

Iran has a long history of supporting resistance groups such as Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War and Hamas in Gaza, both of which have engaged in armed conflict with Israel. Israel has conducted numerous military strikes against Iranian targets in Syria, perceiving Tehran's presence as a direct threat to its security.

Amid Israel-Iran escalation

It's time for region-wide cease-fire



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OPINION

When the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the air strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, he knew what he was doing. Although any attack on a diplomatic mission is a clear violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the Israeli leader proceeded, hoping to divert

attention from his failures in the Israeli war on Gaza. With Israel having previously carried out a series of assassinations against Iranian officials and scientists, this act was hard to deny. No other power in the region could conduct such a brazen violation of international law regarding the sanctity of diplomatic missions.

Coming on the heels of other Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria, this was a provocative act aimed at establishing military hegemony in the region. For their part, the Iranians were caught in a bind. The international response to the brazen Israeli defiance of international law was muted, especially in the West, and Tehran could no longer tolerate the Israeli provocations. Iran also has its own considerations of military deterrence in the region.

The result was an attack from Iranian territory, which sent a clear message to Israel and its allies. It demonstrated the Iranian capabilities but also provided space for de-escalation. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian described the attack as "limited" and said Tehran had warned the United States ahead of launching it.

Due to the deployment of US forces to the region and Israel's own air defence capabilities, nearly all of the drones and missiles Iran launched were intercepted.

This display of military power by Israel and Iran has left the rest of the Arab world terrified of what another regional war could do to an already devastated region. And if it is to take place, there will be not just regional, but global repercussions. Any regional Iranian-Israeli conflict will pull in the Gulf countries, but also the US, Russia, and China, creating a potentially explosive global confrontation.

As Israel and Iran are establishing this new "balance of terror", the international community has to act. The United Nations Security Council must pass a strong binding resolution imposing a full cease-fire in the region that includes the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel, Iran, and all neighboring countries involved, as well as non-state actors.

Importantly, this resolution must recognize that at the core of much of the instability in the region is the unresolved Palestinian question.

Therefore, it needs to call for an end to Israel's genocidal invasion of Gaza and the exchange of captives. It must provide a clear roadmap to Palestinian statehood and the end of the Israeli military control of all Arab territories occupied in 1967. It must create an international peacekeeping force that will ensure compliance by all parties, especially in Gaza but also in the West Bank, where settler violence has reached unprecedented levels.

A clear declaration in support of the Palestinian right to self-determination and a roadmap to its realization is paramount now. Already most European countries have indicated their plans to join the list of 139 states that have recognised the state of Palestine.

This resolution should not repeat the mistakes of UNSC 2728 passed on March 25, which the US tried to undermine immediately by claiming that it was "nonbinding". The resolution was binding but it lacked "teeth" — or clear measures to be undertaken in case of violation. That is why Israel ignored it.

A new resolution, therefore, will require the use of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Article 41 of this chapter reads: "The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to



Israeli interceptors engage over the Al-Aqsa Holy Mosque with Iranian drones and missiles heading toward Israeli targets in occupied Palestine as part of the IRGC's Operation True Promise on April 14, 2024. AFP

be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations."

The possibility of imposing biting sanctions and a diplomatic boycott on those who do not abide by its provisions must be made clear in the resolution. Mention must also be made of the other provisions in Chapter VII which include the use of military force to ensure maintenance of international peace.

For decades, Israel has gotten away with perpetrating egregious violations of international law because it has faced no consequences. Now, the International Court of Justice has declared that Israeli actions in Gaza "plausibly" amount to genocide in Gaza. Israel will not stop its aggression in Gaza or elsewhere in the region unless it is faced with a credible threat of sanctions. Iran, for its part, already faces sanctions pressure from the West, but if China and other non-Western powers were to join such measures, it would think twice before violating the resolution.

With Iran clearly demonstrating it is willing to de-escalate after the attack, a small window of opportunity now exists for action. The US and other countries have come to the rescue of Israel, and this means that it will have to pay back its allies by complying with the cease-fire.

Unless the world wants to deal with the economic and humanitarian catastrophe of a region-wide war in the Middle East, it must move quickly and lay the foundations for a comprehensive lasting peace in the region. The key to that is resolving the Palestinian question once and for all.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

Are embassies off-limits?

Ecuadorian, Israeli actions set dangerous precedent



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OPINION

It has long been held that embassies should be treated as "off-limits" to other nations. Yet in a single week, two cabinets stand accused of violating, in different ways, the laws surrounding foreign diplomatic missions.

First, on April 1, 2024, Iran's embassy in Damascus was bombed, presumably by Israel, killing several high-ranking commanders of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Then, on April 5, Ecuadorian police forced their way into the Mexican Embassy in Quito to arrest a former vice president of Ecuador who was seeking political asylum. Both actions have led to claims of international law violations and accusations that the Vienna Convention, which establishes the immunity of diplomatic missions, was contravened.

As someone with a fair amount of knowledge of embassy life — I have served as Chile's head of mission in China, India, and South Africa and co-edited The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy — I believe the two incidents are of greater concern than much of the international community appears to be viewing them.

Contrary to the famous quip from late businessman and presidential candidate Ross Perot, embassies are not just "relics of the days of sailing ships". Rather, in an increasingly complex world where geopolitical conflict, mass migrations, pandemics, and climate change require careful and stable diplomatic management, any incidents that erode the sanctity of embassy rules could have serious negative consequences. In short, they make for a more dangerous world.

Curious indifference to embassy attack

Of the two recent incidents, the Iranian embassy bombing is the more serious, as it involved the loss of life and resulted in retaliatory attacks.

Yet, Western countries, leaders of which often voice concern over upholding the so-called "rules-based order," have been reluctant to condemn the act.

It was notable that the three liberal democracies on the UN Security Council — the United States, the United Kingdom, and France — all refused to condemn the strike on Iran's embassy when the issue came up before them. Israel, while not officially acknowledging responsibility, argued that the Iranian ambassador's residence was not really a diplomatic venue but "a military building ... disguised as a civilian building". As such, to Israel, it was a perfectly legitimate target. But by this logic, nearly all embassies would be seen as fair game.

Almost by definition, the vast majority of embassies — particularly of the larger countries — are populated with significant numbers of military and intelligence personnel. To suggest that, for that reason, embassies should lose their diplomatic immunity and become legiti-

mate targets for armed attacks would bring the whole edifice of the Vienna Convention crashing down. And with it would come the structure on which worldwide formal diplomatic interactions are based.

The comparatively relaxed international attitude to the embassy violations by Israel and Ecuador reflects, I believe, a failure to grasp the significance of eroding diplomatic immunity and norms.

As global challenges increase, embassies and their representatives become more important, not less so.

If the takeaway from the two latest embassy incidents is that the protection of diplomatic premises can be secondary to whatever is politically expedient on any given day, then it will be of great detriment to the management of international relations. Diplomacy will become much more difficult.

And given the enormity of the challenges the world faces today, that is the last thing any country needs.

The full article first appeared on The Conversation.



A man looks through the gate at the rubble of Iran's consulate building, which was leveled by an Israeli strike, in Damascus, Syria on April 1, 2024. X