

Forging Middle East security and defence architecture amidst Iran's strategic resurgence

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: International relations Scope: Middle East</p> <p>Received: 02 August 2025 Revised: 11 August 2025 Accepted: 11 August 2025 Published online: 02 September 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Iran's strategic role, Middle East Neighbourhood policy, Middle East security, regional security, US hegemony.</p>	<p>This study explores the viability of establishing the Middle East Security and Defence Programme (MESD) under the enhanced leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, aiming to bring peace and stability in the region. Following the recent war between Israel and Iran, the Khomeini leadership has proved a well-equipped military power within the Gulf, and this has forced the major regional actors to rethink whether to continue depending on the United States to provide security and military assistance in the region. With the prevailing conditions faced in the Middle East today, which necessitate security and peace in order to have development, a new security agenda is needed to come up with a Common Defence Policy in the Middle East (CDPM). This framework of agendas must focus on major aspects like military coalition, strategic partnerships, defence technology and formulation of new defence strategies towards curbing disinformation campaigns against Iran. This proposed agenda is indispensable in light of recent threats from Israel and the United States that it is not a ceasefire but rather a pause and that a new attack on Iran is unavoidable. Iran must thus take advantage of the circumstances and has proposed a strategic action plan that aims to defeat the strategic manoeuvres of Israel and the United States to secure its sovereignty and its strategic interests in the Middle East. Iran is at the core of this ambitious plan, which might promote a shared agenda based on CDPM's specific knowledge and ultimately lead to strategic self-determination in the area.</p>

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1. Introduction

The Middle East has consistently faced a range of volatile dynamics, compounded by intricate security challenges (Kamrava, 2019) that necessitate synchronised responses grounded in a mutual understanding, coherent processes, and interoperable military capabilities (Hinnebusch, 2003: 14). The recent military conflict between Iran and Israel, often referred to as the 12-day war that concluded on June 2025, has significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of the region, thanks to the unpredictable United States policies towards the Middle East. Although both parties have proclaimed victory, a closer analysis reveals that Iran has strategically emerged as the vanquisher (*The Economic Times*, 2025; Rezaei, 2025). Iran's conduct in the war reflected its combativeness and revolutionary fervour. It is established that in the Middle East, Iran has been recognised as a major player in the Gulf (IISS, 2022: 318), surpassing Turkey (*ArmedForces.eu*, 2025), Egypt and Saudi Arabia after giving the US an appropriate retort in the intervention in the ongoing military conflict between Iran and Israel (Dzulhisham, 2025: 25). This conflict has underscored Iran's military and missile capabilities, establishing a precedent that renders them a central player in regional security discussions (*Global Fire Power*, 2025).

In analysing strategic intentions in the region, Iran is the focal point. It possesses the highest levels of both conventional military and nuclear capabilities, and has already demonstrated this in recent military conflicts. Additionally, the war has increased the legitimacy of Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, further strengthening his position within the Iranian political landscape as the Iranian people have embraced a new nationalist voice, which the leadership was quick to exploit as an indication of national unity (Saraswat, 2025: 114). The strategic outcome of the war is likely to remain inconclusive, resulting in neither lasting peace nor a definitive resolution to military actions. This is particularly evident when considering Donald Trump's gestures and Israel's post-war posture, as a resumption of fresh attack is likely to address Iran's previous actions against Tel-Aviv (*The Hindu*, 2025). Strategic experts, including those within the Iranian military establishment, policy analysts and diplomatic enclaves, recognise that the ceasefire between Iran and Israel is not permanent, making the possibility of a new military offensive a concern. Given the potential for an attack on Iran by Western forces, the reprieve should be leveraged by Iran to enhance its military capabilities and fortify its strategic interests globally (Reddy et al., 2025). This article aims to propose a common strategic agenda for the Tehran Administration, outlining key foreign policy goals, international engagements, and military alliances (Singh, 2025: 43).

This analysis also examines the potential for Iran to establish a collective security alliance, known as the Middle East Security and

Defence Programme (MESD). It argues for Iran's leadership role in promoting peace and stability within the region, leveraging its recent military success against Israel to gain diplomatic support from the international community and mitigate its regional isolation. The current *status quo* situation followed by the Gulf States, would boomerang to them if they failed to act wisely and decisively (*BBC Monitoring*, 2025). This study also addresses the inadequacies of major Islamic organisations currently operating in the Middle East, noting their minimal impact on the ground despite their established presence. The proposed MESD aims to establish a new Islamic organisation or restructure the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation OIC and Gulf Cooperation Council GCC¹ that prioritises the collective interests of member states over individual national agendas, thereby ensuring the protection of the broader Islamic community's interests.

2. Discussion

2.1. Integrating the neighbourhood first policy

The geopolitical landscape for Iran is progressively precarious, predominantly given the current critical circumstances that have left the Middle East largely indifferent. The escalation of hostilities in June 2025 between Israel and Iran highlighted Tehran's strategic vulnerabilities and its growing regional isolation within the Middle Eastern context (Khatib, 2025). This situation underscores the broader implications for security dynamics in the region, as Iran navigates its fading alliances and the implications of its actions in a complex international geopolitics (Stroul, 2025). The diplomatic engagement from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Silander, 2016: 203)² and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Ghafar & Colombo, 2021: 4)³ has grown increasingly non-cooperative, prompting a shift toward a diplomacy-first security model that emphasises de-escalation with Iran rather than automatic alignment with U.S. or Israeli interests. If larger Islamic states tilted towards the U.S.-led security architecture, it would indicate a significant shortfall in the foreign policy and

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1. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman are the six Middle Eastern nations that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic partnership. In May 1981, the GCC was founded in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Because of their shared goals and comparable political and cultural identities, which have their roots in Arab and Islamic civilisations, the GCC aims to bring its members together. Every year, the council's presidency is switched. Current member states six and primary function in economic and political cooperation.
 2. OIC founded in 1969 with 57 members states-the OIC remain unresponsive in many international crisis due to its inherent weakness and vested interest of the members states.
 3. Despite being an ambitious plan the GCC failed to act like a strong institution in the Middle East due to rivalries and degree of competition amongst the Middle East nations.

diplomatic initiatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the situation has now changed after June 2025. The OIC remained silent even on Gaza strikes in 2023, a body of 57 nations that represent 1.9 billion people, failed to raise a crucial human rights issue can be termed a defunct body (Karim & Kapur, 2023: 114). Consequently, Iran's military strategy should shift to focus on diminishing its regional isolation to assume a leading position in the Middle East. In order to gain the backing of neighbouring countries in the region, Iran ought to offer security guarantees that aim to bolster regional stability. Furthermore, the Islamic Republic of Iran needs to consider a thorough overhaul of both the OIC and the GCC.

In the aftermath of the events of June 2025, Iran has secured a fortified position, prompting President Masoud Pezeshkian to strategically capitalise on this moment to strengthen diplomatic ties and enhance regional influence. Beyond its oil interests and the imperative to gain access to the Western Indian Ocean, Moscow has long regarded the Middle East as a focal point of its foreign policy (Chivvis & Keating, 2024). President Pezeshkian's latest visit to Moscow amidst the Iran-Israel crisis underscored a desire to move past the entrenched animosities dating back to the Soviet era. President Putin is acutely aware that Moscow is competing for regional influence, given the area's proximity to Russia and the ongoing great power rivalry with the United States.

The historical relationship between Iran and the former Soviet Union has been marked by deep-seated mistrust alongside sporadic cooperation. However, Iran's emerging strategic alliance with Russia has significantly bolstered its position in the Middle East (Roll, 2025). During their meeting on June 12, 2025, Putin assured Pezeshkian of Russia's commitment to fostering strategic partnerships and enhancing cooperation across various sectors. This historical visit of the Iranian President has initiated a new chapter of alliance and cooperation, which is prone to be undermined by the West, if we consider their reportage and news analysis. Opening the discussions at the Kremlin, Putin emphasised the importance of the Russian-Iranian agreement on a comprehensive strategic partnership, highlighting its potential to enable practical collaboration in multiple areas. Moreover, China has also pledged its support to Iran in the event of any military provocations from the West (Reuters, 2021).

To contain the US hegemony in the Middle East, Tehran should actively pursue support from Beijing, as both share a common strategic goal of countering US global influence, having faced tensions, sanctions, and pressures from Washington. A relatively robust and autonomous Iran in the Persian Gulf would not only aid China in securing its interests in the area but also help ensure its energy security and establish its presence in the Middle East (Motamedi, 2022). As the United States experiences a relative decline in power and regional

powers continue to rise, the strategic partnership between China and Iran is transforming the security landscape of the Middle East. The strategic initiatives of Iran to look East and China to move West will converge in the Persian Gulf region (Saleh & Yazdanshenas, 2022).

The proposed MESD doctrine is anchored in three interrelated trajectories. First, a legal non-aggression accords with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar would formalise the 2023 Beijing-brokered détente with Riyadh, incorporating crisis hotlines and joint early-warning systems. By illustrating that Gulf stability can be self-managed, Tehran can challenge the notion that enduring U.S. military deployments are the sole deterrent against escalation—a perception that has already been scrutinised in GCC strategic discussions following successive U.S. drawdowns and Iranian precision strikes on regional energy infrastructure. The emerging military and strategic collaboration between Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing can enhance the safety and security of the Middle East (Kamrava, 2018). Additionally, a compelling new narrative is crucial to be made through trusted media outlets, think tanks, and academic institutions to highlight the dangers of U.S. military presence in the Gulf and the serious repercussions if such a presence is not effectively contained (Aron, 2025).

Secondly, to effectively transition from rhetoric to actionable strategies, convergent economic development in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) must prioritise the implementation of initiatives related to post-hydrocarbon diversification. The success of this diversification is inherently linked to robust maritime trade networks. Concurrently, Iran is positioned to attract critical capital flows as global oil demand trends toward stabilisation, a scenario exacerbated by prevailing international sanctions. Iran's active participation in the BRICS currency initiative, proposed by Russia and China, could facilitate its economic reintegration (*Iran Daily*, 2025). Moreover, Iran's role could extend to persuading other pivotal Middle Eastern stakeholders to align with the BRICS currency strategy, enhancing regional economic cooperation and resilience (Chatin & Gallarotti, 2016; Blanchard & Lu, 2012; Winter T, 2020).

Thirdly, Iran must revitalise its strategic communication sector, despite the financial hurdles following recent military conflicts and an ongoing economic crisis. This sector is crucial and cannot be neglected. In pursuing this goal, Iran should not be reluctant to seek financial support, technical expertise, and cybersecurity assistance from nations such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Turkey. Consequently, Iran needs to change its image from being viewed as a revolutionary disruptor to that of a promoter of peace and stability in the Middle East. To accomplish this aim, Tehran must put in considerable effort to enhance its communication and media division. Currently, Tehran oversees more than forty channels in Persian, Arabic, and Kurdish languages through the Islamic Radio and Television Union, employing

13000 individuals across 20 countries. However, in the current context, Iran's media presence is nearly non-existent in the university premises, TV debates, and strategic conferences organised by the leading think tanks of ASEAN nations, South Asia, and Latin American countries.

Establishing news bureaus in the Persian Gulf staffed with bilingual journalists would allow for competition against Saudi-owned pan-Arab media by focusing on narrative rather than just volume. However, the global community, particularly in the ASEAN and South Asia regions, needs to grasp the Iranian viewpoint on all aspects of international conflicts. It is crucial to communicate to the global community that Iran's conflict with Israel is based on three key areas: civilizational, geopolitical, and security dimensions. Therefore, the international community must recognise that Iran is not the aggressor, but rather the victim of an act of war and a clear breach of Article 51 of the UN Charter of 1945 (Ranjan, 2025). A robust information ecosystem is essential, considering the widespread disinformation campaign by Western media outlets. In today's social media and digital warfare, a dedicated system of information units must operate in the region where political debate, news analysis, and malicious and falsified campaigns can be countered with facts, law, and efforts to change biased narratives from the Western media outlets (Mazhari, 2024).

It is suggested that, under the MESD plan, English media organisations, universities, and think tanks be supported to reach a wider audience across ASEAN, Latin America, Europe and Asia. Additionally, the importance of cultural diplomacy is extremely vital in this current era of social media and shared cultures among different nations, especially where there is a significant Muslim (Shia) population (Atalayar, 2025). Therefore, cultural diplomacy initiatives—such as the scholarship programs from the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, collaborative film festivals, and innovation hubs in cities like Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Manila, Mumbai, Colombo, Kathmandu, Dhaka, Cairo, Doha, Istanbul, and Abu Dhabi—should focus on highlighting our shared civilizational accomplishments instead of sectarian divides (Worldview, 2024).

Engaging with Generation Z demands a proactive, knowledge-driven advocacy approach. A consortium that connects Iran's Centre for Strategic Research with impartial institutions like Chatham House, the Wilson Centre, and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) is essential. This partnership can produce impactful policy papers, host influential conferences, and facilitate dialogues featuring leading public intellectuals, integrating Iranian perspectives into crucial academic discussions. Additionally, collaborating with regional think tanks and leveraging social media influencers is critical to dispelling misinformation and launching effective counter-campaigns. This strategy will significantly enhance our soft-power outreach in sectors where government censorship has less influence.

2.2. ASEAN response on Iran-Israel conflict- positive move

The latest success of the Islamic Republic of Iran in ASEAN under the Look-East policy yielded rewarding results. In the latest Iran-Israel conflict in June 2025, ASEAN unequivocally stand with Iran except few nations (Byrnes, 2025). As predominantly Muslim nations, Malaysia and Indonesia strongly denounced Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities (Priya, 2023). Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim emphasised the importance of upholding international law in light of the recent attacks, calling for a measured response (*Intellinews*, 2025). Similarly, Indonesia's leadership expressed its concerns, highlighting the need to respect Iran's sovereignty and promote peaceful resolutions to conflicts (Bedi & Siregar, 2025). Iran openly commended Indonesia's support during recent geopolitical tensions, with its ambassador expressing gratitude and extending an invitation for Indonesian leadership to visit Tehran. He specifically called on Indonesia, identified as the largest Muslim-majority nation, to advocate for Iran within international forums.

Meanwhile, Vietnam, along with other ASEAN member states, has articulately conveyed their "deep concern," advocating for de-escalation and condemning Israel's aggression and blatant violation of all established norms of international law. This response from the ASEAN, especially from Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam, aligns with Iran's strategic policy towards ASEAN's overarching stance of neutrality and its emphasis on diplomatic negotiations, and certainly Malaysia's support for Iran, marking a significant success of Iran's foreign policy and its consistent diplomatic efforts to present facts to the international community wisely (Byrnes, 2025).

Iran's emerging role in the ASEAN region has enhanced its global standing, and the local media in these nations need to provide a clear and factual account of the situation on the ground. On a regional level, the ASEAN foreign ministers have collectively expressed their concerns regarding tensions in the Middle East and have welcomed the ceasefire established in June between Israel and Iran. This reflects ASEAN's commitment to peace and multilateralism. While these statements refrain from attributing blame to Western or Israeli actions, they highlight ASEAN's position as a mediator rather than a participant in the conflict (ASEAN, 2025). Iran capitalises on this opportunity by reminding ASEAN leaders that it is both a victim of aggression and a stabilising force in the region. Iranian officials have emphasised that Israel's actions serve as evidence of the destabilising influence of the U.S. proxy (Israel). Through media outreach and various speeches, Iran argues that international support, particularly from nations like Malaysia and Indonesia, plays a crucial role in "restraining further escalation" and reinforces its narrative of defending sovereignty against foreign aggression (Pillalamarro, 2025).

2.3. Legitimising support for “Axis of Resistance”

Iran is sometimes described as a “Hegemon of the Gulf” by the West without recognising the threat perception from the West and Israel. The threat is not artificial but real — it concerns Iran's existential security and its civilizational ambition to live as a dignified and modern Islamic state (Coredman, 2010: 64). Iran has opted to establish a multifaceted “Axis of Muslim Solidarity” as a diplomatic framework that guarantees security, promotes economic integration, and fosters cultural-religious diplomacy tailored to each target state— not by choice but under compulsion (*IJSS*, 2020). This approach reframes Iranian backing of resistance groups as part of a collective defence against Israeli aggression and U.S. hegemony, while offering tangible bilateral benefits to Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, and India.

The Islamic Republic of Iran views its network of coalition of forward defence network – the “Axis of Resistance” encompassing groups like Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas, Yemeni Houthis, and Iraqi Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Forces-PMF) as an indispensable pillar of its national security strategy. This reliance stems from Iran's perception of profound regional threats, primarily encirclement by hostile powers (notably the US, Israel, and Arab rivals) and the potential for internal destabilisation. Conventional military parity with adversaries like Israel or the US is unattainable; hence, Tehran employs asymmetric deterrence. This alliance of non-state actors (military militia), known as the Axis of Resistance, performs several vital security roles for Iran, most notably providing extended deterrence and strategic depth (Johnny, 2025).

These defence networks serve as forward bases, complicating enemies' offensive strategies and absorbing potential strikes well away from Iranian borders. Hezbollah's supply of weapons poses a direct threat to Israel, while Houthi assaults disrupt opponents' maritime interests. These proxies also enhance Iran's influence, enabling it to challenge rivals, influence political outcomes, and safeguard Shia interests across West Asia without confrontation. This counters perceived US hegemony and Saudi/Israeli influence (*Reuters*, 2024). A significant factor supporting the Axis of Resistance is its cost-effective defence strategy. Maintaining and arming proxy forces is much cheaper than matching the conventional military capabilities of adversaries. This allows resource-constrained Iran to impose disproportionate costs on its opponents. While there are various risks associated with supporting the Axis, several positive aspects should not be overlooked. Most importantly, the Axis believes in Islamic Brotherhood and argues that Sunni rival groups in the Arab world should put aside their hostilities toward Iran. They advocate for all Arab nations to unite and work together to achieve peace and development in the Middle East. After June 2025, a victorious position in the Middle East for Iran must transform the negative propaganda against the Axis of Resistance into

a wave of sympathy in support of both the Axis and the Palestinian cause. Recently, the Axis has demonstrated its core purpose by tying down Israeli military resources on multiple fronts, including Gaza, Lebanon, and the Red Sea, while also deterring broader attacks on Iran itself. Tehran believes that maintaining these alliances is essential for mitigating its core security vulnerabilities by applying persistent, deniable pressure on its adversaries. The Axis is not just a tool of foreign policy; it serves as Iran's primary strategic shield (Connel, 2010: 70).

Considering the significant reliance of the Palestinian struggle on Iranian indirect support, it is essential to reframe the narrative. It is desirable to present Iran's backing of Hizbullah, the Houthis, and Hamas (the "triple H") as a form of Collective Muslim Defence. In this context, Iran's actions can be seen as a defensive solidarity aimed at protecting innocent Palestinian and Yemeni civilians from perceived existential threats posed by the United States and Israel. The Western media portrays the Axis of Resistance an unlawful terror outfit supported by Iran. This narrative should be disseminated through joint statements, academic forums, international law discussions, peace studies, security and strategic conferences, and coordinated social media campaigns involving prominent scholars from each of the affected countries (Alami, 2017: 13).

It is imperative to promote under the MESD program that Israel, although portraying itself as a secular and democratic state, has continuously violated these ideals in its domestic and foreign acts, displaying characteristics more akin to those of a rogue state (Davis, 2003: 32). Its domestic and international policies consistently favour one ethno-religious group—Jewish citizens—over others, especially Palestinians, undermining the fundamental principles of democratic equality and secularism at home (Butenshon, 2006)¹. The current Israel-Iran conflict provided a clear example of this contradiction, as Indian migrant workers employed in Israel on a wage basis were allegedly refused shelter and safety precautions amid Iranian missile strikes. The racialised order in Israeli society and its institutional contempt for non-Jewish life are highlighted by such discriminatory treatment. South Asian employees in Tel Aviv are the main victims of this cruel and discriminatory attitude, which is not a unique incident (Youtube, 2025).

Furthermore, Israel's stated policy in its constitution for human rights, liberalism, and secularism is still primarily verbal; in practice, it upholds an ethno-nationalism that is based on the idea that Jewish blood

1. In this book, author emphasis that why Israel named for Jewish people. The Israel-is State of Israel on May 14, 1948, which has defined a Jewish State not Republic, Sovereign or Democratic-the roots of the State lies in race or a dedicated to particular community-hence no place for other community, still the Israel mentioned in its constitution some cosy words like Secularism, Democracy etc.

is pure, which is incompatible with inclusive democratic ideals (Axelson, 1984). Systemic discrimination, settlement expansion, and occupation practices are examples of how this ideology is expressed. Unfortunately, Western media rarely examine Israel's conduct with the same critical rigour as other nations charged with authoritarianism or human rights abuses, either ignoring or purposefully obscuring these realities (*The Times of Israel*, 2018).

Without such criticism, Israel can continue its destabilising actions in the region while maintaining a façade of democratic legitimacy. The international community, including academics, journalists, and civil society, must recognise and confront the reality that Israel's current policies and actions pose a serious threat to regional peace and stability as tensions in West Asia continue to escalate. Portraying Israel as a rogue state is not a political manoeuvre; rather, it is a crucial step towards justice, accountability, and a more open discussion of human rights and international law in the Middle East (Boyraz, 2024).

2.4. Strategic plan for ease-out economic sanctions

The primary obstacle facing the Islamic Republic of Iran is to rejuvenate the economy, lessen the effects of global economic sanctions, and build sustainable economic resilience through diplomatic shifts, regional collaboration, strategic concessions, and engagement with important international partners. Tehran can begin to recover from its economic struggles by adjusting both international and domestic strategies. Reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and complying with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) can unlock capital and improve credibility. Domestically, implementing currency reform and cautious de-escalation can stabilize the economy and boost public confidence. The JCPOA not only offers immediate sanctions relief but also allows funds to be redirected from the nuclear program to national recovery efforts. This could reconnect Iran to the global financial system, reduce trade costs, free up over \$100 billion in frozen assets, and support infrastructure and social safety nets. Overall, the JCPOA is seen as the strongest solution to Iran's economic crisis (Vij, 2025).

This ambitious objective can be achieved with a committed group of specialists in international law, policy analysis, diplomacy, and academia. Another option to defeat the economic sanction is to adopt an optimal strategy is to alter the perception that the US Dollar is detrimental to long-term economic stability; consequently, the dominance of the US currency must come to an end. To facilitate this, Iran's involvement in the BRICS Currency Initiative represents a strategic step towards financial diversification. The most convincing argument for Iran's participation is that it provides significant, albeit gradual, advantages. Although a BRICS-wide reserve currency

encounters substantial challenges (including issues with convertibility and differing political motivations), Iran's primary advantage lies in enhanced de-dollarisation of its trade, particularly with Russia, China, and potentially India. Conducting bilateral trade transactions in local currencies (Ruble, Yuan, Rupee) within expanded BRICS plus frameworks can considerably diminish vulnerabilities to US financial restrictions (such as exclusion from SWIFT and dollar clearing).

Moreover, we must consider the economic effects that could lower transaction expenses, ease vital imports (such as machinery and food), and allow the repatriation of export revenues for sanctioned goods (including oil and petrochemicals). It enhances connections with major non-Western economies, offering alternative markets and sources of investment. Nevertheless, it is not a complete solution—while it lessens financial isolation, it does not eradicate it and is significantly reliant on the willingness of partners to risk US secondary sanctions. The new currency introduced by BRICS could significantly benefit another under-explored sector of Iran—reviving trade, boosting tourism, increasing investment, and fostering military collaboration, particularly in missile technology, within Africa, Latin America, and ASEAN nations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran should consider renegotiating with the European Union to alleviate the economic sanctions. While EU countries purchase gas and oil from sanctioned Russia, Iran can create a strategic plan to navigate international sanctions by collaborating closely with key EU stakeholders. The EU has significant economic motivations—like energy security and trade—alongside political incentives such as strategic autonomy and maintaining the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan for Action) to lift sanctions. Iran needs to take an active approach, offering specific, verifiable measures on nuclear suspension and efforts to reduce regional tensions in order to restore trust. In exchange, Iran can supply cost-effective petroleum products. This trust can be established through unconditional support for various EU projects, including EU Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs like INSTEX), aimed at enabling humanitarian and permissible trade outside the scope of US sanctions. Additionally, the Islamic Republic can propose collaborations in gas development, counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing, and the stability advantages that would arise from reconciliation in the Gulf. The primary concern for EU countries revolves around Iran's nuclear program, which will be addressed through a similar methodology backed by a dedicated diplomatic mission—comprised of experts in international law, policy analysts, academics, and diplomats. The intended audience includes universities, think tanks, NGOs, social media platforms, and alternative media such as YouTube journalism.

In this endeavour, Iran should demonstrate tangible progress in areas concerning human rights and regional activities to mitigate

political obstacles with the EU. The EU can serve as a crucial intermediary and facilitate legitimate trade channels, albeit on a limited scale at first. It is well known that there is no possible way to fully overcome the sanctions with the help of one strategy. The multi-faceted approach that is coordinated and which is premised upon rational concessions and relationship building will help in the achievement of success. It should be mainly concentrated in four main areas, namely BRICS Currency, Gulf Reconciliation, Nuclear Concessions and EU Engagement. In order to implement such an ambitious project, it can be a good idea to devise a specific unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2.5. Nuclear programme: Strategic rationale and Regional security

In the larger MESD agenda of having Iranian strategic dominance, especially to maintain its national interest within the Middle East region, the Iranian nuclear programme cannot be allowed to be frustrated. It is no secret that the Iranian nuclear programme has always drawn global attention and discussion, mainly because of the effects that it has had on the regional power balance and international security. Represented commonly by the Western actors as the proliferation danger, the comprehensive academic study needs equal attention to the security challenges of Iran, responsibilities as a regional actor and its sophisticated reaction to the kind of continuous military pressure, cyber-attack and discreet sabotage, most exponentially with the United States and Israel.

Most Iranian responses to ongoing military attacks on nuclear facilities have been characterised not by expansive retaliations but rather by restraint and self-defence. The Islamic Republic has consistently adhered to the international nuclear regime, while Western powers have never questioned the number of nuclear weapons amassed by Israel or allowed IAEA and UN experts to assess its nuclear capabilities. These actions appear aimed at undermining Iran's nuclear program, ultimately seeking to eliminate Iran from the Middle East, especially given the irrational and unjustified attacks on its territory without any provocation¹. The assaults have taken various forms, including cyber warfare (such as the Stuxnet virus attack), the assassinations of nuclear scientists, and drone strikes on nuclear sites. In contrast, Iran has consistently asserted its right to peaceful nuclear technology under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has cooperated with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) while pursuing diplomatic resolutions, as exemplified by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 (Mukuntu, 2025).

Examining Iran's historical actions, it's evident that the Islamic

1. IAEA Chief Rafael Grossi said that nuclear facilities "must never be attacked" and called "on all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid further escalation" following Israeli strikes on Iran. Simultaneously, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, African Union also condemn Israel attack on Iran (*Aljazeera*, 2025).

Republic has consistently adhered to the principles outlined in the NPT Treaty. The assaults by the US and Israel on Iranian nuclear facilities raise significant issues regarding international law in connection with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), particularly concerning parties that may have violated both international law and the NPT. This commentary examines the repercussions of these assaults on the NPT framework, which serves as a fundamental element of global nuclear governance, balancing security concerns and energy requirements, even as they might be evaluated under the UN Charter and other international agreements, customary laws, and principles (Khan, 2025). The unfortunate aspect of the whole situation is that Western media has portrayed a negative image of the Islamic Republic and does not accurately represent Iran's responsible behaviour and compliance with the IAEA mandate and all terms of the NPT. Therefore, improving Iran's image as a responsible nuclear state should be promoted through various platforms, and a serious counter-disinformation campaign must be undertaken and strategically defeated.

2.6. Strategic deterrence and Security cover for the Middle East

There is no denying that a new Nuclear Age, characterised by multipolarity and a change in the balance of power, is upon us. Though the majority of the Middle East nations are aligned with the United States, after the recent fiasco of the US and how Russia and China assured unconditional support to Iran indicates that major players of the region are looking for increased security cover because they believe the United States' nuclear umbrella is dwindling and the non-proliferation regime is deteriorating. America is no longer a superpower, and a new global order based on China is taking shape. The MESD core agenda should aim to reintegrate the acceptability of Iran's nuclear capabilities within the Middle East context (Wintour, 2025). Central to the rationale behind this nuclear program is the pursuit of a credible deterrence posture. The region is characterised by asymmetric power dynamics, persistent external interference, and a legacy of insecurity. A robust Iranian nuclear capability serves a significant self-defence function by increasing the costs of aggression, thereby acting as a stabilising force rather than a catalyst for proliferation or conflict—not only for Iran but for the entire Middle East.

At the heart of the debate surrounding Iran's nuclear ambitions lies a fundamental theme: The Supreme Leader Khomeini himself renounced nuclear weapons. The core objective of Iran's nuclear project is to utilise nuclear energy for civilian and peaceful purposes, such as energy production, healthcare, industrial projects, and other infrastructure and development-related activities (Golkar, 2025). Unlike doctrines that advocate for a first-use approach, Tehran consistently frames its program as a defensive measure: its aim is to prevent war, not to instigate it. This nuclear program offers additional

security assurances to the countries in the Middle East; thus, Iran's nuclear energy initiative should be further reinforced¹.

Furthermore, in contrast to common narratives that interpret Iran's ascent solely through a confrontational sectarian perspective, a nuclear-capable Iran might enable a rethinking of collective security for the Gulf. By positioning itself as a nation prepared to extend deterrence, Iran can assure anxious Gulf neighbours, creating opportunities for fresh regional security discussions². Such advancements could promote a decrease in sectarian strife, fostering collaboration and unity among Islamic nations that face shared threats and vulnerabilities. These prospects ultimately depend on Iran's capacity to communicate its intentions and involve Gulf States in constructive, trust-building initiatives. Rivalries within the Islamic community—particularly the Shia-Sunni divide—have frequently been intensified by external powers intent on keeping the region fragmented for their strategic advantage. An empowered Iran that advocates a narrative of Islamic solidarity and collective self-defence—rather than sectarian exclusivity—could rise above longstanding rivalries. By presenting its nuclear program as a counterbalance to U.S. dominance and Israeli military supremacy, Iran positions itself as an autonomous power centre and a potential unifier and eliminating the Shia-Sunni syndrome from the Middle East and establishing the Islamic Brotherhood.

Western media and policy experts often argue that the ongoing tensions between Shia and Sunni groups in Iraq and beyond stem from an ancient rivalry that resurfaced after the Shia gained control of the country following the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime (*Council Foreign Relations*, 2023). Numerous scholars and political leaders highlight the significance of Iran and its “Shia influence,” which poses a challenge to the established political landscape in the Middle East, particularly for nations like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, as it seeks to create a radical Shia coalition and assert its dominance in the Gulf region (Hamidaddin, 2025). Iran should work to dispel the notion that Sunni-majority regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, will feel endangered by Iran's dominance in the Middle East; instead, it should be emphasised that cooperation between Shia and Sunni communities can lead to improvements in the region. If handled effectively, such a shift in the regional dynamics could redirect focus from competition to strategic

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1. Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyyed Abbas Araghchi to the Secretary-General of the UN. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, 13.06.2025).
 2. Message from the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson on X addressed to the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency: "Mr. Grossi, you have betrayed the Non-Proliferation Regime; you have turned the Agency into a partner in this unjust and aggressive war" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, 19.06.2025).

partnership, fostering a security framework that benefits not only Iran but also the wider Middle East (*Guardian*, 2006).

2.7. Iran's inclusion in Russia-China-led regional alliance

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a member of BRICS since 1st January 2024, and the country is already a member of the SCO Group.¹ The key players within the BRICS and SCO look at Iran as a dependable partner considering its commitment to fight against US hegemony, a recent success in its foreign policy indicates that, despite major differences with neighbouring nations, Iran has managed cordial relations with Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt and ASEAN nations. The current geopolitical landscape, marked by India's deepening alignment with Western strategic interests (as evidenced by its enhanced QUAD participation and defence acquisitions) and its consequent perceived distancing from the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and BRICS spirit, presents a critical juncture for Eurasian and Middle Eastern integration. Concurrently, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains ensnared by debilitating unilateral economic sanctions, severely constraining its energy exports and financial integration. In this context, the nascent regional alliance concept championed by China and Russia offers an indispensable pathway for Iran's economic survival and strategic resurgence. Iran's membership in this proposed alliance is not merely advantageous; it is a geopolitical and economic imperative.

To effectively thwart economic sanctions, Iran should strategically align itself with the emerging regional alliance proposed by Russia and China, particularly as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is nearing disintegration due to the rising ultra-nationalism in India under the current administration (Rifah, 2025). Iran's substantial hydrocarbon reserves—ranking fourth in proven oil reserves and second in natural gas globally—remain largely isolated from international markets due to US-led sanctions. A China-Russia coalition, aimed at dismantling Western financial dominance, represents an optimal platform for this alignment (Çarkoglu et al., 1998). The establishment of collective energy security frameworks, preferential trade agreements within the alliance, and the creation of payment mechanisms that circumvent SWIFT—such as utilising the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) or the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS)—would significantly mitigate the effects of sanctions. Including Iran in this alliance would not only transform it into a self-sufficient energy

1. Keeping with its strategy of seeking refuge in international organisations controlled by China and Russia, Iran simultaneously sought admission into the BRICS group and became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in July 2022. On August 24, 2023, Iran declared its admittance into BRICS after receiving an official invitation; actual membership begins on January 1, 2024

powerhouse but also elevate its collective bargaining capabilities and resilience against external pressures.

This proposed regional chapter has the potential to serve as a catalyst for economic collaboration and investment under the guidance of two dominant Asian powers (Fawcett & Hurrell, 1998: 283-308). Sanctions have severely hindered foreign direct investment (FDI) and the development of infrastructure in Iran. Being part of a partnership that emphasises economic cooperation within the bloc can provide immediate assistance. The synergies of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), along with Russian expertise and investment opportunities from Pakistan, CIS states, and others, can facilitate crucial infrastructure projects (transportation, energy transit). Access to combined development funds or specific alliance investment mechanisms would ensure essential capital inflows, boosting non-oil sectors and promoting diversification—an important goal for Iran that has been hampered by sanctions.

The initiative for a common BRICS currency (or a similar settlement mechanism) is central to the objectives of Russia and China, and a newly formed regional alliance could serve as a critical test case for the launch of the BRICS currency within this alliance. This regional grouping specifically addresses a significant vulnerability that sanctions have exploited. Iran, which is severely impacted by its exclusion from the dollar system, stands to benefit greatly from helping to create an alternative financial network. Effective banking collaboration within the alliance, using local currencies or a new unit for trade settlements (notably for oil and gas), is crucial for Iran. Since India has been hesitant to provide a definitive confirmation and is considering the US and Israel as its ideological allies, there has been conjecture that Iran may replace India in the BRICS financial initiatives to defeat the dollar imperialism.¹ This new paradigm shift in India's foreign policy is unprecedented and could further strain its long-term relations with Russia and the Middle East, but could be beneficial for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The regional players of BRICS and SCO can rely on Iran to challenge the dollar's hegemony in global trade and commerce, and it might be a better option than India, which is unreliable (Gangadharan, 2025).

Iran's unmatched geographical and strategic location puts it in a position where no country can share such a position. Integrating Iran in the much-awaited regional alliance under the headship of Russia and China will give a boost to the strategic depth, strategic energy routes, and overland connectivity lines between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, to Russian Federation and China. The enhanced fortification of

1. Paulo Nogueira Batista Jr., former Vice President of the New Development Bank, on the latest episode of Going Underground ahead of the BRICS+ Summit in Rio: "Is India a Trojan Horse in BRICS." https://x.com/GUnderground_TV/status/1941419967640928505.

military-technical cooperation and the exchange of intelligence information between the states of the bloc provides Iran with the potential to deter the actions of regional rivals and the external threat, thus ensuring the collective security of the region, where there is a lot of tension. Iran's entry into the emerging regional bloc undoubtedly strengthens its position, particularly in light of the enduring Western influence in the Middle East. Given the favourable geopolitical dynamics currently at play in South Asia, Iran has a unique opportunity to refine its strategic approach in this region. India's perceived shift toward a more Western-oriented alignment creates a gap in the multilateral systems of Eurasia and the Middle East. It is evident that, with Iran already wielding significant regional influence and sharing strategic interests with key players such as China, Russia, and Pakistan, the latter stands out as a likely leader within this emerging framework. Should Iran's active participation in the new bloc be embraced in its true spirit, other Middle Eastern countries may follow suit. This development could enable Russia and China to counterbalance US influence in the Gulf and illustrate that cooperation can thrive through a strong alternative to Western-centric models.

3. Conclusion

The latest Iran-Israel military engagement has demonstrated the fragility of Middle Eastern security and the pressing need for a paradigm shift in Iran's strategic and diplomatic manoeuvres to maintain its sovereignty and national interests. Although Iran emerged victorious in the latest war against Israel, despite the unpleasant and negative propaganda from Western media that challenged various unfounded claims regarding its retaliatory actions against Israel, this represents a beneficial scenario for Iran, which should take advantage of the current international landscape that favours the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, the proposed common defence agenda under Iran's strategic resurgence, the Middle East Security and Defence Programme (MESD), offers a critical opportunity through a detailed programme of action to rethink regional stability in addition to a military framework through strategic, pragmatic, and balanced leadership. For MESD to succeed and for Iran to firmly establish itself as a regional peace and stability guarantor, several crucial imperatives require swift and focused action.

As it has been analysed in the beginning, Iran needs to take a firm step to come out of regional isolation. The way to sustainable security lies deep in the foundation of sound diplomacy and trust-building. The normalisation and the improvement of relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) must be prioritised. Pro-activity, confidence-building arrangements and open communication in the context of threats in common-whether on the issues of maritime security or the

economic instability pre-requisites. The aura of legitimacy and efficiency of MESD is based on the way it is seen as an all-embracing regional program, but not the continuation of Iranian domination. The political leadership in Iran must be exhibited in bridging as opposed to the consolidation of blocs.

Concurrently, Iran will have to maintain its strategic depth. The Islamic Republic has also been able to appeal to the support of Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey, though major differences exist between the former and Baluchistan. The support of Iran and the Axis of Resistance is a crucial part of Pakistan's deterrence policies and presence in the region. This assistance, however, should be complemented with diplomatic efforts to give it a boost instead of a set-down to achieve wider alliances with bigger players of Asia. Moreover, Iran is also fighting with an ongoing propaganda against Western media that are trying to undermine both its status in the region and the ambitious scheme under the MESD strategy. To counter this obstacle, it is important to have an advanced and committed media structure with employees and analysts who can present the Iranian security vision, objectives of MESD as well as the realities on the ground precisely and diligently. It is crucial to win the narrative in the way of supporting the nation and in gaining international interest.

The accomplishment of MESD is intrinsically linked to addressing its most pressing issues, some of which are non-negotiable, particularly the nuclear-powered project, which must be viewed as a guarantee of Iran's safety. It is significant to emphasise that Iran has consistently adhered to all norms under the NPT and IAEA. At the same time, Israel has a troubling history of disregarding these agencies' guidelines, international law and other UN conventions, and even attacking the United Nations Secretary General in filthy language. The priority should be strict transparency and compliance regarding nuclear safety, and Iran remains committed to UN inspections, cooperation with IAEA expert teams, and adherence to NPT guidelines. Unfortunately, the media narrative tends to be heavily skewed against Iran. For Iran, the nuclear project is not purely about weapons; it embodies a vital foundation for regional confidence and a response to perceived existential threats. Similarly, it is crucial to alleviate the severe impact of economic sanctions. Iran must persist in political, military and diplomatic efforts to secure relief from these sanctions, not only as a national imperative but also as a pathway to unlocking the broader economic benefits and collaborative security opportunities that MESD investments promise. As Iran grapples with sanctions and financial complications will struggle to manage or finance a comprehensive regional security initiative.

In conclusion, proposing this MESD, Iran has a historic opportunity to leverage its strategic position and work hard to defeat all its adversaries within the Middle East and develop harmonious relations

with other nations in the world. It is true that with the vigorous, positive diplomacy that addresses isolation and creates relationships with the GCC/OIC, but these regional organisation lacks any credibility to fight for the objective of the Islamic Brotherhood, Arab Fraternity, opposed the US hegemony in the Middle East due to their vested interests, mostly economic. It is advisable for the Islamic Republic of Iran to work for the new regional alliance; better to wait for any improvement in the insignificant GCC and OIC in the Middle East. The MESD agenda may face critical challenges, particularly regarding strategies to counter disinformation campaigns targeting Iran, implement effective nuclear transparency measures, and leverage Iran's position as a pivotal player in the evolving landscape of international alliances. For the Tehran administration to genuinely foster the advancement and modernisation of the Islamic Republic while safeguarding its sovereignty, nuclear initiatives, and broader national interests, the MESD must transcend its traditional role. By adopting a pragmatic, bold, and balanced diplomatic approach, Iran has the potential to emerge as a foundational element for a more secure, stable, and peaceful Middle East. Ultimately, the onus lies with Tehran to shoulder both the responsibilities and possible benefits of this endeavour, especially given the region's pervasive exhaustion from prolonged conflict.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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