Israel must act against Iran – the clock is running out

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 13.05.2025

The battle over a nuclear deal with Iran will not only determine the fate of the bomb – it will shape the regional order for years to come.

While shifting geopolitical realities in the Middle East have backed Iran into a corner, paradoxically, the current negotiations are working in its favor. As the US administration hesitates on its approach to Tehran, Iran continues to systematically enrich uranium, advance its weapons group, and acquire critical knowledge that could enable it to produce a nuclear weapon, should its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei choose to give the order.

Despite sanctions, economic pressure, and international isolation, Iran is achieving significant gains. Its defensive and offensive capabilities are improving and defeating it in a future military confrontation appears increasingly difficult. This is precisely why Israel and the United States must adopt a firm and uncompromising diplomatic posture – without delay.

A weak agreement – something akin to a "JCPOA 2" – would work against American interests. Such a scenario would buy Iran time to recover economically, bolster the regime's domestic position, and enable it to rehabilitate the "Axis of Resistance," after being severely weakened by Israeli actions and thus restoring Tehran's national security. Even if the deal were to temporarily restrain Iran's nuclear ambitions, it would still allow Tehran to maintain its status as a nuclear-threshold state, while further destabilizing the region. Eventually, when the time seems ripe, Iran would likely move ahead with its operative plan to destroy Israel.

In light of this, Israel should urge US President Donald Trump to revive the ultimatum he issued against Iran in March – which has since been abandoned – and bring it back to the forefront. A natural window for this would be June, during the upcoming session of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors, where a critical decision is expected on reinstating sanctions via the "snapback" mechanism.

Simultaneously, Israel should lead a broad public diplomacy campaign aimed at

the US administration, thought opinion leaders, and the American public, emphasizing a core message: A lenient nuclear agreement will weaken the US, endanger its allies, and throw a lifeline to a radical ideological regime. Conversely, a strong stance toward Iran will reinforce America's regional influence, encourage more nations to join the Abraham Accords, and pave the way for a more stable geostrategic reality.

This effort must also address concerns in the US about being dragged into a costly regional war. Even if military conflict does erupt, Iran is in no position to engage in serious hostilities against the US and Israel. Its proxies are weakened, and the Houthis – the only remaining active outpost – cannot be counted upon to provide the necessary support. Moreover, an Israeli strike, especially with US backing, would significantly impair Tehran's offensive and defensive capabilities.

Given Iran's technological, intelligence, and military inferiority compared to the US, it is doubtful that its leadership would choose to enter a full-scale war, particularly at a time of eroding public support and a deteriorating proxy network. Tehran's decision-making appears driven by survival instincts, making it unlikely that the regime would yield to hardliners like Revolutionary Guards Commander Hossein Salami, who call for direct confrontation.

A targeted public diplomacy campaign could both undermine appeasement efforts in Washington and present Iran with a firm and unequivocal position, forcing it to choose between escalation, which could threaten the regime's survival, or full acceptance of American demands. The latter would mean drinking the "poisoned chalice," akin to Khomeini's painful but calculated decision to end the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. As with Iran's limited response to the assassination of Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in 2020, there remains a significant gap between Tehran's operational capabilities and its willingness to use them.

Even if Israel ultimately has to accept a deal focused solely on the nuclear issue, it must reach a clear understanding with Washington on a comprehensive strategic plan to weaken Iran's regional proxies and missile program. These issues need not necessarily be part of the negotiations with Tehran. Instead, they can be addressed through other means, including kinetic and cyber operations, which will convey unequivocally that both Israel and the US are committed to drawing red lines on terrorism and missile proliferation. This would signal a new strategic reality to Iran and force it to reconsider its offensive ambitions in these arenas.

Diplomacy must rise to meet this moment of decision. The outcome of the nuclear negotiations will not merely settle the question of the bomb – it will determine the future shape of the regional order. Israel must therefore act intensively with the US to ensure it can influence the proposal presented to Iran and help define the path forward in the ongoing struggle against Tehran.

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