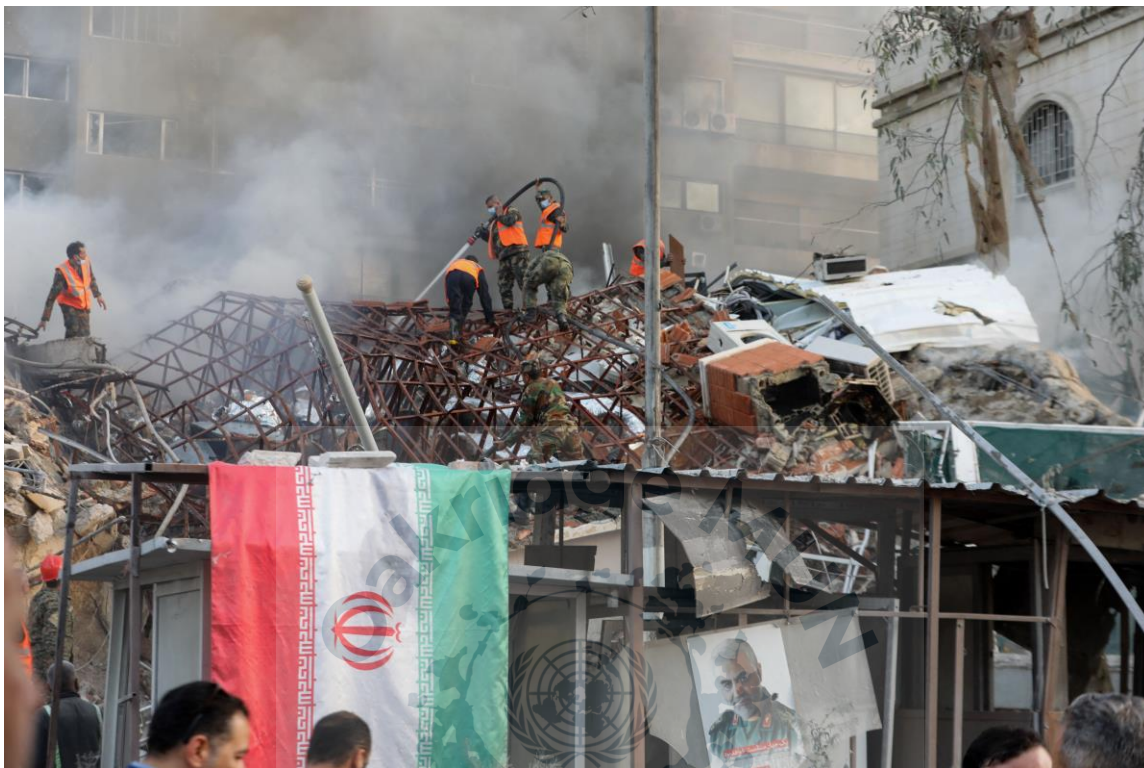


Background Guide



Committee: Joint Crisis Committee- Iranian Cabinet

Agenda: The Iranian-Israeli Conflict

Freeze Date: 1st August 2024

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Conference: Oakridge MUN Hyderabad 2025

Note: The present document intends to make you aware of the background of the agenda put forward for the discussion. It does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of Oakridge MUN 2025

Executive Summary

The **Iranian-Israeli conflict** is a long-standing geopolitical and ideological rivalry that has defined much of the Middle East's recent history. While Iran and Israel do not share a direct border and have never fought a full-scale war, their conflict plays out through **proxy wars, cyberattacks, diplomatic tensions, and ideological hostility**, making it one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the region.

Historically, Iran and Israel maintained relatively cordial relations until **1979**, when the Islamic Revolution in Iran overthrew the pro-Western Shah and brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power. The new theocratic regime adopted an **explicitly anti-Zionist stance**, labeling Israel as an illegitimate and oppressive regime. Iran declared support for the Palestinian cause and began backing groups that oppose Israel, most notably **Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**.

For Israel, Iran is seen as an **existential threat**. Iran's continued military expansion in Syria, support for armed non-state actors, and especially its **nuclear program** have raised deep concerns in Israel. Although Iran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, Israel has conducted covert operations, including **sabotage, cyberattacks (e.g., the Stuxnet worm in 2010), and targeted assassinations** of Iranian nuclear scientists, to delay or disrupt Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The conflict is further complicated by **proxy warfare**. Iran's financial and military support to Hezbollah has led to multiple clashes along the Israeli-Lebanese border, while Iranian influence in Syria has made it a battleground for indirect confrontations. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes frequently target Iranian and allied forces in Syria and Iraq to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah.

In the digital arena, both nations have engaged in **cyber warfare**, targeting critical infrastructure. Iran has been accused of attacking Israeli water systems and transportation networks, while Israel has targeted Iran's nuclear facilities and communication networks.

The **United States** plays a critical role in this conflict as Israel's closest ally and Iran's main adversary. The 2015 **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** aimed to limit Iran's nuclear activities but was heavily criticized by Israel. When the U.S. withdrew from the deal in 2018, tensions surged. Efforts to revive the agreement have stalled, further deepening mistrust.

The conflict has wider regional implications. With the **Abraham Accords** signed in 2020, several Arab countries normalized relations with Israel, driven partly by shared concerns about Iran. Iran views these agreements as a betrayal and a strategic encirclement, intensifying its own alliances and interventions.

As of 2024, the Iranian-Israeli conflict remains **unresolved and highly volatile**, involving overlapping issues of ideology, security, nuclear deterrence, and regional dominance. The situation is made more precarious by the lack of direct diplomatic

channels and the risk of miscalculation through proxies or cyber incidents. The international community, particularly the United Nations, continues to urge restraint, but a long-term resolution remains elusive without significant shifts in both nations' policies and regional dynamics.

Historical Background of the Iranian-Israeli Conflict

The Iranian-Israeli conflict has undergone significant transformations over the past century, shaped by shifting regimes, regional upheavals, and evolving ideological landscapes. Interestingly, **Iran and Israel were once strategic allies**, a fact that may surprise many given the hostility that defines their relationship today.

Pre-1979 Relations: Covert Cooperation

Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran, under **Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi**, maintained **cordial and pragmatic relations with Israel**. Though Iran never officially recognized Israel, it was among the few Muslim-majority nations to engage in covert trade and intelligence cooperation with the Jewish state. The two nations shared a mutual distrust of pan-Arab nationalism, particularly under Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and both were allied with the United States during the Cold War. Iran supplied Israel with oil, and Israel helped Iran with agricultural and military modernization.

This period, often referred to as the era of "peripheral diplomacy," saw Israel forming ties with non-Arab states like Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia to counterbalance hostility from neighboring Arab states.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution: A Turning Point

Everything changed in **1979**, when Iran underwent a dramatic political and ideological transformation. The **Islamic Revolution**, led by **Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini**, overthrew the Shah and established a theocratic regime grounded in Shi'a Islamic principles. The new leadership **rejected Israel's legitimacy**, calling it an "illegitimate Zionist regime" and the "enemy of Islam." Iran's foreign policy was reoriented to reflect its commitment to **resisting Western influence and supporting the Palestinian cause**.

The revolution's rhetoric went beyond support for Palestinians; it called for the destruction of Israel. Iran ceased all diplomatic contact with Israel, converted the Israeli embassy in Tehran into the Palestinian Embassy, and began fostering relationships with groups that opposed Israeli occupation, particularly **Hezbollah in Lebanon** and later **Hamas** in Gaza.

1980s–1990s: Proxy Conflicts and Rising Tensions

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Iran built a **network of proxy groups and militias** to challenge Israel indirectly. Chief among these was **Hezbollah**, established in 1985 with

Iranian support during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel, for its part, began to perceive Iran as its most significant long-term threat, especially as Iran's military and missile capabilities grew.

During this time, Israel also accused Iran of being behind various **terrorist attacks**, including the 1992 and 1994 bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina, which killed over 100 people. Though Iran denied involvement, international investigations linked the attacks to Hezbollah operatives backed by Iran.

2000s Onward: Nuclear Tensions and Covert War

In the 2000s, tensions deepened as Iran's nuclear ambitions became public. Israel viewed the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon as an existential threat and engaged in a covert campaign to sabotage Iran's nuclear program, allegedly assassinating multiple scientists and launching cyberattacks (like the **Stuxnet worm in 2010**).

The historical backdrop thus sets the stage for today's multilayered conflict, where an ideological divide, regional competition, and asymmetric warfare continue to fuel hostilities between **two nations that once shared a quiet strategic alignment**.

Strategic Interests of Iran and Israel

The Iranian-Israeli conflict is shaped not only by ideology but also by deeply entrenched **strategic interests** that fuel ongoing hostilities across multiple domains.

Iran's Strategic Interests

1. **Regional Hegemony:**
Iran aspires to be the dominant power in the Middle East. To achieve this, it seeks to **expand its influence across the "Shia Crescent"** spanning Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen through both diplomatic means and proxy forces.
2. **Deterrence and Security:**
Given its perception of Israel and the United States as existential threats, Iran's strategy is rooted in **deterrence**. This includes support for anti-Israel groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as developing long-range missile capabilities and a controversial nuclear program.
3. **Support for the Palestinian Cause:**
Iran uses its opposition to Israel as a tool for **ideological legitimacy and regional leadership** in the Islamic world, particularly against Sunni Arab rivals who have normalized ties with Israel.
4. **Survival of the Regime:**
Anti-Israel rhetoric serves domestic purposes too, as it reinforces the Islamic Republic's revolutionary credentials and diverts attention from internal discontent.

Israel's Strategic Interests

1. **National Security and Survival:**

Israel sees Iran's nuclear ambitions and support for armed proxies as a **direct and existential threat**, particularly with Hezbollah's arsenal positioned on its northern border.

2. **Preventing Nuclear Proliferation:**

A central pillar of Israel's strategy is preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, which has driven **covert sabotage operations and diplomatic efforts** to rally international pressure.

3. **Regional Normalization and Containment:**

Through the **Abraham Accords**, Israel is working to **normalize ties with Arab states** to diplomatically isolate Iran and build a regional coalition against its expansionist agenda.

Cabinet Position and Relevance in ICC

1. **Supreme Leader of Iran**

The highest authority in Iran, holding control over the military, judiciary, and foreign policy. The Supreme Leader has the final say on all matters related to Israel, including military strategy, proxy warfare, and the nuclear program. His ideological opposition to Israel shapes Iran's entire approach to the conflict.

2. **President of Iran**

The head of the government and a key figure in Iran's diplomatic engagements. While he plays a role in international negotiations (such as nuclear deals), his influence over military decisions is limited by the Supreme Leader and the IRGC.

3. **Attorney General of Iran**

Responsible for legal oversight within Iran. While not directly involved in foreign policy, the Attorney General plays a role in suppressing dissent and prosecuting individuals accused of espionage or collaboration with Israel.

4. **Minister of Defense**

Oversees the regular armed forces and military logistics. He coordinates Iran's military infrastructure, including support for proxy groups that target Israel.

5. **Minister of Interior**

Handles internal security, police forces, and border control. Important in maintaining domestic stability and countering infiltration or sabotage linked to Israeli intelligence operations.

6. **Commander of the General Staff of the Armed Forces**

Iran's highest-ranking military officer, responsible for strategic military planning across all branches. Plays a major role in coordinating Iran's military posture toward Israel.

7. Commander-in-Chief of the Army

Heads Iran's conventional army (Artesh). While Artesh plays a secondary role to the IRGC, it supports defense operations and border security in case of Israeli aggression.

8. Commander of the Army Ground Forces

Leads Iran's ground troops. Important in defensive operations and potential responses to Israeli incursions via land.

9. Commander of the Air Force

Responsible for Iran's aerial defense capabilities. Plays a limited role compared to the IRGC Aerospace Force but is relevant in intercepting Israeli air strikes.

10. Commander of the Air Defense Force

Manages radar systems, surface-to-air missiles, and anti-aircraft operations. Critical to defending Iranian infrastructure from Israeli air attacks.

11. Commander of the Navy

Oversees maritime security and naval operations, especially in the Persian Gulf. May be involved in strategic standoffs with Israeli-allied navies or shipping lanes.

12. Commander-in-Chief of the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps)

Leads the most powerful military institution in Iran. The IRGC directs foreign operations, controls ballistic missile programs, and maintains close ties with Hezbollah, making it a central actor in the conflict with Israel.

13. Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force

In charge of Iran's missile and drone programs. This force is responsible for the development and launch of missiles capable of reaching Israeli territory.

14. Commander of the Quds Force

Heads the elite external operations unit of the IRGC. Manages Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas, and other anti-Israel groups. Heavily involved in Syria and Iraq.

15. Commander of the IRGC Ground Force

Leads IRGC infantry units involved in cross-border operations. Important for deployments in Syria, near Israeli-occupied territories.

16. Commander of the IRGC Navy

Oversees naval units within the IRGC, which are active in asymmetric maritime operations. Could be involved in any regional naval escalation with Israel.

17. Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics

Manages procurement, defense manufacturing, and logistics. Ensures supply chains for Iran's missile and defense systems.

18. Minister of Intelligence

Heads Iran's intelligence and counterintelligence agencies. Monitors Israeli espionage, cyber threats, and domestic collaborators.

19. Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

Handles economic policy and sanctions management. Vital in countering Israeli-aligned economic pressures and sustaining military spending despite sanctions.

20. Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran

Leads Iran's nuclear program. This position is at the heart of Israeli concerns about nuclear weapon development and a target of international scrutiny.

21. Commander of the Sabeerin Takavar Brigade

An elite IRGC special forces unit. Likely involved in covert and high-risk operations near Israeli borders or in proxy theaters like Syria.

22. Commander of Border Guard Command

Monitors and secures Iran's borders. Helps facilitate weapons transfers to Hezbollah and other proxies.

23. Commander of the Basij Resistance Force

Oversees a large volunteer militia network used for ideological indoctrination and civilian mobilization. Plays a role in internal propaganda against Israel.

24. Head of the Passive Defense Organization

In charge of civil defense and cyber infrastructure protection. Crucial in defending against Israeli cyberattacks targeting nuclear and strategic sites.

25. Foreign Minister of Iran

Leads Iran's diplomacy and negotiations. Engages with the international community on nuclear issues, regional alliances, and efforts to counter Israel diplomatically.

Legal and Diplomatic Framework

The Iranian-Israeli conflict is governed by a complex intersection of **international law**, **UN mandates**, and **regional diplomacy**, though its informal and asymmetric nature often places it outside traditional legal confines.

1. Absence of Diplomatic Relations

Iran and Israel have **no formal diplomatic ties** since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when Iran severed relations and adopted an anti-Zionist foreign policy. This has left little room for formal bilateral engagement or conflict-resolution mechanisms under international diplomacy.

2. UN Resolutions and International Law

While the conflict is not directly governed by specific UN resolutions, **UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338**, which call for peace in the Middle East and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories—have served as a broader backdrop. Iran cites these to justify its support for Palestinian resistance, while Israel condemns Iran's involvement as a violation of **UN Charter Article 2(4)**, which prohibits the threat or use of force.

3. Iran's Nuclear Program and the JCPOA

The **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)**, signed in 2015, placed limitations on Iran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for sanctions relief. Israel strongly opposed the deal, fearing it only delayed Iran's path to a bomb. The U.S. withdrawal in 2018, and Iran's subsequent enrichment activities, have reignited tensions and raised legal concerns under the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**.

4. Proxy Warfare and International Humanitarian Law

Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas, and militias in Syria and Iraq has legal implications under **Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions** and **customary international humanitarian law**, particularly concerning the use of force, non-state actors, and attacks on civilians.

Proxy Warfare and the Use of Non-State Actors

The Iranian-Israeli conflict has largely manifested through **proxy warfare**, where both nations, particularly Iran avoid direct confrontation and instead project power through **non-state actors**. This indirect strategy has reshaped the conflict from a traditional interstate rivalry into a **multi-layered geopolitical struggle**, spilling over into Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, Iraq, and beyond.

Iran's Proxy Network

Iran's strategic doctrine, especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has relied heavily on cultivating and supporting non-state actors as **asymmetric deterrents** against adversaries, particularly Israel. The cornerstone of this strategy is the **Quds Force**, a specialized unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), tasked with extraterritorial operations.

Key Iranian-aligned proxies include:

- **Hezbollah (Lebanon):** Perhaps the most formidable Iranian proxy, Hezbollah serves as Iran's primary military deterrent against Israel. Armed with precision-guided rockets, drones, and thousands of fighters, Hezbollah's presence along

Israel's northern border presents a constant threat. Israel views Hezbollah as Iran's forward-deployed army.

- **Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Gaza):** Iran provides financial, logistical, and military support to these groups, enabling rocket attacks and sabotage operations targeting Israel. While Sunni in orientation, these groups have pragmatically allied with Shi'a Iran over shared hostility toward Israel.
- **Shia Militias (Syria and Iraq):** Groups like Kata'ib Hezbollah and Liwa Fatemiyoun have been used by Iran to entrench influence in Syria and Iraq, offering strategic depth against Israel and reinforcing Iran's regional arc of resistance.

Strategic Rationale

Iran uses non-state actors to:

1. **Offset military asymmetry** with Israel's technologically superior armed forces.
2. **Expand its influence** across the Levant and counter Western and Israeli presence.
3. **Retain plausible deniability** in attacks, avoiding direct war while still inflicting strategic damage.
4. **Overwhelm Israeli defense systems** via multi-front threats (e.g., rockets from Gaza, missiles from Lebanon, drones from Syria or Iraq).

This decentralized model offers Iran resilience, if one front is neutralized, others remain operational.

Israeli Response and Countermeasures

Israel has responded with a doctrine of “**prevention through precision**”, conducting targeted assassinations, airstrikes on weapons convoys, and cyber operations (such as the Stuxnet attack on Iran's nuclear program). Israel has frequently struck Iranian arms depots and militia bases in Syria to preempt the buildup of a “northern front.”

Israel considers the Iranian proxy model an existential threat, capable of overwhelming its **Iron Dome** and **David's Sling** missile defense systems. It also classifies Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations, and frames Iran's use of proxies as a breach of international law and a threat to regional stability.

Legal and Diplomatic Implications

The use of non-state actors challenges conventional legal frameworks. **International humanitarian law**, especially the **Geneva Conventions**, restricts targeting civilians, yet Iran-backed groups often operate within densely populated areas, blurring combatant lines. Moreover, these groups are not formal state actors, complicating accountability and negotiations.

Diplomatically, Iran's proxy strategy isolates it from Western nations but garners support from anti-Israel constituencies and regimes sympathetic to Iran's "Axis of Resistance."

Escalations in 2024

January–March 2024: Precursors and Cross-Border Strikes

Throughout early 2024, Israel intensified its **precision airstrike campaign** in Syria, targeting IRGC operatives, arms convoys, and Hezbollah-linked infrastructure. These actions were part of the on-going Israeli effort to prevent Iranian military entrenchment near its northern borders.

- **7 February 2024 – Homs, Syria:**
Israeli airstrikes hit military targets in Homs, including Hezbollah facilities and IRGC-affiliated compounds. At least 10 people were killed, including 2 Hezbollah fighters. The attack raised tensions due to civilian casualties and proximity to Russian positions.
- **14 February 2024 – Iran Pipeline Sabotage:**
Explosions were reported along a gas pipeline in western Iran, allegedly caused by a covert Israeli cyber or sabotage operation. The attack disrupted regional energy supplies and was seen as a direct message to Tehran.
- **March 2024 – Syrian Strikes Intensify:**
Multiple Israeli air raids hit Iranian supply lines and air defenses in Baniyas, Aleppo, and Deir ez-Zor. These attacks led to significant loss of personnel and equipment on the Iranian side and indicated Israel's growing intelligence reach.

1 April 2024 – Strike on Iranian Consulate in Damascus

In one of the most provocative escalations to date, Israeli jets struck a building adjacent to the **Iranian consulate in Damascus**, killing **Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi**, a senior Quds Force commander, and 15 others. Iran viewed the attack as a **violation of diplomatic norms** and vowed a strong response.

This event marked a **red line**, as it was the first time Israel had targeted an IRGC figure of such high rank within a diplomatic facility. The consulate strike directly challenged Iran's presence in Syria and signaled that no Iranian official was beyond Israel's reach.

13–14 April 2024 – Iran's Direct Attack on Israel

In retaliation for the Damascus consulate strike, Iran launched its **first-ever direct military strike on Israeli soil**:

- Over **300 projectiles** were launched, including:
 - 170+ attack drones
 - 30 cruise missiles
 - 120 ballistic missiles

- The targets included:
 - **Nevatim Airbase** (Israel's F-35 operating base)
 - **Ramon Airbase** (intelligence and drone operations)
 - **Golan Heights intelligence sites**
- **Interceptions:**
About 99% of the projectiles were intercepted by Israel's **multi-layered missile defense system**, assisted by the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Jordan. The international military coordination was crucial in averting large-scale damage.
- **Casualties and Damage:**
Minimal physical damage was reported. One Bedouin girl in the Negev region was seriously injured by falling debris. The event, however, **crossed a strategic threshold**, turning a cold conflict into a direct military confrontation.

19 April 2024 – Israeli Retaliatory Strikes

Israel responded with **targeted airstrikes inside Iranian territory** for the first time since the start of the modern conflict era. Israeli jets struck:

- **Air defense systems near Isfahan**
- **IRGC-linked drone and missile facilities in Syria and Iraq**
- **Hezbollah arms convoys in southern Lebanon**

These attacks were calibrated to avoid massive Iranian casualties while signaling Israeli capabilities for deep strikes. The Israeli leadership described the operation as a **“measured response with strategic consequences.”**

May–July 2024 – Shadow Conflict and Assassinations

- **Cyber Warfare Escalates:**
Both nations escalated cyber campaigns. Iranian-backed hackers targeted Israeli financial and water infrastructure, while Israeli cyber units disrupted air traffic control systems and military communications in Iran.
- **Hezbollah Mobilization:**
Skirmishes between Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah increased in Southern Lebanon, but remained below full-scale warfare.
- **31 July 2024 – Killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran:**
In a major escalation, **Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh** was reportedly assassinated in Tehran. While no nation officially claimed responsibility, Israeli sources had previously named him as a target following the **October 2023 Hamas-led attacks**.

Strategic Significance

1. **Shift from Proxy to Direct Warfare:**
Iran's April missile barrage marked the first state-to-state engagement since 1979, upending deterrence doctrines.
2. **Regional Implications:**
Gulf states, especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia, increased diplomatic pressure on both nations. Jordan and Egypt bolstered border security, fearing spillovers.
3. **Global Diplomacy:**
The **UNSC held emergency sessions** in April and July, urging de-escalation. The United States emphasized support for Israel while urging restraint to avoid full-blown regional war.
4. **Military Posturing:**
Both nations placed their armed forces on high alert throughout mid-2024. Israel resumed underground bunker drills, and Iran deployed naval assets near the Strait of Hormuz.

Key Aspects for Consideration

Strategic Consideration as Iranian Cabinet:

1. Preserve National Security and Deterrence Capacity
2. Prevent Full-Scale War with Israel and Allies
3. Strengthen Axis of Resistance & Regional Influence
4. Maintain Domestic Stability and Regime Legitimacy
5. Limit International Isolation and Sanctions
6. Exploit Diplomatic Openings in the Global South, BRICS, and Non-Aligned Nations

Questions the Iranian Cabinet must come prepared with:

- How do we frame the April missile counterattack to appear proportionate and legal under international law (e.g., Article 51 – Right to Self-Defence?)
- Can we push for a **UN condemnation** of the Israeli consulate strike as a violation of diplomatic immunity?
- How should we mobilize **state and international media** to shape public opinion across West Asia and the Global South?
- What messaging should we project to **reframe Iran as the victim**, not the aggressor?
- Should Hezbollah, the Houthis, or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq be instructed to escalate or remain dormant?
- How do we prevent premature retaliation from non-state actors that could justify further Israeli/US action?
- Do we **accelerate nuclear enrichment** as leverage while staying just short of breakout capacity?

- Should we re-engage with the IAEA tactically to prevent international unity against Iran?
- How can we exploit tensions within the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia about normalizing ties with Israel?
- Can we build a **counter-narrative with BRICS nations**, Russia, and China to block a Western-led UNSC resolution?
- How do we position Iran as a regional balancer against Western imperialism, especially for African and Latin American states?
- Do we deploy more air defense systems in key cities like Tehran, Isfahan, and Tabriz anticipating Israeli cyber or kinetic retaliation?
- Should we showcase new **hypersonic missiles or UAV technology** for deterrence, or keep capabilities ambiguous?
- How do we **coordinate covert or deniable operations** via non-state actors without crossing red lines?
- Should Iran prepare an asymmetric cyber or economic sabotage campaign targeting Israeli interests abroad?
- Can we leverage the **Strait of Hormuz** to raise global oil prices and apply pressure?
- What role should the **IRGC Navy** play in subtly threatening global shipping without triggering war?
- How do we mitigate any new Western sanctions post-April retaliation?
- Can we deepen trade with China, India, Russia, and Turkey to stabilize the economy?
- What is Iran's **threshold** for tolerating further Israeli strikes before escalation?
- How should Iran **respond if the U.S. directly intervenes**? Is the goal to avoid U.S. involvement at all costs?
- Can Iran **turn this escalation into a political win**, by mobilizing regional support, strengthening domestic nationalism, and presenting itself as a sovereign power defending international law?
- Should Iran offer **conditional de-escalation** publicly while preparing for worst-case escalation privately?