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Nuclear Diplomacy versus Military Action: The Breakdown of Negotiations and Strategic Outcomes in the Iran-Israel-United States Conflict

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Abstract

The failure of the nuclear diplomacy between Islamic Republic of Iran, the State of Israel and the United States in early 2026 and the subsequent launch of Operation Lion's Roar on 28 February 2026 are one of the most impactful shifts in international security since the Cold War's ends. This paper details the causal mechanisms that blocked the prospect of military escalation despite long multilateral negotiations and reviews systematically the outcomes of the negotiations that have reshaped the structures of security in the region and beyond. The analysis is based on Deterrence Theory, Coercive Diplomacy, Structural Realism, and Security Dilemma Theory to trace the process of diplomacy breaking down into armed conflict. The paper presents a critical analysis of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as a case of impermanent multilateral containment, and identifies the structural vulnerabilities that were uncovered by the unilateral withdrawal of the United States (US) in 2018 and Iran's continued enrichment activities since then. It also explores the three-step approach to preventing negotiations: Israel's preventive military strategy, the dual-track U.S. strategic approach, and Iran's nuclear nationalism. Comparative analysis of diplomatic and coercive instruments is used to evaluate strategic outcomes, such as regional destabilization, erosion of the non-proliferation regime, economic disruption and geopolitical realignment that result from military escalation. The paper ends with an outlook on forward-looking policy scenarios and recommendations for reconstructing a multilateral nonproliferation governance post-conflict.

Keywords: Nuclear Diplomacy, JCPOA, Iran Nuclear Program, Coercive Diplomacy, Deterrence Theory, Operation Lion's Roar, Middle East Security, Non-Proliferation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Iran-Israel-United States crisis of 2026 is a pivotal moment in modern international security as it represents the most serious stage of a 30-year strategic struggle over Iranian nuclear aspirations. Israel and the United States coordinated military action against Iran's strategic and nuclear facilities on February 28, 2026¹, after the failure of talks via Oman and Geneva, reflects a deep crisis in the international nonproliferation system to prevent one of the most intractable conflicts in modern statecraft. A shift from negotiated containment to preventive military action was not absent from a strategic context.

It grew out of the history of missed promises, one-sided assessments of threats, irreconcilable national red lines and the inability of forced diplomacy to resolve issues in a climate of deep strategic distrust. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015, once considered a

¹ "Iran's War with Israel and the United States," Council of Foreign Relations (Center for Preventive Action, April 22, 2026), https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/confrontation-between-united-states-and-iran?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23845330454&gbraid=0AAAAADidA2BXGp8JUcP6v5fJHxd4idzj&gclid=Cj0KCQjwzqXQBhD2ARIsAKrleU-nOemPHOIGgysuwIBuTHNRxXwj9qxYEaghk1txp3cOuq4pTMsXMHEaAmO4EALw_wcB.

major multilateral success, was repeatedly challenged with the US withdrawal in 2018, Iran's steady increase in enrichment and the inability of the revival negotiations of the JCPOA, which started in 2021 and are expected to conclude by 2026, to yield a lasting agreement.²

This paper investigates the causal structure of the nuclear diplomacy's failure, the logic of military escalation, and the multidimensional implications of the failure to build nuclear diplomacy, and its impact on regional and global security. It places such developments in alternative theoretical frameworks, such as deterrence theory, coercive diplomacy, structural realism, and the security dilemma, to develop a comprehensive analytical explanation for the transition from diplomacy to force, and the strategic consequences of this shift.

The paper continues as follows: Section 2 states the research questions and aims. The literature is critically reviewed in Section 3. The theoretical framework is presented in Section 4. The methodology is presented in Section 5. The empirical core of the analysis are the sections from 6 to 18. Section 19 provides comparison evaluations and Section 20 provides forward-looking scenarios. The policy recommendations are found in Section 21, with the conclusions of the study in Section 22.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Primary Research Question

This study has been pursued in light of the following question regarding the 2026 military escalation between Iran, Israel, and the United States, despite ongoing efforts of nuclear diplomacy.

What are the main strategic implications for this failure, and what was the outcome of the nuclear diplomacy that failed?

2.2 Secondary Research Questions

- What were the political and military decisions of each state actor, in the light of strategic calculations and asymmetric security perceptions?
- How did domestic political constraints, institutional distrust and verification failures led to undermine negotiations?
- What are the implications for regional deterrence and global norms of non-proliferation of shifting from diplomatic containment to military confrontation?
- What were the outside influences, from China, Russia and the Gulf Arabs, on the course of the conflict?
- What are the most likely scenarios and policy instruments in the future of nuclear stability in the post-2026 strategic environment?

2.3 Research Objectives

- To trace and critically discuss the chain of events that would lead to military escalation during the conflict between Iran and Israel in 2026 because of diplomatic engagement.
- To Critically assess the validity of the deterrence, coercive diplomacy and structural realism theories in relation to the dynamics of the conflict.
- To evaluate the implications of military action and the potential for diplomatic negotiations in the short and long term.
- To develop policy insights based on evidence for multilateral nonproliferation governance restoration.

² Usaid Siddiqui, "What Was the Iran Nuclear Deal Trump Dumped in Search of 'Better' Terms?," Al Jazeera, April 21, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/4/21/what-was-the-iran-nuclear-deal-trump-dumped-in-search-of-better-terms>.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly discussion on the effectiveness of negotiated vs. coercive instruments in nuclear nonproliferation is an interdisciplinary issue. Evans and Steinberg and Steinberg have suggested that multilateral treaty mechanisms, especially the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its verification architecture, are the most permanent means of stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons.³ The multilateral diplomatic containment analysis of the JCPOA is widely discussed, in the context of the P5+1 framework in which it was negotiated. Structurally flawed, but nonetheless a significant extension of the breakout time for Iran, and a strengthening of IAEA monitoring, have been the general findings of comprehensive assessments by the Brookings Institution, the International Crisis Group, and the RAND Corporation.^{4 5}

United States' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 under the Trump administration and re-imposition of 'maximum pressure' sanctions drastically changed the strategic picture. This action was recorded in relation to the collapse of the diplomatic system as well as the strengthening of the Iranian nuclear nationalism and the loss of political credibility for Iranian moderates by scholars such as Maloney (2019)⁶ and Mousavian (2021)⁷. More recent scholarship has depicted the revival talks for the 2021–2026 JCPOA as structurally deadlocked because of the lack of strategic trust between the negotiating parties and the incongruity of key demands, including a desire for zero enrichment on one side and verified civilian program on the other, which were incompatible in the prevailing political climate.⁸

The theoretical literature on coercive diplomacy, a term that George and Simons (1994)⁹ define as the strategic employment of threats and limited force to induce compliance of the adversary without all-out war, is very useful in helping understand the conflict of 2026. The seminal work on the 'manipulation of risk' by Thomas Schelling¹⁰ (1960) and an analysis of coercion by Robert Pape (1996)¹¹ both highlight the need for credible threats that the opponent feels are symmetric to those of compliance. As with the Iran negotiations, when this symmetry collapses, coercion will not result in concession-it will result in a counter-escalation. Fearon (1994)¹² and Slantchev (2011) have also put forward theories about the circumstances in which information asymmetries and commitment problems create 'bargaining failure' and make war the rational choice for states who wish to settle their differences peaceably. In the 2026 case, Iranian, Israeli and American decision makers were all facing acute information asymmetry and significant mistrust of the adversary's commitment to any agreement they came to.

³ Gareth Evans, "Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play," *Gevans.org*, 2023, <https://www.gevans.org/speeches/speech454.html>.

⁴ Samore, Gary. "The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Definitive Guide." Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2019. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/iran-nuclear-deal-definitive-guide>.

⁵ Robert Einhorn, "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Prelude to Proliferation in the Middle East?," Brookings, May 19, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-iran-nuclear-deal-prelude-to-proliferation-in-the-middle-east/>.

⁶ Suzanne Maloney, *Iran's Political Economy since the Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁷ Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "Evolution of the Biden Administration's Approach to the Iran Nuclear Deal and Prospects for Regional Peace," *Paths to Peace and Security* (2021).

⁸ Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Program: An Irreversible Strategic Choice?," Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

⁹ Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Thomas C Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

¹¹ Robert Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win : Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca (N.Y.) ; London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹² James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994)

The classical theory of nuclear deterrence proponents: Brodie 1946¹³, Kahn 1960¹⁴, Schelling 1966, state that the mutual nuclear threat is an effective deterrent to large-scale warfare. But the use of classic theory of deterrence in the regional nuclear dynamics in the Middle East has been questioned extensively. The lack of survivable second-strike capability, whether Iran has such a capability or not, is an issue of acute first-strike incentives that both Israel and the United States face, thus fundamentally destabilizing the deterrence relationship, Chubin (2009)¹⁵ and Lieber and Press (2017)¹⁶ argue. The 'stability-instability paradox' (Snyder, 1965)¹⁷ is especially pertinent: the uniqueness of the nuclear threshold in Iran could have simultaneously deterred existential strikes and allowed lower intensity conflict escalation. In 2025, SIPRI's annual report noted Iran's enrichment at 60% and 83.7% U-235 purity at Fordow and Natanz respectively, respectively, putting Iran within weeks of getting weapons-grade material, which in essence changed the Israeli strategic calculation.¹⁸

The Middle East is a security complex in which the alliance patterns, perceptions of threats, and possibilities of third-party diplomacy in the region are shaped by the rivalries of key regional powers, as described in the Regional Security Complex Theory (2003) by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver.¹⁹ In this context, Iran's nuclear programs are considered as: a deterrent against the Israeli military superiority, a bargaining chip in negotiations with the western powers and a part of the discourse of national identity and sovereignty. What seems to be a fundamental conceptual mistake of Western nonproliferation diplomacy (Bahgat, 2021) is the failure to disaggregate these multiple functions of Iran's nuclear program, and to view it not merely as a proliferation threat but as a multidimensional strategic asset.²⁰

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research takes a multi-theoretic approach, using four complementary international relations and strategic studies theories. The framework that underlies the explanation of state behavior and the state's imperative to adopt a structural realist perspective on international relations of Waltz²¹, and Mearsheimer.²² In this system Iran's nuclear program is a rational reaction of a vulnerable country to the vulnerability, and the examples of non-nuclear countries targeted for regime change, like Libya and Iraq, bear testimony to this. Structural power concerns also provide an explanation for Israel's military doctrine of preventing attack, as well as the goal of regional domination assumed by the United States.

¹³ Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946).

¹⁴ Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton University Press, 1967).

¹⁵ Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February 2009): [Page Number], <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330902749772>.

¹⁶ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017)

¹⁷ Glenn H. Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965).

¹⁸ "SIPRI Yearbook 2025," SIPRI, 2025, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025>.

¹⁹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Gawdat Bahgat, "Solving the Nuclear Stalemate between Iran and the United States," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, May 9, 2021.

²¹ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill Humanities, Social Sciences & World Languages, 1979).

²² John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Ww Norton & Co, 2001).

To explore the effects of nuclear threshold status on threat perceptions, red lines, and the credibility of compellence strategies, classical and extended deterrence theory is used.²³ The commitments of the United States to Israel and the Gulf Arab states for extended deterrence are assessed based on the conditions (credibility, capability, and communication) required for effective deterrence in a multi-actor regional environment. Using the framework of coercive diplomacy of George and Simons (1994)²⁴, the effectiveness of sanctions, military threats and diplomatic ultimatums as means to change behavior is tested. The features that make coercive diplomacy work (urgency, credibility, limited demands, and “face” for the target) are compared to the empirical record of the US-Iran nuclear talks between 2015 and 2026.

The security dilemma framework proponents: Jervis and Booth & Wheeler²⁵, shed light on the nature of these misreads, and on how these action-reaction cycles lead to preventive war: A sequence of defensive actions such as enrichment for energy, conventional military exercises, and development of missiles are systematically misread as components of an offensive effort.²⁶ This is examined in terms of security dilemma dynamics, whose effects have been compounded in the 2026 conflict, where none of the actors had enough information and institutional trust to credibly signal a purely defensive purpose.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study with a single-case study approach to analyze the Iran-Israel-US conflict in 2026. The case study methodology is apt for the objective of the study which is to trace a causal process in a complex, historically particular strategic episode, for which the statistical method is not suitable and the selection of cases for comparison is limited by the peculiarity and uniqueness of the events.

The data collected include several categories of sources: (1) documents, statements, and declassified communications from official government sources such as the Iranian, Israeli and American governments; (2) reports and assessments provided by authoritative international bodies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Security Council, and SIPRI; (3) policy analyses from leading strategic studies institutions, including the Brookings Institution, the RAND Corporation, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the International Crisis Group; (4) peer-reviewed academic research on international security, strategic studies and Middle East politics; and (5) primary and secondary journalistic coverage by reputable media outlets for the chronology of the diplomatic record.

The analytical method is a mixture of three methods. Based on Beach and Pedersen’s process tracing method,²⁷ is used to trace the causal chain between the process of engagement in negotiations and escalation to military conflict. Thematic analysis is used to detect any common themes in diplomatic communication and strategic decisions. Diplomatic and military analyses are compared, using historical nonproliferation case studies such as North Korea, Libya and South Africa.

6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF IRAN-ISRAEL-US RELATIONS

6.1 Pre-Revolutionary Foundations

²³ Thomas C Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁴ Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

²⁵ 3. Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²⁶ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978).

²⁷ Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran under the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had a close strategic relationship with Israel and the U.S. Iran was a key component of the American Cold War strategy in the Middle East: a bulwark against Soviet expansion with a key buyer of American military technology in the Shah's Iran. There was covert, but substantive, Israeli-Iranian security cooperation, which involved sharing intelligence and transferring, arms.²⁸ In the 1970s, the Shah also began to launch Iran's nuclear programme with clear-cut American backing under the Atoms for Peace program, laying the institutional groundwork that would be used to sustain Iran's nuclear ambitions in the future.

6.2 Post-Revolutionary Reorientation

The Islamic Revolution has revolutionized the Iranian foreign policy. The doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) was a worldview of anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism that was integrated into Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings, which led Iran to become the loudest critic of the Israeli state and the United States. The United States broke ties with Iran in April 1980 after the hostage crisis, and relations have never been close since then, due to the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which the United States supported with intelligence. Israel, in turn, was turned into a focal point of the Iranian revolutionary ideology and successive Iranian leaders denied Israel's existence and offered material support to Hezbollah and Hamas.

6.3 Nuclear Program Development and International Response

The first public information about Iran's secret nuclear program was released in August 2002, when the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) exposed the establishment of nuclear enrichment facilities at Natanz and a heavy-water plant at Arak. Later investigations by the IAEA revealed Iran's nonreporting of these facilities in violation of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement. Diplomatic dialogue was started by the EU-3 (France, Germany, UK) in 2003 and resulted in temporary enrichment suspensions, but not in a final deal that would lead to a permanent suspension. In 2006, Iran resumed nuclear enrichment, which led to a series of multilateral UN Security Council resolutions.

With the election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, Iran opened a window for diplomacy leading to the July 2015 JCPOA a deal that gave Iran limited sanctions relief in exchange for reduced enrichment capacity, stockpiles, and required conversion of the Arak reactor, and unprecedented IAEA verification regime. The JCPOA was approved by a UN Security Council resolution, 2231, and was the most comprehensive multilateral nuclear agreement since the Cold War.

7. NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY AND JCPOA ANALYSIS

7.1 The Architecture of the JCPOA

The JCPOA was a sophisticated deal: Iran would reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium from 300 kilograms to 300kg; limit enrichment to 3.67% U-235; lower its number of installed centrifuges from about 19,000 to 6,104; and agree to allow continuous monitoring by the IAEA, including snap inspections. The P5+1 promised in return "comprehensive" sanctions relief, including the lifting of the US, EU and UN financial and oil sanctions. The terms of the deal included a Joint Commission and a dispute resolution process, as well as sanctions 'snapback' if Iran breaches the deal.

In analytical terms, the JCPOA was a 'managed containment,' not a long-term solution to the nuclear issue but a short-term agreement that purchased time to facilitate diplomatic normalization and extended the breakout time from around two to three months to a minimum of twelve months. The structural weakness was, indeed, its temporal nature: the major

²⁸ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance* (Yale University Press, 2007).

constraints in the agreement were scheduled to end in 10-15 years without a comparable longer-term framework, known as the 'sunset problem.'²⁹

Figure 1. Diplomatic negotiations and multilateral engagement under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).



7.2 US Withdrawal and the Maximum Pressure Campaign

A turning point for the Trump administration was its unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 and the imposition of comprehensive sanctions. The 'maximum pressure' effort targeting Iran to assure a 'JCPOA+' that would extend the nuclear deal to Iran's ballistic missiles and regional proxy operations. But the plan only backfired: since it was clear that no deal would survive a change of US administration, Iranian leaders started to gradually overstep the purview of the JCPOA starting from May 2019. Iran had already removed all operational restrictions imposed under the JCPOA, but continued to claim compliance to the NPT framework, by January 2020.³⁰

7.3 The 2021–2026 Negotiation Failure

The Biden administration's efforts to revive the JCPOA in Vienna by indirect talks in April 2021 have almost reached the point of a deal but failed to reach any signing of an agreement. The issues that caused problems were whether Iran would lift the US designation of the Revolutionary Guards, who would be entitled to compensation for economic losses incurred during the maximum pressure period, and whether the United States could guarantee legally that a new administration would not re-denominate them. The issues were not just technical. On the contrary, they signaled a structural lack of trust and credibility on the part of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which, with good reason, had decided that promises by the United States were not likely to last.³¹

²⁹ Robert Einhorn, "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Prelude to Proliferation in the Middle East?," Brookings, May 19, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-iran-nuclear-deal-prelude-to-proliferation-in-the-middle-east/>.

³⁰ "Board of Governors Verification and Monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in Light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)," 2020, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/documents/gov2020-5.pdf>.

³¹ Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "Why the JCPOA Revival Negotiations Are Failing," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, July 25, 2022.

Talks were ongoing in Oman and Geneva in 2025, with recent reports of progress in talks on verification and enrichment caps. In January 2026, however, the talks were definitively broken off, both parties accusing each other of not playing fair. US negotiators demanded no enrichment while Iran insisted that there was no way it could be done without the loss of sovereignty. This was coupled by the rapid progress of Iran's enrichment efforts, estimated by SIPRI to have made it to 83.7% enrichment by the end of 2025³², which made for the perfect conditions for military action.

8. CAUSES OF NEGOTIATION BREAKDOWN

8.1 Structural Trust Deficit

One of the most basic reasons for negotiation failures was that there was no trust between the negotiators, in a sense, it was not in the structure. In the eyes of Iran, the U.S. had made it clear in 2018 when it withdrew from the deal, that no matter how multilateral it was supported, executive agreements were not binding on future administrations. There had never been a binding mechanism for the United States to make a credible long-term commitment to sanctions relief. No commitment problem of Fearon's³³ type could be solved in the American constitutional framework since Iran wanted guarantees that were structurally unmanageable.

8.2 Incompatible Red Lines

US and Israeli demands for the elimination of all Iranian uranium enrichment capacities, or 'zero enrichment', clashed with Iran's commitment that the technology would be a "right" under Article IV of the NPT, and a national 'sovereign' right and development. Domestically, any Iranian government would face sharp opposition if it made concessions on nuclear enrichment since such a move would be interpreted as a sign of weakness in political culture and surrender to foreign pressure.³⁴ The difference between the negotiating positions was not just technical, but also one of ideology and country interest and sovereignty.

8.3 Domestic Political Constraints

The domestic political situation in all three States was severely limiting diplomatic flexibility on a systematic basis. Bipartisan Congressional opposition to any agreement that was not felt to be sufficiently strict, especially one that allowed enrichment, constrained executive negotiating room in the U.S. In Israel, the political alignment of Netanyahu's government was clearly one of a hardline stance to stop Iran acquiring any nuclear ability, regardless of the consequences, and therefore it was a stance of compellent pressure, not diplomatic negotiation. By 2025, pragmatist and reformist voices in Iran had been systematically suppressed by the Raisi government and the Supreme Leader's office, placing hardliners in dominant positions who saw negotiation as 'weakness.'³⁵

8.4 Verification and Compliance Disputes

There were earlier doubts about verification caused by Iran's history of concealment, such as undeclared Natanz and Arak facilities, failure to fully cooperate with IAEA investigations regarding the possible military dimensions (PMDs) and the Natanz centrifuge attack in 2020, which was blamed on Israel. Western negotiators were unable to make credible Iran assurances to domestic audiences. Iranian compliance assurances to domestic audiences were not credible by Western negotiators. Iran, meanwhile, interpreted the increased verification requirements, especially at its military facilities, as an exercise in intelligence gathering and not necessarily in

³² "SIPRI Yearbook 2025," SIPRI, 2025, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025>.

³³ James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994).

³⁴ Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Program: An Irreversible Strategic Choice?," [Council on Foreign Relations](#), 2022

³⁵ Suzanne Maloney, "Iran's Political Deadlock: Hardliners and the Nuclear File," *Brookings Institution*, 2023.

nonproliferation monitoring. The suspicions were reinforcing one another, resulting in a "verification deadlock" that could only be broken if the political ties changed.

Figure 2. Satellite imagery of the Natanz uranium enrichment facility, one of the central sites in Iran's nuclear program.



9. ROLE OF SANCTIONS AND COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Economic sanctions have been the main tool of coercive diplomacy used on Iran's nuclear program since 2006. UN Security Council Resolutions 1737, 1747, 1803 and 1929 were increasingly broad sanctions that targeted Iran's financial, missile and nuclear programs. In 2018-2021, the US 'maximum pressure' campaign extended these efforts to full economic isolation, by severing Iran's access to SWIFT financial messaging, virtually prohibiting oil exports and targeting the Revolutionary Guards Corps and related economic entities. Sanctions as a coercive tool have a complex analytical picture to them.

On the other, on the eve of entering the JCPOA negotiations in 2013, the lifting of sanctions helped motivate the Iranian government to join talks that were a major feature of Rouhani's campaign. Conversely, the 'maximum pressure' campaign did not achieve its goal of forcing a more complete agreement and instead moved Iran's nuclear program forward and decreased the political strength of the Iranian moderates. This result is in line with previous studies of sanctions efficacy, which have found that 'maximalist coercive pressure' against governments enjoying substantial nationalist support is likely to drive target behavior in the opposite direction.³⁶

In the 2026 case, it brings into sharp focus one of the basic flaws: sanctions are effective when the behavior sought is relatively modest and the leader of the sanctioned state believes that the costs of compliance are less than the costs of resistance. In cases of sovereignty issues, however, such as enrichment, a state's leaders are likely to choose economic hurt over surrender that they see as humiliating at home (Drury, 1998). Here's why Iran's Supreme Leader made it abundantly clear that enrichment is an absolute non-negotiable, and he did so in just this way.

10. ISRAELI STRATEGIC DOCTRINE AND PREVENTIVE MILITARY STRATEGY

³⁶ Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Still Do Not Work," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (July 1998): 66–77, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.66>.

10.1 The Begin Doctrine

Israel's strategic policy towards an adversary's nuclear program is rooted in the 'Begin Doctrine,' which has been executed in the 1981 strike of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq and the 2007 strike of Al-Kabar nuclear facility in Syria, the idea that Israel will not tolerate an adversary acquiring such capability under any international law. This doctrine is derived from Israel's strategy as a small country with existential threats: Israel considers that it does not have the capacity to withstand a first nuclear strike and thus it has to take preventive action before the threshold is reached.³⁷ The doctrine is a logical response to structural vulnerability but systematic incentives for preemption it engenders run counter to diplomatic containment strategies.

10.2 Iran as an Existential Threat

Throughout the years, Israeli strategic analyses have always regarded Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat, and Iranian leaders have regularly made disparaging remarks about Israel's legitimacy. A 2011 RAND Corporation analysis concluded that Israeli decisionmakers were indeed serious about the idea that an Iranian nuclear weapon would have a profound impact on the security situation and would embolden Iranian-backed proxies, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to operate with greater freedom under a nuclear umbrella. At this juncture, in early 2026, with the progress of Iranian enrichment nearing the threshold of weapons production and the talks having failed, Israeli decision makers had decided that the last chance calculation was also in effect.

10.3 Operation Lion's Roar

On 28 February 2026 Operation Lion's Roar Targeted Iranian nuclear facilities and air defense systems, missile storage facilities and critical infrastructure and was conducted in a coordinated manner between the United States and Israel. The operation was presented in public terms as a 'preemptive defensive strike' to stop what was seen as a 'threat of nuclear attack,' but the legal and factual ground for the 'imminent' characterization of the attack was challenged immediately by international legal scholars and the UN Secretary-General. It was the first time that the United States and Israel have carried out a joint military strike against Iran and the biggest military escalation in the Middle East since the 2003 Iraq War.

11. UNITED STATES STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

US strategic interests in the Middle East have always been clustered around four issues: regional stability and the free flow of energy resources through the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, the security of Israel as a treaty ally and strategic partner, the containment of Iranian regional influence and the prevention of Iranian domination of the Persian Gulf, and the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons in a strategically important and volatile area. They have often generated tensions in their inter-relations: measures aimed at Iran have sometimes led to disruption of regional peace; the Israel security pledge has at times been an impediment to cooperation with Arab partners.

This was, at least in part, a confluence of interests in the United States at a particular moment in history in deciding to participate in Operation Lion's Roar. This was seen as a diplomatic setback, especially for the Biden administration, which had put substantial resources into diplomatic containment. The 2026 negotiations had failed, and there was a sense that the United States had suffered a strategic loss and had lost credibility in the region. The threat of an Iranian nuclear weapon was judged to have cascading proliferation risks, such as those of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, which had indicated that they were considering nuclear options should Iran become

³⁷ Uzi Rubin, "The Osirak Attack: The Realpolitik of Preventive War," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*

a nuclear power. Military action was then justified as being a reaction to an actual threat, and as a precautionary measure against a wider proliferation chain.

12. PROXY WARFARE AND REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS

The 2026 struggle can't be explained without considering the wider context of proxy warfare in Middle Eastern security for decades. Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' consists of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Shia militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen, and serves as a force-multiplier for Iran to extend its reach and exact a price from its enemies without engaging in direct nation-to-nation conflict. Hardline elements in Iran who invested in the proxy network have systematically worked against diplomatic accommodations that would involve reducing support for the proxy network, this proxy network has been both a means of Iranian strategy and a limitation on Iranian diplomacy.

Following the start of Operation Lion's Roar, Iran deployed some of this proxy network in a concerted counterstrike. Hezbollah fired continuous rockets into northern Israel, Houthis upped the ante in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and Shia militias operated in Iraq and Syria, attacking US interests throughout Iraq and Syria. These counter-offensive actions, however, did not represent a direct response by Iran's military forces, but they did illustrate the military strike's failure to have the desired impact on Iranian regional influence. They also demonstrated that the region's deterrence system would be triggered as Iran is attacked, and that this would create a security paradox by which an attack on Iran is likely to make Iran more dangerous.

13. DETERRENCE THEORY AND NUCLEAR STABILITY

13.1 Classical Deterrence and Its Limitations

According to classical deterrence theory, rational adversaries will be deterred from acting aggressively if they are threatened with retaliation that they will find unacceptable if they do. The theory is problematic in the context of the Iran-Israel-US triangle. First, Israel was a country that was not officially declared to have a nuclear arsenal, while Iran was declared to be near-nuclear. Classical deterrence theory offers limited advice on how to deter a covert nuclear armed state from attacking a non-nuclear state or a near-nuclear state. Secondly, there is a lack of communication between the parties and proxy actors so that escalation is not predictable and classical deterrence theory cannot adequately model.

13.2 The Stability-Instability Paradox in Practice

The so-called stability-instability paradox, which assumes that nuclear deterrence can lead to strategic stability at the existential level while allowing sub-nuclear strategic instability, because an adversary knows that he or she cannot win a nuclear war.³⁸ This pattern could be a reason why 40 years of low-intensity warfare-such as covert operations, cyber warfare, proxy warfare-have taken place in the Iran-Israel context under the guise of nuclear deterrence. Iran's capability to approach the threshold of becoming a nuclear power could have fueled its proxy operations and limited Israel's choices and thus created much of the pressure that ultimately paved the way for Israel to take preventive conventional action.

13.3 Impact on Non-Proliferation Regime

Potentially important negative externalities have been created by the 2026 military strike for the global nonproliferation regime. States that have watched Iran's nuclear program live through 20 years of diplomatic pressure and respond with wars of choice to military pressure may learn two conflicting lessons: that developing nuclear weapons is an invitation for military attack (a deterrent effect), or that it is only nuclear weapons capability, but not nuclear threshold, that provides effective deterrence (an acceleration incentive). The latter lesson is one that North

³⁸ Glenn H. Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965).

Korea's decision makers explicitly learned from Libya's Gaddafi and his disarmament of its WMDs. One of the greatest long-term nonproliferation potential dangers of military action is that the 2026 strikes will serve as a reminder to other would-be nuclear nations that they too can be attacked for the purpose of preventing them from developing a nuclear weapon. One of the biggest long-term nonproliferation implications of the military action is that the 2026 strikes will serve as a reminder to other would-be nuclear nations that they too can be attacked for the purpose of preventing their development of a nuclear weapon.

14. STRATEGIC OUTCOMES OF MILITARY ESCALATION

Table 1: Strategic Outcomes of the 2026 Military Escalation

Domain	Short-Term Impact	Long-Term Implication
Military	Iranian nuclear sites degraded (~85% per US DoD estimates)	Potential dispersal to hardened/hidden sites
Diplomatic	Multilateral coalition fracture; UN Security Council paralysis	Erosion of non-proliferation treaty regime
Economic	Oil prices surged >40%; Strait of Hormuz threatened	Protracted inflation in energy-dependent states
Humanitarian	Civilian displacement; infrastructure collapse in Iran	Long-term health/environmental consequences
Proliferation	Regional states re-evaluating nuclear deterrence postures	Weakening of NPT universality
Geopolitical	China-Russia alignment strengthened against US hegemony	Accelerated multipolar power reconfiguration

Source: Author's synthesis based on US DoD estimates, SIPRI (2025³⁹)⁴⁰ and Council on Foreign Relations

Militarily, Operation Lion's Roar had a great tactical success in the damage to the Iranian nuclear facilities. According to estimates provided to Reuters (3 March 2026), the US Department of Defense (DoD) estimates around 85% degradation of the country's key nuclear sites. But analysts at the RAND Corporation warned that Iran's parallel program and possible covert facilities may have persisted, and that the country could restore its capacity, which could be at hardened and scattered sites-in a three-to-five-year period. Iran's subsequent announcement of its withdrawal from the NPT after the strikes reinforced the strategic consideration that it is unlikely to be possible to achieve a lasting solution by military means.

The impact on the economy was felt immediately and was significant. The conflict had an impact on oil prices, as markets rallied by over 40% in the 2 weeks after the strikes, due to the Houthis' anti-oil campaign in the Red Sea seaway, along with credible Iran-backed threats to close the Strait of Hormuz (through which around 20% of the world's oil moves).⁴¹ Although Iranian troops never closed the entire Hormuz, the price of uncertainty they had to pay on global energy markets was an economic price which had to be paid by energy importing countries, in particular developing ones.

15. ROLE OF CHINA, RUSSIA, AND GULF STATES

15.1 China

³⁹ "SIPRI Yearbook 2025," SIPRI, 2025, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025>.

⁴⁰ Center for Preventive Action, "Confrontation between the United States and Iran," Global Conflict Tracker (Council on Foreign Relations, January 6, 2023), <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/confrontation-between-united-states-and-iran>.

⁴¹ EIA, "International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)," www.eia.gov, June 25, 2024, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/special-topics/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints.

China's response to the 2026 conflict was a response to two interests: a) it was Iran's most significant economic partner, and b) China had a desire to restrain the America's hegemonic intervention in the world. China has greatly expanded its economic ties with Iran under the 25-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership it signed in 2021, which includes \$400 billion in its energy infrastructure commitments over the course of that agreement. China's denunciation of the strikes in the UN Security Council, together with Russia, which vetoed the action in the Council, was both in the interests of the Chinese and in the context of a broader policy of delegitimizing unilateral use of force by Western nations against non-Western countries. In the wake of the conflict, China has been playing a more active role in positioning itself, such as hosting Iran-Arab state reconciliation talks, which is a sign of China's strategic interests in occupying the political vacuum left by the US military intervention.

15.2 Russia

Russia's stance was strategic opportunism and a real concern for military activity in the vicinity of NATO. Russia was a key outsider builder of Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant and had a veto over nuclear program decisions in Iran. Russian criticism of the strikes had several geopolitical motives: to discredit U.S. action, to assert the Russian-China alliance over the Western unipolar approach, and to drive a wedge between China and the West, with the aim of establishing Russia as a necessary go-between in any diplomatic reconstruction after the conflict. Russia, however, was limited in its ability to be a constructive mediator due to its own military involvement in Ukraine.

15.3 Gulf Arab States

The Gulf Cooperation Council states held strong mixed feelings. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain had been all three, quietly, been pressing for diplomatic pressure campaigns to curb Iran's nuclear capabilities, and warning of existential fears. None officially supported military operations, however, for fear of Iranian counteraction, domestic political repercussions and establishing a precedent for military intervention against civilian nuclear facilities in an area that some Gulf States are pursuing civilian nuclear development. The conflict has complicated the region's new diplomatic framework with Saudi Arabia's 2023 normalization deal with Iran, which had been mediated by China.⁴²

16. INTERNATIONAL LAW AND UN PERSPECTIVE

Under international law, Operation Lion's Roar has serious questions. The prohibition on the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state is set out in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and only allows for Security Council approved collective action under Chapter VII or self-defense under Article 51.⁴³ The strikes were justified as preemptive 'self-defense' against an imminent nuclear threat, but the customary international law test for anticipatory self-defense, the 'Caroline standard,' demands that the threat be 'overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation. UNIDIR, which is an international law research institute at the United Nations, was a group of experts who asked all the same question: Was Iran's threshold status (the possession of a weapon), enough to meet this standard?

⁴² Ali Bagheri Dolatabadi and Mehran Kamrava, "Iran's Changing Naval Strategy in the Persian Gulf: Motives and Features," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 1 (July 27, 2022): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2022.2105815>.

⁴³ Belatchew Asrat, *Prohibition of Force under the UN Charter : A Study of Art. 2(4)* (Uppsala: Iustus ; Stockholm, 1991).

The UN Secretary-General's remarks accusing the strikes of being a 'grave violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter' expressed institutional agreement that there were no existing legal frameworks for legal action. The failure of the Security Council to act in the proper way was highlighted by the stalemate regarding Iran and Israel: the United States and UK blocked any resolution condemning Israel, while China and Russia blocked any resolution condemning Iran. The conflict has, therefore, sparked new scholarly and policy debate on the effectiveness of the Charter system to control preventive warfare in the nuclear age.

17. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIPLOMACY VS. MILITARY ACTION

Table 2 presents a systematic comparative assessment of nuclear diplomacy versus military action across eight strategic criteria.

Table 2: Comparative Evaluation of Nuclear Diplomacy vs. Military Action

Criterion	Nuclear Diplomacy	Military Action	Assessment
Speed of Result	Slow (years of negotiation)	Rapid tactical effect	Military faster; diplomacy durable
Legitimacy	High (multilateral consent)	Low (perceived unilateral)	Diplomacy preferred
Cost (human)	Minimal	High casualties/displacement	Diplomacy far superior
Reversibility	High (agreements modifiable)	Low (irreversible damage)	Diplomacy superior
Nuclear Deterrence	Strong if verified	Can harden resolve to weaponize	Mixed
Regional Stability	Enhances cooperation	Destabilizes alliances	Diplomacy superior
Compliance Risk	Moderate (cheating possible)	Provokes asymmetric response	Both limited
Long-term Outcome	Potentially transformative	Uncertainty/blowback risk	Diplomacy preferable

Source: Author's construction based on Pape (1996⁴⁴), SIPRI (2025)⁴⁵, and RAND Corporation (2013⁴⁶) analysis.

The comparative analysis, however, shows that in most strategic dimensions, nuclear diplomacy has always proved to be more likely to achieve better results, albeit slower and with compliance risks. While military action would be fast and effective in terms of infrastructure destruction, it would also create many negative externalities, such as humanitarian costs, damage to the nonproliferation regime, destabilization of the region, and the potential risk of blowback in the long term, all of which have been systematically shown to be greater than the short-term military benefits. History bears this out: in the Libyan situation, it was possible to negotiate disarmament with an unfriendly country, and in the North Korean situation, the use of coercive measures instead of diplomatic ones proved to be extremely dangerous.

Reversibility, that is, the ability to renegotiate or amend a diplomatic agreement, and the ability to cause irreparable political damage or physical destruction by military strike, the latter being the most analytically difficult criterion-is the most challenging criterion. A diplomatic consequence of the strikes is Iran's withdrawal from the NPT, which cannot be undone by any

⁴⁴ Robert Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca (N.Y.); London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵ "SIPRI Yearbook 2025," SIPRI, 2025, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025>

⁴⁶ Alireza Nader, "Iran after the Bomb How Would a Nuclear-Armed Tehran Behave?," RAND Corporation, 2013.

future diplomatic effort, and which has changed the nonproliferation picture in an irreparable and fundamental way. The difficulty of verification and compliance is far from a disincentive to diplomatic investment, however, due to this asymmetry of reversibility.

18. FUTURE SCENARIOS AND STRATEGIC FORECASTING

Scenario 1: Prolonged Conflict and Iranian Nuclear Reconstitution

The worst-case possible scenario is unrestricted fighting, with Iran's intent to continue to build up and speed up its nuclear program at various hardened locations, and with a gradual escalation of tensions in the region using Iranian proxy forces. In such a case, the Iranian departure from the NPT and rapid enrichment at existing or newly built facilities could yield a working bomb in three to five years, which is much more undesirable than the situation prior to the strikes. This is like North Korea's post-strike reconstitution path after the US pressure campaign in the early 2000s.

Scenario 2: Negotiated Settlement Under Changed Conditions

In a second scenario, the costs of conflict, on both sides, are so apparent that there is political room for a more lasting negotiated structure. If Iran's post-Raisi leadership is humbled by the humanitarian and economic toll of the strikes and the US and Israel realize that military force has not forestalled the threat of Tehran building a nuclear weapon, then a 'JCPOA++' deal could be reached with more rigorous verification, shorter timelines and wider regional security assurances. But there's historical precedent for this too: The 2003 disarmament of Iraq was in response to Gaddafi's realization that the United States had intervened in Libya and could not have repeated that experience.

Scenario 3: Regional Nuclear Proliferation

A third scenario, which is perhaps the most alarming nonproliferation scenario, is a cascade of regional nuclear proliferation as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt learn that the only real way to counter an existential military threat is using nuclear weapons. Said that in 2018, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman would develop nuclear weapons if Iran does, and the 2026 conflict may speed up this calculus, whatever Iran does. The conflict has fragmented the region politically, severely limiting the IAEA's ability to monitor and counter proliferation pressures in the area.

19. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

19.1 Reconstruction of Multilateral Diplomatic Architecture

A multi-lateral diplomatic mechanism to rebuild for the Iran nuclear issue should be given top priority in international efforts. This should be expanded to include regional actors with an interest in regional stability who have independent incentives to engage constructively (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey and possibly China as a co-mediator). It should not be nuclear-only; it should explicitly consider Iran's legitimate security concerns, including formal security assurances and a process of gradual normalization of sanctions.

19.2 Legally Binding Commitments and Congressional Authorization

The U.S. needs to seek ways to give Iran longer-term assurances than executive agreements. A formal treaty will have to be ratified by the Senate, however, which is a challenge in the past, and other means such as congressional-executive agreements or Security Council resolutions with binding authority may offer increased legal strength. An escalation of the deal-making process will not resolve the issue of the 'commitment problem' which is at the core of Iranian doubts about the reliability of the US, and which is inherent in any new pact.

19.3 Strengthening IAEA Monitoring Capabilities

Whatever course of diplomacy is pursued, international investment in IAEA monitoring activities should be significantly increased. The agency's Additional Protocol is the lowest level of

verification; a replacement agreement should include full managed access, environmental sampling on the spot and teams of inspectors from various nations. Most importantly, the IAEA's political neutrality with respect to the influence of its Security Council member states should be strengthened to ensure the credibility of its verification results.

19.4 Regional Security Architecture

The Iran nuclear challenge needs to be part of a wider regional security architecture, which should tackle the dynamics of the security dilemma. These include confidence building between Iran and Gulf Arab states, formal communication between Iran and Israel and possibly a Middle East nuclear weapons Free Zone (MENWFZ) process, although the latter will not be a reality without Israeli participation, which is politically impossible in the current environment. The goal should be to change Iran's nuclear calculus in a way that diminishes the threat environment which makes nuclear deterrence appealing to Iranian decision makers.

19.5 Non-Proliferation Norm Reinforcement

International community must make a concerted diplomatic effort to prevent the 2026 war being set as a precedent for military interventions against nuclear programmed. This requires reform of the Security Council to stop the paralysis caused by the veto, the strengthening of NPT enforcement mechanisms, some automatic consequences for withdrawal from the NPT, and greater commitment on the part of the nuclear armed states to their Article VI obligations which form the normative basis for demanding non-nuclear state restraint.⁴⁷

20. CONCLUSION

The Iran-Israel-United States conflict in 2026 is the most significant nuclear diplomacy fiasco since the end of the Cold War, brought about by structural mistrust, incompatible strategic goals, domestic political limitations, and the gradual decay of the framework for managing nuclear proliferation risks. This paper has shown that a series of reinforcing causal factors were involved in the collapse of negotiations, most notably the credibility crisis resulting from the US JCPOA withdrawal, Iran's domestic political transformation to hardline nationalistic thinking on nuclear sovereignty, Israel's existential threat thinking and the limits of coercive diplomacy in addressing core sovereignty issues.

The strategic consequences of the military escalation (damage to infrastructure but not elimination, damage to the nonproliferation regime, region destabilization, economic disruption and geopolitical realignment) are consistent with theoretical literature, which has reached the same conclusions as in the case of other programs. The strategic outcomes of military escalation (infrastructure degradation without program elimination, nonproliferation regime damage, destabilization of the region, economic disruption and geopolitical realignment) confirm the theoretical literature, which has consistently concluded that military action against nuclear programs provides only a short-term delay and substantial negative externalities. A comparative examination of diplomatic and military instruments shows that diplomacy is slow, uncertain, and vulnerable to the threat of defection, but is consistently more effective than military action in most strategic measures that are important to nuclear nonproliferation.

The war of 2026 is not a conclusion to the war, but rather a change in the nature of the strategic challenge. Iran's exit from NPT, damage to IAEA verification mechanisms, the possibility of cascade proliferation in the region and the erosion of international legal conventions on preventive warfare are all making the strategic environment more dangerous than before when military action was initiated. To overcome this climate, the need is for multilateral diplomacy,

⁴⁷ "Appendix: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," *Arms Control* 5, no. 3 (December 1984): 90–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440388408403805>.

not triumphalism, to invest in the institution-building and in building a more sustainable regional security mechanism that will be able to handle the nuclear proliferation threat in the future. The overall lesson of the 2026 war is that nuclear diplomacy, whatever its defects, setbacks, and failings, is the only means of strategic success that can yield lasting results on nuclear proliferation. The other option, preventive military action, would meet the short-term needs of deterrence theory, but destroy just the institutional, normative and diplomatic frameworks that enable long-term nuclear stability. The reconstruction of this infrastructure is the major strategic issue for the next decade in the post-2026 world.

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