, while also viewing foreign intervention as a threat to the country itself, not just to the regime. Furthermore, the opposition's internal fragmentation, with its ethnic and ideological divisions, along with the role of the IRGC and Basij forces in maintaining internal control, raises doubts about the opposition's ability to act effectively.²⁴



- ▶ b. The Gulf states are wary of being exposed as playing any role in destabilizing Iran, a concern that could curtail opposition activity.
- ▶ c. The confrontation is with two adversaries largely viewed unfavorably by the Iranian public; Israel first, followed by the US.
- ▶ d. The desire of international powers, particularly Europe, China and Russia, to contain the impact of instability on oil markets is evident, especially if Iran moves to close the Strait of Hormuz or if the fighting escalates to the point of targeting oil facilities across the Gulf region. This reflects a strong interest in containing domestic unrest.



- ▶ e. Iran's growing ability to respond and inflict significant losses on Israel has gradually become evident, reinforcing confidence among regime supporters despite the initial security breaches at the onset of the confrontations.

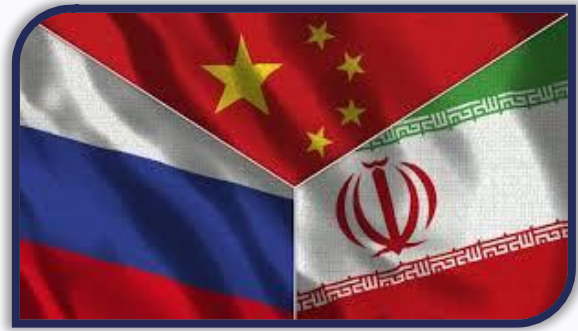
2. The Iranian Nuclear Program

According to most reports, including those by IAEA²⁵, the damage inflicted on Iran's nuclear program is greater than what Iran acknowledges, but significantly less than what the US and Israel claim. Based on the scientific development indicators previously noted, Iran's nuclear capabilities have become an established fact in the field. This makes it highly unlikely that the current regime will roll back its nuclear program, and strategic ambiguity is expected to continue shaping Iran's position on the program and its limits. Secrecy surrounding the program is likely to deepen, especially after suspending cooperation with the IAEA. However, Iran does not appear, at least for now, to be preparing to withdraw from NPT, although it may use the threat of withdrawal as a negotiation tactic. It is worth noting that the 1968 Treaty prohibits any of the 191 signatory states from acquiring nuclear weapons. This suggests that the most probable scenario is Iran's continued pursuit of its nuclear program under a strategy of ambiguity, keeping open the possibility of further US and Israeli attacks, unless Trump surprises the world with a new shift in his approach to Iran.²⁶



3. The Structure of Iran's International Alliances

We noted that Iran's most important allies are China and Russia. Both countries appear somewhat inclined to encourage Iran toward "some compromise," especially concerning its nuclear program, despite condemning US and Israeli attacks on Iran. China's pragmatic approach reinforces this stance, while the possibility of confrontation over Taiwan limits China's willingness to become deeply involved in the Middle Eastern quagmire. Meanwhile, Russia's preoccupation with the Ukrainian front reduces its inclination toward imperial overstretch, as Paul Kennedy described. Nevertheless, both countries are unlikely to withhold political and logistical support in certain areas should tensions escalate. This is particularly true given that China and Russia maintain interests with Israel and seek to avoid sacrificing these under specific conditions. Moreover, their strategic partnership agreements with Iran do not extend to a full military alliance but remain within the bounds of cooperation and coordination in security and defense.²⁷



On the regional level, Iran's alliances have weakened, starting with its loss of Syria first, followed by Hizbullah's strategic decline second, and then the ambiguity and fluctuation of the Iraqi forces linked to Iran. Adding to this the significant cooperation between Israel, Azerbaijan and India, it becomes clear that Iran will not achieve regional dominance according to its 2005 plan. However, the regime will not abandon this approach, which increases the likelihood of renewed military confrontations and mutual encirclement between Israel and Iran once again.

However, it is important to recognize that Iran spans four subregions: the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Gulf. A chronological study of Iran's historical strategic tendencies, from the Proto-Elamite civilization (3200 BCE–2800 BCE) to the present, shows that Iran has oriented itself toward the Caucasus 15 times, the Middle East 13 times, Central Asia 10 times, and the Gulf region only twice.²⁸ This indicates that Iran's vital sphere of influence is concentrated primarily in the first two regions, which explains its strong commitment to a Middle Eastern orientation, given its importance to Iran's international standing.



Conclusion

The analysis above leads to the following preliminary conclusions:

- ▶ 1. In the short term, the regime is more likely to survive than to be replaced.
- ▶ 2. Iran is more inclined to continue its nuclear program than to abandon it.
- ▶ 3. A US invasion of Iran remains unlikely due to domestic opposition, the potential costs under Trump's policies, European reluctance, Russian and Chinese opposition, and concerns among Gulf states over possible fallout.
- ▶ 4. The obstacles preventing Iran from reaching the "central state" status in the Middle East remain stronger than the forces driving it toward that position.
- ▶ 5. The likelihood of continued Israeli–US confrontation with Iran (militarily, through intelligence, politically and economically) outweighs the likelihood of any peace process between them. Likewise, the probability of ongoing mutual encirclement between Israel and Iran (via regional alliances with states or non-state actors) exceeds that of abandoning this strategy. However, it is unlikely to escalate into direct invasion, as previously noted.
- ▶ 6. Iran's political indices, such as stability and democracy, remain largely negative, while its scientific indicators are strongly positive. Its economic indicators fall somewhere in between. This points to the potential for intermittent episodes of limited unrest.



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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