

fundamentally permit decision-making, negotiation, and agreement?

The reality is that not many indications of rationality are observed. Was Iran not negotiating with the United States during the 12-day war? Then why did the United States attack Fordow, Isfahan, and Natanz? While technical negotiations were supposed to continue, why were the attacks carried out? Does war not possess rules and frameworks?

What logic and framework do attacks on educational centers, medical facilities, residential places, and historical monuments follow? It is natural that these actions engender mistrust. Iran endeavors, through diplomacy and regional consultations, including Mr. Araghchi's travels to Pakistan, to moderate these contradictory behaviors. Trump, even within the United States, has repeatedly circumvented Congress. At present, as

well, he endeavors to preserve his war powers without regard for legal restrictions. Although the Democrats seek to restrict these powers, they have not yet succeeded. Therefore, even if a certain rationality exists within the domestic structure of the United States, the behavior of American presidents and their disregard for rules and commitments have created mistrust. There exists no definitive guarantee

that, if a promise is made, it will certainly be fulfilled. No such guarantee exists, neither at the international level nor within the United States. Nevertheless, if the objective is the avoidance of war and the preservation of achievements, there is no recourse except to continue the path of diplomacy and to arrive at a type of agreement; an agreement wherein concessions are granted and concessions are received, so

that the country's infrastructure, the lives of the people, and further damages may be protected. At present, the "neither war nor peace" situation has disrupted the lives of many inside Iran; due, for instance, to internet problems and the damages inflicted upon professions dependent upon international communications. For this reason, efforts are underway by various officials, including the government, the Supreme Na-

tional Security Council, Mr. Qalibaf, and Mr. Araghchi, to return the people's living conditions to a normal state as quickly as possible, while preserving achievements. It is true that the opposing party is not particularly trustworthy; however, ultimately, there exists no other way except to move along this same path of diplomacy.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

Iran isn't 'flailing'

It's executing a coercive risk strategy

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OPINION

Iran's strategy of drone and missile strikes is neither random nor desperate; rather, it is a coherent strategy designed to steadily increase the political and economic costs of continued US and Israeli military operations. Iran's goal is not merely to put an end to the current fighting but to inflict sufficient pain to ensure the United States and Israel do not repeat this again. Understanding the logic behind Iran's actions is essential in coming to realistic assessments about the course of the conflict and preventing dangerous miscalculations.

In his briefing on the morning of March 10, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth dismissed Iran's alleged week of strikes across the Persian Gulf as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps "flailing recklessly". It is a reassuring framing. It is also wrong — and dangerously so. Understanding what Tehran is actually doing matters enormously for what comes next.

Iran's campaign does not look like desperation. It looks like Thomas Schelling. In his classic study of military coercion, Schelling defined risk strategy as the deliberate manipulation of shared danger. This approach exploits the "danger somebody may inadvertently go over the brink, dragging the other with him".

This is precisely what Tehran is attempting. By widening the conflict and raising economic and political costs of continued fighting, Iran aims to create pressure on Persian Gulf governments, global markets, and ultimately Washington, compelling it to halt the campaign. The first 10 days of fighting, examined carefully, reveal not reckless lashing out but a coherent and escalating coercive logic.

Tehran's campaign reflects an updated deterrence calculus. After the April 2024 Damascus strike killed senior IRGC officers, Iran telegraphed its retaliatory attack on Israel in advance, signaling restraint. But that caution was not rewarded. Washington and Tel Aviv struck again — and again. Tehran has since concluded that restraint, unreciprocated, does not deter. Only costs that are impossible to ignore achieve that effect.

Consider the target selection. According to the Institute of National Security Studies, Tehran



The illustration depicts US President Donald Trump as stuck in a figurative "escalation trap" within Iran's flag. **ALLIE CARL/AXIOS**

has launched more than 750 missiles and 2,000 drones toward the region. Only about 180 targeted Israel — the state that directly struck Iranian territory. The UAE alone absorbed over 1,400 drones, 260 ballistic missiles, and eight cruise missiles. That disparity is not simply an accident of geography. It is a strategic choice.

The campaign also followed a deliberate progression. Early strikes concentrated on military installations hosting US forces, including Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, and the US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Rather than striking those bases indiscrimi-

nately, those attacks repeatedly targeted missile-defense radars and communications nodes. Within days, the campaign expanded to civilian infrastructure, including airports, ports, hotels, and data centers used by the US military and its partners. A drone strike on a logistics unit at Kuwait's Port Shuaiba killed six American soldiers, suggesting Iranian intelligence had tracked US forces miles from the main base. By midweek, energy infrastructure had entered the target set. Strikes on Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura refinery, fuel storage facilities at Fujairah in the UAE, and Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG complex — the world's largest — sent European gas fu-

tures up 76% in a single week. Oil crossed \$110 per barrel. Each target category serves a distinct coercive purpose. Attacks on military installations raise risks to US personnel. Strikes on airports and ports signal to Persian Gulf governments that hosting US forces carries direct economic consequences. Disruptions to LNG and oil infrastructure send a warning far beyond the Middle East that the costs of this war will not remain local.

The Persian Gulf states are a particularly well-chosen pressure point not because they are combatants, but precisely because they are not. In the weeks before the conflict, Persian Gulf



The photo leaked on March 29, 2026, shows a damaged American E-3 Sentry plane, an airborne warning and control system (AWACS), after a strike on Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base during the US-Israeli war on Iran. **NBC NEWS**



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leaders urgently warned Washington against attacking Iran, stressing their territory must not be used for offensive operations. Yet they now find themselves entrapped in a war they neither chose nor supported. Their economies face simultaneous downturns in hydrocarbon, shipping, tourism, and aviation revenues. Their militaries are expending interceptors at a rapid rate. Persian Gulf leaders have publicly called for de-escalation. That is exactly what Iran is counting on.

Some analysts argue that Iran's strikes are backfiring, pushing Persian Gulf states closer to Washington rather than pressuring it. There is something to this. Persian Gulf anger at Tehran is real. But the asymmetry of interests limits how far that logic runs. Iran is fighting for regime survival. For the Persian Gulf states, this war is not existential. However furious Persian Gulf leaders may be, they have powerful incentives to avoid further escalation. Their economies, their reputations, their carefully constructed images of stability are all at risk. That calculus favors pressure toward de-escalation, not wider war, which is precisely Iran's bet.

Tehran also still holds cards it has yet to play. Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil processing facility remains vulnerable. Expanded attacks on desalination plants could threaten drinking water for tens of millions. And Iran is now signaling readiness to escalate dramatically. It has reportedly laid roughly a dozen mines in the Strait of Hormuz in recent days. Iran possesses thousands of mines to make a sustained closure of the Strait a genuine possibility. That would confront Washington with a terrible dilemma: Attempt to reopen it under withering drone and missile fire, at significant cost to American ships or personnel, or accept a prolonged closure of the waterway — one that could take weeks or months to reverse. The mines laid so far look less like the opening of that campaign than a demonstration that Tehran retains the option — and is prepared to use it.

None of this means Iran's strategy will succeed. Escalation, once begun, follows its own logic. But dismissing Tehran's campaign as reckless flailing badly misreads the situation — and risks badly miscalculating what comes next.

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