

Iran's All-In Bet on Chaos

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For generations, the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor, and the cunning of Scheherazade have fueled an imagination rich with wonder and flying carpets. But the “carpet” now unfolding bears nothing of that enchantment. In poker parlance, it means going all in — staking everything on a single, decisive gamble. That is precisely the strategy Iran appears to have adopted on the geopolitical chessboard.

Tehran is engaging in a high-risk confrontation, brandishing the threat of cutting off vital energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz. By targeting such a critical artery of the global economy, Iran is playing a game whose consequences extend far beyond the Middle East. This is compounded by an unprecedented military escalation: barrages of missiles — including supersonic ones — and swarms of drones targeting Israel, as well as several states across the region, from the United Arab Emirates to Turkey, including Iraq and the Caucasus.

The gamble is all the more perilous given that Iran's own economy depends on that same strait for its oil exports, particularly to China. Yet the clerical regime appears willing to absorb this systemic risk, revealing a survival logic in which escalation overrides economic rationality. Domestically, that logic translates into extreme repression: tens of thousands of protesters are reported to have been killed within days by Basij forces and the Revolutionary Guards.

In response, the Israeli-American counteroffensive marks a turning point. Strikes on Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure have reached unprecedented intensity. The bombing of the Natanz facility with high-yield munitions underscores a clear objective: to contain — or even neutralize — the regime's strategic capabilities before they become uncontrollable.

The stakes, however, extend beyond the regional theater. For decades, Iran's official rhetoric — echoed in institutions, demonstrations, and schools — has called for the destruction of Israel and confrontation with the West. In that sense, the Israeli-American strike may be seen as preemptive: the prospect of an Iran capable of

directly threatening Western powers is no longer the stuff of fiction. Given the demonstrated reach of Iran's missile arsenal — including supersonic systems — and the regime's sustained investment in this domain, it is plausible that within a decade or less Iran could have posed a serious threat to the very Western powers it openly denounces.

In this context, the role of certain regional actors remains ambiguous. Despite heavy losses to its arsenal during the Twelve-Day War, Hezbollah continues to align itself with Tehran, risking dragging Lebanon into a spiral of destruction.

Sunni powers, for their part, oscillate between caution and wait-and-see pragmatism. While quiet cooperation exists behind the scenes, few openly acknowledge any strategic convergence with Israel. The vulnerability of their energy infrastructure and uncertainty over the conflict's outcome help explain this restraint.

Europe, sidelined from the initial decision-making, has voiced concern while remaining within range of Iran's ballistic capabilities. In the background, an ideological — even eschatological — dimension cannot be ignored. Certain circles within Iran's leadership subscribe to a Shiite messianic vision in which the advent of the Mahdi would follow an ultimate apocalyptic confrontation. However marginal it may seem, such a worldview is not without influence on a strategy that defies conventional deterrence logic.

Yet there is another face to Iran. Segments of the opposition, both inside the country and across the diaspora, openly reject the regime and view its Israeli and American adversaries as potential agents of its downfall. This contrast underscores a central reality: behind Iran's "all-in" gamble lies not only a regime's bid for survival, but also the future of a people caught between aspirations for freedom and the excesses of a political system willing to risk everything to stay in power.