

FORUM:	Security Council
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Introduction

Few issues on the Security Council's current agenda combine a nuclear proliferation risk, power rivalry, and acute humanitarian emergency as tightly as the situation happening currently in Iran. Since June 2025, Iran has fought against a direct war with Israel and the United States, watched the United Nations reimpose sweeping multilateral sanctions, and endured the deadliest wave of domestic turbulence since its 1797 revolution. Each crisis feeds the others: military strikes hardened Teheran's resolve to preserve at least a latent nuclear capability, sanctions has already deepened the severe economic collapse, and that economic collapse triggered a level of repression that has drawn international condemnation. Because Iran sits at the center of Gulf energy routes, hosts a network of allied armed groups across the region, and possesses the technical means to approach nuclear weapons capability within the short timeframe, instability inside the country carries more consequences than it seems. The council's task is to prevent renewed war, encourage a verifiable and durable resolution to the nuclear file, and respond to the humanitarian toil of sanctions and repression, all without the diplomatic tools that historically allowed for compromise.



Background

Tensions between Iran, Israel, and the West have been happening for decades, but the immediate crisis accelerated after the 2015 joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA). The United States withdrew from the deal in 2018, and Iran progressively abandoned its own enrichment limits, eventually stockpiling uranium almost by 60 percent, a short technical step from weapons grade material (Arms Control Association). By early 2025, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had lost significant overlook into Iran's nuclear sites, and diplomatic talks between Washington and Tehran repeatedly stalled (Congressional Research Service).

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, which was a surprise campaign of striking Iranian nuclear facilities, missile infrastructure, and senior military and individuals related to scientific knowledge. Iran retaliated with missile barrages against Israeli cities, and the conflict escalated even further on June 22 when the United States struck the fortified enrichment sites at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan in Operation Midnight Hammer (Jazeera). A ceasefire broken by the United States and Qatari took effect on June 24, ending what is now called the Twelve-Day War, though both Iran and Israel separately claimed on victory (Britannica).



The war left Iran's nuclear program damaged but not completely dismantled: the IAEA has since been unable to verify the location or condition of Iran's pre-war stockpile of uranium; some of it is actually believed to stay buried near the Isfahan tunnel complex (Institute for Science and International Security). Diplomatically, the war also

hardened positions ahead of a separate deadline. Under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which had endorsed the JCPOA, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (the 'E3') regained the ability to trigger a 'snapback' of pre-2015 UN sanctions if Iran was found in significant non-performance of its commitments (House of Commons Library, "E3 Triggers"). The E3 invoked this mechanism in August 2025, and despite objections from Russia and China that the move was procedurally invalid, the snapback took effect on September 27, 2026, reimposing six prior Security Council resolutions targeting Iran's nuclear, missile, and arms-transfer activities (Security Council Report).

This reimposition of sanctions compounded with a currency collapse that had already been underway since the twelve-day war, and by January 2026 the rial had lost more than half of its value (Jazeera). As subsidies collapsed and merchants in Teheran's Grand Bazaar closed their shops, nationwide protests erupted on December 28, 2025, spreading to all 31 of Iran's provinces and drawing all students, laborers, and ethnic minority communities (Britannica, "2026 Iranian protests"). The government's crackdown, combined with an internet shutdown, has been described by UN officials as the deadliest response to domestic unrest since the 1979 revolution, with human rights monitors reporting myriad deaths and detentions (The New Humanitarian). Amid all of this internal turmoil, Israeli and American forces conducted a second, broader round of strikes of Iranian nuclear infrastructure in February 2026, accentuating on how the unresolved underlying nuclear dispute remains even as Iran's government faces unprecedented internal pressure (IAEA, government)

Problems Raised

Problem 1: An Unresolved and Unverified Nuclear Program

The central problem confronting the Council is that nobody, including the IAEA, can currently confirm the status of Iran's nuclear material. Before the June 2025 strikes, Iran had accumulated approximately 440 kilograms of uranium almost 60 percent of approximately three quarters of the technical work needed to reach weapons grade enrichment (Arms Control Association). Military strikes damaged conversion and enrichment facilities at Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan, but the IAEA has repeatedly reported that it has no verified information on where this stockpile is now stored or in what condition, and Iran had denied inspectors access for more than a year (IAEA). This ambiguity is dangerous in both directions: it may tempt further preventive strikes by Israel or the United States on the assumption that Iran is rebuilding a weapons option, while also leaving the international community unable to confirm whether Iran remains peaceful, as Tehran insists (Institute for Science and International Security). Without renewed inspection to break this flow, the Council has no reliable mechanism to prevent either a covert breakout or another unilateral round of military strikes (2025 UN Sanctions Reimposition).



Problem 2: Economic Collapse, Repression, and Humanitarian Fallout

The reimposition of UN sanctions has intersected with years of mismanagement to produce a currency and cost of living crisis that has, in turn, triggered the most severe unrest Iran has experienced in decades (Jazeera). Nationwide protest began from December 2025 spread to every province, and the government's crackdown involved a prolonged national internet shutdown and a security response that rights group describe as the most catastrophic since 1979, with controversial death tolls from thousands and tens of thousands of detentions (Britannica). Ordinary Iranians bear the cost that they themselves have never created: hospitals report shortages linked to sanctions on financial transfers, currency depreciation has eroded savings and wages, and the shutdown of the national information network cut off access to banking, remittances, and emergency communication for weeks (The New Humanitarian). The humanitarian toll is compounded by the reputational and political risk that further unrest could trigger foreign intervention, whether through opportunistic support for opposition factions or renewed military action, at a moment when the Iranian state is already at its most fragile state since the revolution (House of Commons Library).

International Actions

The Snapback of UN Sanctions



The E3's decision to trigger the snapback mechanism represented the most significant multilateral action taken against the Iran since the JCPOA was signed. Once signed in September 2025, it restored six prior Security Council resolutions covering nuclear-related restrictions, an arms embargo, and a ban on Iran's ballistic missile activity. The

United States welcomed the move as a necessary response to Iran's non-cooperation with the IAEA, while Russia and China, along with Iran itself, argued that the E3 had lost standing to invoke the mechanism and that the sanctions carry no legal force. This split has left the Council without a unified position: briefings on the nuclear file since the snapback have produced no consensus on next steps, and the practical effect has been to harden three separate camps, the E3 and United States on one side, Russia and China on the other, and Iran rejecting the process altogether, rather than producing a renewed negotiating framework.

Ceasefire between Iran and Israel

Both the June 2026 Twelve-Day War and the February 2026 strikes ended through American and Qatari mediation rather than through the Security Council itself, reflecting a pattern of bilateral or trilateral diplomacy, not multilateral bodies have managed the most acute escalations. The June 2025 ceasefire, phased over 24 hours to allow both sides to complete existing operations, held despite early violations on both sides (Al Jazeera). This kind of crisis diplomacy has proven effective at stopping active fighting but has not addressed the underlying nuclear dispute or established any lasting verification mechanism, meaning each ceasefire functions as a pause rather than a resolution, leaving the door open to renewed strikes, as occurred in February 2026 (IAEA).

Key Players

United States



The United States has been the most consequential outside actor in the crisis, directly striking Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025, supporting Israel's February 2026 follow up strikes, and publicly warning Tehran against further violence toward protesters (Al Jazeera). Washington has framed its position as favoring a negotiated outcome, stating it would

welcome new negotiations with Iran, while also backing the E3 led snapback and threatening further military action if Iran advances its nuclear program or continues its crackdown on demonstrators (U.S. Department of State).-

Israel

Israel considers Iran's nuclear program an existential threat and has demonstrated a willingness to strike preemptively, first in June 2025 and again in February 2026 (Britannica 12 day war) Israeli officials maintain that the program cannot be considered dismantled and have signaled they view continued strikes as necessary rather than exceptional, a position that keeps the risk of renewed conflict persistently high regardless of diplomatic developments elsewhere (IAEA).

Russia and China

Russia and China have positioned themselves as defenders of Iran's procedural rights within the Security Council, jointly proposing resolutions to extend the JCPOA related deadline and rejecting the legality of the E3's snapback (Security Council Report). Both states maintain economic and strategic ties with Tehran and have consistently opposed unilateral sanctions and military strikes, framing the crisis as a product of Western pressure rather than Iranian non-compliance, though neither has offered a concrete alternative framework for resolving the nuclear dispute (United Nations).

Iran

Iran maintains that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful and considers the snapback sanctions and recent strikes illegitimate (U.S. Department of State). Domestically, the government under President Masoud Pezeshkian faces its greatest legitimacy crisis since 1979, attempting simultaneously to negotiate from a weakened position abroad and suppress unprecedented unrest at home, a balancing act that has so far relied on repression rather than reform (Britannica)

Possible Solutions



Restoring IAEA Access and Verification



Any lasting effort to reduce tensions would depend on restoring the IAEA's ability to monitor Iran's uranium stockpile and verify where it is and what condition it is in. The Council could support a gradual return of inspectors, with limited sanctions relief being provided as Iran reaches specific verification milestones. This would give Iran a reason to cooperate without requiring the much more difficult goal of fully bringing back the JCPOA. Even limited monitoring could make the situation less uncertain, reducing concerns about possible covert weapon development while also lowering the risk of further preemptive strikes.

Coordinated Humanitarian Channels Independent of the Political Standoff

The Council and relevant UN humanitarian agencies should work to establish channels for medical and financial humanitarian assistance that remain functional regardless of the political dispute over sanctions, ensuring that ordinary Iranians are not made to bear the full cost of a standoff over enrichment levels and centrifuge counts. This could include exemptions for medical imports and remittance channels, along with independent monitoring of the crackdown on protesters by the UN Human Rights Council's existing fact finding mechanisms, to keep humanitarian relief separate from the unresolved nuclear and sanctions dispute

Glossary

Enrichment

The process of increasing the proportion of fissile uranium-235 in a sample, needed for both nuclear fuel and, at high levels, nuclear weapons

Snapback Mechanism

A provision of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 allowing JCPOA participants to reapply previous UN sanctions on Iran without being subject to a Security Council veto

JCPOA

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers that restricted Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief

IAEA

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN body responsible for verifying and monitoring nuclear programs worldwide

E3

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, acting jointly as European parties to the JCPOA

Breakout Time

The estimated time required for a state to produce enough weapons grade fission material for a single nuclear weapon

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