

Tehran's Post-War Reset: Deterrence, Missiles, and Regional Ambitions

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 19.10.2025

With the end of the Gaza War, the Islamic Republic of Iran is summing up a tumultuous two-year period of warfare that drew it into the circle of fighting and fire, contrary to its pre-war strategy. As a result of the blow it received from Israel in the twelve-day war between Israel and Iran, and the severe damage to its network of operatives, Tehran is taking a series of actions in an attempt to strengthen its deterrence capability, which suffered an unprecedented setback, signalling its intention to renew the “ring of fire” around Israel. This is especially so in light of increasing threats against it, including the activation of the snapback (UN Security Council sanctions) and the trauma from being caught off guard by Israel.

Missile Program and Intercontinental Ambitions

First, Tehran is focusing on increasing the range of its ballistic missiles to intercontinental levels, i.e., 5,500 km and above. Parliament member Mohsen Zangeneh revealed in an interview (September 20) on Iranian television that the “unidentified lights” seen in Iranian skies two days earlier, which sparked public curiosity and attention, were a successful intercontinental missile test. It is possible that this was the Khorramshahr-5 ballistic missile, expected to reach a range of 12,000 km, which, according to Defence Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh (August 21), has not yet entered operational service. Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi denied Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s claim, following the test, that Tehran is developing intercontinental missiles capable of threatening Washington and New York. However, Ahmad Bakhshayesh Ardestani, a member of the Iranian Parliament’s Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, confirmed the matter. In an interview with Iranian media, he stated that Khamenei had lifted the previous limit of 2,200 km on Iran’s missile range, and that Iran “is now developing its missile program as far as it wishes,” because it must “strengthen its most important military power factor, namely its missile program, without any limitation.”

Pressure for Nuclear Weapons Development

At the same time, pressure is growing from senior regime officials on Khamenei to approve nuclear weapons production. In this context, Ali Shamkhani, Khamenei's senior advisor and formerly long-time head of Tehran's nuclear program, called (October 12) for the regime to produce nuclear weapons, stating that it would have been better if Tehran had developed nuclear weapons in the 1990s. Earlier, on September 22, it was reported that 70 parliament members sent a letter to the Supreme National Security Council, the senior institution where strategic decisions are made in Iran, demanding authorisation for nuclear weapons development. The legislators emphasised that their request was to permit the development and possession of nuclear weapons, but not their use, for deterrence purposes. In addition, nuclear scientist Mahmoud-Reza Akhmi, President of Beshtehi University in Tehran, which is under U.S. and European sanctions due to its links to Iran's nuclear program, stated (October 15) that "if one day it is required to build an atomic bomb, we could do it in the best possible way." He stressed that "we have the capability and resources to develop nuclear weapons, but we have no intention to do so."

Rebuilding the Proxy Network

Furthermore, Tehran is signalling its determination to rebuild its network of proxies despite the significant changes in the geopolitical map following the war. As revealed (September 30) by the Mossad's Persian-language account on X, Abdollah Saberi was appointed to replace Saeed Izadi, who was eliminated in the twelve-day war, as head of the Palestine branch in the Quds Force. In this role, Saberi will coordinate the reconstruction of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip (as well as in Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank), including the process of strengthening and building capabilities and transferring financial and military assistance. Saberi is expected to rely on various special units of the Quds Force, including Unit 840, responsible for special operations. Its advanced weapons smuggling and 'reality-altering' activities targeting terrorist elements in the West Bank have been repeatedly thwarted by the IDF and Shin Bet in recent years; Unit 340, the technological support unit providing knowledge and equipment for Iran's regional operative network, engaged in technology projects related to weaponry; and Unit 190, responsible for smuggling weapons to the operative network, whose commander, Behnam Shahryari, was also eliminated in the war.

As stated (September 24) by Parliament Speaker and Supreme National Security Council member Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Tehran sees nurturing the “Resistance Axis” as a fundamental component of its national security. Qalibaf also expressed Iran’s ambition to renew the “ring of fire” around Israel, explaining that if Tehran does not fight Israel in the Golan Heights, it will fight it on its own borders. He also stressed that Iran’s channel for transferring assistance to Hezbollah remains open, even though it has become more difficult due to regional developments. This signals Iran’s extensive motivation to rebuild and restore Hezbollah. As part of its motivation to rebuild its network of proxies, on October 11, Commander of the Navy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ali-Reza Tangasiri boasted of Tehran’s ability to export missiles, drones, and warships.

Continued Trauma and Alertness

At the same time, signs of nervousness and alertness are still evident in Tehran, arising from concerns that Iran may again be attacked by Israel unexpectedly. The insecurity felt by the regime’s leadership, due to its failure to read deep regional and external developments and thus the approaching Israeli strike, remains apparent. These signs were clearly reflected in the suspicion with which, in early October, Putin’s message from Netanyahu was received, stating that Israel does not intend to resume the war against Iran. In response, Foreign Minister Araghchi (October 11) said that Iran’s forces remain on alert for the possibility of renewed conflict, as it may be an Israeli deception operation.

At the same time, in an effort to mitigate the significant drop in the national currency and alleviate public fears that could spark protests, the regime is sending reassuring messages to the public. This is done through senior security officials who state in the media that “the enemy will not dare to resume the war” and therefore “the likelihood of renewed conflict is low.” The heads of the security apparatus, IDF Chief of Staff Abdolrahim Mousavi, and IRGC Commander Mohammad Pakpour, also emphasised in a media statement at the end of a joint working meeting (September 29) that Iranian forces are “fully prepared” for a powerful confrontation against any kind of threat or possible aggression. In addition, Pakpour conducts tours of operational IRGC units to examine their readiness for the possibility of renewed war.

The Challenge of Steering Iran's Strategy

Khamenei extensively outlined in his televised speech on September 23 his concern that renewing negotiations with the U.S. would be a move whose harm outweighs its benefit, as it would symbolise surrender to Trump and trigger additional U.S. demands in missile development and more. Nevertheless, the moderate and reformist camps are questioning his policy, as evidenced by the sharp criticism over the rejection of President Pezeshkian's invitation to attend the Sharm el-Sheikh summit chaired by Trump. In their view, participation could have opened the door to renewed U.S.-Iran negotiations and eased tensions between them. However, due to Khamenei's deep suspicion and lack of trust toward Trump, it currently appears that he will continue to impose strict conditions on resuming negotiations and pursue a policy aimed at successfully navigating the Trump period.

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