

Tehran, or the Foretold Escalation

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In the constant invocation of diplomacy, the facts are sometimes overlooked. While the “P5+1” negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program were unfolding, Iran steadily consolidated an armed arc of influence across the Middle East.

From Lebanon to Yemen, via Syria, Iraq, and Gaza, its proxies have been equipped with increasingly sophisticated arsenals. At the same time, Tehran has refined its ballistic missile capabilities and accumulated enriched uranium, bringing the nuclear threshold closer. Covert operations attributed to its networks—at times narrowly thwarted in Europe and North America—as well as the heavy toll borne by U.S. forces since the 1980s, complete the picture.

This gap between diplomatic discourse and strategic reality undermines the credibility of international law. Neither sanctions nor negotiations have decisively altered the regime’s trajectory. Worse still, time appears to have worked in its favor.

A pressing question therefore arises: how long should one wait? The arming of groups such as Hezbollah, now endowed with considerable firepower, is not a marginal phenomenon but the core of a strategy of indirect deterrence. Waiting means accepting the risk of a simultaneous conflagration on multiple fronts.

Iran has already demonstrated its capacity to disrupt the global order, notably in the Strait of Hormuz. Tomorrow, it could go further. In response, some contemplate targeted strikes on its energy infrastructure—an option limited in scope but fraught with consequences. Iran’s retaliation could well target the vital resources of its neighbors, including desalination facilities, thereby exposing civilian populations.

Repeated calls of “Death to America” in official institutions, public demonstrations, and Iranian schools may be cited to justify robust action. However, by invoking the disappearance of a civilization, President Trump employs rhetoric that echoes, in some respects, that of Iran’s most hardline

factions. Moreover, framing the current conflict as a victory for Christianity, as the U.S. Secretary of Defense has done, risks alienating key Muslim allies. Such statements raise questions about the balance and reach of the White House's political messaging.

No one knows what is unfolding behind the scenes of the Iranian-American talks reportedly taking place in Pakistan during this two-week lull. Should the possibility of proactive moves by China be considered? The future may yet hold surprises.

One uncertainty remains domestic. A shift originating from within the core of power – the Revolutionary Guards or the military establishment – could still alter the equation. In its absence, however, the range of options narrows: ensure the neutralization of Iran's nuclear and ballistic programs, act at the risk of escalation, or refrain – and risk facing a far more severe confrontation in the longer term.