

## **From the Development of Iran's Nuclear Program to the “12-Day War”: Challenges for the Wider Region**

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### **Introduction**

The "12-Day War" that began in June 2025 between Iran and Israel escalated a conflict that had been simmering for decades. The long-standing hostility between the two nations had drastically intensified on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, backed by Iran, launched an attack on Israel. The conflict officially began on June 12, 2025, when Israel, under the operation named "Rising Lion", struck Iran's Natanz nuclear facility. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the strike aimed to hit "the heart" of Iran's nuclear program to prevent the development of nuclear weapons. In contrast, Iran asserted that its nuclear program was solely for peaceful purposes.

This article outlines the stages of Iran's nuclear program development, with a particular focus on the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) during Donald Trump's first presidential term and the consequences that followed. It analyzes the negotiations between the U.S. and Iran over a new nuclear agreement and the associated challenges. The article also details key phases of the “12-Day War” and the damage caused by attacks on nuclear facilities. In conclusion, it examines the interests and motivations behind the U.S. and Israeli involvement in the conflict, followed by an analysis of the war's impact on Russia and Georgia.

### **Stages in the Development of Iran’s Nuclear Program**

In 1953, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed the United Nations General Assembly with a speech focusing on the peaceful use of atomic technology. This speech, delivered against the backdrop of growing global use of nuclear materials, laid the foundation for the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The agency was tasked with ensuring the safe and peaceful use of nuclear

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technologies, serving the goals of international peace, security, and the UN's sustainable development agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Another milestone came in 1968 with the signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The treaty outlined three core objectives: preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and pursuing nuclear disarmament. The NPT divided signatory states into two categories: the five officially recognized nuclear-weapon states as of 1967 (the U.S., USSR, France, UK, and China), who committed not to spread nuclear weapons; and non-nuclear-weapon states, which neither possessed nor sought to acquire such weapons. While the IAEA is not a party to the NPT, Article III of the treaty grants it authority to monitor and verify nuclear activities. Signatories are obligated to provide the IAEA with information necessary for verification.<sup>3</sup>

As for Iran, its nuclear program began in 1967 when the United States provided Tehran with a five-megawatt research reactor for research purposes. Iran joined the NPT in 1970, and in 1974, established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, with the goal of building 23 nuclear power plants for energy generation. However, the 1979 Iranian Revolution disrupted relations with the U.S., delaying the project. The U.S. soon added Iran to the list of state sponsors of terrorism, leading to the imposition of numerous sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

From the early 2000s, after Iran disclosed its nuclear facilities near Natanz and Arak, the international community grew increasingly concerned. Despite promises to halt such activities, Iran repeatedly violated agreements, prompting the UN, U.S., and EU to impose new sanctions. In 2009, the revelation of a secret enrichment facility in Fordow led to further sanctions. In 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly declared that Iran's enrichment of uranium up to 20% represented a red line for Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani, who supported restoring relations with the West, opened the door for negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: China, France, Russia, the UK, and the U.S., plus Germany). This resulted in the signing of the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) in November 2013, under which Iran agreed to temporarily halt aspects of its nuclear

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<sup>2</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency. History. Accessible at <https://www.iaea.org/about/overview/history>

<sup>3</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency. Non-Proliferation Treaty. Accessible at <https://www.iaea.org/topics/non-proliferation-treaty>

<sup>4</sup> Arms Control Association (January 2023). Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy With Iran, 1967-2023. Accessible at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/timeline-nuclear-diplomacy-iran-1967-2023>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

program in exchange for limited sanctions relief. Continued negotiations led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in October 2015. The agreement aimed to lift international sanctions in return for Iran's commitment to use its nuclear program exclusively for peaceful purposes.<sup>6</sup> Iran also agreed to enhanced IAEA inspections and voluntary limits on uranium enrichment.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this progress, Iran was periodically accused of breaching the agreement. However, IAEA reports from 2015-2016 indicated that the agency had no credible evidence that Iran was violating the deal. Still, in January 2016, the U.S. imposed new sanctions on 11 individuals and entities linked to Iran's missile program, drawing Tehran's ire. In March, Iran tested two missiles, which the U.S. claimed violated the deal. Iran argued that the missiles were not designed for nuclear use and therefore did not violate JCPOA terms.<sup>8</sup>

Tensions surrounding the nuclear deal escalated during Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. On March 21, during a speech at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Trump labeled the JCPOA a "catastrophic" deal and made its dismantling his top priority. He argued that the problem wasn't just the possibility of Iran violating the deal, but that the deal allowed Iran to build a bomb while technically complying with its terms. Trump contended that although the JCPOA limited Iran's military nuclear capabilities, it did not eliminate them entirely, which posed a threat, especially to Israel.<sup>9</sup> He also strongly criticized the JCPOA for "the silence on Iran's ballistic missile program."<sup>10</sup>

After winning the election, on May 8, 2018, President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the JCPOA, once again calling it a flawed agreement that failed to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons or ballistic

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the U-235 isotope content must be no more than 3.67%, which is sufficient for the production of nuclear fuel required for "peaceful" reactors; naturally mined uranium ore contains slightly more than 0.7% of this isotope; however, to create nuclear weapons, dozens of kilograms of material with a U-235 content greater than 90% are required.

Jimser Rekhviashvili (June 19, 2025). What is Iran's nuclear program and what remains of it? Radio Free Europe. Accessible at <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33448144.html>

<sup>8</sup> Arms Control Association (January 2023). Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran, 1967-2023. Accessible at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/timeline-nuclear-diplomacy-iran-1967-2023>

<sup>9</sup> The Times of Israel (March 22, 2016). Full text of Donald Trump's speech to AIPAC. Accessible at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/donald-trumps-full-speech-to-aipac/>

<sup>10</sup> Elena Chachko (October 14, 2027). Trump's Iran Statement: The (Non)Action Items. Lawfare. Accessible at <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/trumps-iran-statement-nonaction-items>

missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. imposed further severe sanctions, despite IAEA reports from 2018 confirming Iran's compliance and cooperation with the agency.<sup>12</sup>

Even after the U.S. withdrawal, Iran initially continued to comply with JCPOA terms and called on the remaining signatories to do the same. However, the reimposed sanctions significantly damaged Iran's economy, prompting Tehran to gradually violate the deal's terms. Under Trump, the U.S. launched a "maximum pressure" campaign, reinstating sanctions on Iran's banking, oil, and other sectors, and forming an "Iran Action Group" to coordinate its strategy. The U.S. demanded that Iran halt uranium enrichment and ballistic missile development as a condition for sanctions relief and normalized relations. Iran, initially compliant according to IAEA reports, viewed the sanctions as provocations and responded by installing new centrifuges and exceeding uranium enrichment limits, effectively breaching the JCPOA.<sup>13</sup> By late 2020, the Iranian parliament passed legislation to increase uranium enrichment and suspend IAEA monitoring if sanctions remained in place.<sup>14</sup>

In 2021, Joe Biden became the President of the United States. During his election campaign, he criticized Trump's decision and considered rejoining the JCPOA.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Biden administration did not return to the agreement. Iran, for its part, demanded the lifting of sanctions and the closure of the IAEA investigation, while simultaneously advancing its nuclear program - enriching uranium up to 20%, installing new centrifuges, and starting the production of uranium metal, which violated the terms of the JCPOA. The IAEA expressed concern over Iran's actions. Negotiations with Iran became increasingly difficult, further exacerbated by the election of Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi focused on recovering the economic damage caused by sanctions and demanded their removal. Under his administration, uranium enrichment reached 60%. During this period, Iran also sold drones to Russia,

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<sup>11</sup> Congress (June 17, 2025). Iran's Ballistic Missile Programs: Background and Context. Accessible at <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13035>

<sup>12</sup> Arms Control Association. IAEA Report Confirms Iran's Compliance with the JCPOA. Accessible at <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-06-08/iaea-report-confirms-irans-compliance-jcpoa>

<sup>13</sup> The device that separates substances with different densities through rapid spinning

<sup>14</sup> Arms Control Association. IAEA Report Confirms Iran's Compliance with the JCPOA. Accessible at <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-06-08/iaea-report-confirms-irans-compliance-jcpoa>

<sup>15</sup> David E. Sanger, Lara Jakes and Farnaz Fassihi (July 31, 2021). Biden Promised to Restore the Iran Nuclear Deal. Now It Risks Derailment. The New York Times. Accessible at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/31/us/politics/biden-iran-nuclear-deal.html>

which made JCPOA-related negotiations even more impossible.<sup>16</sup> On December 7, 2023, Kurt Campbell, the Biden administration's National Security Council Coordinator, called the JCPOA agreement "dead."<sup>17</sup>

### **Attempts at a New Iran–U.S. Nuclear Deal During Trump's Second Term**

On February 4, 2025, Donald Trump signed a National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) aimed at reinstating the "maximum pressure" policy on the Iranian government. The memorandum focused on blocking all pathways to nuclear weapons, reducing Iran's malign foreign influence, and reasserting U.S. national security. According to the memorandum:

- Iran must be prohibited from possessing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles;
- Iran's terrorist networks must be neutralized;
- The aggressive development of Iran's missile capabilities, as well as other asymmetric and conventional weapons, must be restricted.

The NSPM instructed the Treasury Secretary to apply maximum economic pressure on the Iranian government, including sanctions and enforcement mechanisms targeting those who violate existing sanctions. A notable part of the memorandum addressed the protection of the U.S. homeland from Iran, stating: "The previous Administration's tolerance of Iran's threats to American citizens and companies ends now." It also reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to ending Iran's nuclear ambitions: "For far too long - all the way back to 1979, to be exact - nations have tolerated Iran's destructive and destabilizing behavior in the Middle East and beyond. Those days are over. Iran has been the leading sponsor of terrorism, and their pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens the civilized world. We will never let that happen."<sup>18</sup>

On March 3, 2025, IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi announced that the agency was seriously concerned about Iran's nuclear program. He reported that Iran's stockpile of 60% enriched uranium-235

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<sup>16</sup> Arms Control Association. IAEA Report Confirms Iran's Compliance with the JCPOA. Accessible at <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-06-08/iaea-report-confirms-irans-compliance-jcpoa>

<sup>17</sup> Guy Taylor (December 7, 2023). Iran nuclear deal dead, says Biden nominee at confirmation hearing. The Washington Times. Accessible at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/dec/7/iran-nuclear-deal-dead-says-joe-biden-nominee-conf/>

<sup>18</sup> The White House (February 4, 2025). Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Restores Maximum Pressure on Iran. Accessible at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/02/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-restores-maximum-pressure-on-iran/#:~:text=Pressure%20on%20Iran-,The%20White%20House,%3A%20Today%2C%20President%20Donald%20J.>

had significantly increased, reaching 275 kilograms, an unprecedented quantity for a non-nuclear-weapon state. According to Grossi, Iran had not complied with JCPOA obligations for the fourth consecutive year, including denying the IAEA access for monitoring. Iran insisted that it had disclosed all sites where nuclear activities were being carried out, yet the IAEA discovered uranium particles of anthropogenic origin at undeclared locations in Iran. Tehran failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for either the particles or the discrepancies in its declared uranium inventory. These unresolved issues, Grossi stated, seriously hindered the IAEA's ability to ensure Iran's nuclear program remained exclusively peaceful.<sup>19</sup>

A few days later, on March 7, Trump publicly disclosed that he had sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei proposing a new nuclear agreement.<sup>20</sup> The letter reportedly demanded the complete dismantlement of Iran's nuclear program, cessation of uranium enrichment, and an end to support for proxy groups such as Hezbollah and the Houthis. Khamenei initially rejected the offer, accusing the U.S. of insincerity and seeking dominance over Iran.<sup>21</sup> However, by late March, he expressed a willingness to engage in talks, likely influenced by the economic hardship caused by U.S. sanctions.

On April 12, a series of negotiations between the U.S. and Iran began in Oman, led by U.S. Special Representative Steve Witkoff and Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. Three rounds of negotiations were held in Oman and two in Rome. Although no tangible results were achieved, both sides described the discussions as constructive. The main unresolved issue was the U.S. demand for Iran to completely halt uranium enrichment, a condition Tehran firmly opposed.<sup>22</sup>

Israel was dissatisfied with the prospect of a potential U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement, fearing it would still allow Iran to enrich uranium and thus threaten Israeli security.<sup>23</sup> Israel even discussed possible military action against Iran, prompting Trump to warn that such threats could jeopardize the delicate negotiation

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<sup>19</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency (March 3, 2025). IAEA Director General's Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors. Accessible at <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/iaea-director-generals-introductory-statement-to-the-board-of-governors-3-march-2025>

<sup>20</sup> Jon Gambrell and Will Weissert (March 8, 2025). Trump wrote to Iran's leader about that country's nuclear program and expects results 'very soon'. AP News. Accessible at <https://apnews.com/article/iran-us-trump-letter-khamenei-f78aeb869d146978b6d377184e236ef9>

<sup>21</sup> Thornike Gordadze (June 8, 2025). Peace, Power, and Paradoxes: Trump's Iran Gamble and Its Regional Reverberations. GEOPolitics. Accessible at <https://politicsgeo.com/article/152>

<sup>22</sup> Parisa Hafezi and John Irish (May 23, 2025). Iran, US see hope for progress after US nuclear talks. Reuters. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-iran-hold-nuclear-talks-amid-clashing-red-lines-2025-05-23/>

<sup>23</sup> Itamar Eichner (May 27, 2025). US warns Israel: Don't surprise us with a move that will sabotage talks with Iran. Ynet. Accessible at <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/sykm115qml1>

process.<sup>24</sup> Reports also suggested that Iran, anticipating possible military strikes from the U.S. or Israel if talks collapsed, reinforced its air defense systems and increased military investments.<sup>25</sup> One report stated that Iran ordered large quantities of solid-fuel Chinese components for ballistic missiles.<sup>26</sup> On May 26, Austria's domestic intelligence agency reported that Iran was producing missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads over long distances, a claim Iran dismissed as false.<sup>27</sup>

On June 2, reports emerged that Iran was preparing to reject the U.S. proposal, citing incompatibility with its national interests. The main point of contention remained the U.S. demand for Iran to halt uranium enrichment and export its stockpile abroad. Iran, in contrast, demanded the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes and sought guarantees that the U.S. would not unilaterally alter the agreement conditions in the future.<sup>28</sup> On June 9, Iran officially rejected the Trump administration's proposal, announcing that it would present its own initiative for discussion in the next round of negotiations.<sup>29</sup>

Following the rejection, rhetoric between the two sides intensified. On June 10, President Trump told Fox News that Iran was becoming "much more aggressive" in the talks.<sup>30</sup> The next day, Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh warned that if negotiations failed and conflict erupted, Iran would strike

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Wintour (May 28, 2025). Trump says he warned Israel against attack on Iran as nuclear deal 'very close.' Guardian. Accessible at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/iran-nuclear-talks-europe-mandelson-us>

<sup>25</sup> The Jerusalem Post (June 3, 2025). Iran strengthening its air defense systems in case of Israeli, US attack. Accessible at <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-856332>

<sup>26</sup> Laurence Norman (June 2, 2025). Iran Orders Material From China for Hundreds of Ballistic Missiles. The Wall Street Journal. Accessible at <https://www.wsj.com/world/iran-orders-material-from-china-for-hundreds-of-ballistic-missiles-1e874701>

<sup>27</sup> The Times of Israel (May 30, 2025). Iran rails at Austria over 'fake' intel report saying Tehran is seeking nuclear bomb. Accessible at [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/iran-rails-at-austria-over-fake-intel-report-saying-tehran-is-seeking-nuclear-bomb/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/iran-rails-at-austria-over-fake-intel-report-saying-tehran-is-seeking-nuclear-bomb/)

<sup>28</sup> Parisa Hafezi (June 3, 2025). Exclusive: Iran poised to dismiss US nuclear proposal, Iranian diplomat says. Reuters. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-poised-dismiss-us-nuclear-proposal-says-iranian-diplomat-2025-06-02/>

<sup>29</sup> Reuters (June 10, 2025). Iran to present counter-proposal to US, Trump says talks to resume. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-present-counter-proposal-us-nuclear-talks-foreign-ministry-says-2025-06-09/>

<sup>30</sup> Danielle Wallace and Bret Baier (June 10, 2025). Iran becoming 'much more aggressive' in nuclear talks, Trump tells Fox News. Fox News. Accessible at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/iran-becoming-much-more-aggressive-nuclear-talks-trump-tells-fox-news>

American bases in the region. Trump also issued repeated threats of military action if a deal was not reached.<sup>31</sup>

Against this backdrop of escalating tensions, on June 12, 2025, the IAEA Board of Governors declared Iran to be in non-compliance with its nuclear obligations, the first such finding in 20 years.<sup>32</sup> The Board's resolution stated that Iran's enriched uranium stockpiles could be used both for reactor fuel and for nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup> Iran dismissed the resolution as politically motivated and vowed to continue its nuclear activities, including building more enrichment facilities and centrifuges.<sup>34</sup>

### **"The 12-Day War"**

The Iran–Israel conflict dates back decades. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two countries had close relations. However, after the revolution, Iran adopted a strongly anti-Israel stance and began actively supporting groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>35</sup> Following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, tensions between Iran and Israel escalated sharply. By June 2025, the confrontation had developed into a full-scale war, now referred to as the "12-Day War."<sup>36</sup>

On June 12, Israel struck the Natanz nuclear facility, located approximately 225 kilometers from Iran's capital.

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<sup>31</sup> Reuters (June 11, 2025). Iran threatens to strike US bases in region if military conflict arises. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-threatens-us-bases-region-if-military-conflict-arises-2025-06-11/>

<sup>32</sup> Aleksandar Brezar and Jorge Liboreiro (June 12, 2025). The UN nuclear watchdog finds Iran in non-compliance with its obligations. Euronews. Accessible at <https://www.euronews.com/2025/06/12/un-nuclear-watchdog-finds-iran-in-non-compliance-with-nuclear-obligations>

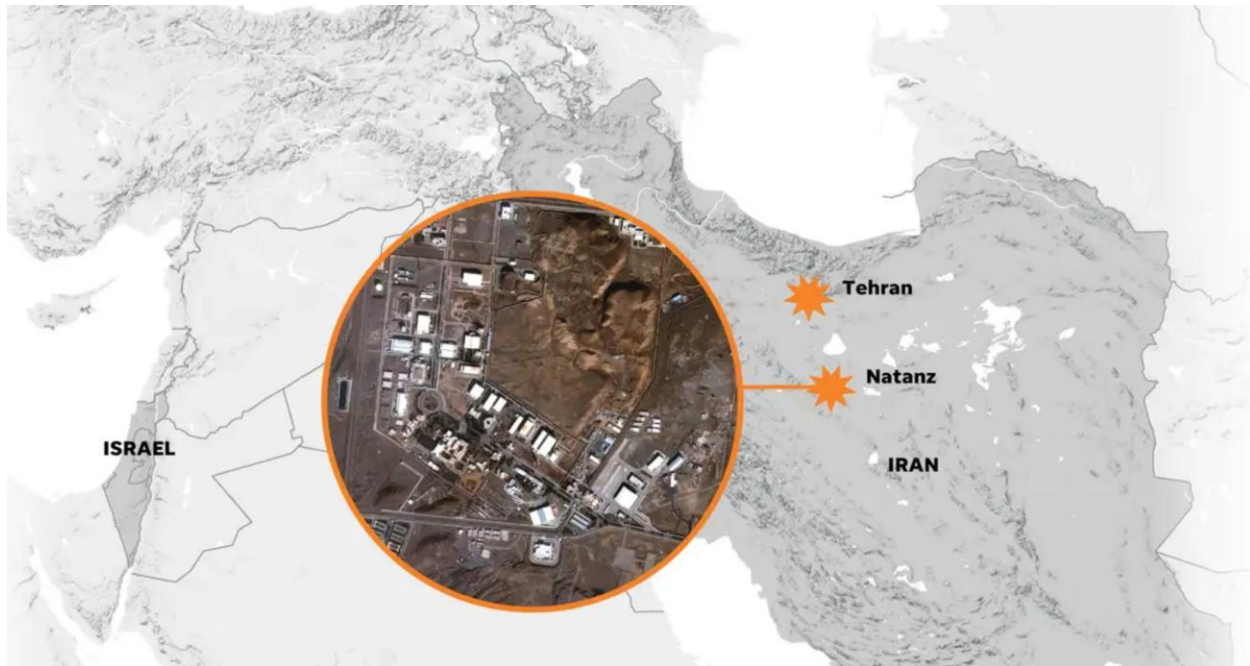
<sup>33</sup> Bethany Bell and David Gritten (June 12, 2025). Global watchdog finds Iran failing to meet nuclear obligations. BBC. Accessible at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3v6w2qr12o>

<sup>34</sup> Mostafa Salem and Frederik Pleitgen (June 12, 2025). Iran threatens nuclear escalation after UN watchdog board finds it in breach of obligations. CNN. Accessible at <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/06/12/middleeast/iran-threatens-nuclear-escalation-iaea-intl>

<sup>35</sup> Erik Skare (December 18, 2023). Iran, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad: A marriage of convenience. ECFR. Accessible at <https://ecfr.eu/article/iran-hamas-and-islamic-jihad-a-marriage-of-convenience/>

<sup>36</sup> Parisa Hafezi and Ahmed Rasheed (June 26, 2025). Iran turns to internal crackdown in wake of 12-day war. Reuters. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-turns-internal-crackdown-wake-12-day-war-2025-06-25/>





Source: USA Today<sup>37</sup>

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the military operation, called "Rising Lion," was aimed at the "heart" of Iran's nuclear program and that it was crucial to stop Iran quickly to prevent the production of nuclear weapons. In contrast, Iran continued to insist that its nuclear program was solely for peaceful purposes. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned that Israel would face "severe punishment," while Iran's Foreign Minister described the airstrikes as a "declaration of war."

In retaliation, Iran launched several strikes within hours, under Operation "True Promise 3," targeting dozens of settlements, military centers, and airbases in Israel with ballistic missiles. According to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), approximately 100 missiles were fired, most of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome air defense system.<sup>38</sup> Israel, in response, intensified its attacks on Iran's energy infrastructure, broadening the scope of its military campaign. Drones struck the South Pars gas field in Bushehr Province, one of the largest gas fields in the world and a critical part of Iran's energy production. Later, Israel

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Borresen, Davis Winkie, Kim Hjelmgaard, Francesca Chambers and Shawn J. Sullivan (June 13, 2025). Israel attacks Iran: See strike map, satellite images of nuclear sites. USA Today. Accessible at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/graphics/2025/06/13/israel-attacks-iran-tehran-where-map-video-satellite-images-of-the-strike-nuclear-sites/84179253007/>

<sup>38</sup> Lana Lam, Sofia Ferreira Santos, Jaroslav Lukiv & Nathan Williams (June 19, 2025). Israel-Iran: How did the latest conflict start and where could it lead? BBC. Accessible at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdj9vj8g1g2o>

destroyed two key energy facilities in Tehran: The Shahr-e Khatam fuel and gasoline storage facility and Shahr-e Rey, one of the country's largest oil refineries.<sup>39</sup>

The damage caused by Israel's strikes was outlined as follows: On June 13, 2025, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) reported that Israel's strikes on the Natanz nuclear facility had destroyed the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) and its electrical infrastructure. The Institute assessed that the loss of electricity likely caused damage to the centrifuges. However, satellite imagery released on June 14 provided a follow-up review, which altered the Institute's initial assessment. Due to the underground nature of the facility, satellite images could not provide precise results, leading to questions from Israeli officials about how effective the attack had been. According to ISIS, if the centrifuges were physically damaged in addition to losing power, the attack would be considered successful.<sup>40</sup>

This evaluation matched a later statement from IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi on June 14, 2025: "On the same day [of the attack], the main cascade hall appears to have been attacked using ground-penetrating munitions...the strikes on the underground cascade halls were seriously damaging."<sup>41</sup>

Israel's attack resulted in the death of several significant military figures, nuclear scientists, and politicians. According to Iran, ten military generals were killed, including: Mohammad Bagheri, the Chief Commander of Iran's Armed Forces, second in rank after Ali Khamenei; Gholamali Rashidi, Deputy Chief Commander of the Armed Forces; Hossein Salami, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Despite the loss of these high-ranking military commanders, their deaths did not have the same scale of impact as the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the most powerful figure after Ayatollah Khamenei. Their positions were quickly filled by their deputies.<sup>42</sup>

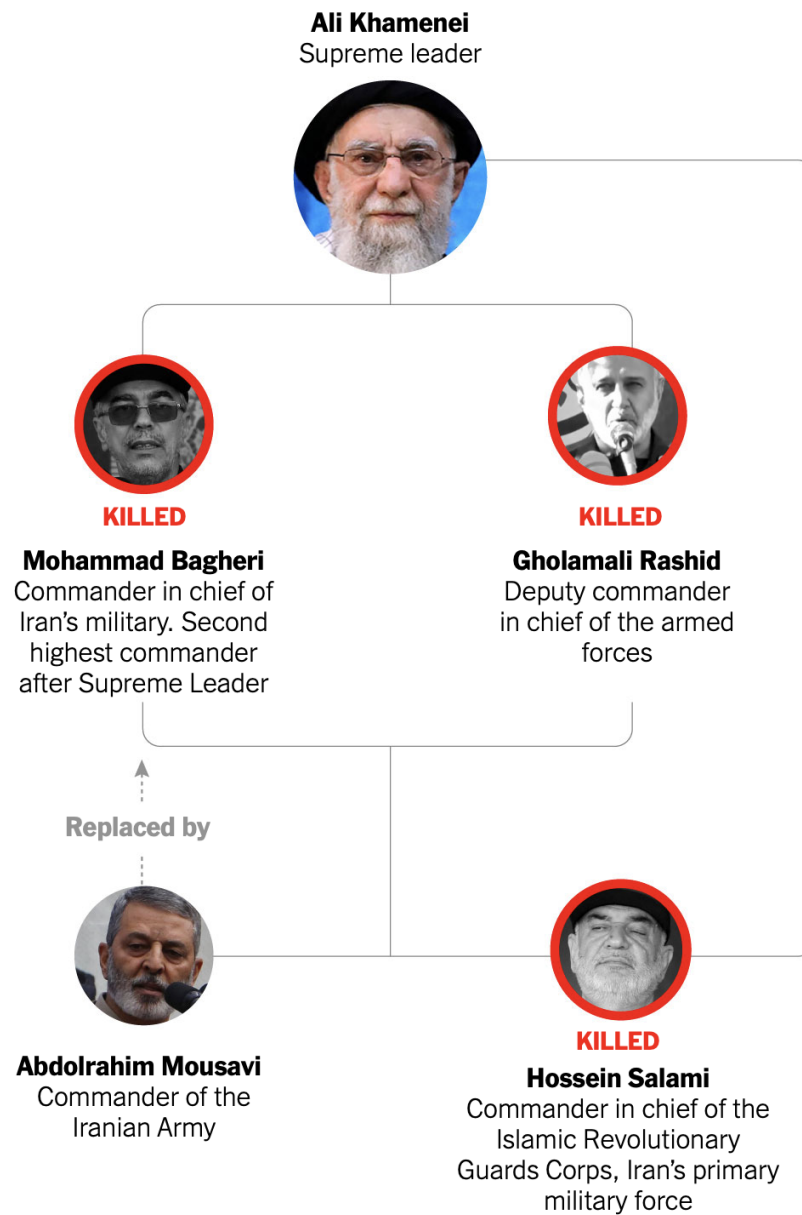
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<sup>39</sup> The New York Times (June 17, 2025). Mapping the Israel-Iran Conflict. Accessible at <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/world/israel-iran-maps-tracking>

<sup>40</sup> David Albright and Spencer Faragasso (June 24, 2025). Post-Attack Assessment of the First 12 Days of Israeli and U.S. Strikes on Iranian Nuclear Facilities. Institute for Science and International Security. Accessible at <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/post-attack-assessment-of-the-first-12-days-of-israeli-strikes-on-iranian-nuclear-facilities>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Granados (June 13, 2025). These Are Iranian Generals and Scientists Killed by Israel. The New York Times. Accessible at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/13/world/middleeast/iran-military-generals-killed-israel.html>



Source: U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (Iranian military structure) • By Samuel Granados

Source: U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency<sup>43</sup>

As a result of the attack, eight nuclear scientists were also killed, including Fereydoun Abbasi, the former head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, and Mohammad Mehdi Tehranchi, the former president of Tehran's Azad Islamic University. Israel's strikes also claimed the life of Ali Shamkhani, one of the most

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

influential Iranian politicians and a close confidant of Ayatollah Khamenei, who was overseeing nuclear program negotiations with the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Israel's attack on Iran sparked responses from the "Axis of Resistance" - a network of Islamist militant groups in the Middle East, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and other jihadist factions in Palestine, the Houthis in Yemen, and various Shi'a military groups in Syria and Iraq.<sup>45</sup> Hezbollah condemned Israel's attack on Iran, calling it a dangerous escalation, but officially stated that it would not launch a direct attack on Israel in response.<sup>46</sup> Hezbollah's decision to refrain from attacking Israel made sense given their two-month-long confrontation with Israel in 2024, where Israel had a clear upper hand. Since October 2023, Hamas has been involved in direct conflict with Israel. As a result, they did not allocate separate resources for responding to the attack on Iran. As for the Houthis, they had launched several attacks against Israel after the war in Gaza began. June 2025 was no exception, and the Houthis officially declared they had attacked Israel in retaliation for the strike on Iran.<sup>47</sup> The Axis of Resistance's restraint from becoming deeply involved in the war confirms that this network has been weakened by its years-long conflict with Israel.

On June 22, the United States became involved in the conflict. Initially, President Trump emphasized the importance of reaching a nuclear agreement and called on Israel to exercise restraint in its attacks. However, he later described Israel's attack on Iran as "extraordinary" and "very successful," which contradicted his earlier position.<sup>48</sup> On June 21, the day before the attack, Trump stated that he would give Iran a reasonable amount of time, two weeks, to make a decision. Otherwise, he would order an airstrike on Iran.<sup>49</sup> He also mentioned that the decision might be made even earlier. Yet, the attack on Iran came

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Amare Kenaw (June 26, 2025). The Israel-Iran Strikes: Scenarios and Further Implications. Institute of Foreign Affairs. Accessible at <https://www.ifa.gov.et/2025/06/26/the-israel-iran-strikes-scenarios-and-further-implications/>

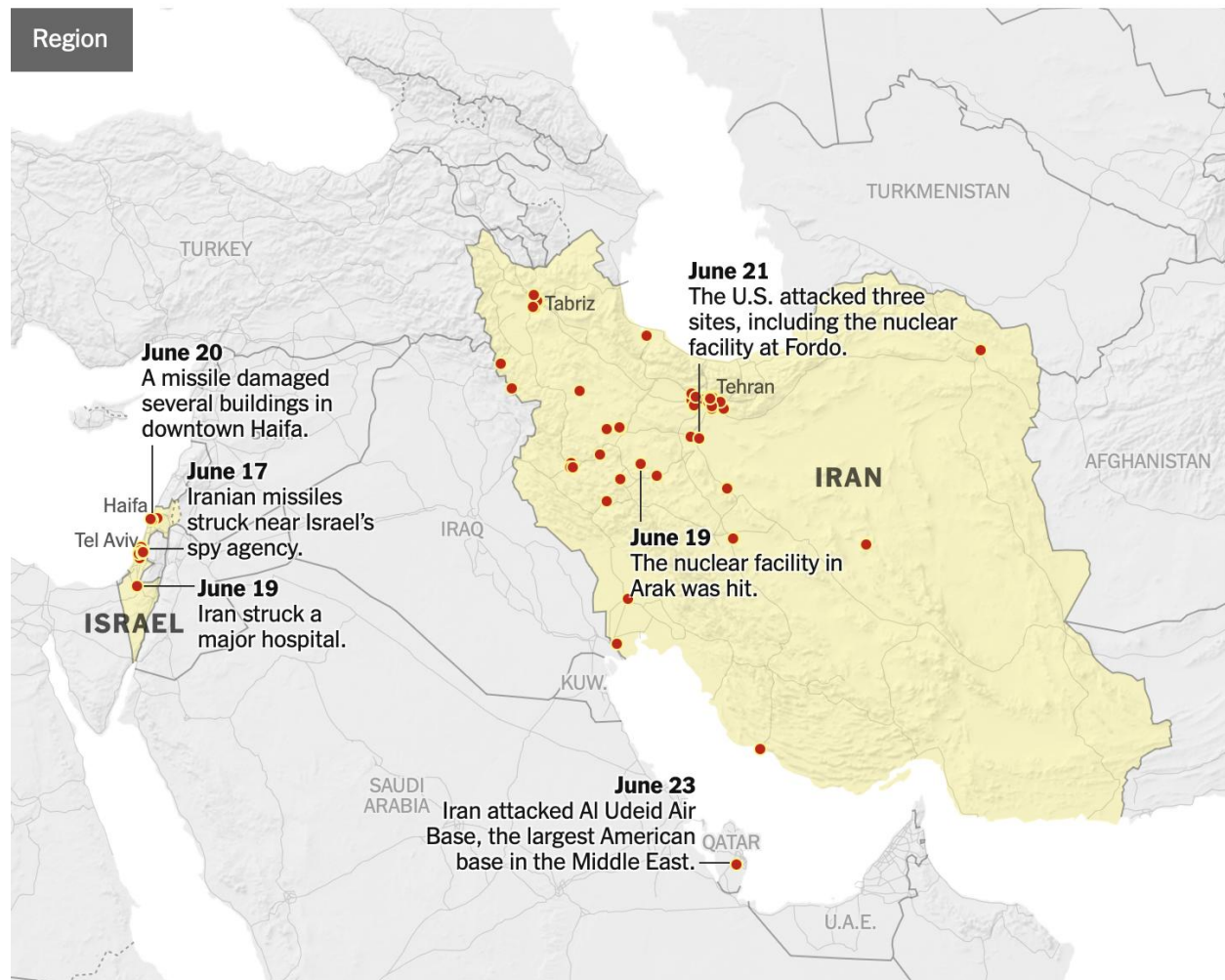
<sup>46</sup> The Times of Israel (June 13, 2025). Hezbollah officials say it will stay out of the Israel-Iran fight. Accessible at [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/hezbollah-official-says-it-will-stay-out-of-israel-iran-fight/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/hezbollah-official-says-it-will-stay-out-of-israel-iran-fight/)

<sup>47</sup> Reuters (July 2, 2025). Israel's defence chief threatens to retaliate for Houthi missiles. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-army-says-missile-launched-yemens-houthis-intercepted-2025-07-01/>

<sup>48</sup> Steve Holland (June 14, 2025). 'We knew everything,' Trump tells Reuters about Israel's strikes on Iran. Reuters. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/trump-tells-reuters-its-unclear-if-iran-still-has-nuclear-program-2025-06-13/>

<sup>49</sup> Betsy Klein (June 21). Trump says 2-week timeframe is the "maximum" to decide on US involvement in Iran. CNN. Accessible at <https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/israel-iran-conflict-06-20-25-intl-hnk>

unexpectedly just one day after this statement. The US launched strikes on Iran's main nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan.



Source: *The New York Times*<sup>50</sup>

In response, as promised, Iran launched a missile strike on the U.S. military base at Al Udeid, located in Qatar. Qatari officials condemned the attack and reported that Qatar's air defense systems successfully intercepted the Iranian rockets. U.S. officials confirmed that no casualties resulted from the strike. Three Iranian officials familiar with military plans stated that Iran had alerted Qatari authorities in advance of the attacks in order to minimize casualties.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The New York Times (June 17, 2025). Mapping the Israel-Iran Conflict. Accessible at <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2025/world/israel-iran-maps-tracking>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

On the evening of June 23, U.S. President Donald Trump posted a statement on the Truth Social platform, announcing that Israel and Iran had reached a formal agreement to fully cease fire. However, following this statement, both sides accused each other of violating the agreement. Officially, the end of the war is marked on June 24.

Trump initially claimed that the attack on Iran had completely destroyed its nuclear capabilities. However, U.S. intelligence soon contradicted this, stating that Iran's nuclear activities had only been delayed by a few months.<sup>52</sup> The Pentagon, in a statement on July 2, contradicted the earlier intelligence report, claiming that the U.S. attack had delayed Iran's nuclear program for two years.<sup>53</sup> According to IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, while the attack was "heavy," it was not "absolute,"<sup>54</sup> meaning that Iran could still resume the production of enriched uranium within a few months. On June 25, Iran declared that its nuclear sites had been "severely damaged," but provided no further details. Despite the attack, Iran's position remains unchanged: it claims that its nuclear materials are used for peaceful purposes and it will continue their production.<sup>55</sup> Due to a lack of information, assessments of the exact damage to Iran's nuclear program remain difficult to ascertain.

Following the U.S. and Israeli attacks, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced that Iran would leave the IAEA. He stated that IAEA inspectors would no longer be allowed into Iran because the security of the country's nuclear facilities could no longer be guaranteed, and its peaceful nuclear activities could not be assured.<sup>56</sup> Although Iran had already been non-compliant with IAEA conditions for years and had not provided full information required for monitoring, leaving the IAEA is still a significant negative development. The agency would lose access to sites it had previously inspected and the critical information it had used to assess Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, Iran's withdrawal from the IAEA could

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<sup>52</sup> Jon Gambrell, David Rising and Farnoush Amiri (June 26, 2025). Trump says US and Iranian officials will talk next week as the ceasefire holds. AP News. Accessible at <https://apnews.com/article/israel-iran-war-nuclear-06-23-2025-63d873b977642a40986d1f1dee5c4b37>

<sup>53</sup> France 24 (July 2, 2024). US strikes set back Iran nuclear programme by up to two years, says Pentagon. Accessible at <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250702-us-iran-nuclear-program-pentagon>

<sup>54</sup> Ellen O'Regan (June 29, 2024). Iran could resume uranium enrichment in 'months,' says IAEA chief. Accessible at <https://www.politico.eu/article/iran-resume-uranium-enrichment-months-iaea-rafael-mariano-grossi/>

<sup>55</sup> The Times of Israel (June 25, 2025). Iran says nuclear sites 'badly damaged' amid conflicting reports on strikes' success. Accessible at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-says-nuclear-sites-badly-damaged-amid-conflicting-reports-on-strikes-success/>

<sup>56</sup> Jon Gambrell (Jul 3, 2025). Iran's president orders the country to suspend cooperation with UN nuclear watchdog IAEA. AP News. Accessible at <https://apnews.com/article/iran-nuclear-iaea-cooperation-8bbdc81b9199d8d179d0fb2e1b8dac2a>



potentially encourage other countries to begin producing nuclear materials without oversight or withdraw from existing agreements or agencies, posing a serious threat to international order and security.

### **Israel and U.S. Interests**

The Trump administration justified its strikes on Iran's nuclear sites for the following reasons:

- (1) Preventing Iran's Nuclear Weapons Development: The U.S. argued that Iran was on the verge of developing nuclear weapons, citing a June 12, 2025, report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which stated that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was sufficient for "nine nuclear bombs." The airstrikes aimed to destroy key nuclear facilities (Fordo, Natanz, Isfahan) to prevent Iran from having the capacity to produce uranium for nuclear weapons, especially at the deeply buried Fordo enrichment site.
- (2) Support for Israel's Security: In the context of Iran's missile retaliation, the Trump administration saw the strike as a necessary step in supporting Israel. Trump stated that an attack on Iran's nuclear program would serve U.S. interests and ensure the collective defense of allies, including Israel.<sup>57</sup>
- (3) Deterrence of Iran: The Pentagon and the White House described the strikes as a response to Iran's non-compliance with IAEA nuclear obligations and its aggressive stance, including threats to exit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and missile tests. The goal was to deter Iran and prevent further escalation in the region.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the official rationale focusing on security and the defense of allies, the U.S. decision may have been influenced by several less vocal motivations:

- (1) Trump's Domestic Political Goals: The airstrikes aligned with Trump's campaign promise to adopt a tough stance against Iran, contrasting with Biden's more diplomatic approach. By launching a high-profile operation, Trump may have aimed to strengthen his domestic image as a decisive leader.

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<sup>57</sup> Congress.gov (June 26, 2025). Israel-Iran Conflict, U.S. Strikes, and Ceasefire. Accessible at <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13032>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

- (2) Countering China and Russia's Influence: Iran's growing ties with China and Russia posed a threat to U.S. influence in the Middle East. The strikes may have aimed at weakening Iran as a regional power and reducing its role in China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- (3) Testing Iran's "Axis of Resistance" and Proxy Network: The U.S. may have sought to test Iran's weakened state (due to poor air defense and economic difficulties, and weakened proxies like Hezbollah) by assessing its ability to counteract in future conflicts. By targeting nuclear sites, the U.S. may have also been testing whether Iran's "Axis of Resistance" could function effectively in regional confrontations.

For Israel, the primary declared motive for the strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities was to prevent the development of nuclear weapons. Prime Minister Netanyahu clearly stated that a strike on Natanz's nuclear facility, the "heart" of Iran's nuclear program, was necessary to halt Iran in the short term and prevent it from obtaining nuclear weapons. This aligns with Israel's longstanding concern over Iran's nuclear ambitions, particularly Iran's continued high-level uranium enrichment and non-compliance with the IAEA's regulations. In addition to preventing nuclear weapons development, Israel's actions were likely aimed at fundamentally dismantling Iran's nuclear infrastructure and reducing Iran's regional influence.

An unofficial goal may have been to weaken Iran's "Axis of Resistance" and its proxy groups that pose a direct threat to Israel's defense and security. Despite the primary focus being on nuclear sites and energy infrastructure, Israel's broader objective could have been to reduce Iran's capacity to fund and arm these proxy networks.

### **Impact of the "12-Day War" on Russia and Georgia**

In 2001, the Iranian parliament ratified a comprehensive cooperation agreement with Russia, which remains in force until 2026. However, the parties decided to draft a new agreement, as the old one no longer reflects the current state of relations. In January 2025, Iran and Russia signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, covering defense, counter-terrorism, energy, finance, transport, industry, agriculture, culture, science, and technology.<sup>59</sup> Despite expectations in some circles that Russia

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<sup>59</sup> Radio Free Europe (January 17, 2025). "Russia and Iran signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement". Accessible at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33279523.html>



would provide military support to Iran, the agreement does not specifically address participation in defense against attacks. As a result, Russia had no obligation or resources to assist Iran in this conflict.

While the war may not have significantly impacted Russia in a direct military sense, it harmed its image by weakening its strategic partnerships. As for the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran (especially targeting nuclear infrastructure) did not diminish Russia's supply of Shahed drones to Iran, as Russia assembles Iranian-style drones in its Tatarstan region.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the war benefited Russia as it shifted Western attention away from the Russia-Ukraine war.

For Georgia, the events in Iran had limited economic and political repercussions due to the geographical distance and duration of the war. However, it's noteworthy that Georgia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Aleksandre Khvtisiashvili, attended an event at the Iranian Embassy commemorating those who had died in Israel's armed attack against Iran's territorial integrity.<sup>61</sup> This statement drew criticism from the Israeli Embassy in Georgia. Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, which has followed an anti-Western policy, made two visits to Iran. This has distanced Georgia from its European perspective. If the conflict in the region escalates, Georgia may become a recipient of migrant flows, although not as much as Iran's close ally and neighbor, Armenia. Azerbaijan, sharing a land border with Iran, has closed its borders with Iran.

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<sup>60</sup> Illia Novikov (June 27, 2025). Russia and Ukraine trade long-range drone attacks as Putin says Moscow is ready for new peace talks. Accessible <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-drones-8bc387e15ef93e33d2fda9dec920a0d2>

<sup>61</sup> Civil.ge (June 2, 2025). "Georgian Dream's" Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Attended an event held at the Iranian Embassy. Accessible at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/689928>