Analytical Appraisal of the 2024 Iran-Israel Conflict and Chances of Global Escalation

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Abstract

This research aims to undertake a pragmatic analysis assessing the probability of transforming a localized conflict between Israel and Iran escalating into World War III. The animosity between the two belligerent nations is deeply rooted and originated in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Iranian Republic, under Ayatollah clergy, overtly declared Israel an illegitimate State that occupied the Palestinian land and took a staunch position against the spread of Zionism in the region. The reasons for the enmity primarily rested upon the two nations' pursuit of regional influence, ideological differences, proxies, great powers' crisscrossed interests, and oil politics. Moreover, recent attacks on Israel-occupied land by Hezbollah and Hamas with Iranian support have added fuel to hidden fire comprised of hatred, tension, and proxy conflicts. Interestingly, even though neither of the two nations are nuclear weapons states as per the NPT standards, the threat of the use of nuclear weapons is being talked about. Besides that, the issue of nuclear proliferation adds a critical dimension to the rivalry, with Israel viewing Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat. This complex and volatile relationship forms the backdrop for the study, which shall critically examine the potential for a bilateral conflict to spiral into a regional conflict and ultimately lead to a global war. The research shall endeavor to identify the reasons for the animosity and military capability to fight a protracted war, including their respective nuclear ambitions and delivery systems. It will also explore the cascading economic effects of a regional conflict, such as the disruption of global oil supplies and the triggering of regional alliances, especially the involvement of three big powers, the U.S.U.S., Russia, and China. The research shall focus on developing a nuanced understanding of the strategic and tactical levels of conditions under which an Iran-Israel conflict could potentially escalate globally and propose strategies for mitigating the threat of a broader conflict involving nations across continents.

Key Words.   Israel, Iran, Shia Crescent, Middle East, World War III, Conflict Resolution.

Prelude

The origin of the Iran-Israel conflict may be traced to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The ousting of the Shah, a staunch ally of Israel, and forming the Islamic Republic signified a fundamental transformation. Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader, categorically condemned Israel as an illegitimate entity and embraced a resolute anti-Zionist position, characterizing the conflict as a religious battle against an "infidel" State. This ideological framework reverberated throughout the wider Muslim world and became a fundamental aspect of Iran's foreign policy. (Baltaci, 2022)

Although the two nations, i.e., Israel and Iran, are geographically isolated, the chances of their bilateral war remain high. Iran overtly denounces the existence of Israel as a nation-state that came into being through illegal and forced occupation of Palestinian

lands with the open support of the United States (U.S.U.S.). The U.S.U.S. bureaucracy and the Congress are entirely dominated by the Jewish community, who are not only influential in the political domain (JTA, 2021) but also have a monopoly over the U.S.U.S. economy. It is commonly believed that the U.S.U.S. economy is dependent upon the Jews' owned businesses and resultant investments (Kobrin, 2012). Otherwise, since the end of the Cold War, the geo-strategic sphere has been relegated to favor geo-economics for managing global affairs (Shahzad, 2021).

The ideological jealousy, survival concerns, and egoistic animosity between Israel and Iran have alarmingly shaped the strategic, diplomatic, and political landscape of the Middle East. The Russia-China alliance poses a problem not only for U.S.U.S. policymakers but also for American allies globally. The backing of Russia and China for Tehran and its proxies has stressed Israeli strategic priorities and rendered the Middle East a more perilous environment amid the looming potential of an expanded conflict, for an in-depth assimilation of the issues between the two nations that could ruin the global peace urges for a sincere and evidence-based analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Despite their geographical distance, the enduring conflict between Iran and Israel can be effectively analyzed through the lens of realist international relations theory. Realism, with its emphasis on State power, national interest, and the anarchic nature of the international system, provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of this complex relationship. This framework will explore how core tenets of realism, including the security dilemma, the balance of power, and the pursuit of hegemony, illuminate the motivations and actions of Iran and Israel (Notre Dame International Security Center, 2022)

At the heart of the Iran-Israel conflict lies a classic security dilemma. Each State's attempts to enhance its security are perceived as a threat by the other, leading to escalating tensions. Israel maintains a policy of nuclear ambiguity and has never formally acknowledged possessing nuclear weapons. Leaving aside the debate about the opacity of Israeli nuclear weapons possession or otherwise, it is viewed by Iran as a significant security challenge. Conversely, Iran's nuclear program, while officially declared for peaceful purposes, is perceived by Israel as a potential pathway to acquiring nuclear weapons, thus threatening its survival. This mutual distrust, fueled by the absence of effective communication channels and the lack of an overarching security framework in the region, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of escalating hostility (Garcia-Navarro,2009)

Realism posits that states strive to maintain a balance of power to prevent any single State from dominating the international system. Kenneth Waltz argues that the global system is characterized by a constant struggle for power and survival (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). The same template in the Middle East rightly identifies

that Iran and Israel, both regional powers with considerable military capabilities, are locked in a struggle for regional dominance. In addition, John Mearsheimer also argues that great powers are inherently revisionist and seek to maximize their power and influence within their respective regions. While neither Iran nor Israel can be classified as a global great power, both exhibit regional hegemonic ambitions. Realist theory also acknowledges the influence of external actors on regional dynamics. The United States, as a global power, plays a crucial role in the Middle East power politics and stands with Israel. Similarly, Russia and China, both vying for more significant influence in the region, have become increasingly involved, further complicating the dynamic.

In a nutshell, realist international relations theory offers a compelling framework for understanding the core dynamics of the Iran-Israel conflict. The security dilemma, the balance of power, and the pursuit of regional hegemony, as explained by prominent realist scholars like Jervis, Waltz, and Mearsheimer, provide valuable insights into the motivations and actions of both states.

Analyzing the Contemporary Geo-Strategic and Geo-Political Landscape of the Middle East

Prior to the revolution, Iran and Israel engaged in pragmatic but clandestinely, and the interactions centered on mutual security interests about Arab nationalism. The trend was off and on reported in intelligence reports, and the Arabs saw Iran through a tainted prism. The revolution abruptly ended this collaboration and substituted it with open animosity (Abbasi & Khan, 2016). On the part of Arabs, the clandestine Iranian-Israeli interactions' concerns were replaced by Islamic sectarian domination practices, i.e., Shiite Vs Sunnis. The Persian Empire's legacy was the main resting point or, in other words, motivation for Iranians to establish Middle Eastern domination. Since autocracy was brought down in Iran, the Arabs with Monarchy further distanced themselves from Iran and did not demonstrate any appetite for bilateral relations improvement. The feelings were further substantiated in the geopolitics of the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, after the 2016 Arab Spring Movement (Sachs, 2019).

It was an effort by various Arab states with kingship to keep their public away from such independence. The vacuum was well perceived by the great powers as well as Israel, which played their power politics cards to keep the Arabs and Iran separated by propagandizing Iran as a threat to their rule. However, Iran came out resilient initially from its war against Iraq and kept focused internally on the development of its indigenous industry, especially the weapons industry. Besides looking inward, Iran worked on the Shiite sect's sentiments spread in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen for forming anti-Israel proxies to keep Israel at bay by keeping them engaged in the backyard. Proxy warfare emerged as a hallmark of the conflict, enabling both powers to participate indirectly while circumventing direct military engagement (Kahl et al., 2012).

Although Israel and Iran never admitted to having nuclear weapons, they tacitly have been aligning themselves with the often concerns and suspicion raised by great powers about the capability of Iran and Israel to enrich Uranium to weapons-grade level. Both states used the writings of different arms controllers to win the positive side of deterrence. Thus, it can be ascertained that the nuclear issue added a tangible, though intangible in appearance, another layer of complexity in an unpredictable natured geo-strategic environment of the Middle East. Israel, an undeclared nuclear power, views Iran's nuclear ambitions as a direct threat to its security and, ultimately, existence (Russell, 2009).

On the other hand, Iran maintained that being an NPT State, its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. However, in 2019/20, the Iranian Foreign Office threatened the arms control community that it would withdraw from its NPT commitment if its sanctions were further tightened after the President opted to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Prior to 2020, Iran had always been under stringent verification mechanisms due to Israeli influence on the U.S.U.S. and its like-minded states (United States Institute of Peace, 2022). Such threats kept fueling Israeli suspicions and international concerns.

The Middle East's geopolitical environment has recently seen unexpected Israeli acceptance at diplomatic, political, and people-to-people levels and warmth among Arab states. Once seen with hatred, Israel has managed to add warmth to its cold relationship with Arab states. The Arab states swam along the changing geo-economic trends that have been prioritized over geo-strategic concerns. The complex interdependence has played its role, and the Arab states opted for normalizing the bilateral relationship instead of a continued animosity with Israel. However, it cannot be out rightly rejected that the geo-strategies of the great powers did not play. However, only the geo-economic priorities as the U.S.U.S. and its allies used sticks and carrots at all levels, especially the security factor, were played with all mastery. The monarchs were made afraid of the 2016 Arab Spring revolution that might resurface anytime amid increased awareness through social media and the challenging financial hardships faced by the public, even the oil-rich states. (Ouandjeli,2024)

The Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, represent a watershed moment. These agreements, driven primarily by shared concerns about Iran's regional influence and facilitated by U.S.U.S. mediation, have created a new dynamic in the Middle East. While lauded by some as a historic breakthrough towards peace in the Middle East, the Accords have also been criticized for exacerbating existing divisions within the Arab world and contributing to a muted response to Israeli actions, particularly in the wake of the October 7, 2023 attacks and subsequent Israeli military operations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria (Sabu, 2023).

The Accords, mainly driven by shared security concerns regarding Iran and facilitated by the Trump administration, effectively created a new geopolitical alignment in the region. This realignment, however, has deepened existing fault lines within the Arab world, creating a divide between those who embraced normalization with Israel and those who remained committed to the traditional Arab consensus on the Palestinian issue. The accords have provided Israel with increased diplomatic leverage and strategic depth, creating a de facto anti-Iran bloc within the region. This has further isolated Iran and heightened its perception of encirclement by hostile forces (Deutsche Welle, 2020).

The fast-paced Israeli diplomatic and political standing in the Middle Eastern region with its time and battle-tested military capabilities, besides assured nuanced security cover by the U.S.U.S., has not only emboldened Netanyahu and Tel Abib to take unprecedented hostile military action against Hamas and Hezbollah but also dented the Iranian ambition of becoming an influencer in the Middle East on the pattern of once Persian Empire. (Katz, 2020) This has added to the probability of an outbreak of hostilities in case of any military miscalculation. To further add to the Iranian position in the region, the Abraham Accords have resulted in strategic setbacks to those aiming to contain its influence and solidify Israel's position. Moreover, the Accords have been done to dissuade the revisionist states, i.e., Iran and its affiliates, for instance, Turkey, from altering the regional order, particularly in light of the perceived withdrawal of the U.S.U.S. from the region (Yousaf, 2021). Over the last two years, the intensified proxy skirmishes and rhetoric rattling on both ends have further entrenched the adversarial relationship.

Regarding the Great Powers' play of their strategic interests, Chand Russia has somewhat familiar or aligned interests in the Middle East vis-à-vis the U.S.U.S. (Youvan,2024). Despite not being officially allied, China and Russia have the same view of regional policy. The known reasons for the divergent interests pivot around multiple factors: inter-alia resource competitiveness, an extension of power, political and diplomatic influence in decisions and policies of regional powers, assured and cheap supply of oil and gas while keeping own resources intact, historical hatred, a threat to alliances to foster own strategic interests, especially in terms of having the military presence to influence regional actors and beyond and last but not the least to checkmate each other's monopoly.

Russia and China find the U.S.U.S. as a hegemonic power striving for global supremacy, a perspective influenced by their historical contexts and Cold War interactions significantly when the global geo-political landscape transforms from a sole to a multi-polar world. The shared skepticism of the two giants who are inching towards challenging the geo-strategic monopoly of the U.S.U.S. does not let the established U.S.U.S. supremacy get further deep-rooted in the strategically and economically significant Middle East. Cultivating relationships with countries that have historically been aligned with the United States, particularly Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Turkey, is a critical component of Sino-Russian strategy in the Middle East. China and

Russia seek to reduce U.S.U.S. influence and establish a multipolar world order by fortifying their economic and political relationships with these nations. China's Belt and Road Initiative, exemplified by its expanding economic partnerships throughout the Middle East, and Russia's military and diplomatic engagement, as evidenced by its intervention in Syria, indicate this strategy. By cultivating these relationships, they can challenge the established U.S.-U.S. security architecture and provide alternative partnerships, potentially weakening American leverage in the region. This dynamic is also a factor in the broader geopolitical competition, as both China and Russia are striving to restrict the projection of American power and reshape the international order to have an equal share of the pie, which the U.S.U.S. is solely enjoying at the moment in relative terms. In this context, the great powers' strategic interests further put the Middle East on a challenging course for gaining strategic stability (Dahshan, 2024)

The muted Arab response to Israeli actions following the October 7 attacks can be attributed, in part, to this new fractured reality. States that normalized relations with Israel, now bound by strategic partnerships and economic ties, found themselves in a difficult position. Openly criticizing Israel could jeopardize these newly forged relationships and potentially undermine their security interests. This dynamic is consistent with the realist perspective on international relations, emphasizing national interest and power politics as primary drivers of State behavior.

The muted response can also be attributed to the declining influence of the Palestinian Authority and the fragmentation of the Palestinian movement itself. The internal divisions between Fatah and Hamas and the lack of a unified Palestinian strategy have weakened the Palestinian cause and diminished its ability to mobilize regional and international support. Israel and its allies have exploited this internal weakness to marginalize the Palestinian issue further and advance normalization efforts (Cook, 2018).

However, it is important to note that the Arab response was not entirely uniform. While some states remained largely silent, others, such as Algeria and Iraq, condemned Israeli actions. These differing responses reflect the Middle East's complex and evolving political landscape, where national interests, ideological commitments, and historical grievances intersect.

Moreover, the Abraham Accords have not eliminated the potential for Arab states to collaborate on the Palestinian issue. The Arab League, while weakened, continues to serve as a platform for dialogue and coordination. However, the potential for future collective action remains contingent on several factors, including the evolving regional security dynamics, the internal dynamics within the Palestinian movement, and the willingness of Arab states to prioritize the Palestinian cause.

Last but not least, the change in the White House in Washington has mixed expectations regarding escalation or defusing the situation in the Middle East. The Biden

Administration has been pursuing normalcy; however, the provisioning of weapons to Israel amid inhumane killings of innocent civilians in Gaza does not support the sincerity behind the cause. Now, when Trump is taking over the reins, it is being seen with multiple prisms of analysis. Trump has been instrumental in the past about ending the war in Afghanistan, so only time will tell whether Gaza shall see peace or otherwise. The Great Powers have realistically mishandled the Gaza situation, and it is an opportunity for damage control.

The October 7, 2023 Hamas Attack on Israel: Chances of Global Escalation

October 7, 2023, saw an unprecedented surprise attack by Hamas inside Israel, using paragliders and capturing substantial positions and several Israeli soldiers. Since then, the war between the two sides has taken a protracted shape and resulted in over 45000 killings of innocent Palestinians. The unprecedented use of lethal weapons by Israel has destroyed over 80 percent of the Gaza Strip as well. The atrocities of Israel have gone unchecked, and nothing could stop Tel Aviv from seizing fire. The one-year-plus war, besides Israeli incursions into Lebanon, Israel, and Iran, has rung the bells in power corridors regarding the Israeli offensive behavior in the Middle Eastern strategic landscape.

As identified earlier, Israel has been a fundamental component of the U.S.'sU.S.'s declared objective to establish an "integrated, prosperous, and secure Middle East" so that it could shift its attention to other powers, particularly Russia and China. The Trump administration enabled the Abraham Accords to improve relations between Israel and numerous Muslim-majority nations, especially the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. It is being speculated that Hamas's assault aimed to disrupt negotiations facilitated by the Biden administration to improve relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, so establishing a united front against Iran, a mutual adversary that financially supports Hamas (Narea, 2023).

The potential for a conflict between Israel and Iran to escalate into a global conflagration or World War III is a topic of significant debate. While the scenario carries a degree of plausibility given the volatile regional dynamics and the involvement of major global powers, arguing that such a conflict would inevitably escalate to a world war requires a cautious and nuanced analysis.

Analytical Arguments Against Escalation to World War III

Structurally, despite possessing substantial defense forces and establishments with potent, precise weapons in inventory, both Israel and Iran exhibit structural imbalances that hinder their capacity to engage in sustained confrontation. Leaving aside Israeli concealed nuclear capability, no party can achieve a military victory over the other. Israeli defense forces safeguard territory and borders from adversarial neighbors, primarily through proactive operations, while Iran defends its regime and engages in asymmetric warfare.

Survival warfare influences their forces rather than conquest (Raine, 2024). So structurally and objective-wise, the two belligerents are not likely to escalate.

The existence of nuclear weapons, particularly among the major powers, acts as a powerful deterrent against direct military confrontation. The catastrophic consequences of a nuclear exchange create a strong incentive for restraint, even in the face of intense regional conflicts. This concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), while grim, has historically prevented direct conflict between nuclear-armed states. As articulated by Kenneth Waltz, "Nuclear weapons, paradoxically, can enhance stability by making the costs of war too high." Similarly, on the same grounds, though ambiguous, deterrence has played its role in keeping the conflict local (Russell, 2009)

Despite the extraordinary powers having their vested interests, which they guard jealously, they need regional stability to meet the ends. These powers would never like to disrupt the world's energy market, which keeps their industry's wheels running for apparent prosperity and domination. At the same time, the proliferation of weapons in the Middle East, especially the weapons of mass destruction as a result of security threats, does not gel with the geo-strategic interests (Einhorn, 2016). A strengthened State with advanced weapons can start dictating its terms to ensure security, thereby reducing the efficacy of the security cover mantra by the major powers. The current global landscape increasingly defines economic competition, particularly between the United States, Russia, and China. A major military conflict, especially one involving the Middle East and its vital energy resources, would disrupt global trade and economic stability, negatively impacting the interests of all major powers. This focus on economic competition is a restraining factor against actions that could escalate a regional conflict into a global one. The interconnectedness of the global economy incentivizes major powers to prioritize economic stability over risky military adventures (Beebe & Lieven, 2023).

Moreover, the assumption that the Iranian proxies would assume greater risk in their confrontations with Israel often presupposes that Iran would provide them with a security umbrella, which may or may not occur. Despite Iran's increasing support for its proxies, Tehran may hesitate to offer a definitive security guarantee due to apprehensions regarding moral hazards that could entangle the Islamic Republic in a possible nuclear confrontation. Tehran may choose ambiguous threats that provide ample freedom to retreat from conflicts (Takeyh, 2010). *Secondly*, even if the Islamic Republic were to offer a security assurance to its proxies, it is improbable that Iranian-backed organizations would regard it as sufficiently trustworthy to influence their decision-making processes significantly. Arguably, there is no justification for assuming that Hezbollah, Hamas, or Syria would possess adequate confidence in the Iranian regime's readiness to jeopardize Tehran to safeguard Beirut, Gaza, or Damascus, as well as concerns regarding entrapment i.e. apprehensions that proxies might be incited to undertake actions not endorsed by Tehran and the potential that any conflict between its allies and Israel would (Kahl, Irvine,

& Dalton, 2016). *Third*, Iran and its proxies know with surety that beyond a certain threshold, the Israelis will respond massively as they did in 2006 and 2008 against Lebanon and Gaza. In addition, it should also be kept in mind that the Iranian proxies maintain their distinct objectives that may or may not be furthered by escalating the confrontation with Israel at any particular moment. It is globally well known that Hezbollah and Hamas covertly receive support from Iran; nonetheless, they ultimately determine their attacks on Israel based on their localized assessments and not on the behest or immediate desire of Iran to meet their political ends (Exum, 2012). So, a large-scale war remains suspicious, and Israel knows it, too. For instance, Hezbollah has been demonstrating its autonomy by prioritizing its domestic survival and the satisfaction of its people over the interests of its benefactor in Tehran (Eiran,2012)

Furthermore, there have been instances in the past when Tehran opted to leave its Shiite allies during crises. Scholars perceive that the history of mistrust between Iran and its Shiite allies may not deliver at the time of need. So, a large-scale war may not be there due to the trust factor, and thus, foresee that Iran is likely to withdraw in future Levantine conflicts with Israel. For instance, Iran could not meet the expectations of its proxy allies at the time of crises inter-alia, the 1991 Shiite uprisings in Iraq, the 1998 Taliban capture of Mazar-e-Sharif that cost Iran the death of its diplomats besides numerous Shiite Hazaras, the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict, the 2008 Iraqi-U.S.U.S. "Charge of the Knights" operation aimed at Iranian-supported Shiite militants in Basra, and the 2011 Saudi intervention in conjunction with the Bahraini government's suppression of the Shiite opposition. (Eisenstadt,2011)

Moreover, there is a division between the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Iranian conventional armed forces. The clergy regime's preferential treatment of the IRGC is connected to its highly politicized nature, which is not liked by the professional army. The ruling elites of the Islamic Republic accommodate the wishes of the IRGC due to their reliance on its assistance in confronting domestic political opposition. In such a divided power structure, expectations for a large-scale offensive are far-fetched in perception (Alfoneh,2020).

There is yet another much talked about block, namely the "Shia Crescent," that could pose a unified response or pre-empt offensive against Israel or the U.S.U.S. bases. It needs careful consideration. The probability of converting the so-called Shia Crescent, comprising states like Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen, into a potent military force that could escalate out proportionally is hugely less likely. Israel and Iran have played the concept of this alliance but tacitly for their respective advantages. Israel projects the crescent as a threat to Israel's existence. It uses it for its offensive outside geographical boundaries, equipping its forces with the deadliest weapons besides winning the sympathies of the U.S.U.S. and the West.

On the other hand, Iran does not deny it and uses it to project its influence across the region for obvious political advantages. However, on the ground, none of the states thought to be part of the Shiite Crescent has the potential for a unified and coordinated military campaign against Israel, reducing the likelihood of a large-scale regional war that could draw in extraordinary powers. Hence, the concept of the Shia Crescent may not be a catalyst for World War III (Haji-Yousefi, 2009).

Analysts also claim that the apprehension about conflict escalation in the Middle East is not very likely, even though Iran and Israel have recently exchanged rockets, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. The reason could be that both Iran and Israel are tied up in their respective domestic political challenges. On Tehran's part, mistrust between Iranian clergy and the conventional armed forces, lack of appetite among the Iranian public for a full-fledged war after a protracted war with Iraq, and the sanctions that denied the Iranian youth to prosper are the major impediments. On the Israeli side, Netanyahu's criticism by even Jews for not being able to deliver in terms of providing security to settlers, demonstrations against his rule at the global level, and the retaliatory approach for compulsory conscription does not let Israel scale the escalator ladder. Hence, the exchange of long-range weapons and offensive statements is primarily for the domestic audience, not for escalation. (Agrawal, 2024).

Last but not least, the Arab States would not like to be entangled in confrontation with Israel and the U.S.U.S. vis-à-vis Iran for apparent disadvantages. Saudi Arabia was close to brokering a peace deal with Israel at the U.S.U.S. behest, besides those states who had already shown their allegiance with Israel through their respective inked Abraham Accords. (Sallon, 2023)

In addition, the Trump Administration, which is known to be anti-war, might not let the war in Gaza take a further protracted shape and thus might not turn into an interregional or World War III course. In his speech about victory, Trump indicated the same thing (Magid, 2024).

Analytical Arguments for Potential Escalation to World War III

As a military argument, multiple factors can exponentially increase the chances of an unwarranted escalation. For instance, the inherent fog of war, miscommunication, misperception, or accidental escalation can lead to dire consequences in a volatile region like the Middle East. Due to the Great Powers' interests, even a small-scale conflict can become inter-regional.

Previously de facto friends, Iran and Israel now perceive one another as competitors for power and influence in the region. The Iranian regime perceives Israel as a regional adversary intent on destabilizing its revolutionary framework; conversely, Israel regards Iran as its primary security threat, presenting significant strategic and ideological

challenges to the Jewish State. Israeli apprehensions regarding the potential advantages the Arab upheavals may confer upon Iran, so augmenting its regional power, have intensified Israeli trepidation despite the dubious nature of the increased Iranian influence. Such crisscrossed threats could become a recipe for an unexpected escalation. (Kaye, Nader, & Roshan, 2011)

There is a complex web of relationships between the warring factions like Hamas, Houthis, and Hezbollah in the Middle East. Each mentioned actor has strong strategic relations with the great powers besides the regional power-aspiring states, such as Turkey. In case of direct conflict between Iran and Israel, it might draw in the Iranian proxies, and thereby, the U.S.U.S. might take the side of Israel to which it has openly committed. Similarly, if Turkey embroils into conflict with Iran, the U.S.U.S. is likely to intervene in support of Turkey. On the other side, on Iranian behalf, Russia and China might jump in, thus extending the heat of the war beyond the region, and the escalation ladder could not be that steep.

Notwithstanding, war analysts believe it would only involve great powers in conflict provided that their assets are either directly hit inside the Middle East or, worst case, on their respective mainland. It seems nonpractical, but the fog of war may result in miscalculation. (Ghanem, 2024)

The great powers desire stability in the Middle East for their energy needs. However, their effort to make the world look at them as their survivors requires them to be seen as militarily and diplomatically strong. The security guarantees by the great powers make them superior, and thus, the world order starts shifting from sole to multi-polar. Significantly, when they are not directly affected and their mainland remains safe, adventures elsewhere for their strategic interests suit them. In such a scenario, if the U.S.U.S. starts dominating the Middle East politics and the energy pie share increases in its favor as a security provider, Russia and China are expected to resist either by confrontation or else empower their allies to a sufficient level for checkmating the U.S.U.S. and its likeminded states' interests. So, the war might see a stepped-up escalation, resulting in an intra-regional conflict that could turn into an inter-region conflict (Spencer-Churchill, 2024).

It is widely believed that Israel and Iran, albeit never signaled to have nuclear weapons, possess nuclear weapons. An ambiguous deterrence is restrictive in keeping both belligerents short of direct war. Notwithstanding, in case of confrontation or case of a bearable loss due to each other's proxies, a losing leadership may opt to use nuclear weapons, if at all they have them. While the likelihood of such a scenario remains low, the potential consequences are so catastrophic that it cannot be ignored in any analysis of escalation risks. In a nuclear confrontation between Israel and Iran, two interrelated risks may emerge. The initial factor is crisis instability. Mutual deterrence should prevent premeditated assaults in "peacetime," although concerns over surprise attacks may

motivate both parties to execute pre-emptive strikes. The restricted strategic depth and assumed susceptibility may compel Israeli authorities to execute a nuclear strike if an Iranian assault is impending. (Edelman, Krepinevich, & Montgomery, 2011).

Furthermore, Israeli officials may perceive an attack as effective owing to their nuclear superiority and a precedent of endorsing military interventions. Iran may fear a disarming Israeli strike during a crisis because of its limited initial arsenal, creating "use them or lose them" pressures for Tehran to pre-emptively engage (Kroenig, 2012). However, the argument for nuclear capability being played has been driven out of the assumption that the two states have nuclear weapons capability.

Moreover, Iranian and Israeli maritime rights disputes have long been played clandestinely. Tehran's asymmetric marine weapons include fast-attack vessels, coastal anti-ship missile systems, and UAVs. It often offensively reiterates that it will "close the Strait of Hormuz." In this case, the conflict would immediately escalate and could hurt Iran's and its allies' economies, besides those of others in the region depending upon the Gulf. In the case of Iranian Israeli vessels' seizures, Indian Ocean ship attacks, and a rise in Yemni Houthis' attacks are likely to be responded to by Israeli strikes on IRGC facilities and tit-for-tat offensive activities in the Red Sea. In such a scenario, the conflict can escalate with the involvement of major powers' economic interests. (Raine, Barry, Childs, Hinz,& Voo, 2024)

The possibility of a conflict between Israel and Iran, potentially involving various regional actors, escalating into World War III cannot be entirely dismissed. However, the current geopolitical landscape does not fully support the argument that such a conflict would inevitably lead to a global war. Nevertheless, the risks of unintended consequences, proxy warfare entanglement, and the clash of significant power interests remain real and cannot be ignored. The potential for miscalculation and the nuclear wildcard add further layers of complexity. Ultimately, the future trajectory of the conflict will depend on the choices made by the key actors involved, both regional and global (Kempe, 2024)

A cautious and nuanced approach, prioritizing diplomacy and conflict resolution, is essential to mitigate the risks of escalation and prevent a regional conflict from spiraling into a larger conflagration with potentially catastrophic consequences. A deeper understanding of the complex interplay of interests, the limitations of military power, and the potential for unintended consequences is crucial for navigating this volatile landscape and promoting a more stable and secure future for the Middle East and the world.

Suggested Conditional Solutions for Iran-Israel Conflict Resolution

The escalating tensions between Iran and Israel, coupled with the increasing militarization of the Middle East, present a potential threat that can turn into a grave security threat to regional and potentially global stability. The lethality of weapons

possessed by both countries and the broader proliferation of advanced weaponry throughout the Arab world creates a scenario where even a localized conflict could result in the widespread destruction of critical infrastructure and potentially spill over into other regions, leading to untenable consequences. Mitigating this risk requires a multifaceted approach involving diplomatic engagement, regional security frameworks, arms control initiatives, and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict. Notwithstanding, the suggested solutions suggested in the preceding paras are purely optimistic and would have their foundation built on the assumption that both Iran and Israel (primarily Israel) would step back and give negotiated space for Palestinians to exist and resort to a State solution in Palestine as per land occupation by Palestinians and Israeli settlers prior to 1967 Arab Israel War. Without being optimistic, pessimism would continue to prevail and keep the World hostage to chances of unimaginable destruction.

First of all, an immediate establishment of a communication link between the foreign offices of the two states is a must for an immediate diffusion of the hostilities. Politics and diplomacy are all about engagement. Without engagement, there is almost a 100 percent chance of misperceptions at a strategic level that could escalate the situation to an unprecedented level. Pre-emptive or preventive strikes could become an incentive to avoid damage. The establishment of a hotline between the two can be brokered by Great Powers having strategic interests in the region. Others could be the Arab states, primarily Saudi Arabia, which recently had a rapprochement with Iran. The approach might have backlash domestically, but it has to be done by taking them into confidence. It is the most preferred confidence-building measure (CBM) that could avoid regional war due to miscalculation.

However, another immediate mitigating measure could be the time-tested 'Back-Channel Diplomacy.' It has been successful in the past when the two governments or states never wanted to have dialogue for fear of domestic criticism and threat to their rule. It could be through influential people-to-people engagement having roots in public, sports competitions, cultural events, civil society dialogue, non-governmental organizations engagements, and academics. The facilitating states could arrange the events tacitly on the third State's land to avoid an initial breakup. Such engagements are crucial to understanding each other's sensitivities, knowing intentions, addressing misperceptions, and exploring potential areas of cooperation for creating space for dialogue outside the constraints of formal negotiations besides fostering building trust to de-escalate. The same groups can later become pressure groups to compel respective governments and convince their respective country mates. However, both sides must build an environment and avoid making hostile statements to break the ice.

Establishing a regional security architecture with all key regional players could be yet another tangible effort for long-term stability. Brokering actors could again be the great powers besides those who have entered into bilateral diplomatic and political relationships

with Israel through the Abraham Accords. For such an initiative, both Iran and Israel have to ceasefire and respect the sovereignty not only of Palestinians but also of the rest of the Arab states. It is a tricky proposition, yet such an option will likely see the daylight amid globalization and converging global stakes. Optimistically, the suggested security architecture in the Middle East can immediately reign existing tensions and prevailing security dilemmas. The suggested architecture could be an excellent platform for establishing joint security initiatives, i.e., managing arms proliferation, combating terrorism, and conflict resolution mechanisms, thereby promoting regional cooperation.

Security concerns do not solely drive the Iran-Israel conflict. Historical grievances, ideological differences, and competition for regional influence also play significant roles. Addressing these underlying drivers of conflict is crucial for achieving sustainable peace. This requires promoting dialogue and understanding between different religious and ethnic groups, addressing historical injustices, and finding ways to accommodate the legitimate security concerns of all parties. Overall, emphasis should be placed on understanding the political grievances and complex interplay of sectarianism and listing factors contributing to failure in driving conflicts in the Middle East.

Promoting economic interdependence and regional cooperation can create shared interests and reduce the incentives for conflict. Regional economic integration, infrastructure projects, and joint ventures can foster economic growth, create jobs, and build community trust. The European Union's experience demonstrates the potential of economic interdependence to promote peace and stability. While replicating the EU model in the Middle East faces significant challenges, fostering greater economic cooperation can contribute to de-escalation and create a more positive-sum dynamic in the region.

International institutions, such as the United Nations, can play a crucial role in mediating disputes, facilitating dialogue, and providing a platform for multilateral cooperation. Strengthening these institutions and empowering them to play a more active role in conflict resolution is essential for mitigating the risks of escalation.

Conclusion

The Iran-Israel conflict has profoundly reshaped the political landscape of the Middle East. The Abraham Accords, driven by shared security concerns regarding Iran, have led to a significant realignment of regional alliances, with several Arab states normalizing relations with Israel. This shift has further deepened divisions within the Arab and broader Muslim world, weakening traditional notions of solidarity and highlighting the increasing prioritization of national interests. Despite the contemporary evidence indicating an increased probability of regional war in the Middle East, tangible indicators do not favor faith in the perception. Having gone through the complete historical background of the conflict and the great powers' interests, a careful reading about the likely unfolding of the situation relatively compels us to conclude that while a regional conflict

carries significant risks and the potential for broader involvement, the likelihood of it directly triggering a global war involving the major nuclear powers is relatively low, albeit not entirely dismissible.

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