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# *Promoting Solutions to the Iran-Israel Conflict*

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***Abstract.*** After April 2024, the Iran-Israel conflict became an open multi-domain crisis featuring direct sovereign strikes, targeted diplomatic premises, and fused nuclear and energy security risks. Three structural failures sustain this rivalry, namely no regional security architecture, a verification vacuum eliminating the neutral factual baseline for bargaining, and selective Charter enforcement that erodes Council credibility. Drawing on UN Security Council records, IAEA safeguards reports, treaty texts, and open-source developments, the study traces the trajectory from the April 2024 Damascus strike through the June 2025 nuclear site campaigns to the ongoing maritime coercion near the Strait of Hormuz. It also reviews international responses, including Council firebreaks, IAEA safeguards dialogue, and regional mediation by Qatar, Egypt, and Oman. Diagnosing why these symptom-focused measures fall short, the study proposes a sequenced pathway consisting of a basic firewall prohibiting strikes on diplomatic premises, safeguarded nuclear sites, as well as civilians, a standing crisis management channel, and an incentive-linked framework that ties sanctions relief to verifiable nuclear and missile rollbacks.

***Keywords:*** Iran-Israel conflict, Middle East security framework, Strait of Hormuz, nuclear verification

## 1. Introduction

The Iran–Israel rivalry has long been one of the most volatile fault lines in the Middle East. For decades the competition was conducted through proxies, cyber strikes, covert sabotage, and targeted killings, a pattern often described as a shadow war. This managed confrontation relied on an informal firewall. Israel struck Iranian assets in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and occasionally inside Iran. Iran replied through its resistance arc, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iraqi militias, together with deniable sabotage at facilities such as Natanz. Both sides understood that direct sovereign strikes on each other's homeland and on diplomatic premises were taboo. The collapse of this firewall after April 2024 marks a qualitative shift that demands explanation.

Existing scholarship has examined the rivalry from multiple angles, including proxy escalation, nuclear safeguards, and the geopolitical spillover of the Gaza war. Organizations such as the International Crisis Group have tracked the erosion of red lines, and legal scholars have noted the damage to diplomatic immunity following the Damascus strike [1]. Yet most analyses treat the security deficit, the verification vacuum, and the selective enforcement of Charter norms as separate issues. Few address how these three constraints lock together to form a self-reinforcing crisis.

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The present study takes this structural interplay as its starting point. It asks why the layered international responses deployed since April 2024 have failed to reverse escalation, and what kind of sequenced pathway could realistically address root causes rather than merely managing symptoms.

Drawing on UN Security Council records, IAEA safeguards reports, treaty texts, and open-source developments, the study traces the trajectory from the April 2024 Damascus strike through the June 2025 nuclear site campaigns to the ongoing maritime coercion near the Strait of Hormuz. It reviews responses including Council firebreaks, IAEA safeguards dialogue, and regional mediation by Qatar, Egypt, and Oman. Diagnosing why these symptom-focused measures fall short, the study proposes a sequenced pathway consisting of a basic firewall prohibiting strikes on diplomatic premises, safeguarded nuclear sites, and civilians, a standing crisis management channel, and an incentive-linked framework that ties sanctions relief to verifiable nuclear and missile rollbacks. The aim is a politically survivable alternative that lowers the probability of uncontrolled leaps and rebuilds the informational and institutional conditions for diplomacy.

## 2. From managed shadow war to open multi-domain crisis

Three pivotal transformations define the new landscape of the Iran-Israel rivalry. The breakdown of the taboo against sovereign strikes, the erosion of IAEA safeguards, and the fusion of the conflict with global energy security through Strait of Hormuz coercion.

### 2.1. He management collapse and the normalization of sovereign strikes

The rupture dates to 1 April 2024, when an Israeli strike hit the Iranian consular annex in Damascus, and to Iran's 13-14 April homeland-to-homeland salvo of drones and missiles launched from Iranian territory toward Israel [2]. Even if actors dispute labels, the visual and legal fact is a strike on a structure inside an embassy compound, which damages the diplomatic-inviolability regime [3]. Once that taboo is broken, each side treats more of the other's sovereign footprint as reachable, commander-level targeting normalizes, and the number of paths to uncontrolled escalation multiplies quickly.

### 2.2. The verification vacuum and the disappearance of the safeguards floor

The older containment model relied on the IAEA safeguards continuum, inventory counts, seals, cameras, and environmental sampling, so that outsiders could speak of verified numbers rather than guesses. That floor has eroded. GOV/2024/13 documents a loss of continuity of knowledge after surveillance-equipment removals and access restrictions [4]. GOV/2026/8 shows the problem persisting into 2026 where on-site access remains constrained and continuity of knowledge stays incomplete [5]. The political consequence is perverse. The more a site is struck or sealed off, the harder the Agency's return becomes, and the more both sides substitute worst-case inference for verified facts.

### 2.3. Fusion with energy choke points and the creation of a global public crisis

As the United States intervenes in the conflict and directly strikes Iran, coercion and interdiction near the Strait of Hormuz transform a regional rivalry into a source of strain for global energy supplies and logistics networks. The April 2024 seizure of the MSC Aries signaled that merchant shipping is part of the same escalation calculus. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development(UNCTAD)'s maritime-transport review frames how concurrent choke-point pressures

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cascade into routing shifts, fuel and food inflation [6]. That global-public-bad quality is what forces outside powers to treat the Iran–Israel front as a live market-risk problem, not merely a regional feud.

## 3. Past action as a layered approach to symptom management

International efforts to manage the crisis have unfolded across three distinct layers. The Security Council's normative role, the International Atomic Energy Agency(IAEA)'s technical dialogue, and regional mediation.

### 3.1. The security council functioning as firebreak and normative stage

After the April 2024 the Council met, recorded, and named principles even when it could not compel. The 9602nd meeting placed on the official record the violation of diplomatic-premises immunity, the Article 2(4) prohibition, and the demand that all parties step back [2]. Those sessions create a public baseline and preserve at least the language of rules when enforcement is missing [7]. Resolution 2728, adopted 25 March 2024 (14-0-1, US abstaining), demands an immediate ceasefire, hostage release, and humanitarian access; [8] yet it carries no enforcement chapter, no monitoring regime, and no penalty gradient, so compliance stays voluntary and political, and the Council's credibility discount deepens when its own demands go unmet.

### 3.2. The IAEA struggling to maintain a technical lifeline

The IAEA prevents the nuclear file from collapsing wholly into power-political arbitration. China's ambassador to the IAEA, Li Song, summarized a wide Board view when he argued that the Iranian nuclear issue can only be properly resolved through political and diplomatic engagement and safeguards cooperation within the IAEA framework, and that dragging it back to coerced Security Council formats risks destroying the remaining verification lifeline [4]. Still, when the Agency cannot physically reseal or sample, its reports become inventories of ignorance rather than assurance, which feeds domestic narratives that shrink diplomatic space.

### 3.3. Regional actors providing parallel mediation the UN cannot replace

The UN supplies universality, while several regional states provide the access, trusted informal communication links, and short-notice venues that make crisis management operational. Oman remains a discreet US-Iran backchannel, and the March 2023 Beijing mediated Saudi-Iran rapprochement has already provided Tehran with an additional channel of communication to Gulf states beyond a purely adversarial framework [1].

Pakistan has recently moved from the edge of that map to one of its most consequential hubs, acting as a "credible shuttle coordinator" between Washington and Tehran during the April 2026 flare-up. Islamabad confirmed it was transmitting positions between the two sides, with the Pakistani army chief Munir speaking to Trump ahead of a halt in firing and with Iranian officials acknowledging Islamabad's role before both camps agreed to sit in Islamabad on 10 April for further talks; Prime Minister Shehbaz simultaneously framed the effort as stabilizing a strait-dependent, economically exposed front where Pakistan itself faces severe energy and border-security pressure along its roughly nine-hundred-kilometre frontier with Iran [9]. Islamabad's advantage is a blend of interests and identity, deep religious-cultural links to Tehran, working security contacts with Washington, and usable ties to Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Doha, which lets it present itself as a

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relatively balanced venue that can host without stealing credit. However, if this channel is to outlast a single pause, it must be paired with the same scaffolding this paper following argues in Chapters IV-V, namely a codified red-line regime, a technical incident-review mechanism, and verification-linked restraint, otherwise the "shuttle success" will remain a symptom-only achievement.

## 4. Why symptom-only management keeps failing

Why do existing measures keep falling short? Three structural deficits provide the answer. The security dilemma without a regional architecture, the verification vacuum as a structural feature, and selective enforcement that hollows the Charter.

### 4.1. The security dilemma operating without a regional architecture

The security dilemma operates without any regional architecture. Israel treats an unconstrained 60 percent enrichment programme plus a dispersed proxy ring as existential-tier, and justifies preventive strikes as inherent self-defence under Charter Article 51 [10]. Iran replies that enrichment up to 60 percent sits inside its *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons(NPT)* protected peaceful rights (Arts. I-IV), and that Israel, which sits outside the NPT and is widely described as possessing an undeclared nuclear arsenal, lacks the standing to dictate Iran's fuel cycle while striking Iranian sovereign and consular sites with impunity [11]. Because no regional security treaty, no non-aggression code, and no incident-review board exist, both sides normalize pre-emption, domestic audiences punish compromise as betrayal, and defence postures constantly read as offence.

### 4.2. The verification vacuum as a structural rather than technical problem

The verification vacuum is structural rather than technical. Safeguards need access, and access is a political grant. Once a site is struck, or cameras removed, or declarations disputed, continuity of knowledge breaks, and the baseline becomes an estimate rather than a verified inventory [5]. In security-studies terms, the cost of a mistake, for example assuming that a military-applied threshold has been crossed, rises precisely when information quality falls. Striking Fordow, Natanz, or Isfahan may delay capability briefly yet destroys the only institution-based mechanism that could convert capability back into negotiable numbers.

### 4.3. Selective enforcement and the resulting charter credibility gap

Selective enforcement hollows the Charter from within. Article 2(4) and Article 51 only regulate behaviour when enforcement looks principled. When a strike on a diplomatic compound draws no equivalent Council enforcement while other actors are sanctioned for lesser breaches, the normative order fractures. The rule set must bind everyone or it binds no one. Under those conditions Tel Aviv and Tehran both come to believe battlefield facts outweigh normative texts, which locks in escalation.

The 2026 crisis demonstrates this selective enforcement dynamic in operation. On 28 February the United States and Israel carried out coordinated strikes on multiple Iranian cities and nuclear-connected sites, and Iran retaliated across the region, including against US assets and Gulf states. The Secretary-General condemned the escalation on all sides, invoking Article 2(4) against the use of force [12]. Yet the Council's eventual response, Resolution 2817 adopted on 11 March by 13-0-2 with China and Russia abstaining, singled out Iran's retaliatory attacks on Gulf states for condemnation while remaining silent on the initiating strikes against Iran proper [13]. This

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asymmetry is precisely the kind of selective enforcement that erodes the Charter's credibility. Iran's mission to the UN had already submitted a formal letter characterizing the strikes as armed aggression and asserting the right of self-defence under Article 51, while demanding an emergency meeting [14]. Israel's foreign minister replied in kind, framing the operation as defensive and lawful under the same article, accusing Tehran of closing the Strait of Hormuz and arming proxies, and urging designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps(IRGC) as a terrorist organization [15]. Both sides invoked the same Charter provisions to justify opposing actions, yet the Council chose to condemn only one side's conduct. The message sent to both sides is clear: the Charter's restraints apply unevenly, and the Council's legitimacy depends on whose violation is being judged. This credibility gap reinforces the belief in both Tel Aviv and Tehran that battlefield outcomes matter more than normative commitments, which is precisely the condition that locks escalation in place.

## 5. A sequenced pathway of firewall, channels, and incentives

A way forward requires a sequence of three mutually reinforcing moves. The basic firewall reinstates the old prohibitions against attacking diplomatic premises, safeguarded nuclear sites, and civilians. The standing crisis-management channel absorbs and contains future incidents. The incentive-linked framework ties tangible relief to verifiable behavioral changes, rewarding restraint and punishing defection. Together these three elements form a minimal institutional scaffolding that does not require a grand peace treaty or regime change, yet can lower the probability of uncontrolled escalation and rebuild the informational and political conditions for diplomacy.

### 5.1. A basic firewall protecting diplomatic premises, nuclear sites, and civilians

The indispensable baseline is simple. Stop treating diplomatic premises, safeguarded nuclear sites, and civilian concentrations as legitimate battlefields. Without such a baseline, every crisis management effort starts from a position where the most fundamental rules of interstate conduct have already been breached, making crisis management far more difficult.

A realistic vehicle is a coded red-line understanding announced through the Secretary-General's good offices and echoed by the Council. It prohibits three things. To begin with, Targeting of diplomatic missions contrary to *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations(VCDR)* Art. 22 inviolability, a norm that has already suffered serious damage after the April 2024 Damascus strike and needs explicit reaffirmation [2]. Next, Strikes on IAEA safeguarded nuclear sites, because those strikes destroy the only neutral verification handle and eliminate the factual basis for any future negotiated cap on enrichment [5]. Finally, Intentional fire toward civilians, as a humanitarian floor consistent with international humanitarian law obligations and with the Council's own repeated demands for civilian protection.

Both sides can sell this domestically. Tehran can frame it as defending national dignity. Tel Aviv can frame it as locking in constraints on Iran's escalation ladder and protecting Israeli civilians from indiscriminate fire. The point is discipline, not surrender. Each side gains a publicly defensible reason to hold fire without appearing weak.

Crucially, this firewall must be communicated clearly to military commanders on both sides. A publicly declared understanding, reinforced through existing military-to-military channels or through the UN Truce Supervision Organization machinery, reduces the risk of inadvertent escalation caused by miscommunication or unauthorized action.

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### 5.2. A standing crisis-management channel for rapid incident control

Because friction will recur even after a firewall is agreed, an institutional mechanism to absorb shocks is essential. Even already ceasefires can unravel within hours if a single incident goes unexplained. The absence of a reliable fact-finding and communication channel allows each side to assume the worst about the other's intentions, triggering retaliatory cycles.

The same arrangement that houses the firewall should also accommodate a standing channel under a Chapter VI mandate dealing with Pacific Settlement (Arts. 33-38) [10]. The channel would include two components. A secure hotline connecting designated senior officials in Tel Aviv, Tehran, and the UN Secretariat, allowing direct communication in a crisis without the delays and distortions of public messaging. And a small rotating technical incident-review board composed of impartial experts nominated by the Secretary-General and acceptable to both sides.

The board's mandate is tightly defined. Its job is rapid fact-verification using satellite imagery, open-source intelligence, and any agreed sensor data, narrative containment by issuing a preliminary factual assessment within 12 to 24 hours of a reported incident, and proportional-response advice that helps both sides calibrate their reactions within the agreed red lines. The board does not assign blame or make legal determinations. It simply answers the factual question of what happened, based on the best available evidence.

Over time, the existence of such a board shifts the burden of proof from guess-and-escalate to show evidence or stand down. A party that obstructs the board's fact-finding undermines its own credibility, whereas a party that submits evidence of a violation strengthens its claim to moral authority. This procedural shift, though modest, has proven effective in other conflict settings, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe(OSCE)'s incident-prevention mechanisms in Eastern Europe and the UN's disengagement observer force in the Golan Heights.

This channel does not replace diplomacy. It makes diplomacy possible by preventing a single strike from cascading into a full exchange before diplomats have time to work.

### 5.3. An incentive-linked framework that rewards verified restraint

Restraint needs oxygen. The wider sanctions and security squeeze should be tied to visible, time-lined, and reversible benchmarks rather than endless demand-first-reward-never loops. One of the recurring failures in past negotiations has been the insistence on full compliance before any relief, which gives the complying party no incentive to take the first step.

The framework operates on a simple principle. Verified freezing or rolling back the 60 percent stockpile and centrifuge arrays would unlock proportionate, conditional relief, for example civilian-aircraft-parts licensing or targeted financial carve-outs, all snapping back automatically if cheating is confirmed through IAEA verification. The automatic snap-back provision is essential because it removes the need for a new Council vote to reimpose sanctions, a process that can be blocked by any permanent member.

Beyond the nuclear file, the framework extends to other domains of the rivalry. Verified missile-deployment pullbacks from forward proxy sites would unlock diplomatic upgrades such as travel-ban easing for technocratic officials or limited consular re-openings. Certified cessation of cross-border proxy fire would unlock multilateral reconstruction pledges for Gaza and Lebanon that require coexistence to unlock

The design principle is strict reversibility with verification. Tehran must know that breaking commitments re-imposes costs automatically, without requiring a new political battle in the Council.

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Tel Aviv must know that holding fire actually buys something beyond a short lull, that there is a tangible payoff for restraint that can be delivered quickly and withdrawn just as quickly if violated.

Together, these three moves, a firewall, a crisis channel, and an incentive framework, form a coherent sequence. The firewall stops the bleeding. The channel manages the inevitable aftershocks. The incentives give both sides a reason to stay inside the mechanism. None of them requires trust. They require only that each side sees a clearer interest in managed rivalry than in uncontrolled escalation.

## 6. Conclusion

The Iran-Israel conflict has escalated beyond the old shadow-war containment because three structural failures reinforce each other. There is no regional security architecture, so every defensive move reads as offensive. There is a verification vacuum that replaces neutral facts with worst-case assumptions, so uncertainty drives strikes. And there is selective Charter enforcement that drains the Council's legitimacy at the precise moment restraint requires a credible referee. The layered responses since 2024 have prevented total fragmentation but address symptoms, not structure. The three-part sequenced alternative advanced here, a basic firewall, a crisis-management channel, and an incentive-linked framework, offers a way to re-embed the rivalry inside rules, information, and face-saving restraint.

Two limitations deserve emphasis. The analysis draws on publicly available UN documents, IAEA reporting, treaty texts, and open-source developments. It cannot account for closed-door red-line calibration in either government. The pathway also assumes a minimum of rational cost-benefit calculation on both sides, an assumption that domestic coalitions in Tel Aviv, Tehran, and Washington can test at any moment. Future research might productively explore domestic audience costs and how they shape each leadership's ability to accept even limited forbearance, as well as the institutional design options for a standing regional security dialogue under UN auspices that does not require a full peace treaty to be useful.

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