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"Navigating Snapback through October 2025: Scenarios and Strategic Outlook for Iran"

Taha Zeinali, Helyeh Doutaghi, Sara Larijani

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EDITORIAL

The original topic of this Research Bulletin was a set of articles, oriented around the theme: "The Arab-Iranian Region after the Ceasefire." Manifestly, that set of articles was mis-placed and mis-estimated. The Israeli/US genocide resumed by March 18, and continues at time of writing, alongside the loss of Syria to imperialist-sectarian proxies, the Lebanon front temporarily rendered quiet amidst the need for Hezbollah to look to its domestic legitimacy and to rebuilding its command-and-control structure after the Israeli decapitation attack, and Yemen resilient. To that end, this bulletin instead contains a policy briefing, separated into three contiguous components, entitled "Navigating Snapback through October 2025: Scenarios and Strategic Outlook for Iran," by Taha Zeinali, Helyeh Doutaghi, and Sara Larijani. The brief lays out possible scenarios and pathways for Iran to use the ongoing negotiations with the US to its advantage, sketching out how Iran might prevent "Snapback," protect its safe and its interests, and avoid a Libya scenario: disarmament and then dismemberment at the hands of the US/NATO.

Navigating Snapback through October 2025: Scenarios and Strategic Outlook for Iran
May, 2025

Taha Zeinali, Helyeh Doutaghi, Sara Larijani[1]

Executive Summary

As the fourth round of negotiations between Iran and the United States concludes in Oman, the potential remains for the use of the snapback mechanism by the E3 under UNSCR 2231. In this context, the US appears to be activating the full spectrum of its hybrid pressure strategy. This strategy combines escalated regional military deployments, the imposition of new sanctions during negotiations, European threats to initiate snapback, campaigns around maximalist demands—such as requiring Iran to give up enrichment—and coordinated media messaging invoking the prospect of "possible military action against Iran's nuclear facilities" should talks fail. These measures reflect a broader Western effort to shape the negotiating environment through coercion rather than lawful diplomacy, underscoring the urgency of a well-prepared strategic and legal response by Iran.

This policy analysis examines the complexities of the snapback mechanism and outlines Iran's strategic and legal options. It evaluates the procedural and political vulnerabilities of snapback within the frameworks of international law, multilateral diplomacy, and regional security dynamics. The analysis concludes that the reactivation of UN Security Council sanctions presents a significant threat. However, this threat extends beyond Iran's security and negotiating position, impacting the broader objectives of regional stability and international peace. The analysis is structured into six key sections:

1. The current geopolitical and negotiating context;
2. The legal architecture of the snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231 and the JCPOA;
3. Strategic forecasting outlines three primary scenarios:
    1. Non-activation of snapback, with four possible trajectories;
        a. Neutralization (extensive roadmap provided in section 4)
        b. Interim deal
        c. Comprehensive deal
        d. Alternative UN Resolution to extend
    2. Activation of snapback through two distinct pathways;
        a. Failed talks
        b. Snapback as further leverage
    3. Negotiation sabotage, encompassing covert operations and parallel escalatory measures by the Israeli regime and Western allies.
        a. US-Israeli military attack
        b. Israeli sabotage/covert operation
        c. Fabricated intelligence for IAEA
4. A legal and procedural roadmap for neutralizing snapback if triggered by the EU at the Security Council;
5. Addressing the remote but dangerous prospect of a "Libya model" and outlining how Iran can decisively resist such a coercive disarmament framework.

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6. Concluding remarks and a discussion of strategic outlook for Iran

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1. As of mid-April 2025, indirect US–Iran negotiations mediated by Oman have entered a critical phase, with the fourth round recently concluded amid growing pressure and strategic ambiguity. Tehran has proposed significant nuclear concessions—including capping enrichment at 3.67% and expanding IAEA oversight—yet the talks remain fragile due to the absence of reciprocal commitments on sanctions relief or non-withdrawal assurances from Washington. The Trump administration's reliance on coercive diplomacy—escalating sanctions, military deployments, and implicit threats of force—raises serious legal concerns under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and Article 52 of the Vienna Convention. Concurrently, Iran faces renewed E3 pressure, with threats to trigger snapback as the October UNSCR 2231 sunset deadline nears. These dynamics unfolded amid regional instability, including US strikes in Yemen, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, suspected sabotage in Iran, and a volatile reshuffling of the US foreign policy team. Despite diplomatic rhetoric, Washington's maximalist demands—echoing calls for a "Libya model"—have deepened mistrust. Iran remains engaged but cautious, aiming to avert snapback without compromising sovereignty. The weeks ahead will be pivotal for testing whether diplomacy can prevail or collapse under mounting pressure.

2. The snapback mechanism, embedded in both the JCPOA (paragraphs 36–37) and UNSCR 2231, allows any participating state to trigger the reimposition of UN sanctions by alleging "significant non-performance," bypassing the veto system and preventing a resolution aimed at continuing sanctions relief from passing. This structure, designed to ensure swift enforcement, effectively empowers any P5 member to unilaterally restore sanctions, with no meaningful recourse for Iran. This enforcement tool has proven deeply asymmetrical: only Iran faces substantive penalties, while violations by the E3 or the US—including Washington's 2018 withdrawal and illegal re-sanctioning—have carried no consequences. Iran retains the right to invoke the dispute mechanism, but lacks a binding remedy and faces escalating risks if it withdraws in protest. The 2020 US snapback attempt, made after exiting the JCPOA, was rejected by nearly all Security Council members, exposing the contested legal grounds and political isolation of such unilateral claims. Today, E3 threats to trigger snapback—despite their own prolonged non-compliance—underscore the mechanism's unequal coercive function and its departure from diplomacy. The October 18, 2025 sunset date marks the expiration of JCPOA-specific measures, after which the snapback mechanism will cease to exist—raising the stakes for all actors.

3. The analysis outlines the three main strategic scenarios Iran may face in 2025 regarding the activation or expiration of the snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231: (1) no party invokes snapback by its October expiration, thus terminating the UN sanctions framework and restoring Iran's full rights under the NPT; (2) the E3 triggers snapback, reimposing pre-JCPOA UN sanctions under Chap ter VII; and (3) negotiations are derailed by third-party sabotage, most likely initiated by the Israeli regime.

   Under the first scenario, Iran could proactively neutralize the snapback threat by maintaining careful but limited nuclear cooperation, leveraging political maneuvering, and solidifying alliances with Russia and China to deter unilateral action. Alternatively, Iran might pursue an interim agreement—a "less for less" arrangement—where it offers partial nuclear concessions and enhanced transparency in exchange for limited sanctions relief and a commitment from Western powers not to trigger snapback before UNSCR 2231 expires. Another possibility is a new comprehensive deal, where Iran accepts deeper and longer-term nuclear restrictions in return for

gradual sanctions relief. Though such an agreement may lack enforceable guarantees, leave Iran vulnerable to future US policy shifts, and undermine Iran's nuclear deterrence and leverage. Such an unequal, comprehensive deal will likely be interpreted by Iranian leadership as a threat to the nation's security. Notably, the snapback mechanism itself, viewed as an inherently unjust and one-sided measure, represents one of the most onerous and disadvantageous aspects of the JCPOA for Iran, rendering the country susceptible to intense pressure by 2025. A new imbalanced comprehensive agreement could be perceived by critics within Iran as even a less favorable deal compared to the JCPOA, serving as a stepping stone for adversaries' intent on imposing a Libya Model on Iran. An improbable extension or substitution of UNSCR 2231 represents an alternative avenue within this scenario. These pathways would allow Iran to avoid escalation, delay confrontation, and retain leverage, while the expiration of UNSCR 2231 would enable Iran to expand its international partnerships and assert its compliance with international law, even as Western unilateral sanctions continue.

In the second scenario, snapback may be activated either due to the collapse or stagnation of talks, or cynically used as leverage even after partial agreement, reinforcing perceptions of Western bad faith. The reimposition of UN sanctions on Iran, through successful invocation of the snapback mechanism, would certainly have economic effects, yet largely incremental, compared to the already US-led "maximum pressure" campaign and existing EU measures. While the formal return of a comprehensive UN sanctions regime—targeting Iran's nuclear, military, financial, and trade sectors—adds legal and diplomatic weight, its practical economic impact is marginal given that Iran's access to global markets, finance, and arms is already severely restricted by US secondary sanctions and widespread international overcompliance. The most profound consequences of snapback are diplomatic and geopolitical: it would symbolize the collapse of diplomacy, escalate tensions, and risk uncontrolled confrontation, which neither Iran nor most regional and European actors desire. For Iran, snapback represents a diplomatic setback and a security threat, likely provoking retaliatory steps and hardening its nuclear posture, while for Europe, it marks a failure of diplomacy with potential blowback for regional stability and European interests. Regional states, especially in the Persian Gulf, now prioritize de-escalation and economic stability, viewing renewed confrontation as contrary to their interests. Ultimately, snapback chiefly serves hawkish interests in Washington and Tel Aviv, closing diplomatic offramps and increasing the risk of escalation, while offering no benefits to the broader international community and threatening to deepen divisions within the UN Security Council itself. The paper cautions against distorted narratives used to pressure Iran and gain leverage. It highlights that, first, the economic impacts of UN sanctions are often overstated, while the ongoing effects of US measures are downplayed. Second, it points out that Iran is portrayed as the only country bearing the consequences of snapback, leaving all other stakeholders overlooked.

The third scenario introduces the possibility of external sabotage—ranging from military strikes or covert operations to fabricated intelligence reports— involving the Zionist regime, deliberately intended to provoke Iran and either preempt or justify snapback. These actions, while risky, may shift attention from diplomacy to crisis management, potentially paralyzing the Security Council and escalating into regional conflict. Iran must prepare not only to prevent snapback through calibrated engagement but also to counter destabilizing sabotage through assertive deterrence, alliance-building with Russia and China, and readiness to reframe the global narrative in its favor. Each scenario carries distinct legal, strategic, and diplomatic implications, and Tehran's ability to anticipate and shape these outcomes will be critical to preserving national sovereignty and long-term negotiating leverage.

4. The analysis includes a blueprint of how Iran can use diplomatic and legal means to push back against the activation of snapback by E3 members. From May to October 2025, Iran pursues a

calibrated, month-by-month strategy to prevent the activation of the snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231 and to neutralize any attempt by the E3 to place the issue on the UN Security Council's agenda. In May, under Greece's presidency, Tehran reaffirms its commitment to diplomacy, and secures Russian and Chinese backing to resist snapback. In June, with Guyana presiding, Iran undertakes symbolic nuclear de-escalation, concludes a safeguards deal with the IAEA and formally activates the JCPOA dispute mechanism to stall procedural escalation—while also building regional alignment and emphasizing multilateral legal norms. In July, under Pakistan's presidency, Tehran intensifies pressure on the E3 for reciprocal sanctions relief, capitalizes on transatlantic divisions, and coordinates asymmetric readiness with allied regional forces. By August, with Panama leading the Council, Iran emphasizes progress in negotiations, leverages procedural tools within the UNSC, and mobilizes support from BRICS and the Non-Aligned Movement. During the 80th session of the UN General Assembly in New York, Iran also introduces a resolution condemning the use of unilateral sanctions and the instrumentalization of the Security Council to universalize Western foreign policy objectives—framing snapback as an abuse of multilateralism.

September presents the highest risk, with the Republic of Korea—a close US ally—holding the presidency. Tehran engages in intensive lobbying both offensive and offering limited final concessions at the UNGA while working to delay any Council action past the October 18 deadline. October, with Russia assuming the presidency, offers Iran its strongest position: Tehran declares the expiration of UNSCR 2231 a legal and strategic victory, initiates steps to formalize interim agreements, and deepens its economic and security partnerships with Russia and China.

Legally, Iran relies on Rule 9 of the UNSC's Provisional Rules of Procedure, which requires Council consent to place any item—such as a snapback notification—on the agenda. If objected to, a procedural vote must be held under Article 27(2) of the UN Charter, requiring nine affirmative votes with no veto applicable. To block agenda adoption, Iran must secure 9 abstentions or "no" votes in the Council. While Pakistan, Algeria, and Sierra Leone are likely to align with Iran, the remaining non-permanent members—Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Panama, Slovenia, Somalia, and the Republic of Korea—pose a challenge. Success depends on intensive diplomatic lobbying and coordinated maneuvering by Iran (with support of Russia and China) to influence swing votes, particularly from Guyana, Panama, Slovenia, and Somalia. By reinforcing the procedural complexity of snapback and internationalizing its opposition through both the UNSC and UNGA, Iran constructs a multi-layered defense that combines legal legitimacy, geopolitical alliances, and institutional diplomacy.

5. A crucial component of the analysis focuses on the strategic risk that Western states –particularly the US and Israeli regimes– are trying to impose a 'Libya Model' on Iran: a comprehensive coercive framework to dismantle its nuclear and military infrastructures in exchange for promises of sanctions relief and normalization. In this scenario, snapback serves not merely as a legal mechanism of sanctions, but as a strategic tool to erode Iran's deterrence and force it into capitulation. Western strategies range from economic strangulation and diplomatic isolation to offering limited incentives in exchange for maximal concessions, and even integrating limited military strikes into broader pressure campaigns. Tehran views this as an existential red line, rejecting any outcome that imposes nuclear dismantlement or zero enrichment, as well as restrictions on its conventional defense capabilities or any limits on its asymmetrical strategies and regional alliances. Iran's counter strategy must too be multidimensional: maintaining credible deterrence and strategic ambiguity, leveraging alliances with Russia, China, and the Global South countries; initiating legal and political institutional frameworks to challenge sanctions globally– such as through BRICS or ICJ mechanisms. Domestically, Iran must reinforce the 'resistance economy', cushion the population against external shocks by adopting counters to neoliberal

policies, and ensure political unity can withstand pressure. Simultaneously, Tehran should delineate clear red lines in negotiations, uphold its strategic posture, and demonstrate that any attempt to force a Libya-like outcome will not only fail but provoke heightened regional instability. Preserving leverage, not surrendering it, remains essential to Iran's long-term security and sovereignty.

Key Recommendations

Maintain Strategic Flexibility and Anticipation
Iran should increase consultations with various stakeholders (including adversaries and allies) to anticipate likely scenarios and responses, gauge their red lines and establish its boundaries. Internally, it must reinforce economic resilience and political unity to prepare for worst-case outcomes. This includes bolstering the resistance economy and shoring up public trust.

Use Time as a Strategic Asset

The snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231 expires on October 18, 2025. The imperative is to reach this date without triggering snapback, stripping the West of a key instrument of multilateral coercion. To achieve this, Tehran must deploy a multi-pronged strategy: sustain diplomatic engagement and visible negotiation progress without crossing core red lines; preserve its nuclear posture in a way that signals restraint without capitulation; intensify outreach to non-permanent Security Council members to obstruct procedural advances; and, when necessary, consider activating the JCPOA's dispute resolution mechanism against the E3 to create a legal and political buffer. Above all, maintaining the active support of Russia and China within the Council remains essential to shield against unilateral maneuvers and ensure balance within the multilateral framework.

Pursue an Interim Agreement

Tehran should propose a calibrated, reversible set of nuclear concessions (e.g., capping enrichment, enhanced IAEA monitoring) in exchange for partial sanctions relief. The aim is to disarm snapback momentum politically, not surrender strategic leverage. Quiet signaling of severe responses (e.g., NPT withdrawal) if snapback is triggered reinforces deterrence.

Monitor UNSC Dynamics Proactively

Iran must not rely solely on veto powers. To block procedural adoption of a snapback agenda, Tehran needs at least nine votes against or abstaining—including support from non-permanent members like Pakistan, Algeria, and Sierra Leone, and influence over swing votes such as Panama, Guyana, Slovenia, and Somalia. Early and sustained diplomatic engagement is essential.

Prepare for Snapback Contingencies

If snapback proceeds, Iran must be ready with economic and nuclear response plans. This includes stockpiling essentials, expanding barter systems, deepening ties with non-Western states, and crafting a stepwise nuclear response (e.g., 60% enrichment, halting the Additional Protocol and significantly limited monitoring) that maintains deterrence while avoiding excessive escalation.

Counter the "Libya Model" Narrative

Iran must continue to reject any disarmament-for-relief paradigm. Strategic messaging should emphasize Iran's readiness for retaliation, its past diplomatic goodwill, and the destabilizing risks of Western coercion. Assertive, proportionate military responses to sabotage can reinforce this posture.

Preserve Deterrence While Avoiding Costs of Weaponization

Iran's security rests not on acquiring a nuclear weapon, but on credible latent capability. Sustained enrichment, advanced missile development, and regional alliances serve as key deterrents. Tehran should continue projecting that it has the capacity and willingness to escalate, without crossing legal as well as geopolitical thresholds and thereby incurring expenses associated with the weaponization process.

Expose and Challenge Israeli WMD and Advocate Legal Accountability

Iran should prioritize a counter-offensive strategy, leading an international legal and diplomatic campaign against Israel's unlawful and unchecked possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). Promoting the establishment of a comprehensive non-proliferation regime, including stringent limitations, sanctions and inspections under the international legal framework, is essential to address the actions of an apartheid regime, which has been extensively and credibly accused of violating international law and committing genocide and crimes against humanity. This initiative extends beyond Iran's national security interests and represents a collective international obligation to uphold regional and global stability, security, and adherence to established international legal norms.

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1. Introduction

As the geopolitical landscape continues to shift, this policy analysis takes a closer look at the complexities of the snapback mechanism through the lens of Iran's legal and strategic calculus. It outlines multiple scenarios and assesses their implications within the intersecting frameworks of international law, diplomatic alignments, and regional power dynamics. The paper aims to provide a strategic analysis of potential scenarios and outcomes regarding the activation of the UN "snapback" sanctions mechanism on Iran through October 2025. It assesses the legal, diplomatic, and strategic landscape surrounding the JCPOA and UNSCR 2231, evaluate risks of escalation, and outline Iran's options for navigating and neutralizing snapback threats while safeguarding its core interests.

The paper argues that while the E3 (UK, France, Germany) may attempt to trigger snapback before the October 2025 expiration of UNSCR 2231, Iran possesses significant procedural and diplomatic tools to neutralize this threat through a multi-layered strategy of legal maneuvering, alliance-building with Russia and China, and targeted engagement with non-permanent Security Council members. The paper cautions against distorted narratives used to pressure Iran and gain leverage. The analysis contends that the economic impact of reimposed UN sanctions would be largely incremental rather than transformative, given that Iran already faces comprehensive US secondary sanctions and widespread international overcompliance, though the psychological effects on market confidence and the Iranian currency could be substantial. The paper frames snapback not merely as an economic challenge but as a security threat that risks uncontrolled escalation harmful to all regional stakeholders—a narrative Iran should actively communicate to counterbalance perceptions that consequences are limited to Tehran alone. Hence, the snapback would symbolize diplomatic collapse, escalate tensions, and risk uncontrolled confrontation, contradicting the de-escalation priorities of Iran, Europe, and regional Persian Gulf states.

The paper presents a comprehensive examination of Iran's strategic options in the face of potential UN Security Council snapback sanctions. It includes examining three core scenarios: the expiration or neutralization of snapback, its invocation and the reimposition of sanctions, and the risk of negotiation sabotage leading to military escalation or fabricated pretexts. The analysis highlights the inherent injustice of the snapback process, the improbability of Iran accepting a "Libya model" disarmament, and the importance of Tehran's strategic patience, international engagement, and resistance to Western pressure. It is argued that Iran must pursue a multi-track strategy to neutralize the snapback, adopting an approach of measured concessions coupled with firm red lines. Central to the analysis is the warning that Iran must never cross its established red lines in negotiations, as capitulating to a "Libya model" of disarmament would place Iran in a more vulnerable position than snapback itself. Instead, the authors advocate for a flexible strategy combining calibrated nuclear restraint, procedural delays at the UN, strategic ambiguity regarding potential responses, and deepened partnerships with Russia, China, and Global South nations—effectively using time as a strategic asset to reach the October deadline when the snapback mechanism expires, while preserving Iran's deterrent capabilities and sovereignty.

The analysis begins by contextualizing the situation as of May 2025, then explores different scenarios related to either triggering or avoiding snapback, detailing how Iran plans to sidestep such a situation. Additionally, it examines the circumstances that might prompt Western states to activate the snapback process and the implications of those decisions for all involved. This report seeks to equip and inform policymakers, analysts, legal experts, and other interested readers with essential insights and recommendations, helping them grasp the complex dynamics at play as Iran faces urgent challenges and high-stakes negotiations.

2. Current Context (May 2025): Iran, the US, and the Shadow of Snapback

Beginning in April 2025, Iran and the United States are engaged in indirect negotiations aimed at de-escalating the nuclear standoff and sanction regimes. These talks – now concluding their fourth round – have been mediated through third parties (particularly with Oman playing a major role) and are taking place against a backdrop of high tensions and threats directed at Iran. The negotiations so far have yielded limited but notable progress on the nuclear front. Iran has signaled willingness to roll back certain nuclear activities in line with the original Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions (JCPOA) limits. In particular, Tehran has indicated it is prepared to cap uranium enrichment at 3.67% U-235 purity (the level permitted under the JCPOA) instead of the significantly higher levels it reached in recent years. Iran has also offered to restore expanded monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), granting inspectors greater access to nuclear sites to verify that its program remains peaceful. These steps, if implemented, would mark a substantial reduction of Iran's nuclear advancement since the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018.

Despite these encouraging signs on the technical nuclear issues, major gaps remain in the talks. There has been little substantive discussion yet on the lifting of US sanctions, which Iran insists upon, or on how to handle the impending UNSC snapback deadline. The US negotiating stance has so far focused on securing Iran's return to nuclear restraints, with American officials reportedly demanding that Iran halt enrichment beyond civilian energy needs and fully address IAEA verification concerns before any sanctions relief is granted. Washington's position has been reinforced by a campaign of pressure. The US President Donald Trump has issued explicit warnings that if Iran does not agree to acceptable terms, the US "will not hesitate to take action" to prevent Tehran from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon. This implicit and illegal threat of possible use of force (prohibited under 2.4 of UN Charter) or other aggressive measures underscores the urgency that the US attaches to the talks – and by extension, the seriousness of the snapback issue if diplomacy fails. It is also important to note that Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT)—specifically Article 52—a treaty is void if its conclusion has been procured by the threat or use of force in violation of international law. Although the US has not ratified the Convention, it acknowledges this provision as reflective of customary international law. From Iran's perspective, as a party to the VCLT, any negotiation conducted under the shadow of coercive threats—whether military or economic—raises serious questions about the validity and legitimacy of resulting agreements.

Iran, for its part, entered these negotiations seeking a path out of the impasse that would preserve its rights and security. Tehran's immediate objectives include averting further escalation, getting relief from unjust US sanctions, and heading off the re-imposition of UN sanctions. The Supreme Leader and other high-ranking Iranian officials have made it clear that Iran is prepared to reverse course on its nuclear expansion if its core interests are respected – notably, the economic benefits and lifting of sanctions promised under the JCPOA and assurances that the US will not again abandon any agreement. So far, the US has given no guarantee on either point (a "poison pill" issue given the US legal status and political climate), and discussions on sequencing sanctions relief have been minimal. As a result, the negotiations remain fragile.

It is important to review the recent interconnected developments in order to better understand the context. On April 30th, 2025, the US escalated its "maximum pressure" campaign by imposing fresh sanctions targeting Iranian oil and petrochemical traders, including seven entities and two tankers accused of illicit shipments. Donald Trump has directed the Treasury to drive Iran's oil exports to zero through aggressive enforcement. The UK, France, and Germany have indicated they stand ready to reapply all UN sanctions if negotiations collapse. Donald Trump has repeatedly warned that he will not hesitate to strike Iran if it defies US demands. Lastly, on April 26, a massive blast tore through Iran's Shahid Rajaee container port in Bandar Abbas, killing dozens and injuring hundreds. Iranian

officials say improperly stored chemicals in port containers caused the fire, but the catastrophe (which coincided with sensitive nuclear talks) fueled rumors of sabotage.

In parallel, the US launched a sustained aerial bombardment campaign against Yemen, in violation of Yemen's sovereignty, targeting the Ansarullah movement– an ally of Iran and one of the key forces within the West Asian Resistance Front. This military escalation came in response to Ansarullah's naval blockade in the Red Sea, which was aimed at vessels linked to Israel. Ansarullah's measures are to uphold its legal obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) which not only prohibit genocide but obligate states and actors to prevent and suppress it wherever it occurs. Yemen has invoked this framework as a form of third-party countermeasure against the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, which an increasing number of international legal experts, as well as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), have characterized as plausibly constituting acts of genocide; a legal assessment that is no longer meaningfully in dispute. On May 6, Oman announced a US-Yemen ceasefire. Under the deal, neither side would target the other, and the US declared that its bombing of Yemen would stop "effective immediately" in exchange for the Ansarullah's pledge to halt attacks on international shipping, except for Israeli linked ones.

In early May, Trump's administration abruptly reshuffled his foreign policy team. Donald Trump removed Mike Waltz as National Security Adviser (nominating him as US Ambassador to the U.N.) and named Secretary of State Marco Rubio as acting NSA. The planned fourth round of US–Iran negotiations (scheduled for the 3rd of May) was unexpectedly delayed (reportedly at Washington's request) and postponed to be held in Muscat on May 11th. Such sudden changes – along with unfilled posts – inject volatility into US policy and raise questions about how coherent or negotiable Washington's approach will be. Donald Trump publicly states that he wants a deal, in alleged contrast to warmongers in his administration and beyond who are pushing for a more restraining outcome. However, Steve Witkoff, Trump's top negotiator and his Special Envoy to the Middle East, just two days before the planned fourth round of indirect talks, almost completely reiterated what Iran hawks have been demanding. In a recent interview, Witkoff asserted that Iran should neither possess centrifuges nor engage in enrichment activities, emphasizing that there must be dismantlement of all enrichment facilities and there will be no expiration clauses for these restrictions. On Friday, May 9th, Steve Witkoff warned that if these demands were not agreed upon by May 11th, the US would halt the negotiations.

In the aftermath of the fourth round of indirect talks in Muscat—mediated by Oman—the US administration intensified its campaign to normalize these maximalist positions, repeatedly emphasizing, "That's our red line. No enrichment." This approach was clearly intended to challenge Iran's longstanding red lines and extract further concessions from Tehran. Consequently, the diplomatic landscape has become increasingly tense, with the fifth round of indirect US-Iran talks repeatedly delayed amid rising rhetoric and strategic maneuvering— ultimately scheduled for Friday, May 23rd, in Rome. In the days following Steve Witkoff's insistence on "zero enrichment" and the complete dismantlement of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, Tehran issued a forceful public rejection. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei denounced the US demands as "nonsense," declaring, "For them to say 'we won't allow Iran to enrich uranium' is utter nonsense; we are not waiting for anyone's permission." The Supreme Leader has basically reiterated that Iran would not accept any agreement that stripped it of its sovereign right to peaceful enrichment under the NPT framework.

The US maximalist demands largely align with those put forth by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, who referred to them as a "Libya-style" agreement – complete cessation of enrichment and the dismantling of Iran's nuclear program. Iranian officials have characterized the current US position as a non-starter and warned that any attempt to impose a "Libya-style" deal would lead to an immediate cessation of all voluntary transparency measures and possible withdrawal from the NPT altogether, heightening the risk of unchecked proliferation. These inconsistencies foster ambiguity in Tehran

regarding Washington's genuine motives, cultivating skepticism in both Iran and Europe concerning the US' dedication to achieving a diplomatic solution. In a recent interview Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said, "particularly on the issue of enrichment, there is a serious disagreement between us and the American side, and I don't think we can reach an agreement until this issue is resolved."

The "unreasonable and illogical positions" of the US administration, in Araghchi's words, unfold amid a shifting geopolitical landscape, as outlined above. The US has encountered a series of strategic setbacks—most notably its failure to neutralize Ansarullah in Yemen, escalating tensions with the regime in Tel Aviv, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Despite the Israeli regime's commission of grave atrocities and the imposition of a humanitarian catastrophe on Palestinian civilians, it has failed to achieve its principal objective of dismantling Hamas. These developments, coupled with the EU's absence from the negotiation table and attempts to reframe the regional narrative through targeted assassinations and exaggerated portrayals of Resistance Front losses (particularly in Syria), reflect a broader Western effort to obscure its own deteriorating position in West Asia.

This context sets the stage for a high-stakes, zero-sum showdown. Looming in the background of these developments and talks is the October 2025 deadline when UNSCR 2231's special provisions expire. Both Tehran and Western capitals are acutely aware that if no agreement is reached or clearly in sight by late 2025, the E3 (UK, France, Germany) could move to trigger the snapback mechanism before it lapses. However, invoking snapback now carries broader implications. It could deepen mistrust with US allies and unsettle global energy markets. Iran has already warned that US threats against its trade partners have bred "deep suspicion and mistrust" about Washington's sincerity. Moreover, snapback was deliberately designed to bypass the P5 veto; its unilateral invocation risks not only eroding the authority and credibility of the UN but also setting a dangerous precedent in the architecture of international governance—particularly at a time when multilateral institutions have already failed to uphold the most fundamental principles of international law in the wake of the atrocities committed since October 7th. Nonetheless, Iran must prepare for scenarios where even partial compromise might not prevent a snapback, as well as scenarios where deft diplomacy could run out the clock on snapback altogether. The current context is one of cautious engagement overshadowed by hard deadlines and harder bargaining. Iran has made an opening move by offering to scale down its nuclear program significantly, but the lack of reciprocal steps on US sanctions obligations raises questions about Western intentions. The snapback mechanism, due to expire in less than six months, hangs like a sword of Damocles – potentially unraveling all diplomatic efforts if triggered.

On the other hand, Washington and the capitals of the E3 continue to view a negotiated agreement as significantly more desirable than the implementation of snapback measures. They understand that reinstating sanctions may lead Tehran to limit access for the IAEA or potentially withdraw from the NPT, thereby depriving inspectors of oversight into Iran's nuclear program and heightening the risks associated with proliferation. Iranian officials have already threatened to expel inspectors if snapback is invoked. On May 21st, Seyed Abbas Araghchi warned again European countries against triggering the UN snapback sanctions mechanism, describing it as a "grave mistake" that would carry serious consequences. In addition, the Western leaders and experts concede that military strikes cannot guarantee destruction of Iran's hardened, dispersed facilities and would risk uncontrollable escalation. From the perspectives of the US and the E3, it is clear that there is no viable 'military solution' available, and the invocation of snapback mechanisms could trigger escalation, potentially leading to a regional conflict that neither party is equipped to manage. In contrast, a carefully calibrated agreement could incorporate enrichment provisions while maintaining verification measures, all at a relatively low political cost. The next section will explore the dynamics of the snapback mechanism, outlining its legal basis and political implications.

3. Understanding the Snapback Mechanism

3.1. Legal Basis and Process

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action: The 'snapback' mechanism was first introduced under JCPOA's Dispute Mechanism (paragraph 36-37). Under these terms, if Iran or any of the E3/EU+3 believes the other side is not meeting its commitments, the issue is first referred to the Joint Commission (15 days), and if unresolved, can escalate to Foreign Ministers (another 15 days), and optionally to a three-member Advisory Board (15 days) whose non-binding opinion is then reviewed again by the Joint Commission (5 days). If after this process the issue remains unresolved, the complaining party may cease performing its own commitments. However, all parties also have the right to notify the Security Council for 'significant non-performance'. At this stage, the Council has 30 days to adopt a resolution to continue sanctions relief. If no such resolution is adopted (which is assured if the complaining state or its allies veto it), all previous UN sanctions snap back into effect without requiring a new vote. In practical terms, given the veto power of the SC permanent members (US, Russia, China, France, UK), any of the 5 members will have the power to unilaterally ensure the reimposition of all previous UN sanctions against Iran.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231: The 'snapback' mechanism was also incorporated into the UNSCR 2231 (2015) – which endorsed the JCPOA – as a way to quickly reimpose UN sanctions if Iran 'significantly' violated the nuclear deal. The UNSC resolution, similarly to JCPOA, notes that in essence, any JCPOA participant state can notify the Security Council of a 'significant non-performance' by Iran, triggering a 30-day countdown. During this period, the Council must vote on a new resolution to continue Iran's sanctions relief. To pass, that resolution needs at least 9 of 15 votes and no veto by any permanent member. If such a resolution fails to be adopted – whether by veto or lack of majority – all prior UN sanctions automatically snap back into effect at the end of the 30 days. This snapback would 'reactivate previously terminated UN resolutions on Iran, scrub the JCPOA from the books, and reimpose all sanctions waived by that agreement'. Notably, Resolution 2231 built in this process to bypass the usual P5 veto hurdles, ensuring that a single participant's complaint could restore sanctions unless the Council affirmatively kept relief in place.

3.2. Sunsets in UNSCR 2231 and JCPOA

Under the pre-2015 UN sanctions, Iran was subject to comprehensive international restrictions – including a ban on all uranium enrichment and reprocessing, prohibitions on ballistic missile development and arms transfers, and freezes on key Iranian individuals' assets. These measures had been lifted or moderated by UNSCR 2231, with sunset clauses causing some restrictions to expire over time. Notably, the UN arms embargo and travel bans ended in October 2020, and missile/drone-related restrictions expired in October 2023. By October 18, 2025, ten years after the JCPOA's adoption day, the UN resolution endorsing the JCPOA will reach its 'Termination Day' meaning all JCPOA-specific UNSC measures expire. After that date, absent further action, no UN sanctions on Iran's nuclear program would remain and the snapback mechanism would cease to exist. This looming deadline in October 2025 has raised the stakes for all parties – especially Iran and the Western powers – to either resolve outstanding issues or potentially see a last-minute invocation of snapback to re-impose UN sanctions before the window closes.

3.3. Unequal Agreement and inherent injustice

The snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231 was designed to enforce compliance with the JCPOA by all participating States. However, in practice, it operates in a profoundly asymmetric and unjust

manner. Although UNSCR 2231 formally allows any JCPOA participant to trigger snapback if there is "significant non-performance" by another participant, the design of the sanctions regime means that only Iran faces meaningful penalties in the event of snapback. This makes the mechanism inherently unequal and one-directional. Punitive measures are directed solely at Iran, with no reciprocal consequences for Western noncompliance. This structural imbalance has been exposed by the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and the subsequent re-imposition of illegal unilateral sanctions, without any recourse or punishment being possible under the current system. Under these conditions, while Iran is entitled to initiate the same dispute resolution process as the E3/EU+3, the end of that path offers Iran no meaningful legal remedy that is binding—only the option to withdraw from the agreement, a move that would risk further isolation and potentially justify escalatory actions, including military threats, against the country. In effect, the JCPOA provides Iran with no mechanism to enforce compliance or demand accountability from other parties. By contrast, the E3/EU+3 retain exclusive authority to reimpose all UN Security Council sanctions against Iran, without Iran's consent or recourse. This unequal power agreement reflects the asymmetry rooted in the broader unequal power dynamic through which the JCPOA was negotiated. While Western powers wield enforcement tools backed by international law (Chapter VII of UN Charter which is legally binding on all UN members), Iran is left with political procedures that offer no concrete leverage.

3.4. Invocation of Snapback under Trump's first term and Contested Interpretation

In August 2020, the US – which had withdrawn from the JCPOA in 2018 – attempted to invoke snapback. The US argued it still had the right to do so because Resolution 2231's text listed the US as a JCPOA 'participant' and did not explicitly remove that status if a country ceased compliance with the deal. The US notified the Council of Iranian non-compliance, seeking to restore all UN sanctions. However, this move and the US legal interpretation, was widely rejected. All other JCPOA participants (Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, Iran, and the EU) and the majority of UNSC members asserted the US had no legal standing as a 'party to the agreement' to trigger snapback after leaving the accord. With the Council in open disagreement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres indicated the UN would not consider sanctions reimposed because the US was alone in its claim. Indeed, no other UN member state moved to enforce the purported snapback sanctions in 2020, rendering the unilateral US declaration ineffective. The Biden administration in February 2021 formally reversed the US snapback attempt, withdrawing the notification and acknowledging that the 2020 effort "had no legal effect".

3.5. The E3 Threats of Snapback

The E3's invocation of snapback is both politically hypocritical and legally untenable. Following the US unilateral withdrawal and launching of a "maximum pressure" campaign that imposed unprecedented sanctions far exceeding pre-2015 measures, the European parties failed to deliver even minimal economic relief promised under the deal (e.g., INSTEX transactions totaled a mere €20 million against pledged billions). For a period of 12 months following the US' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018, the Islamic Republic of Iran maintained full compliance with its nuclear-related obligations under Annex I. This adherence persisted despite the US sanctions' snapback including the US Treasury's reimposition of extraterritorial secondary sanctions through Executive Order 13846 on August 6, 2018, and the European Union's failure to operationalize INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges) as required under JCPOA Paragraph 26. Paragraph 26 of the JCPOA preamble explicitly obligates signatories to "ensure Iran's access in areas of trade, technology, finance, and energy" through "effective financial mechanisms.", which created the legal foundation for INSTEX's establishment. The EU simultaneously re-imposed sanctions on Iran

Shipping Lines (IRISL) in 2020 – an entity delisted on JCPOA Implementation Day – directly violating Paragraph 26's prohibition on "new nuclear-related sanctions". These measures together with the "failure of INSTEX" demonstrated European non-compliance with JCPOA. Internal EU documents cited in reports acknowledge INSTEX's limitations as a "political signaling tool" rather than a viable sanctions-offsetting mechanism, contravening the JCPOA's binding economic provisions.

As the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York stated in his letter to the UNSC, "the E3 has repeatedly and egregiously failed to meet its obligations under paragraph 20 of Annex V of the JCPOA, displaying a persistent pattern of non-compliance. The E3's refusal to implement its sanctions-lifting commitments on Transition Day of 18 October 2023 constitutes a clear breach of the JCPOA and UNSCR 2231, a violation that continues unabated." Conversely, Iran initiated phased non-compliance measures in May 2019 – 365 days after the US withdrawal – as expressly permitted under JCPOA Article 26 (page 20): "Iran has stated that if sanctions are reinstated in whole or in part, Iran will treat that as grounds to cease performing its commitments under this JCPOA in whole or in part." Iran's actions were thus not a breach of the JCPOA, but rather a lawful exercise of its rights under the agreement.

Iran's partial compliance breaches occurred *after* and *in response to* this Western systemic non-performance, rendering accusations of "significant non-performance" a cynical distortion of causality. The JCPOA's snapback mechanism, weaponized by states that actively sabotaged the agreement, epitomizes its structural asymmetry: Iran alone faces enforceable penalties, while Western powers face no accountability for undermining the deal's foundational bargain. To punish Iran for defending its interests after years of unilateral violations is not only unjust but exposes the JCPOA as a tool of coercion, not diplomacy.

4. Scenarios for 2025 Snapback Activation

From Iran's strategic perspective, it is important to assess under what circumstances the West cannot or will not activate snapback versus when they can and likely will – and how Tehran can influence or respond to those outcomes. Iran faces two scenarios. One in which an unfriendly JCPOA participant (likely, given recent developments, to be the UK or France) triggers snapback before the termination date (reimposing international sanctions under Chapter VII). And one in which no snapback invokes, and UN sanctions relief simply continues post-2025, and the snapback mechanism will expire alongside the opportunity to ever reimpose those sanctions against Iran. Each scenario carries different legal, diplomatic, and strategic implications for Iran. This section examines situations for both results, along with intermediate possibilities. Crucially, both main scenarios must be considered in combination with the possible outcome of the ongoing maximum pressure, ongoing negotiations, and military threats over the next few months. The possible outcomes could be an interim deal (less for less), a comprehensive deal, a military attack or major sabotage, or no deal. Below we explore the scenarios. A summary of the potential scenarios, their implications for Iran, and the strategic calculus underpinning each outcome is provided below.

Scenario	Explanation	Implications for Iran

Scenario 1: No Snapback Invoked	*UNSCR 2231 and JCPOA restrictions expire in October 2025 without snapback activation.*	*Iran regains full rights under the NPT, free from UNSC nuclear constraints.*
1.1: Snapback Neutralization	- Tehran proactively undermines snapback via legal/diplomatic maneuvers. - Balances minimal IAEA cooperation with procedural delays and alliance-building (Russia/China).	Legal/political victory: Ends UNSC nuclear restrictions. Expands economic/security/ military ties (Russia, China). Unilateral sanctions persist, but Western legitimacy weakens.
1.2: Interim Agreement	- Limited nuclear concessions (e.g., enrichment caps) for partial sanctions relief. - Delays snapback but avoids irreversible commitments.	Temporary relief: Preserves leverage for future talks. Risks Western backtracking; seen as pragmatic yet insufficient.
1.3:Comprehensive Deal (JCPOA 2.0)	- Coercive Western framework with stricter nuclear limits (no sunsets) and gradual sanctions relief. - Framed as a diluted "longer and stronger" deal favoring the West.	Asymmetric burden: Erodes deterrence, invites domestic backlash. Risks entrenching US withdrawal threats without binding guarantees.
1.4: Alternate UN Resolution	- UNSC adopts a new resolution extending/modifying restrictions to avoid snapback. - Requires unprecedented P5 consensus (US-Russia-China alignment).	High-risk gamble: Avoids snapback but legitimizes new Western demands.
Scenario 2: Snapback Invoked	*E3/US trigger snapback before October 2025, reimposing all pre-JCPOA UN sanctions.	Iran is labeled "non-compliant"
2.1: Snapback via Failed Talks	- Talks collapse or stall by mid-2025; West claims "diplomatic exhaustion."	Marginal economic effects are expected due to the existing US-led "maximum pressure"

	- Snapback activated to pressure Iran into capitulation. - Iran leverages Russian/Chinese support to delegitimize snapback, hardening resistance.	campaign, though the psychological impact is altering expectations and causing short-term economic effects. Profound diplomatic and geopolitical consequences are likely—not only for Iran, but for the entire region and beyond; a risk of uncontrolled escalation that could harm both regional and global stakeholders. Extortion narrative: Hardens domestic resolve, strengthens anti-West alliances. Risks further escalation if sanctions relief is withheld. Iran will diversify partners (relying on Russia/China lifelines), emphasize its "resistance economy," and rally Global South opposition to unfair sanctions
2.2: Snapback as Leverage	- West weaponizes snapback despite Iranian compliance to extract concessions. - Iran retaliates by exposing Western unreliability and rallying allies.	
Scenario 3: Negotiation Sabotage	*Third-party actions (e.g., Israeli strikes, fabricated intelligence) derail diplomacy, triggering snapback or military conflict.*	*Iran shifts focus to deterrence and asymmetric retaliation.*
3.1: US-Israeli Military Strike	- Direct strikes on nuclear facilities under the pretext of preventing weaponization. - Snapback becomes secondary to regional war dynamics.	Existential threat: Mobilizes regional allies, withdraws from NPT. Paralyzes UNSC through deadlock; global backlash against Israel/US. A shift in Iran's nuclear doctrine toward weaponization is highly likely.
3.2: Israeli Sabotage/Cyberattacks	- Covert operations (e.g., assassinations, cyberattacks) disrupt talks. - West frames Iran as the aggressor to justify snapback.	Provocation narrative: Counters with asymmetric warfare (proxy strikes, cyber retaliation). Divides EU-US cohesion; strengthens Iran-Russia-China axis.

3.3: Fabricated Intelligence	- False "weaponization" reports prompt snapback. - Iran exposes collusion, threatens NPT withdrawal while retaining IAEA ties.	Pretext for escalation: Rally Global South support, retain diplomatic off-ramps. Risks accelerated nuclear deterrence if the UNSC process continues.

Scenario 1: No Snapback Invoked – UNSCR 2231 and JCPOA Restrictions Expire

In the first scenario, no party triggers snapback by October 18, 2025. On this date, UNSCR 2231 and special UN restrictions related to the JCPOA will end. This outcome means there will be no active UNSC sanctions on Iran's nuclear program, effectively closing the Security Council's case on the issue. After UNSCR 2231's expiration, the legal basis for re-imposing UN sanctions disappears; snapback attempts post-termination would be null. Essentially, Western powers lose the snapback option by default on 'Termination Day', once the JCPOA-era resolution sunsets. Thus, if the deadline arrives without action, Iran will gain a stronger position to resist future pressure. This scenario requires political and diplomatic means, meaning the US and E3 would be unable to trigger snapback even if they wanted to. The following outlines four pathways through which such an outcome could materialize.

1.1. Expiration of Snapback (Neutralization)

In a hypothetical best-case scenario, parallel to any interim talks, Tehran would implement a proactive doctrine aimed explicitly at nullifying the snapback threat. Iranian strategists would pursue a multi-track campaign combining political, legal, and diplomatic maneuvers. On the compliance front, Iran would maintain a minimal but careful cooperation with the IAEA – enough to avoid giving the Security Council an obvious trigger for snapback, but without fully reversing its advances. Politically, Iran would work to fracture the consensus among the US, UK, France, and Germany. Tehran might highlight divisions over unrelated regional issues or economic ties to undercut US/E3-EU unity, and use public and private diplomacy to sow doubt about the wisdom of snapback. Iran's leadership would also court its Security Council allies – especially Russia and China – to make clear that any unilateral move to trigger the reimposition of sanctions would exacerbate the fragmentation of the Security Council's decision-making authority and risk entrenching a structural deadlock reminiscent of the paralysis seen during the Cold War era. As a strategic measure, the three states should underscore the accelerating shift toward alternative international governance structures—most notably through the BRICS framework—as a credible and expanding platform for equitable multilateralism. At the UN, Iran could press for a presidential statement (or at least public statements) emphasizing negotiation over sanctioning, turning Security Council dynamics against an easy snapback resolution. Behind the scenes, Iran might couple these legal and diplomatic efforts with firm deterrence signals. For instance, discreet backchannel messages to EU capitals and Persian Gulf states could underline that further escalation would invite response, reinforcing the costs of unilateral action against Iran. In short, Iran's doctrine would be dynamic and assertive. By juggling limited compliance with savvy international maneuvering, Tehran would raise the political and legal costs of triggering snapback. Far from a passive stance, this strategy is a calculated initiative to manipulate the timeline and keep snapback off the table. (This multi-layered strategy will be expanded upon in section Five of the analysis.)

1.2. Interim Agreement (or Diplomatic Breakthrough)

There is a scenario where Iran manages to forestall snapback without unilaterally returning fully to JCPOA conditions in exchange for partial sanctions relief. This essentially involves an interim, "less for less" arrangement, a JPOA 2.0 (Joint Plan of Action) or tacit understanding where Iran addresses

enough of the West's urgent concerns to deprive them of a rationale to trigger UN sanctions, yet Iran does not surrender all of its leverage or receive full sanctions relief upfront. Such an agreement might include limited extension of some of the JCPOA's sunsets regarding the current nuclear limits beyond 2026. This scenario may be the most realistic pathway for Iran to navigate mid-2025, given the limited time and deep mistrust on both sides. In crafting such an outcome, Iran can look to historical analogues. For example, in 2013, the JPOA (interim nuclear accord) froze parts of Iran's program in exchange for modest sanctions relief, paving the way for the JCPOA in 2015. A 2025 interim deal could play a similar role, essentially postponing the showdown. For Iranian policymakers, this scenario is essentially a balancing act – avoid provocation, offer just enough, and keep the big picture (final deal vs. national resistance) in flux until a more favorable moment.

In this scenario, Iran would voluntarily dial back key nuclear activities to a significant extent. For example, Iran could cap enrichment at 3.67% and maintain its stockpile of enriched uranium under IAEA seal (in the country). This step, which Iran is already hinting at offering, would substantially lengthen Iran's "breakout time" and address the proliferation risk that most worries the West. Iran could also stop operating its more advanced centrifuges and perhaps even remove and store a number of them under IAEA seal. It must not dismantle them (as a full JCPOA return would require), but simply not use them for now – a reversible but confidence-building step. Critically, Iran might resume implementation of the Additional Protocol and other enhanced inspections, allowing the IAEA to verify these limits robustly. More transparency would directly tackle Western fears of covert activities and help resolve outstanding safeguards questions.

In exchange for these measures – which fall short of full JCPOA compliance but are meaningful – Iran would seek certain concessions from the other side to solidify the snapback standstill. These could include legally binding clauses in any interim agreement that provides assurances from the Western parties that the UN's snapback mechanism will not be invoked before UNSCR 2231 sunsets in October 2025. It also must include sanctions relief to signal reciprocity. While the US may not be willing (or legally able, given its domestic politics) to lift all sanctions without a bigger deal, there could be steps such as unfreezing all Iran's funds abroad, issuing sanctions waivers for oil sales or electricity exports, waiving of secondary sanctions, etc. The EU could also effectively (re)activate INSTEX or other financial mechanisms to ensure providing a legal framework for European nations to enable trade with Iran.

For Iran to successfully execute this strategy, it must calibrate its concessions just right: enough to satisfy the minimum demands of the E3/US, but not so much that it gives all its leverage away for peanuts. The tricky part is that Western hawks might accuse Iran of "JCPOA minus" as a trap to get past 2025 and then resume problematic activity. Iran would need to maintain credibility by sticking to the interim limits and continuing diplomacy, so the E3 feel politically shielded from US hardliners pressure to snapback. It is a delicate balance. Tehran would also want to ensure that any interim steps it takes are reversible in case the other side reneges (for example, it could keep the removed centrifuges on standby and only suspend, not ratify, Additional Protocol again until a final deal).

There are, of course, risks and downsides. First, the interim deal might never lead to a final deal, and Iran could find itself constrained in the long term by self-imposed limits while still under many US sanctions. Iran could end up in a protracted interim state. Second, by not snapping back, the West loses leverage, but Iran also loses the incentive the West might have had to offer big sanctions relief to avoid snapback. In other words, if snapback is off the table due to Iran's partial compliance in exchange for partial sanctions relief, the urgency for the US to lift sanctions might diminish, leaving Iran still economically strangled by unilateral sanctions. In Washington, critics will say Iran is just gaming the sunsets. In Tehran, critics will say the West is pocketing nuclear concessions and will never lift sanctions. A collapse of the interim deal after October 2025 (when snapback is no longer possible) could leave Iran in a vulnerable spot – with its nuclear program restrained by its own promises but no

prospect of UN leverage against the West. Lastly, Israel and the US hawks most likely will not be satisfied with a partial deal and could take unilateral action (like covert sabotage or even strikes on nuclear facilities) if they feel Iran still retains nuclear potential. Tehran would have to manage the regional optics and strengthen its deterrence from a much stronger position.

On balance, however, many Iranian strategists likely view some form of interim agreement as the most pragmatic outcome to pursue. It prevents an escalation to snapback or war in 2025 while preserving Iran's dignity better than a rush back to 'full' unilateral JCPOA compliance would. For Iranian policymakers, the chief merit of the interim agreement is its de-escalatory effect. By trading limited compliance steps for concrete relief, Tehran would gain a degree of flexibility and undermine the snapback mechanism and render it functionally obsolete. The agreement would delay a sharp confrontation, making it politically and legally more difficult for opponents to suddenly reimpose UN sanctions.

1.3. Comprehensive Deal (JCPOA 2.0)

By mid-2025, the US and E3 may succeed in securing a new comprehensive agreement with Iran—not a return to the JCPOA, but an updated and customized framework that includes deeper concessions, particularly on sunset clauses, inspections, and enrichment limits for Iran. The Western side will present this as a sufficient safeguard against Iran's nuclear advancement, effectively removing the need to trigger the snapback mechanism. From Iran's standpoint, however, this outcome reflects an agreement reached under conditions of coercion, including the looming threat of snapback, coupled with constant military pressure and a strategic communications campaign portraying Iran as weak, significantly narrowing Iran's bargaining space. The resulting deal thus resembles a diluted version of the Biden administration's "longer and stronger" formula—demanding stricter limits without sunsets (e.g., restoring the stockpile limits on enriched uranium and heavy water and surrendering all enriched uranium stockpiles above the JCPOA limits to a third country, restricting uranium enrichment to no more than 3.67 percent, dismantling advanced centrifuges, and extending monitoring) and yet failing to provide verifiable and sustainable full sanctions relief (instead, providing gradual sanctions relief contingent on verified compliance across all areas) and guarantees against future US withdrawal.

Critically, Iran would still face the risk of US withdrawal due to the lack of legal mechanisms to bind Washington long-term, especially without Congressional ratification. In practice, the US may offer sanctions relief through executive waivers, but legal constraints imposed by Congress will block full, sustainable sanctions removal. This agreement will be packaged by the West as a diplomatic win for all sides as well as for the 'international community', despite its structural asymmetrical and fragile foundations. Some political figures in Iran who are less skeptical of Western counterparts may view it as a means to deter the threat of war and the snapback of the UNSCR sanctions, thus providing a degree of economic relief. Notably, the snapback mechanism itself, viewed as an inherently unjust and one-sided measure, represents one of the most onerous and disadvantageous aspects of the JCPOA for Iran, rendering the country susceptible to intense pressure by 2025. A new imbalanced comprehensive agreement could be perceived by critics within Iran as even a less favorable deal compared to the JCPOA, serving as a stepping stone for adversaries' intent on imposing a Libya Model on Iran. Hence, a comprehensive agreement that lacks guarantees along with sustainable and verifiable sanctions relief—which could undermine Iran's nuclear deterrence and leverage—will likely be interpreted by Iranian leadership as a threat to the nation's security.

1.4. Alternate UN Resolution or Extension

A more remote scenario is an attempt to formally extend or replace UNSCR 2231 before October 2025 in order to avoid both expiration and snapback. In theory, the UNSC could adopt a new resolution to carry on certain restrictions (like enrichment restrictions) for a further period, giving more time for talks. However, this would require US-Russia-China agreement which is currently elusive. Alternatively, if an interim nuclear arrangement is reached, the UNSC could bless it with a new

resolution that supersedes 2231, thus solving the sunset issue and making snapback unnecessary. While this is complex diplomatically, European members might float such ideas if snapback looms and no final deal is ready. Iran would have to consider if it would welcome a technical extension (which keeps some UN limits but no new sanctions) or reject it on principle. Iranian leadership has consistently opposed reopening UNSCR 2231, viewing any new resolution as a potential vehicle for introducing unwelcome conditions or diluting existing commitments. s. However, if the alternative is snapback, Tehran might find an extension secured through a swift UNSC vote (with Russia/China support) as the more tolerable course within a constrained set of options for the time being. l. This scenario's plausibility largely depends on unprecedented P5 cooperation, which in the current global climate is difficult – but not impossible if all sides desperately seek to avoid a breakdown.

2. Implications: No Snapback Invocation

The implications of success in this scenario are significant. This will be a huge legal and political victory for Iran. Once UNSCR 2231 terminates without snapback, the immediate legal implication is that Iran would be under no UNSC obligation to restrict its nuclear activities beyond basic NPT requirements. Iran would revert to being treated like any normal Non-Proliferation Treaty member-state in terms of UN mandates (subject only to voluntary or agreed upon IAEA safeguards). Iran's activities such as advanced enrichment, heavy-water reactor development, or missile tests – which were previously flagged by 2231 – would no longer violate UN edicts. Iran will have a far broader diplomatic maneuvering space. Iran's diplomatic strategy would likely focus on consolidating economic and security ties with countries willing to ignore US sanctions. Iran can more confidently sign trade and military deals with Russia, China, and regional partners (who would be even more justified in defying US secondary sanctions once UN sanctions are gone). We may see increased arms purchases (advanced fighter jets, air defense systems, etc.). Iran could also use the absence of UN sanctions as a public relations tool, inviting international investment or cooperation by saying "There are no binding international legal constraints impeding any cooperation with Iran—only the exertion of unilateral pressure and coercive tactics by a declining United States seeking to preserve its remaining dominance through extralegal means." This might not bring Western companies back (as they would still fear US penalties), but it could sway some smaller states or enterprises to engage with Iran for niche needs.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that unilateral/Western sanctions would persist. The expiry of UN sanctions does not affect the existing US sanctions regime including the "Maximum Pressure" campaign. Likewise, other European states are poised to maintain their own sanctions. In fact, Britain, France and Germany have announced they would "maintain nuclear proliferation-related measures on Iran, as well as arms and missile embargoes, after ... Transition Day on 18 October 2023" due to Iran's alleged JCPOA breaches. The E3/US, having failed to snap back sanctions "despite their will," would leverage more aggressive unilateral or ad hoc coalition sanctions and may even resort to other means of pressure. Tehran can assert that it is in full compliance with international law (since no UN resolution is being violated) and that any remaining sanctions are unilateral and unlawful and therefore lack universal legitimacy. Iran could move in international forums to undermine those unilateral sanctions. Overall, the best case for Iran is that, by averting snapback, it forces the West to accept a more balanced negotiation in 2026 without Tehran being held at sanctions' gunpoint. The worst case is that the West, frustrated by losing the snapback tool, shifts to a more confrontational strategy outside the UN framework. Iranian policymakers must evaluate and anticipate these consequences with caution.

Scenario 2: Snapback Invoked – UN Sanctions Reimposed

In this scenario, at least one remaining JCPOA participant (it will only be one of the E3 at this point) formally notifies the UNSC of Iran's 'significant non-compliance' in a calculated timing before October 2025, causing the snapback mechanism to activate. Reports by Reuters indicate that the E3 diplomats

are indeed looking to (or threatening to) trigger snapback by August if no substantial deal can be found by then. On March 13, 2025, Britain warned that 'it would trigger a return of UN sanctions on Iran, if needed, to prevent it from getting a nuclear weapon'. Essentially, if by mid-2025 there is no clear deal and/or Iran remains out of full compliance, the E3 and the US will be unwilling to let the October deadline pass. Notably, the snapback might be invoked either if there is no deal by mid-2025 or an interim deal is reached without sufficient guarantees for Iran's full compliance from the perspective of the Western powers. In any of these cases, the snapback mechanism to prevent the expiration of UN sanctions will be weaponized in order to change the negotiating table in favor of the West.

2.1. Negotiations Fail or Stall

If the ongoing talks collapse or reach a stalemate by early summer 2025, the case for snapback strengthens. Western leaders will argue that Iran is in "significant non-performance" of its commitments and that diplomatic avenues have been exhausted. Even absent a formal collapse, a lack of substantial progress by late spring could lead the E3/US to decide that waiting is too risky. They will not want to be caught in September 2025 with Iran still in breach and no time left to re-impose sanctions. Some US think thanks urge encouraging the Europeans to invoke snapback by May 2025 at the latest, if Iran has not capitulated to acceptable terms. Should the US advocate for a comprehensive agreement accompanied by maximalist demands that exceed Iran's established red lines, such a scenario is highly plausible. While engaging in active diplomacy to avert this situation represents a prudent strategy, it is essential for Iran to remain vigilant. Given the mixed signals and approaches exhibited by the Trump administration, Iran must prepare for the possibility that hardliners within the Trump administration will take precedence in shaping Washington's policy toward Iran, potentially overextending US leverage and ultimately hindering the negotiation process.

2.2. Snapback as Leverage (despite Interim Agreement)

For the Islamic Republic of Iran's leadership, an interim nuclear agreement by mid-2025 was meant to prove good faith and secure sanctions relief. However, in this scenario, Western powers (led by the US and E3) refuse to deliver promised sanctions relief or parity on compliance. Tehran expects that the West will cynically invoke UNSCR 2231 snapback even after a deal – not because Iran renounces the accord, but simply to squeeze more concessions out of it. In effect, snapback is seen as an extortionate tactic, reinstating sanctions to keep Iran constrained and extract deeper concessions (for instance on enrichment levels or regional deployments).

2.3. Implications of Snapback Invocation

If any of the outlined conditions are fulfilled and the choice to activate the snapback mechanism is decided, theoretically the timeline moves forward according to the following illustrative scenario: either France or the UK commences the procedure by formally informing the Joint Commission of the JCPOA about Iran's alleged "significant non-performance" (Day 0). The Commission is afforded a 15-day period to resolve the dispute (Days 0–15). If the matter remains unresolved, it escalates to the Foreign Ministers, who are granted an additional 15 days to address the issue (Days 15–30), followed by a 15-day assessment by a neutral Advisory Board (Days 30–45). Subsequently, the Joint Commission deliberates the Board's recommendations for 5 days (Days 45–50). If the resolution is successfully placed on the agenda, there are three potential pathways through which UN sanctions on Iran may be reimposed:

1. a negative vote by nine or more Council members opposing the continuation of sanctions relief;
2. the exercise of a veto by one of the permanent members—most likely the US, France, or the UK; or
3. inaction by the Council, resulting in the resolution not being adopted within the prescribed time frame.

Importantly, a failure to adopt the resolution due to majority opposition—without recourse to a veto—can serve as a powerful political message against Iran. It signals that sanctions relief lacks broad support within the Council, rather than being unilaterally blocked by a single permanent member. In either case—whether through the use of a veto or nine negative votes—the resolution would not pass. Under the terms of the JCPOA and Security Council Resolution 2231, failure to adopt the resolution within the 30-day window results in the automatic reimposition of all previously lifted UN sanctions on Iran (Day 50-80).

The successful invocation of the snapback mechanism would re-activate a prohibition on Iranian enrichment-related activities and reprocessing. (Iran would be demanded to suspend all enrichment, as per UNSC Resolutions 1737 and 1929, something it has categorically refused in the past.) It automatically triggers the re-imposition of a comprehensively structured sanctions regime against Iran. These measures, originally outlined in a series of Security Council resolutions—1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, and 1929—target the critical nuclear, military, financial, and trade sectors of the country.

Specific Sanctions Triggered

- *Resolution 1696* (2006) laid the groundwork for subsequent measures by demanding that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. It marked the first formal effort to address Iran's non-compliance with international nuclear obligations.

- *Resolution 1737* (2006) introduced targeted sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans on individuals and entities linked to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. It also prohibited the export of nuclear-related technologies, materials, and dual-use items that could contribute to Iran's nuclear program.

- *Resolution 1747* (2007) expanded sanctions to include a complete ban on the export of arms from Iran and imposed restrictions on the import of arms into the country. These measures significantly curtailed Iran's ability to engage in military trade and reinforced its international isolation in the defense sector.

- *Resolution 1803* (2008) strengthened financial restrictions by urging states to exercise heightened vigilance in transactions involving Iranian financial institutions, particularly Bank Melli and Bank Saderat. These measures aimed to disrupt the financial networks supporting Iran's nuclear and missile programs and placed additional constraints on its economy.

- *Resolution 1929* (2010) represented the most comprehensive set of sanctions, targeting a wide range of activities. It imposed strict limitations on Iran's ballistic missile program, authorized cargo inspections to prevent the transfer of prohibited items and implemented extensive financial and commercial restrictions. This resolution specifically targeted the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its affiliated entities and individuals, recognizing their central role in Iran's nuclear and military activities.

Furthermore, while the UNSC resolutions have been adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter—thereby rendering them legally binding upon all UN member states—it is essential to emphasize that the Council has consistently acted pursuant to Article 41 of Chapter VII. This provision authorizes the Council to impose measures not involving the use of armed force in order to enforce its decisions. Such measures may include the complete or partial interruption of economic relations, as well as rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, along with the severance of diplomatic relations. Crucially, Iran has never been formally designated by the Security Council as "a threat to international peace and security" under these resolutions. Moreover, none of the sanctions

imposed on Iran were adopted under Article 42 of the Charter, which authorizes the use of military force. This reaffirms that the Council has never taken any measures that would authorize, endorse, or legally qualify the use of armed force against Iran.

The measures of the UNSC resolutions on Iran's nuclear case were implemented progressively across the resolutions, with each subsequent resolution expanding and strengthening the UN sanctions regime against Iran. However, since 2018, Iran has faced a US-led "maximum pressure" campaign, which has subjected the country to extensive unilateral, secondary, and extraterritorial sanctions. These measures have been further reinforced by EU sanctions, as well as the full compliance—and, in many cases, overcompliance—by numerous economic and financial institutions and national economies worldwide. This overcompliance has amplified the impact of sanctions, creating significant challenges for Iran's economy and its ability to engage in international trade and financial transactions. In this context, the question arises: what *additional* impact would the invocation of a UN snapback mechanism have, given the already extensive network of unilateral and multilateral sanctions? From Tehran's viewpoint, the practical economic impact of re-imposed UN sanctions would not be insignificant but likely marginal compared to the devastating US sanctions already in place. Western analyses themselves acknowledge that snapback's direct economic effects would be limited relative to the status quo, since "Tehran already faces an array of US secondary sanctions that are far more comprehensive and damaging" than the old UN measures. Several factors temper the incremental impact of UN sanctions:

Oil and Trade Flows: None of the prior UNSC resolutions explicitly banned Iranian oil exports or non-oil trade. The US sanctions, by contrast, have effectively slashed Iran's oil sales through secondary sanctions threatening any buyer with penalties. Snapback would not itself cut off Iran's oil exports – major importers like China have been purchasing Iranian crude through covert channels despite US sanctions and they are unlikely, in practice, to be deterred by a revived UN embargo. China's imports of hundreds of thousands of barrels per day have flowed via "complex, clandestine" routes designed to conceal origin. That clandestine system would probably continue, as Beijing and others weigh UN strictures as less threatening than US financial punishments. In short, countries currently willing to risk US sanctions to buy Iranian oil are not apt to suddenly comply with a UN prohibition.

Banking and Finance: Iran's exclusion from the global financial system is already near-total due to US Treasury actions (sanctioning Iranian banks, cutting off access to SWIFT, etc.). UN sanctions would reinforce an *official* international ban on financing proliferation-sensitive activities by all states in dealing with Iranian banks. However, banks and companies worldwide have long been steering clear of Iran to avoid US penalties; that caution is in place regardless of UN actions. As one analysis notes, firms already willing to engage Iran despite U.S. sanctions "probably would not be deterred by" a UN requirement to exercise vigilance. Conversely, institutions already heeding US restrictions need no further incentive – snapback simply *reinforces* policies they are following anyway. One tangible effect is that prospects of recovering frozen Iranian funds diminish. But this codifies an existing reality under US pressure. Lastly, some EU sanctions are not automatically restored by UN snapback; critical European measures (on energy, shipping, insurance, etc.) would require separate EU action – and while the E3 would likely take such action politically, it is not a given in the snapback legal mechanism itself.

Arms and Military Transfers: The resumption of a UN conventional arms embargo may have limited immediate impact on Iran's military procurement, since the US and its allies already unilaterally bar arms transfers to Iran. Even after the UN arms ban lapsed in 2020, Western nations maintained their own embargoes. Countries inclined to sell weapons to Iran – chiefly Russia or China – will be constrained by snapback on paper. But Moscow and Beijing did not rush major new arms deals in the window after 2020 (partly to avoid antagonizing the West or violating US sanctions), and any covert arms cooperation (e.g. Iran's purchase of Russian fighters) might persist irrespective of UN rules.

Reimposing UN restrictions would give added legal justification to condemn any overt arms deals, yet it does not provide new tools to physically stop illicit transfers. In sum, the UN arms ban's return is symbolically significant but may not drastically change Iran's military supply situation under the current geopolitical alignments.

Psychological Effects and Market Shocks: A critical economic impact arising from the formal collapse of the JCPOA framework and the reimposition of UN sanctions would be psychological, significantly altering expectations within the Iranian economy. The Iranian currency and business sentiment have been partially sustained by hopes—however faint and sometimes exaggerated by certain Westernized Iranian media outlets—of a restored deal or sanctions relief. A snapback would extinguish any remaining hope for near-term relief, likely triggering capital flight, further devaluing the rial, and deterring investment as Iranians brace for an indefinite future under sanctions. This loss of hope represents a real cost, as it undermines domestic confidence and could exacerbate economic malaise. However, this impact is rooted more in the psychological narrative of isolation than in new tangible trade restrictions, given that trade is already severely constrained by existing sanctions.

Overall, Western narratives often overstate the economic impacts of UN sanctions while downplaying the ongoing impact of US measures. Some hawkish sources portray snapback as a crushing blow or a "game-changer" for Iran's economy, but this is largely political theater. The reality is that while reinstated UN sanctions add legal and diplomatic weight to the US-led "maximum pressure" campaign, but they do not vastly increase Iran's economic pain beyond what Washington has already inflicted. As one anti-Iran analysis supportive of reimposing UN sanctions on Iran succinctly put it, "the economic impact of such changes may be small". This does not mean UN sanctions are cost-free – they tighten the diplomatic noose and foreclose certain avenues. But in Tehran's view, the West's focus on snapback is a narrative tool to pressure Iran and gain leverage.

However, beyond economics, invoking snapback carries profound strategic and geopolitical risks. Iranian officials warn that this step would fundamentally alter Iran's relations with the West and could spark an uncontrolled escalation. As Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi cautioned in May 2025, any "misuse" of the snapback mechanism by the E3 would have severe consequences – not only ending Europe's role in the deal, but potentially escalating tensions to a point of no return. In Tehran's eyes, snapback is tantamount to Europe abandoning diplomacy in favor of confrontation, a move that would likely be celebrated by hardliners in Washington and Tel Aviv but feared by most regional (as well as global) actors.

For Iran, snapback represents a diplomatic and a security threat. The immediate response from Tehran would be to demonstrate resolve and retaliatory capability. Iran's leadership would likely feel compelled to underscore that it cannot be intimidated– both to the Iranian nation and to deter adversaries – which raises the prospect of nuclear and regional escalation. On the nuclear front, snapback will strengthen voices in Tehran arguing that since even UN sanctions have returned despite Iran not seeking a bomb, Iran might as well exit the NPT and maximize its deterrence. Beyond the nuclear realm, Iran could retaliate asymmetrically across the region. Ultimately, Iran's reaction would seek to demonstrate "resistance and resilience, whether through nuclear steps, conventional steps, or both," as one hawkish US think tank observed.

For Europe, invoking snapback is more costly than beneficial. It could be seen as a coordinated show of transatlantic resolve against nuclear proliferation; however, it represents a failure of European diplomacy and carries consequences contrary to Europe's own security and economic interests. By resorting to snapback, Europe essentially abandons the diplomatic track and accepts that confrontation is the only path forward. From a strategic standpoint, Europe has much to lose from a heightened conflict with Iran. Another war or severe crisis in West Asia would directly impact Europe: it could

spike oil prices, trigger refugee flows, and endanger European troops or interests in the region. Additionally, snapback would likely terminate European diplomatic access to Iran. Tehran has made clear that if Europe triggers sanctions, "Europe's role [in the nuclear deal]" is finished. In the long run, this could diminish Europe's influence in regional security matters – a strategic setback for powers like France and Germany that seek a role in Persian Gulf stability.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of snapback's misalignment with regional interests is the stance of Iran's Arab neighbors. In contrast to their skepticism of the JCPOA in 2015, the Persian Gulf states in 2025 have shown a more united and pragmatic support for a diplomatic deal with Iran. The China-brokered restoration of Saudi-Iran relations in 2023 is emblematic of this trend. These states have learned that direct confrontation is dangerous and costly. They have been on the receiving end of missile and drone attacks (e.g. Yemen strikes) and know that an Israel/US-Iran escalation would put their cities and economies on the frontline. As a result, key Persian Gulf powers now prioritize de-escalation. Moreover, the Persian Gulf economies need stability: they are embarking on ambitious diversification plans, which would be jeopardized by a new Iran crisis that scares off investment and tourism. In sum, most Arab states do not welcome a snapback escalation. Even Turkey, a NATO member, has balanced relations with Iran and would be uneasy with conflict on its border.

The snapback scenario is broadly aligned with the preferences of hawkish factions in Washington and Tel Aviv, because it legally puts Iran back under UNSC sanctions and could justify more aggressive measures thereafter. Zionist strategists likely view snapback as paving the way for a tougher stance by legitimizing the claim that Iran is in breach of international peace and security. Similarly, in the US, hawks (including in Congress and potentially within a new administration) have explicitly pushed for snapback. This reveals an intent to provoke a confrontation that they believe will extract greater concessions from Iran (or even precipitate regime change). However, not all US actors favor this course. US intelligence and many military officials are well aware that cornering Iran can backfire. Even some in Washington who favor pressure caution that snapback's direct benefits are limited and that it could trigger Iranian reactions that make the situation more dangerous, possibly trapping the US in an escalatory ladder leading toward war – a war that Donald Trump might not truly want to ignite.

In aggregate, the geopolitical consequences of snapback are starkly negative for Iran as well as almost all parties. It closes off diplomatic offramps and raises the likelihood of further escalation. Iranian policymakers note with concern that the only clear winners in a snapback scenario are those pushing for an escalation spiral – chief among them, hardliners and warmongers in Washington and Tel Aviv who seek maximalist pressure – whereas the interests of Europe, the Persian Gulf states, and indeed Iran itself lie in avoiding escalation that could engulf the region and undermine regional security and stability.

Lastly, Iran perceives this scenario as a diplomatic failure and an escalation of hostilities instigated by Western powers. While the West may seek additional strategies, Iran, bolstered by the support of major powers like China and Russia, could effectively undermine efforts to reintroduce Iran's case into the active agenda of the UNSC, potentially leading to significant tensions within the UNSC and potentially a deadlock situation, debilitating consequences for international legal institutions. (The strategies that Iran might employ to counter the reinstatement of UN sanctions will be explored further in section 5 regarding the Libya Model).

Scenario 3: Negotiation Sabotage and Contingent Escalation

3.1. US-Israeli Military Strike of Iran's Nuclear Facility

A markedly different scenario unfolds when military action involving the Zionist regime in coordination with the US comes into play. For years, the Israeli regime has sought to portray a nuclear-capable Iran as an existential threat and has a track record of targeting nuclear facilities in the region, as evidenced by its operations in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007, as well as assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists and covert sabotage operations in Iran. Officials within the Israeli regime have indicated the possibility of undertaking 'preemptive strikes' and may be influenced by the self-perpetuated narrative that 'Iran is currently at its most vulnerable point in decades', prompting them to consider an aggressive and perilous course of action. Should the Zionist regime, whether independently or in collaboration with the US, conduct strikes on Iranian nuclear installations in 2025, the strategic landscape could be dramatically transformed, as it would be understood as an act of war and met with a forceful and immediate response from Iran. High-ranking Iranian officials have warned that, in light of such a scenario, Iran may change its nuclear doctrine. As a result, it is anticipated that Iran will limit the IAEA's access and oversight of its nuclear program and facilities, indicating the potential realization of this warning. In this context, a military assault might render the discussion of snapback sanctions irrelevant; the attention would likely shift towards the dynamics of war and its containment. It is unlikely that the UNSC would consider snapback sanctions amid an ongoing military conflict with the risk of an all-out-war throughout the region; diplomatic initiatives would probably shift towards negotiating a ceasefire or passing resolutions that denounce acts of violence, which would, in itself, be a contentious undertaking.

3.2. Israeli Sabotage and Terror

It is likely that the Israeli regime attempts to disrupt negotiations through a limited military strike or a series of covert operations, including sabotage, cyberattacks, and targeted assassinations, which have been executed periodically in the past. The aim of these actions would be to compel Iran to yield to terms beyond asserted red lines during negotiations through targeted military pressure *and* to apply further pressure on the E3 and the United States to take a more assertive stance and activate the snapback mechanism. Should Israel conduct a coordinated military strike or engage in sabotage during the negotiations, it would likely provoke a strong response from Islamic Republic of Iran. In this context, Western capitals are expected to align with the Zionist regime, labeling Iran as the aggressor, thereby facilitating further Israeli aggression under the justification of 'Israel's right to self-defense'. Consequently, Tehran should anticipate that the US and the E3 will 'call for Iran to exercise restraint', eventually using the incident as a rationale for initiating snapback sanctions at the UN. This would be framed as a necessary punitive action rather than a political maneuver. However, it is likely that Russia and China would potentially advocate for a resolution that condemns the use of force by Israel and the US. This situation could result in paralysis within the UNSC, preventing any consensus on further actions.

Furthermore, it is essential to take into account the positions of the Persian Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, as their security is intimately connected to developments in the region. These countries may support de-escalation and might subtly urge the E3 to steer clear of snapback in favor of engaging in discussions about regional security. Moreover, Israel's impact on US foreign policy represents a significant consideration. The Trump administration could either align closely with the hardline Zionist entity's position, subsequently exerting pressure on European nations to adopt a more aggressive stance toward Iran, or, alternatively, frustrated by perceived Israeli manipulation of the negotiations, the US may opt to contain the escalation and advocate for a ceasefire along with a diplomatic resolution. In this context, snapback is integrated into a comprehensive strategy that encompasses military and economic pressure with the objective of weakening Iran's interests.

Iran's prompt and assertive response, coupled with the activation of strategic alliances with China and Russia, serves as a crucial factor in counteracting this Zionist approach.

3.3. Fabricated Intelligence Report of Iran's Weaponization Move

Finally, we must examine a situation in which a fabricated intelligence report, originating from Israel, persuades the US that Iran is advancing towards nuclear weaponization. This development could result in the E3 promptly invoking the snapback mechanism. From Iran's viewpoint, these developments affirm that the West is being incorporated into a strategy guided by Israel. An early activation of the snapback mechanism could leave Iran off guard, consequently limiting the time available for diplomatic negotiations. Nevertheless, Iran will retain a period exceeding two months (specifically at least 80 days, as previously noted) from the time the E3 initiates the dispute resolution process. Consequently, Iran's response may be both immediate and forceful. In order to counter this coordinated action, Iran may seek to highlight this collusion and appeal to other global stakeholders. Furthermore, Iran could declare its intention to adhere to its commitment to withdraw from the NPT and restrict all IAEA cameras and inspectors the moment snapback is invoked, should the UN process for reinstating sanctions continue unabated. Invoking the snapback could indeed trigger or coincide with a substantial security crisis and covert attacks, which would carry extensive implications. (The possible reactions of Iran will be analyzed in Section 6, which centers on the counter-strategies utilized by Iran to respond to the Libya Model following the reinstatement of UN sanctions by the US/E3.)

3.4. Implications of Negotiation Sabotage

In summary, third-party actions, particularly by the Israeli regime, could either preempt or precipitate snapback. An Israeli strike might render snapback moot or make it urgent. Overall, this is a scenario that Iran hopes to avoid—it is high-risk, unpredictable, and could spiral into open conflict—but being prepared for it (with contingency plans for nuclear self-reliance or even an accelerated weapons option as a last resort) may be necessary. Furthermore, the snapback decision in this context will not occur in isolation; it is interconnected with the broader security landscape. To mitigate this, it is essential for Iran to affect and disrupt the cost-benefit analyses and assert deterrence, in Tel Aviv, as well as in various other capitals both in the West and within the region. Leveraging its diplomatic and military means as well as its strategic partnerships, Iran must demonstrate and assert its will and capabilities for a crushing response to any aggression in a manner that will inflict expenses on the US, Europe, Arab nations, and Israel that exceed their current expectations.

5. Neutralizing Snapback (May–October 2025)

This section focuses on a hypothetical situation in which Iran formulates a comprehensive approach to impede the US and the E3 from initiating the snapback mechanism. This strategy is set to evolve from May to October 2025, in the context of the ongoing indirect negotiations and developments detailed in the introduction of this paper. The analysis is underpinned by certain assumptions. First, back-channel US–Iran negotiations for a new nuclear arrangement are in progress throughout 2025, though no final agreement is imminent. Iran uses these talks to demonstrate diplomatic engagement and aims to reach an interim deal without yet returning to full JCPOA compliance. Second, Iran continues to exceed JCPOA limits in the short term, in response to the US-led 'Maximum Pressure,' but does so in a calibrated way, thereby maintaining pressure while avoiding a clear pretext for snapback. Third, Moscow and Beijing remain firmly supportive of Iran's position in the UN Security Council, opposing the re-imposition of UN sanctions and prioritizing the preservation of the JCPOA framework. This strategic support provides Iran with a diplomatic shield in multilateral forums. Fourth, Iran is aware of a coordinated US-Israeli strategy urging the E3 to trigger snapback by May–June 2025—before UNSCR 2231's authority expires. That strategy's goal is to "flip the negotiating table"

by restoring UN sanctions and forcing Iran to negotiate from a position of weakness. Iran's counter-strategy is explicitly designed to neutralize these anti-Iran tactics and recommendations.

Iran determines its objectives to avert the activation of the snapback mechanism before October 2025, in order to preserve as much sanctions relief and diplomatic space as possible, while continuing to advance its interests and demonstrating limited nuclear compliance. To achieve this, Tehran employs a mix of legal-institutional maneuvers, proactive diplomacy, geopolitical leverage, and asymmetric deterrence. Iran's counter-strategy unfolds in phases, with each month bringing specific initiatives. These efforts intertwine diplomatic engagement, legal stalling tactics, alliance-building, and calibrated escalation to delay or dissuade any snapback attempt. The plan is chronologically outlined below, with parallel efforts on all fronts each month. The following table outlines the chronological phases of Iran's multi-pronged strategy to neutralize snapback, synthesizing diplomatic, legal, and deterrence measures undertaken from May to October 2025.

From May to October 2025, Iran has a narrow but viable window to prevent the snapback issue from being formally placed on the UN Security Council's agenda. Although Iran has no vote in the Council, it can work through political allies—especially Russia and China—to invoke Rule 9 of the Council's Provisional Rules of Procedure, which requires Council consent to adopt an agenda item. Any objection would trigger a procedural vote, governed by Article 27(2) of the UN Charter, which mandates nine affirmative votes without the possibility of a P5 veto. Iran's objective would be to prevent the procedural vote from securing the required majority by encouraging abstentions or "no" votes from non-permanent members. To this end, Iran should intensify diplomatic engagement with members such as Algeria, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—states that may be open to persuasion. The presidency of the Council rotates monthly and carries agenda-setting power, making it critical to track who holds that role. The highest-risk month is September, when the presidency is held by the Republic of Korea, a close US ally likely to prioritize Western objectives. To mitigate this, Iran must preemptively build consensus among non-aligned members well before September. Conversely, the presidencies of Guyana (June), Pakistan (July), and Panama (August) may offer more favorable conditions for Iran to delay or obstruct procedural movement – but this requires effective and preemptive lobbying by Iran. With Russia assuming the presidency in October, Tehran's position would be strongest at the very end of the snapback window, offering a potential final safeguard against the issue being tabled.

Month & Strategy Focus	**Summary of Activities**

May 2025: Diplomatic Offensive & Deterrence **(Greece presidency at the SC)**	- Reaffirms commitment to diplomacy while upholding sovereign rights - Exposes contradictions in US approach while building multilateral support - Secures Russia/China support to block snapback at the UN. - Engages EU capitals via mediators to emphasize costs of snapback. - Warnings of NPT withdrawal via back channels. - Counters Washington's legal pretext strategy with reciprocal legislative framework
June 2025: IAEA Cooperation & Regional Outreach **(Guyana presidency at the SC)**	- Undertakes concrete nuclear restraint measures (though very limited and reversible, e.g., converting a small part of the 60% enriched uranium) to underscore Iran's "Good Faith" - Engages the UN Secretary-General and allies - Strikes IAEA deal to resolve safeguards issues, preempting UNSC referral. - Strengthens public alignment with Russia/China against "unilateral" sanctions. - Activates JCPOA dispute mechanism to stall proceedings. - Convenes regional security dialogues (e.g., Persian Gulf détente). - Coordinates with UNSC allies to delay procedural steps.
July 2025: EU Unity & Asymmetric Readiness **(Pakistan presidency at the SC)**	- Presses E3 for reciprocal sanctions relief in exchange for nuclear freezes. - Exploits US-E3 divisions to deter unified snapback action. - Coordinates with regional allies for escalation - Unifies domestic factions behind dual-track strategy.

August 2025: Strategic Patience & Global Advocacy **(Panama presidency at the SC)**	- Emphasizes "progress" in talks to dissuade snapback urgency. - Leverages UNSC procedural delays (e.g., rival resolutions). - Mobilizes Non-Aligned Movement and BRICS states for UNGA resolution against unilateral sanctions. - Signals latent threats via calibrated regional incidents.
September 2025: UNGA Diplomacy & Deadline Race **(Republic of Korea presidency at the SC)**	- Offers final concessions (e.g., suspending 60% enrichment) at UNGA. - Exploits UNSC presidency rotations to delay snapback past October 18. - Finalizes contingency plans (e.g., nuclear acceleration, regional retaliation) if triggered.
October 2025: Post-Snapback Consolidation **(Russia presidency at the SC)**	- Declares UNSCR 2231 expiration a diplomatic victory. - Proposes formalizing interim deals into long-term agreements. - Deepens ties with Russia/China (e.g., arms sales, economic projects). - Hardens nuclear site security against sabotage.

May 2025: Intensifying Negotiations and Preventing Escalation

- *Reaffirm Commitment to Diplomacy While Upholding Sovereign Rights*: In May, Iran publicly reiterates its commitment to a diplomatic solution while simultaneously emphasizing that any agreement must respect Iran's sovereign rights and established red lines. Tehran signals measured flexibility in the ongoing indirect talks—for example, by indicating a potential willingness to freeze enrichment at current levels as part of a balanced interim deal—but firmly communicates that fundamental nuclear rights remain non-negotiable. This calibrated openness is aimed at convincing the E3 to hold off on snapback in favor of negotiations, while Iran calls upon the international community to urge the US administration to adopt a reasonable and realizable approach that serves the interests of all parties. By proactively offering proportionate diplomatic concessions while maintaining principled positions, Iran effectively preempts Europe's attempts to leverage the looming October deadline to force an asymmetric deal, thereby making snapback appear not only premature but counterproductive to achieving sustainable security arrangements in the region.

- *Expose Contradictions in US Approach While Building Multilateral Support*: Iran should actively and systematically highlight the contradictory signals emanating from the US administration—contrasting Trump's public assertions about wanting a deal with his negotiators' maximalist demands that effectively preclude any viable agreement. By documenting these inconsistencies in diplomatic communications and media engagements, Tehran can justify its measured approach while demonstrating good faith. Simultaneously, Iran should actively engage Russia, China, and influential Global South nations to issue public statements calling for serious, balanced negotiations based on mutual respect and reasonable expectations—similar to the approach that successfully yielded the JCPOA. These coordinated diplomatic interventions would implicitly validate Iran's position without appearing orchestrated, creating a chorus of respected international voices advocating for pragmatic diplomacy rather than coercion. Such multilateral endorsement would not only strengthen Iran's negotiating leverage but also complicate Western efforts to portray Tehran as the intransigent party, effectively shifting the narrative toward shared responsibility for diplomatic progress

- *Engagement of Russia and China:* Iranian envoys in New York, Moscow, and Beijing work in concert to coordinate opposition at the UN. Russia and China privately assure Iran that they will contest any snapback invocation as illegitimate or destabilizing. (Notably, when the US unilaterally tried to invoke snapback in 2020, 13 of 15 Security Council members – including Russia and China – rejected the U.S. position, asserting Washington had "no right" after exiting the JCPOA. Iran leverages this precedent to buttress its case.) In June 2025, Tehran secures renewed statements from Moscow and Beijing in diplomatic channels that they favor preserving UNSCR 2231 and continuing talks, cautioning Western powers against undermining the process. This great-power backing serves as a deterrent signal to E3. Basically, it means any snapback move would face concerted pushbacks from two veto-wielding Council members, leading to a political showdown.

- *Outreach to EU3 Capitals:* Simultaneously, Iran launches a behind-the-scenes diplomatic offensive in Europe. Through mediators (Oman, Qatar, or the EU foreign policy chief), Iran delivers messages to London, Paris, and Berlin emphasizing that a snapback will kill the ongoing talks and trigger Iranian counter-measures (without yet specifying publicly). Tehran reminds the Europeans of their own stated position from 2020. Back then, the E3 said they "are not joining a maximum pressure campaign" and sought to preserve the JCPOA through dialogue. Iran argues that this logic still holds – snapback would be a point of no return, whereas negotiations are making incremental progress. These communications are coupled with subtle incentives. Iran hints at potential economic and energy benefits for Europe under a revived deal (e.g. future oil/gas contracts or trade opportunities) along with the commitment to establish a diplomatic framework with regional partners regarding security of European commercial vessels, if snapback is averted. The goal in May is to fray the US-E3 consensus by bolstering the more dovish voices in Europe who prefer a diplomatic outcome over a confrontation.

- *Back-Channel Warnings of Consequences:* Alongside its positive diplomatic overtures, Iran uses back channels in May to warn of severe consequences if snapback is triggered. Through trusted intermediaries (e.g., Russia or Oman), Tehran relays messages to Washington and European capitals that snapback will compel Iran to escalate its nuclear and regional posture. One pointed warning is the revival of a threat to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if UN sanctions are re-imposed. (Iran's leadership has made this threat before – e.g. in 2020, Foreign Minister Zarif explicitly stated Iran would pull out of the NPT if its nuclear file was taken to the UNSC). Now in 2025, Iran makes clear that snapback would leave it no choice but to consider NPT withdrawal, free itself from all nuclear constraints, or even

expel IAEA inspectors. This dire scenario is floated not as an immediate action but as a contingency Iran is prepared to enact, lending credibility to the deterrent. It establishes a new equation: any US-Israeli 'path to trigger snapback' will be met with Iran's declared readiness for '*promised withdrawal*' from the NPT. The plan makes explicit that such a move is no longer a hypothetical threat, but a calculated response embedded in Iran's strategic calculus. Iran leverages that very risk to make European diplomats think twice about setting off a chain reaction that ends international monitoring altogether. Additionally, Iran hints at regional repercussions. If cornered by renewed UN sanctions, Tehran's defense forces may respond asymmetrically – a thinly veiled reference to potential upticks in regional allies' activities or threats to Persian Gulf shipping. These warnings are delivered privately to maximize their sobering effect on Western decision-makers while avoiding a public ultimatum that could escalate tensions prematurely.

- *Counter Washington's Legal Pretext Strategy with Reciprocal Legislative Framework*: Iran must strategically counter Washington's pattern of using domestic legal constraints and political pressures as pretexts for demanding unequal concessions from Tehran. Taking inspiration from the December 2020 Strategic Action Law to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Rights of the Iranian People, representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly should introduce comprehensive legislation that codifies Iran's nuclear red lines more explicitly than those articulated by lead negotiator Araghchi. This new framework would establish the principle of strict reciprocity in any agreement, mandating that any temporary restrictions, verification measures, or sunset provisions must apply equally to both parties. The law should specifically address the pattern of Western powers using maximalist opening demands to normalize excessive concessions from Iran, while incorporating provisions that protect Iran's enrichment rights under the NPT and prohibit any "Libya model" disarmament schemes. By institutionalizing these parameters through formal legislation, Iran can strengthen its negotiating position and effectively communicate to Western counterparts that domestic political constraints exist on both sides—creating a more balanced negotiating dynamic that prevents the US from extracting disproportionate concessions through its strategy of normalized maximalism.

June 2025: Leveraging International Forums and Allies

- *Engaging the UN Secretary-General and Allies*: Iran quietly reaches out to the UN leadership and non-Western Security Council members to build a broader coalition against snapback. Iran's Foreign Minister Araghchi (or a special envoy) meets with the UN Secretary-General to convey Iran's commitment to non-proliferation and diplomatic resolution, while warning that a snapback confrontation at the UNSC could fracture the Council and undermine the authority of UNSCR 2231. Tehran also galvanizes support among Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), as well as BRICS member states and other international partners. By June, several countries – for example, NAM chairs or influential BRICS members like South Africa – voice at the UN that re-imposing sanctions would be counterproductive. Such statements do not block the legal process, but they contribute to an atmosphere of skepticism around the US-E3 snapback push. The impression Iran aims to create is that snapback is a needlessly provocative move isolated to the West, whereas the broader international community favors continued diplomacy.

- *"Good Faith" Nuclear Gestures*: Iran undertakes concrete (though very limited and reversible) nuclear restraint measures to underscore its good intentions. For instance, Iranian technicians convert a small portion of their 60% enriched uranium stockpile into reactor fuel or dilute it to lower enrichments under IAEA monitoring. This voluntary step does not bring Iran back into full JCPOA compliance, but it demonstrates a halt to escalation. Iran publicizes the move

as a confidence-building measure tied to progress in the ongoing talks. The timing is aimed at undercutting any E3 argument that Iran's program is racing ahead unchecked. However, such measures by Iran will be perceived as a sign of weakness if, at the same time, the US imposes new sanctions and leverages threats of bombing Iran. Thus, Iran's voluntary actions to exhibit "Good Faith" should be incorporated and mutually practiced in the negotiations, contingent upon the US administration's restraint from adopting aggressive measures and hawkish rhetoric.

- *IAEA Cooperation to Preempt UNSC Referral:* A pivotal front in June is the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The IAEA Board of Governors convenes in mid-June, and Iran moves proactively to prevent any "special resolution" that could feed into a snapback narrative. In early June, Tehran strikes a deal with the IAEA to resolve or make tangible progress on outstanding safeguards issues (for example, explaining past traces of uranium at old sites). While maintaining its established red lines, Iran may allow inspectors limited additional access or provide supplementary information, aiming to secure an IAEA Director General report that acknowledges improved cooperation. Indeed, a technical understanding reached in June forestalls any Board resolution to refer Iran to the Security Council. Without a fresh IAEA censure, the legal case and political momentum for snapback weaken. Iran's message is that it is not in "significant non-performance" of nuclear obligations in a manner that justifies UN sanctions, especially while negotiations continue. This undercuts the trigger condition for snapback defined in UNSCR 2231 (significant Iranian non-compliance), buying Iran more breathing room.

- *Public Alignment with Russia and China:* June also sees high-profile diplomatic engagements with Iran's great-power backers. President Pezeshkian or senior officials travel to Moscow and Beijing (or host Russian/Chinese dignitaries in Tehran) to publicly shore up strategic ties. These meetings yield statements that Russia and China oppose any "unilateral" reactivation of UN sanctions and instead call for US re-entry into the JCPOA commitments. By broadcasting this unity, Iran amplifies the message that snapback would not have universal legitimacy. (In 2020, the UN Secretary-General declined to recognize the US snapback claim precisely because it lacked Security Council consensus. Iran wants to recreate a similar dynamic in 2025. A snapback move by the E3 would be seen by major powers as illegitimate or at least highly contentious). Furthermore, Russia and China signal that, even if snapback were somehow declared, they may not comply fully with re-imposed sanctions. This is hinted at in economic forums – e.g. Chinese officials note that China will continue lawful trade with Iran and not allow unjust sanctions to impede legitimate commerce. Such hints tell Europe that a snapback might fracture the UNSC and result in uneven enforcement, undercutting the utility of the measure.

- *Regional Diplomacy:* Iran capitalizes on a changing geopolitical landscape in West Asia to bolster its position. Notably, relations with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states have improved after the China-brokered détente in 2023. In June, Iran convenes a regional security dialogue, perhaps through the Baghdad Dialogue or another forum involving (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council states to emphasize collaborative security and non-aggression pacts in the Persian Gulf. By showcasing a more stable regional environment, Iran aims to reduce the perceived urgency in Europe and the UN for punitive action. If even traditional rivals in the region are finding modus vivendi with Tehran, the E3 will be less inclined to shatter this calm with a snapback-provoked crisis. Indeed, the renewed Iran-Saudi ties carry wide implications, indicating Persian Gulf states are hedging and pursuing independent diplomacy, which in turn supports the climate for a nuclear compromise rather than confrontation. Iran nurtures this by quietly assuring neighbors that it seeks economic integration (energy exports, investment)

once sanctions are eased, an outcome that Arab states would welcome. In addition, Iran wants the Persian Gulf states to see that a threat to Iran's security will entail a danger of major security crisis for the entire region. These regional stakeholders, in turn, might whisper to Western partners that a snapback – and the Iranian retaliation it could provoke – would threaten regional stability and energy supplies. This indirect lobbying complements Iran's direct diplomacy, reinforcing a narrative that continued restraint and dialogue are in everyone's interest.

- *Utilize the JCPOA Dispute Mechanism (Conditional Activation):* Anticipating a potential E3 move to trigger snapback, Iran prepares to activate the legal-institutional countermeasures within the JCPOA framework. The decision to initiate this process should be contingent on the trajectory of negotiations and the extent to which the E3 signals a serious intent to pursue snapback. While we suggest June as a strategic window—given the Security Council calendar and procedural timelines—it is ultimately the Iranian negotiating team that is best positioned to assess when activation would be most effective. Tehran formally invokes the JCPOA's Dispute Resolution Mechanism against the E3, on the grounds of material non-performance. Iran asserts that the E3 have failed to fulfill their obligations under the agreement—specifically, to ensure the realization of the economic benefits anticipated under the JCPOA—due to their continued acquiescence to, and practical enforcement of, extraterritorial US sanctions. By lodging its own complaint, Iran creates a procedural roadblock: dueling disputes muddle the legal basis for any one-sided snapback notification. This tactic also buys time – per the JCPOA process, disputes must go through a Joint Commission and Ministerial review before reaching the UNSC, stretching the timeline. Iran signals it is ready to exhaust every step of this process, effectively stonewalling a rush to the Security Council on the snapback issue.

- *Undermining the Snapback Process:* Even as Iran works diplomatically to prevent a snapback decision, it also plans for worst-case procedural scenarios at the UN. Knowing that Security Council presidency rotations can influence the snapback timeline, Iran coordinates with allies and friendly nations on the Council to slow down or complicate proceedings if needed. (Western advisors recommend May–June as the best time to initiate the snapback process partly to have Western-friendly nation (specifically Republic of Korea in September) in the Council presidency and avoid procedural hurdles. Iran's goal is to upset that calculus. For example, should any E3 member formally notify the UNSC of Iranian non-compliance, Iran will lobby Russia (or any Council president sympathetic to Iran) to procedurally challenge the inclusion of the snapback request on the Council's agenda. The objective is to contest even the preliminary steps toward putting the matter to a vote. While the snapback mechanism is automatic after 30 days absent a resolution, procedural maneuvers can be used as stalling tactics:

  1. Challenging the Inclusion on the Agenda: The inclusion of an item on the Security Council's agenda may be procedurally contested in accordance with Article 27 of the UN Charter and Rule 9 and Rule 40 of the Council's Provisional Rules of Procedure. Under Article 27, decisions on procedural matters require the affirmative vote of nine members, with no veto power granted to the permanent members. This contrasts with substantive matters, which require both nine votes and the concurring votes of all five permanent members. According to Rule 9, an item may only be placed on the agenda with the consent of the Council. If a member (e.g., Russia or China) objects to including a proposed item—such as a snapback notification—a procedural vote must be held. Iran must seek to build a coalition of at least seven other members (beyond China and Russia) to prevent the proposal from reaching the nine-vote threshold required for adoption. Iran should engage in sustained bilateral outreach

to potential swing states—such as Algeria, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—urging abstention or opposition to any procedural move to introduce snapback.

2. Delaying Circulation and Discussion: The Council President (if sympathetic to Iran) can delay or deprioritize circulation of the request or its scheduling for discussion. The President may argue the request is incomplete, not urgent, or requires clarification or verification. If Iran is able to lobby the Council President, the item might be deferred or postponed under claims of due diligence.

3. Requesting Clarification or a Legal Opinion: Members may demand legal clarification from the UN Secretariat (especially about JCPOA language on snapback or UNSCR 2231). This request can serve as a stalling tactic under the guise of legal uncertainty or competing interpretations.

In June, Iranian diplomats discreetly discuss such contingencies with the UNSC President of the month (if a friendly country holds it), as well as with allies in the UNSC, and with legal experts, aiming to delay any formal UNSC action into a less favorable month for the snapback proponents. Every week gained is valuable as the October cutoff draws nearer.

July 2025: Solidifying Commitments and Raising Deterrence

- *Maintaining EU Engagement:* By July, Iran's multi-pronged efforts have one overarching aim, which is to keep the E3 on the diplomatic track through the summer. Tehran stays closely engaged with European negotiators to solidify the interim understandings reached in May/June. There is an emphasis on *reciprocity*. Iran might agree to extend IAEA monitoring arrangements or refrain from new nuclear advances, but presses the E3 for tangible incentives in return, such as unblocking certain Iranian oil export payments via a European channel. Some sanctions relief measures by Europe (within the JCPOA framework or humanitarian exceptions) are acknowledged by Iran as goodwill outcomes of dialogue. This positive feedback loop is designed to lock in the E3's commitment to talks – having obtained some concessions, European diplomats have a stake in continuing the process rather than abandoning it for snapback. Iran reminds them that a snapback now would nullify these hard-won interim gains. Essentially, Tehran is working to shift European calculus. Instead of viewing snapback as leverage, Europe sees it as a failure of diplomacy that would forfeit progress and invite Iranian escalation.

- *Preventing a United Western Front:* Iran also seeks to divide the ranks of its adversaries. Throughout July, Iran subtly differentiates its messaging to various Western audiences. For the US (especially if the Trump administration is internally debating the timing of pressure vs. diplomacy), Iran indicates that a snapback pushed by Washington's domestic hardliners or the Israeli regime would be taken as a hostile act breaching the spirit of the ongoing talks. To the Europeans, Iran contrasts the E3's potential snapback move with the Trump administration's nominal return to diplomacy – essentially implying *Europe would be blamed for torpedoing negotiations* if it triggers UN sanctions in the middle of talks. By exploiting any daylight between Washington and the E3 positions, Iran hopes at least one of the European trio will balk at pulling the snapback trigger. (For instance, if Germany harbors more reservations about a confrontational approach, Iran may concentrate its persuasion efforts on Berlin, offering economic carrots or appealing to Germany's preference for a non-proliferation diplomatic victory.) A lack of total unity could paralyze the snapback initiative, since the E3 traditionally acts in concert on JCPOA matters. Iran's objective is to ensure that by July, the E3 is not

monolithic in favor of snapback – ideally, one or more quietly prefer extending talks, which creates hesitation and delay.

- *Asymmetric Readiness (Quiet Phase):* While overtly Iran stays diplomatic in July, behind closed doors it prepares its asymmetric tools as a deterrent-in-waiting. Iran's military forces and regional allies are put on discreet alert to be ready for potential escalation in case snapback proceeds. Iran's leadership seeks to avoid unleashing any provocation now – doing so could unify the West – but it ensures that its allies understand there's a loaded powder keg. The intended effect is psychological: by late July, Western security planners would caution their political leaders that a snapback could trigger retaliatory flare-ups across West Asia. This layered deterrence – nuclear (NPT exit threat) and regional – buttresses Iran's diplomatic stance by raising the potential cost of snapback for the West. Tehran is effectively saying: *if you choose the "pressure" path, be prepared for assertive responses and escalation that might be beyond your control.*

- *Domestic Political Alignment:* Internally, Iran's competing factions align in July behind the government's strategy. The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) convenes to review the situation and gives full backing to the negotiating team's approach of measured concessions coupled with firm red lines. Political forces in parliament, who strongly oppose any agreements involving concessions beyond Iran's declared red lines, are brought on board by being made partners in the contingency planning – for instance, lawmakers begin drafting legislation that would mandate new nuclear escalations or even withdrawal from the NPT *if* snapback occurs. This internal unity is critical; and negates the false binary of resistance vs. negotiations. Rather than standing in opposition, Iran's diplomatic efforts are positioned alongside military readiness on the ground and strategic media engagement, framing a cohesive grand strategy aimed at confronting the full spectrum of Western hybrid warfare. It signals to the world that Iran is disciplined and prepared. There will be no domestic wavering that might invite the E3 to think Iran's resolve is weakening. Instead, European diplomats see that Iran's system stands ready to retaliate in unison if unjustly sanctioned. By July's end, Tehran's messaging – both domestic and international – converges on a clear posture. Iran is committed to a negotiated solution but equally ready to absorb and respond to a snapback confrontation. This dual-track messaging is aimed to deter a snapback without derailing the diplomatic pathway that is still open.

August 2025: Strategic Patience and Calculated Pressure

- *Running Out the Clock – Cautious Optimism:* Entering August, Iran's strategy pivots to strategic patience. With roughly two months until the October 18 deadline, Iran's best move is to sustain the status quo – continued diplomacy, no snapback. However, Iran must be prepared for deterring Israeli sabotage and terror and must not refrain from or delay assertive and measured responses to any aggression, crucial to maintain deterrence. Throughout August, Iranian officials strike an upbeat tone that a new nuclear understanding is "within reach," while also insisting that Iran will not be coerced by deadlines. Tehran pointedly notes that UNSCR 2231's snapback mechanism will cease to exist after October 18, 2025, implying that after that date Iran expects to be treated as a normal non-nuclear-weapons state with no special UN sanctions. This serves as a gentle reminder to E3. If they can hold off a bit longer, the problematic snapback question resolves itself legally. Iran emphasizes that it is meeting its commitments under the provisional understandings (e.g. maintaining the enrichment freeze agreed in June, continuing enhanced IAEA monitoring), thereby asserting there is no crisis that warrants UN action. The subtext to Europe and the world is clear – with patience, the nuclear and sanction issues can be managed without blowing up the diplomatic process.

- *Leveraging the UNSC Dynamics:* Iran keeps a close eye on the UNSC presidency and dynamics in August. If snapback proponents have held off this long, they may be eyeing an early-September move (since waiting until the very last minute is risky for them). Iran's diplomats coordinate with Russia and China to be prepared in the Council. For example, if a snapback notification seems imminent, Russia might preemptively table a procedural motion or a rival resolution (perhaps proposing an extension of UNSCR 2231's timelines or expressing support for ongoing diplomacy) that could create confusion or require time to debate. While such a resolution would likely be vetoed by Western powers, the debate itself burns valuable days and throws a spotlight on the Council division. Iran's aim is to consume the calendar by any means necessary. Even minor procedural wrangling – over the wording of any Security Council President's note, or whether the 30-day clock started properly – could push an early-September snapback attempt past mid-September, inching closer to expiration. Tehran knows the letter of UNSCR 2231 is on the snapback proponents' side (any JCPOA participant can notify non-compliance), but Iran exploits every ambiguity and opportunity for delay in the Council's working methods with help from its allies. This form of asymmetric legalism in the UN is a last resort to stall a hostile move until it is too late to matter.

- *Global South Solidarity and Media Campaign:* As the final stretch nears, Iran intensifies its public diplomacy globally. In August, Iranian diplomats and sympathetic nations in the Non-Aligned Movement as well as the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations spearhead a resolution in the upcoming 80th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 80) in September 2025 condemning unilateral sanctions and urging all states to uphold the JCPOA framework. Although General Assembly resolutions are non-binding, a strong majority vote in favor would signal that most of the international community does not support re-imposing UN sanctions on Iran. Such a display of global sentiment would further delegitimize a snapback initiated by a handful of Western states. Concurrently, Iran orchestrates a media campaign – op-eds by officials in international newspapers, appearances by the foreign minister on global networks – arguing that snapback would be a "historic mistake" undermining the UN Security Council's authority and the credibility of diplomatic agreements. Iranian commentators cite the 2020 snapback debacle when the UN Secretary-General and nearly all Council members refused to recognize the US's snapback claim as valid, emphasizing that attempting a similar move now (even via the E3) would plunge the Council into controversy and weaken multilateralism. By framing snapback as not only anti-Iran but anti-global consensus, Tehran seeks to shame and isolate the proponents of such a measure. The goal is to make the political cost of going through with snapback appear prohibitive on the world stage.

- *Calibrated Regional Pressure:* In late August, with the clock close to running out, Iran may also apply subtle regional pressure to underscore what is at stake. By demonstrating this capability without overtly breaking the diplomatic atmosphere, Iran adds one more layer of psychological deterrence as the Termination Day approaches. This approach carefully maintains plausible compliance with Iran's diplomatic posture (Iran can claim it is not directing any attacks) while reminding the West of the high stakes in a more tangible way than statements alone.

September 2025: Final Diplomatic Push and Contingency Planning

- *UN General Assembly Diplomacy:* September brings the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York – a crucial venue for last-minute diplomacy. Iran's president uses the UNGA podium to deliver a measured yet firm message. Iran is prepared to finalize a new nuclear arrangement that addresses international concerns, but it will not yield to pressure tactics or illegal snapback moves. In bilateral meetings on the sidelines, Iranian officials meet with their E3 counterparts

(even if informally) to hash out remaining differences in the draft interim deal. At this stage, Iran might agree to additional confidence measures – for example, suspending all 60% enrichment activities entirely (not just freezing growth) if an interim agreement is signed. Tehran presents this at UNGA as a major concession showing its commitment to non-proliferation. The expectation is that Europe will respond by formally shelving any snapback plans *and* by coordinating with the US on partial sanctions relief (such as issuing waivers for certain trade or unfreezing a portion of Iran's overseas funds). By making this offer under the spotlight of UNGA, Iran puts the onus on the E3. The world is watching to see if they choose compromise over confrontation. This is essentially Iran's final diplomatic gambit to neutralize the snapback threat – offering enough on the nuclear front to render snapback unnecessary, at least for now.

- *Securing a Delay Past the Legal Deadline:* If snapback has still not been triggered by mid-September, Iran is on the verge of success. However, Tehran remains vigilant until October 18 date passes. In September's first half, Iran and its allies ensure the UNSC remains mired in process rather than action. The Council's presidency in September (potentially held by Russia or another friendly state) could be leveraged to run out the clock. For example, should any Western member circulate a draft resolution or attempt a formal notification, the Council president can use procedural discretion to delay convening a meeting or to accept communications "for the record" without official action. By late September, even Western diplomats might concede that initiating snapback no longer makes practical sense – a notification on September 20, for instance, would technically complete in late October (after the 18th) when UNSCR 2231 is already set to terminate. There is legal ambiguity about whether snapback can take effect if the 30-day period straddles the expiration of the resolution's term. Iran's position (shared by Russia and China) is that after October 18, the snapback mechanism itself expires along with UNSCR 2231's special provisions. To avoid a legal quagmire, the E3 might begrudgingly hold off once this date draws so near. Iran's relentless focus is to push any potential trigger past this point of no return. By the end of September, through a combination of diplomatic headway (the nearly ready interim deal) and procedural delaying tactics, Tehran expects that a snapback initiation is no longer on the table.

- *Contingency Plans for Breakout:* Even as Iran is optimistic that snapback will be averted, it finalizes contingency plans in case the worst happens at the eleventh hour. The Iranian leadership prepares a step-by-step escalation plan to execute if a snapback notification is somehow made (for example, if one E3 country suddenly breaks ranks and files a complaint on September 1). This contingency plan includes a public announcement that Iran considers the snapback "null and void" (echoing the language used by many UNSC members in 2020), immediate acceleration of nuclear activities (e.g. feeding UF6 gas into advanced centrifuges that had been idle), suspension of voluntary JCPOA and Additional Protocol measures (if any still in place), and a threat to expel inspectors if UN sanctions actually re-materialize. Additionally, Iran's security council would authorize proportionate regional responses – for instance, targeting an isolated US military outpost in Iraq with rocket fire or seizing a flagged oil tanker in the Persian Gulf – to impose costs for what Iran deems an illegal and hostile act. These plans are kept ready but undisclosed, unless needed. The mere existence of such a plan, however, is likely known to Western intelligence by late September, which further dissuades snapback. In essence, Iran has a "break glass in case of emergency" retaliation strategy ready, even while it fully expects not to have to use it. This dual approach – preparing for conflict while working for peace – ensures Iran is not caught flat-footed by any surprise decision in Western capitals. By the end of September, all signs (diplomatic and procedural) indicate that snapback will indeed be avoided, but Iran remains alert until the finish line is officially crossed.

October 2025: Securing the Endgame and Post-Snapback Landscape

- *UNSCR 2231 Termination Achieved (Oct 18, 2025)*: On October 18, 2025, the ten-year anniversary of Adoption Day, UNSCR 2231's special provisions expire as scheduled. Thanks to Iran's successful delay strategy, no snapback was activated in time. Consequently, the remaining UN restrictions on Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile activities are terminated, and the snapback mechanism itself lapses. Iran hails this outcome as a diplomatic victory. It withstood intense pressure and preserved its rights under the JCPOA framework. Iranian officials emphasize that the UN Security Council's formal involvement in the Iran file is now effectively concluded – any future issues must be handled through normal channels or a new agreement, not the automatic re-imposition of old sanctions. However, Tehran exercises restraint in its public celebrations, mindful not to provoke a backlash. The government reiterates that Iran's preference is for a comprehensive agreement that addresses all parties' concerns, and it remains engaged in the ongoing talks for a new arrangement. By taking a measured tone at this moment of triumph, Iran aims to make it easier for the E3 (and the US) to continue negotiating rather than feel humiliated or eager to find a Plan B.

- *Post-Snapback Diplomatic Overture:* Following October 18, Iran adopts a firm and measured diplomatic stance. Tehran underscores that the expiration of the snapback mechanism marks the end of an era in which Western powers, particularly the E3 and the United States, wielded coercive leverage under the guise of multilateralism. Iranian officials make clear that the balance of power has shifted: by withstanding years of unlawful sanctions and dismantling the UN snapback framework, Iran has demonstrated the resilience and strategic depth of its resistance model. In this context, any future engagement with European states will not be premised on trust, but on verification, reciprocity, and hard-earned caution. While Iran remains formally committed to diplomacy and engagement, it no longer views the E3 as credible or reliable partners. Over the past decade, their repeated failure to uphold the commitments made under the JCPOA—including their inability or unwillingness to mitigate US sanctions—has eroded Tehran's confidence in European good faith. Moving forward, Iran insists that it will evaluate any new proposals not through gestures of goodwill, but through concrete, enforceable actions.

- *Managing the Geopolitical Aftermath:* On the geopolitical front, Iran moves in October to consolidate ties with partners who helped it weather the storm. High-level visits are exchanged with Russia and China to deepen economic and military cooperation now that UN restrictions have lifted. (For example, new agreements on arms sales or joint economic projects are unveiled, leveraging the fact that there are no UN constraints – a direct consequence of snapback's failure.) Iran also ensures that regional allies remain aligned. Simultaneously, Iran is expected to advance its asymmetric deterrence posture, using the legal and strategic space created by the sunset of UNSCR 2231 restrictions. This may include high-visibility demonstrations of military capability—such as ballistic missile tests, now free from UN prohibition—as a calibrated signal to deter aggression and assert sovereign defense rights. Iran also advances "Security Belt" style military exercises with China, Russia, and other allies. Beyond conventional deterrence, Iran will also begin quietly deepening its support for the regional Resistance Front, recognizing its key role in struggle against the ongoing genocide in Palestine as well as the Western aggression in broader region . This support may take the form of technological transfers, capacity-building, intelligence cooperation, or other forms of logistical assistance designed to strengthen allied movements across the region. These efforts, while not publicly declared, are aligned with Iran's long-term objective of building a robust, transnational deterrent architecture rooted in regional partnerships.

In parallel, Iran monitors the Zionist entity and hardline US factions for any signs of reckless action. The Israeli regime, which strongly advocated snapback, is now in a tougher position; Iran stays vigilant against the possibility that Israel might resort to unilateral covert or military action in absence of UN sanctions. Tehran's intelligence services remain on high alert through October, having already hardened nuclear sites' security earlier in the year. Any sabotage attempt will be met with prompt countermeasures. Iran may also use this period to advance its asymmetric deterrence quietly – for example, conducting a ballistic missile test (which is no longer banned by UN language after October 18) to demonstrate its growing conventional capabilities, thereby cautioning adversaries against military adventures. All these steps aim to lock-in the advantages Iran gained by preventing snapback, while deterring any immediate retaliation outside the UN process.

- *Internal Consolidation and Messaging:* Domestically, the Iranian leadership capitalizes on the snapback's prevention to bolster public morale and strengthen legitimacy. In speeches, they highlight how Iran's steadfastness and clever diplomacy defeated the "plots" of its enemies. Crucially, however, the leadership also communicates to the Iranian public that the door to diplomacy remains open and that the struggle was to create favorable conditions for a just agreement – not to evade an agreement altogether.

6. Resisting a "Libya Model" Outcome

Throughout this analysis, one underlying theme is the maximalist strategy that some Western policymakers might be pursuing. The strategy is basically using the combination of threats of snapback and military attack before the Termination Day, or by snapping back the UN sanctions after that date, to impose a deal that is essentially a capitulation or a 'Libya Model' outcome. They understand that Iran will not accept such a deal under current conditions. However, certain anti-Iran hawks will continue to push for maximalist demands. This pressure could succeed in either stalling ongoing indirect negotiations or convincing E3 states to invoke the UN snapback mechanism, even potentially in the context of an interim agreement. In either case, a scenario where snapback is invoked by the E3 must be seen as a 'Libya Model' objective. In this section, we first discuss the West's strategy aimed at imposing their maximalist demands and securing Iran's capitulation (the "Libya Model"). Then, we will examine what Iran should and could do to counter this strategy and resist the re-imposition of UNSCR sanctions and the broader capitulation demand.

To clarify, the "Libya model" in the Iranian context implies a scenario where Iran is compelled to fully dismantle large portions of its nuclear infrastructure (far beyond the JCPOA requirements), ship out all enriched uranium, allow anywhere-anytime inspections, and perhaps also curb its missile program and regional strategic alliances – in effect, capitulating to Western demands for comprehensive disarmament-like measures. In return, Iran would receive the lifting of sanctions and promises of normalization. However, as Iranians frequently note, the Libyan state under Muammar Gaddafi, after giving up its weapons programs in 2003 for sanctions relief and integration, was eventually overthrown during the 2011 political unrest and destabilization following NATO intervention, plunging the country into a state of unending and disastrous war. To Tehran, the lesson is clear: trust in Western security guarantees can be fatal, and maintaining a solid and reliable deterrent, potentially including a breakout capability, is crucial for national security. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei famously warned years ago that Iran is not like other countries that surrendered their programs, referencing how Gaddafi "wrapped up his nuclear program, gave it to the West, and later they destroyed him" – vowing Iran would not fall for that trap. Iranian military and security establishment figures often argue that giving up deterrent capabilities would invite foreign aggression, particularly US-Israeli interventions. The Libya scenario is almost synonymous not only with 'regime change' but also national security

catastrophe and threat to territorial integrity in Iranian discourse, which is why it is so vehemently opposed.

Nonetheless, segments of the US and its allies appear to be pushing in the direction of maximal pressure, explicitly aiming to make Iran choose between collapse or capitulation. The snapback mechanism is a critical tool in that toolbox. Indeed, a hawkish, Zionist policy document from April 2025 argues that once snapback is in place, sanctions should be maintained long enough not just to contain Iran's nuclear program, but to roll back the power projection of the Axis of Resistance in the Middle East by cutting off resources and leveraging internal discontent fueled by economic misery. Western hawks explicitly argue that snapback sanctions should be kept in place for an extended period (perhaps 6–12 months or more) to wear down Iran's economy and regional influence before negotiating. From Tehran's viewpoint, this means snapback is essentially the point of no return for the JCPOA framework and is likely a prelude to a demand for capitulation.

Iran must view such statements with gravity. They indicate that for some in Washington and European capitals (and certainly Tel Aviv and some Arab states), the ultimate goal is not a return to the JCPOA's balance, but a far more unequal outcome that further subjugates Iran. The endgame they seek might be a "grand deal" where Iran accedes to extensive limits (perhaps a permanent ban on enrichment above low levels, the dismantling of the Fordow enrichment facility, handing over advanced centrifuges, halting long-range missile development, etc.), in exchange for phased sanctions relief and diplomatic normalization, most probably without any reliable guarantees. This would go well beyond the JCPOA, aligning with what Israel and some US lawmakers have advocated ("longer and stronger" deal).

Given this, how might the West attempt to push Iran into a Libya-like deal, and how can Iran counter those moves?

6.1. Western Strategies Aimed at the Libya Model

The focus of our analysis in this section is on the US and the E3's pursuit of a deal with Iran modeled after the Libya framework, as proposed by Netanyahu, in a scenario following the invocation of snapback measures and the successful reestablishment of the UN sanctions regime. However, the notion of implementing a comprehensive or interim agreement, wherein concessions accepted by Iran exceed its stated red lines in exchange for the lifting of snapback and partial sanction relief, should be regarded as an attempt to pursue the same strategy in different phases. Nevertheless, given the clear assertion from Tehran's leadership regarding their commitment to maintaining these red lines, we consider such scenarios to be highly improbable. Yet we do not exclude them completely from our analysis.

Maximize Economic Strangulation: The West aims to reduce Iran's oil exports to near-zero (as has publicly announced and done under maximum pressure), lock Iran out of the international banking system, and curtail even humanitarian trade by aggressive enforcement of sanctions. Snapback aids this by universalizing these Western restrictions through legal language, pressuring countries like India or UAE that might otherwise trade with Iran to fall in line. The goal is to create such economic pain that Iran's leadership faces a crisis – potentially threatening domestic stability – thereby forcing them to consider concessions that were previously off the table. This is essentially what happened with Libya. Iran is different in many aspects, including a larger, more sanctions-hardened economy, but the Western calculus may be that another round of intense sanctions could trigger unrest or at least panic in Tehran. This is essentially the resurgence of the "maximum pressure" era, only now potentially under the aegis of both Washington and the UN.

Diplomatic Isolation, Stigmatization and Threat of War: By snapping back UN sanctions, Western powers also regain the narrative that Iran is a global outlaw. This could pave the way for further measures. For example, pushing Iran's file back to the agenda of the UNSC regularly. In the Libya case, Gaddafi feared international ostracism and indictment; similarly, Western hawks might quietly threaten that if Iran does not bend, they could pursue actions like snapback followed by attempts to invoke military chapters of the UN Charter. This is far-fetched given Russia/China would veto, but the psychological aspect matters. Already, threats of military action feed into this strategy. Such threats might be perceived more seriously if the US and European powers believe the certain narrative produced by Zionist and other anti-Iran hawks that argues Iran is weak and military attack will be low cost. The aim is to make Iran's leaders think that if they do not give up the nuclear advances and rights, war could be next.

Offer Limited Rewards for Big Concessions: Western officials might dangle enticing promises if Iran were to go the Libya route. For example, the US could offer to not only lift all nuclear-related sanctions but also help integrate Iran into the global economy, support international investment, and perhaps even provide security assurances. In private, they might suggest gradual normalization. For a proud, revolutionary state like Iran, these promises are suspect – but they could be calibrated to appeal to pragmatic factions. The Libya model pitch might be sugar-coated as a win-win. Iran gives up dangerous capabilities it "does not really need" and gets prosperity in return. This strategy aims to create internal debate within Iran, perhaps splitting political factions on how to respond.

Incremental Erosion of Iran's Position: Another strategy short of open confrontation is to force Iran into interim or limited deals that gradually chip away at its leverage. For instance, a lesser version of the Libya model would be: first get Iran to suspend most of its nuclear program for minimal relief, then later insist on extending and deepening those suspensions, moving the goalposts. If Iran's economy remains weak and sanctions mostly intact, Western negotiators can then say, "We need more – we need you to dismantle X or halt Y missile program – if you want real relief." A poorly managed "less-for-less" interim deal could inadvertently lead Iran toward a Libya-like situation, where it freezes parts of its program, loses leverage, but does not get full sanctions relief, leading to demands for even more concessions. Iranian policymakers have long been wary of this slippery slope, fearing they give away leverage without receiving promised rewards, and additionally exposing the country economically as well as socially more dependent on sanctions reliefs and thus more vulnerable to sanctions. The Libya model strategy would exploit that by always demanding more concessions for somewhat vague future benefits.

Contained Military Campaign

In addition to the threats of military intervention, a coordinated limited military operation by Israel and the US could be integrated into the negotiation strategy. A recent policy analysis from a Zionist think tank posits that, for instance, targeting and destroying one nuclear site and eliminating its air defense capabilities through a precise military strike alter the cost-benefit analysis for Tehran. This action aims to compel Iran to concede to the terms asserted by the US and its allies at the negotiation table. Nevertheless, the policy analysis recognizes the potential for the strategy to backfire, accurately noting that for the Iranian leadership, such a response represents "a dangerous sign of weakness" and would be deemed unacceptable by the Iranian nation, as it fundamentally signifies capitulation.

6.2. Iran's Counter-Strategy to Resist the Libya Model

In response to the reimposition of sanctions through the snapback mechanism, Iran's legal options to overturn the decision remain limited. Short of seeking an advisory opinion at the International Court of Justice (a lengthy recourse with no enforcing mechanism anyway) – there is no legal measure that would allow Iran to reverse snapback under JCPOA. Iran must therefore pursue a multi-dimensional

strategy not merely aimed at neutralizing sanctions, but at systematically raising the political, economic, and diplomatic costs for those sanctioning Iran, thereby resisting the push towards a Libya-style capitulation. This strategy should rest on some main pillars as discussed below.

Maintain Sufficient Deterrence and Strategic Ambiguity: As long as Iran retains some level of nuclear capability (even if latent) and missile and drone power as well as regional allies, the cost of attacking Iran remains high, and the West cannot dictate terms absolutely. Iran's leadership likely calculates that if pushed to the brink, they would rather escalate than surrender everything. Tehran should reserve the right to engage in proportionate, controlled escalation—such as gradually expanding its nuclear program under full IAEA monitoring or limiting cooperation in select areas—to increase its bargaining power without crossing thresholds that would provoke a full international consensus against it. One oft-mentioned step is for Iran to quit the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or at least cease implementing its safeguards agreement, expelling IAEA inspectors in retaliation. Iranian officials have argued that if they are going to be punished with maximum sanctions regardless, they will not adhere to international nuclear obligations that go beyond basic requirements. Exiting the NPT would be a dramatic move and would send the crisis to a new level, possibly inviting military action from adversaries, but the threat serves as a deterrent. By maintaining strategic ambiguity, Iran can keep adversaries off balance while preserving room for negotiation and recalibration based on the evolving diplomatic landscape. Essentially, the acknowledged reality that Iran possesses the technological capability, institutional knowledge, and resource base to develop a nuclear weapon within a short timeframe—if ever cornered or existentially threatened—constitutes a form of strategic deterrence in itself and can serve as leverage against the Libya model.

Leverage Global Divisions and Build Coalitions: Iran can work with powers like Russia, China, and strengthen its strategic depth in countries in Africa and Latin America, and even some European economic stakeholders to resist the Western hawks' approach. Ensuring China continues buying some oil and Russia continues political backing gives Iran breathing room. If the West sees that Iran is far from being entirely isolated – that it has viable alternatives – they may recalculate the feasibility of strangling Iran into submission. In Libya's case, Gaddafi had lost the Soviet Union's support and was isolated; Iran in today's transitioning world towards multipolarity has powerful strategic partners and friends. Tehran should reinforce those ties (e.g., via long-term cooperation agreements) to show it will not be alone even under snapback sanctions. Politically, Iran may focus on mobilizing international opposition, particularly from Russia and China (to publicly denounce and defy) and framing the snapback as an illegitimate act of political coercion rather than a bona fide enforcement of international peace and security. This approach seeks to delegitimize the process in public and foster and legitimize collective non-compliance with the reimposed measures. Legal efforts can also be pursued; though individual states have taken legal actions against sanctions, a collective, South-centered international legal effort against sanctions within the international legal system is needed. Iran should take the lead on the legal front for a joint ICJ case.

China and Russia could offer Iran economic lifelines or diplomatic cover to mitigate the impact. For instance, Russia could announce that it does not consider itself bound by the reimposed UN sanctions (although as a UNSC permanent member this would be legally dubious). Or China could quietly expand imports of Iranian oil despite the snapback, effectively negating some pressure. In an extreme case, Russia/China could propose an alternative multilateral agreement with Iran (perhaps inviting Iran into a broader Eurasian security framework) to signal that snapback will split the world into camps. While they probably will not outright violate UNSC decisions, their stance could influence how effective snapback really is. From Iran's standpoint, cultivating strong assurances from Moscow and Beijing now – that they will help Iran weather any snapback storm – could bolster Tehran's resolve. If Iran believes that even under UN sanctions it can count on significant trade or aid from these great powers, it might be less likely to bend to Western demands. This requires Tehran maintain a very active diplomacy with Moskow and Beijing.

Formation of a "Sanctioned States Mechanism" within BRICS and ICJ: Tehran should also aggressively expand its political and economic alliances, particularly within the emerging multipolar order led by BRICS nations. Iran should propose and advocate for the establishment of a formal BRICS+ Sanctioned States Coordination Mechanism—a structured forum for cooperation among nations targeted by unilateral sanctions. This mechanism could include trade facilitation agreements, alternative financial clearing systems outside SWIFT, mutual investment protection treaties, and coordinated legal challenges against extraterritorial sanctions regimes at international bodies such the ICJ. By embedding Iran's anti-sanctions strategy within the larger BRICS+ architecture, Tehran can both shield its economy and institutionalize a broader resistance against Western economic coercion

Leverage Ongoing Negotiations and Establish Clear Red Lines: Iran should make clear that any invocation of the snapback mechanism by an E3 state prior to October will be deemed a material breach of the ongoing negotiating framework with the US, entitling Iran to suspend or withdraw from all negotiations. Furthermore, it must be expressly stipulated in any renewed agreement that the triggering of the snapback process—prior to the full expiration of relevant provisions (i.e., Termination Day)—shall automatically terminate Iran's obligations under the agreement in its entirety. Iran must also set clear red lines in negotiations, including no zero enrichment, no dismantling of centrifuge infrastructure, no elimination of its stockpile without immediate and equivalent rewards, no discussion of missile capabilities in the nuclear talks, and no abandonment of regional allies. By communicating these red lines clearly, Iran can frame what is and is not possible. Western negotiators then know pushing beyond those will break talks. The Libya model essentially ignores Iran's red lines; Iran must reinforce them with consistent negotiating behavior.

Making Sanctions Costly for the Imposing Bodies: Iran should actively develop and implement lawful countermeasures designed to increase the material and political costs for those states engaged in imposing coercive measures against it. Regionally, Iran could respond to snapback by unleashing its allies or military assets to pressure US interests – perhaps imposing measured sanctions on shipping in the Persian Gulf or encouraging rocket attacks on US bases via allied resistance forces, as a form of coercive counter-pressure. None of these are desirable for Iran since they carry risks, but they illustrate that snapback will not be a one-sided pain for Tehran; Iran would have options to raise the costs for its adversaries too. Specifically, Iran should expand and amplify its support for regional anti-colonial and resistance movements challenging genocide, framing such support as a legal obligation under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), or the Genocide Convention, to prevent genocide. In parallel, Iran should operationalize targeted sanctions against entities and states complicit in arming or enabling genocidal acts, particularly in violation of the Geneva Conventions and customary international law.

Resistance Economy: Tehran often emphasizes its "resistance economy" doctrine, implying it can survive sanctions indefinitely and will not trade sovereignty for dollars. Renewed UN sanctions will likely be intended to provoke unrest – especially among Iran's working-class and impoverished – by deepening inflation, shortages, and unemployment. Tehran's response must prioritize protecting vulnerable populations and stabilizing markets to sustain economic security. Concrete steps should include enforcing anti-corruption measures vigorously (since corruption is a known driver of internal conflict and the main sense of injustice) and imposing strict capital and foreign exchange controls to stabilize the rial and curb speculative attacks. Regulating commodity prices and building a more disciplined, regulated financial/currency system will prevent wild swings that hit the impoverished hardest. Iran must prioritize boosting domestic production of sanctioned goods, supporting key industries, and managing consumption of foreign currency. The government may need to increase subsidies or welfare for the population as a buffer against rising inflation or devaluation that snapback might trigger. Equally important is active economic diplomacy. Iran must intensify sanctions evasion networks by expanding and hardening the mechanisms for oil export and money transfer that Iran has developed. With snapback, some previously neutral countries might shy away, but others (especially under Russia/China

cover) may step up. Iran should coordinate with Russia to use new payment systems (like MIR or CIPS) and perhaps increase oil swaps (Iranian oil for Russian delivery elsewhere, etc.). Tehran can further pursue swap lines and payment agreements with China and deploy crypto or digital rial mechanisms to bypass dollar clearing. Engaging countries like Venezuela or Malaysia for swaps, and utilizing border trade with neighbors (Iraq, Afghanistan) in local currencies can continue. Iran should expand barter and bilateral trade in local currencies with other sanctioned or semi sanctioned states and with rising powers. For example, Iran's recent deal linking its banking network with Russia's and its new ACUMER payment network (an Asian Clearing Union–based platform) allow trade with Russia, India and others without SWIFT. In conjunction with the BRICS and all countries facing sanctions, Iran should actively participate in the de-dollarization movement, motivated by geopolitical transformations and the increasing number of global regions affected by US-led economic sanctions. Such a coordinated strategy – cushioning the social impact of sanctions while diversifying payment channels – would blunt the sanctions' intent to incite unrest and help preserve internal stability.

Public Messaging, Political Unity: Iranian officials will continue to publicly reject any deal that resembles capitulation. This is important for both external and internal audiences, signaling to the West that pressure will not break Iran's will and reinforcing legitimacy internally. By projecting an image that Iran would rather endure pain than surrender like Libya, Iran hopes to undermine the psychological aspect of the West's strategy. However, this messaging must be paired with action (like slowly reducing dependency on oil, boosting domestic production, etc.) to be credible. Lastly, the state of Iran must communicate transparently with the public about the challenges ahead and emphasize national unity in facing external pressure – this can shore up social stability in the face of tightening sanctions.

Pointing Out the Risks to the West: Iran can also try to convince more pragmatic voices in the West (and certainly the Europeans) that attempting a Libya-style outcome is dangerous and counterproductive. Iranian diplomats can argue that if pressed too hard, Iran could radicalize its policies – e.g., actually move toward a bomb or cause a regional war – which would be disastrous for all sides. They can remind Europe that a collapse of diplomacy could mean Iran exiting the NPT, leading to a nuclear crisis on Europe's doorstep. Essentially, Iran can highlight that it has escalation dominance in certain areas. It can always escalate further unless the West is willing to go to war, which Europe certainly does not want. This may resonate with more cautious elements, who might then advocate for a more modest deal rather than maximalist aims. In effect, Iran would be saying "if you try to force Libya on us, you'll get North Korea instead" – meaning Iran would choose the path of open nuclearization and confrontation over humiliating surrender.

In analyzing Western strategy, Iranian policymakers should note that Western actors are not a monolith. The US and Israeli regimes are often the drivers of the hardest line. Europe, while aligning with the US on many issues, is somewhat more risk-averse and inclined to salvage some agreement. This was evident when Europe hesitated to join the US in 2018 and sought to keep the JCPOA alive. So Iran might find space to exploit differences – perhaps offering Europe just enough to undercut the US push for snapback and regime change type outcomes. If Europe and other powers are satisfied with an interim deal, the "Libya model" strategy could be blunted.

In conclusion, the Western "Libya model" approach is essentially a maximalist pressure campaign that Iran is determined to resist. Snapback, if it happens, would be a major component of that pressure – but Iran's response would likely be to double down on resistance rather than capitulate. Western hawks believe the Islamic Republic of Iran is brittle and can be broken; Iran believes it can withstand and outlast pressure, as it has in the past. The truth will depend on many factors (economic conditions and policy making, public tolerance, international support). Crucially, Iran's leadership will be determined to resist any coercion that resembles the fate of Libya. For Iranian strategists, being aware of the Libya model's allure in some Western quarters means preparing to navigate a period where offers of relief come tied to demands for near-total nuclear dismantlement. Iran's task is to avoid being cornered into

such a choice. This means keeping enough leverage (nuclear progress, regional influence, missiles and drones' development, great power backing, and alliance making) and enough dialogue going so that the West opts for a compromise solution instead of all-or-nothing. As of early May 2025, Iran still has cards to play – its nuclear program has advanced to a point where the West is very concerned, which paradoxically gives Iran leverage to trade. The art for Tehran will be to trade just enough to relieve pressure, but never so much that it finds itself defenseless, in a position that could invite a fate like Libya's. Any whiff of the Libya model in Western proposals will be a red line for Iran, and rightly so from its viewpoint.

7. Conclusion: Strategic Outlook for Iran

The year 2025 is proving to be a pivotal juncture for Iran's nuclear diplomacy and its broader confrontation with Western powers. The impending expiration of UNSCR 2231's special provisions – and the potential snapback of the UNSC sanctions regime – has created both a deadline and an opportunity. From the analysis above, several key points emerge for Iranian decision-makers.

First, Iran should maintain *a flexible strategy*. A key recommendation for Iranian policymakers is to increase consultations with all major players (Russia, China, Europe, and even regional neighbors) in advance. By gauging their red lines and likely responses, Iran can better predict which scenario is unfolding. Additionally, Iran should strengthen internal resilience for worst-case outcomes (e.g., bolstering its "resistance economy" for the snapback case, and shoring up political unity). Ultimately, Iran's goal is to preserve its sovereignty and security while avoiding unnecessary conflict. Each scenario carries different risks and opportunities toward that goal. Whether through deft diplomacy that outmaneuvers snapback or through steely resolve in the face of it, Iran will need to navigate the next six months with a clear-eyed understanding of the other side's calculations – as well as its own limits.

Second, time can be Iran's ally if used wisely. The snapback mechanism *will disappear* after October 18, 2025, removing one of the most powerful tools of international coercion. Iran's strategic objective should be to navigate to that date without triggering snapback, if at all possible. To do so, Tehran can employ a combination of restraint (avoiding provocative nuclear moves that cross red lines), diplomacy (keeping negotiations alive and showing enough progress to persuade the E3 to hold off), and alliance building (ensuring Russia and China continue to support and politically shield Iran in the UNSC). Successfully reaching "Termination Day" without snapback would significantly improve Iran's position – it would deny the US an international legal basis for its sanctions and put the onus back on Washington to seek a new agreement or live with Iran's program.

Third, Iran should pursue a calculated interim arrangement as a way to prevent snapback while preserving core interests. By offering limited but meaningful nuclear concessions (such as the enrichment cap and enhanced monitoring) Iran can strengthen the argument of those in the international community who prefer diplomacy over escalation. The goal is to give the E3 enough confidence to resist US pressure for snapback, on the grounds that Iran's program no longer poses an imminent proliferation risk. Tehran can pair this with behind-the-scenes messages that if snapback is pursued despite Iran's concessions, Iran will retaliate in ways that make everyone worse off (e.g., leaving the NPT). Essentially, Iran should make the choice clear. *Either* a cooperative Iran under an interim deal, *or* a cornered Iran taking extreme steps – with the hope that Europe (and perhaps some in Washington) opt for the former. An interim deal is not a final victory for Iran, but it buys time and avoids a potential diplomatic collapse that snapback could precipitate.

Fourth, Iran must remain vigilant about the UNSC dynamics and not rely on a veto "savior." The analysis shows the West can likely execute snapback if they are determined, by timing it advantageously

and mustering the needed votes. Therefore, while Iranian diplomacy with Russia and China remains paramount, engagement with the E3, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and BRICS member states is also crucial. It may be worthwhile for Iran to engage more directly with European powers in coming months to explore what would convince them to forgo snapback. Europe's calculus involves not just non-proliferation but also regional stability and its economic interests. If Iran can present a package of steps that assuages Europe's proliferation concerns and perhaps hints at future economic openings (should the US rejoin a deal later), the E3 might prefer that route over a risky snapback showdown.

Fifth, Iran needs a contingency plan for the worst-case scenario where snapback happens. Despite the best efforts, Tehran must be prepared for UN sanctions to return. Despite diplomatic endeavors, Tehran should prepare for the reinstatement of UN sanctions by fully embracing its "resistance economy" doctrine, which emphasizes long-term sanctions resilience without sacrificing sovereignty. The US-led maximum pressure coupled with anticipated UN sanctions aim to trigger unrest among vulnerable populations by worsening economic conditions. Iran's response must protect impoverished social classes and stabilize markets by implementing strict capital and foreign exchange controls to stabilize the national currency, regulating commodity prices to prevent market volatility that disproportionately impacts the impowerished, boosting domestic production of sanctioned goods while managing foreign currency consumption, and potentially increasing subsidies or welfare programs to buffer against inflation. Simultaneously, Iran should intensify economic diplomacy through expanding and hardening existing sanctions evasion networks for oil exports and money transfers, coordinating with Russia to utilize alternative payment systems (MIR, CIPS) and increase oil swaps, pursuing swap lines and payment agreements with China, deploying cryptocurrency or digital rial mechanisms to bypass dollar clearing, engaging in barter and local currency trade with neighbors and other sanctioned states, and leveraging new financial infrastructure like the banking connection with Russia and the ACUMER payment network. Iran must also actively participate in the global de-dollarization movement alongside BRICS and other sanctioned countries, reflecting broader geopolitical shifts.

Sixth, Tehran must launch a strategic diplomatic initiative to delegitimize the snapback – portraying it as an unjust move given the US left the JCPOA – in order to encourage some countries to quietly ignore parts of the sanctions. Importantly, Iran should decide in advance how it would respond to snapback in the nuclear realm. Will it immediately ramp up enrichment to 60% or 90%? Will it expel most of the IAEA monitors? Or will it try to show restraint to avoid giving the West a pretext for military action? These decisions should be made now, rather than in the heat of the moment. A measured response could retain some sympathy internationally, whereas an overreaction could enhance a broader unity against Iran. Tehran might consider a step-by-step response. For instance, first resume 60% enrichment and halt implementation of the Additional Protocol but stop short of NPT withdrawal unless further provoked. The idea would be to signal seriousness yet leave room for de-escalation if the West re-engages.

Seventh, Iran should actively counter the "Libya model" narrative and strategy by continuing to project strength and expose the risks of that approach. This includes public diplomacy highlighting Iran's past cooperation and the dangers of pushing Iran into a corner. Iranian officials and media can emphasize that Iran has viable options to retaliate (from nuclear advances to regional asymmetrical responses) and that the only sustainable solution is a compromise that respects Iran's rights. Crucially, assertive and proportionate responses by Iran's military forces to any foreign sabotage or provocative aggression will significantly support Iran's counter-narrative making. Tehran can also underscore any double standards – for example, if snapback is threatened despite Iran showing flexibility, it can question the good faith of the West. By framing the issue as Iran being reasonable and the West overreaching, Iran can try to win the battle of narratives, which matters for retaining international support (or at least neutrality) from many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Eight, Iran's deterrence strategy against hostile military actions by the US and Israel rests on three pillars: the West Asian Resistance Front, a network of allied regional actors; advanced conventional defense capabilities, including precision missiles and drones; and a latent nuclear deterrence potential. While the first two elements are widely recognized in strategic analysis, the nuclear dimension remains underappreciated. Western and Israeli assessments consistently highlight the high risk of failure in military strikes against Iran's nuclear infrastructure, noting that such attempts could inadvertently accelerate Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons—a paradox rooted in Tehran's demonstrated capacity to convert US-led maximum pressure campaigns and hybrid warfare into advancements in indigenous nuclear technology and expertise. As Iran's foreign minister has recently stated, "mastering enrichment technology is a hard-earned and homegrown scientific achievement; an outcome of great sacrifice of both blood and treasure". Iran stands as a unique case where externally imposed coercion has catalyzed technological resilience, enabling it to approach a nuclear threshold despite significant economic and diplomatic costs. Put differently, it is not the mere possession of a nuclear weapon that guarantees Iran's security and sovereignty—as some analysts in Tehran often assert—but rather the credible potential, ability, and demonstrated willingness to become a nuclear-armed state if necessary. This latent capability, carefully calibrated and visibly maintained, has served as an effective form of strategic deterrence. In this context, retaining domestic enrichment capacity at elevated levels—while remaining below the weaponization threshold—is arguably more consequential than actual weapon acquisition. Notably, the experiences of the Zionist regime and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed, show that nuclear status alone has not shielded them from territorial attacks or strategic vulnerabilities. For Iran, deterrence lies not in crossing the threshold, but in convincing adversaries that it can and will, if its sovereignty is fundamentally threatened. This reality underscores the necessity for Iran's leadership to pursue legally binding, internationally guaranteed agreements that address reciprocal obligations: verifiable constraints on its nuclear program in exchange for safeguards against military escalation, in addition to sanctions reliefs and legally binding commitments from the E3 to refrain from activating the UN's snapback mechanism. Iran must unequivocally reject any agreement that imposes restrictions on its nuclear advancements as well as further enrichment activities to a level that fundamentally compromises the nation's essential nuclear deterrence threshold.

Finally, in response to the extensive international condemnation of Israel's ongoing atrocities in Palestine—including credible evidence of genocide in Gaza, war crimes, systemic apartheid practices, and violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention—Iran, in coordination with regional and global partners committed to upholding international humanitarian law, must initiate and pursue a diplomatic campaign to address Israel's unlawful and unchecked ownership of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). The imperative for such action extends beyond Iran's sovereign security interests; it is a collective responsibility to safeguard regional and international stability and security, and prevent further escalation of state-sanctioned violence, including acts of ethnic cleansing, forced displacement and mass starvation, and disproportionate use of force against civilian populations. A regime globally recognized for its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, expansion of settlements, and discriminatory policies must not retain unchecked WMD capabilities, which risk destabilizing West Asia and enabling further breaches of *jus ad bellum* (laws governing the use of force). Israeli regime's opaque nuclear arsenal, developed outside the NPT's safeguards regime, constitutes an existential threat to any nations in the region that advocates for sovereignty and non-proliferation norms and condemns genocide and atrocities by Israeli Defense Forces and fascist settlers in and beyond Occupied Palestine. By anchoring this counter-offensive campaign in universally recognized legal frameworks—rather than unilateral rhetoric—Iran can galvanize broader consensus among non-aligned and global South states and accountability mechanisms (e.g., the International Court of Justice). Such an approach would reinforce the inadmissibility of nuclear proliferation under international law while foregrounding the rights of Palestinian self-determination and collective regional security.

In conclusion, from Tehran's strategic viewpoint, the coming months demand a delicate balancing act: offer enough to avert the threat of snapback but hold enough in reserve to deter attempts at capitulation. Iran has to neither appear weak (inviting maximalist demands) nor too intransigent (justifying snapback in the eyes of others). By leveraging time, divisions among its adversaries, and its own capabilities – Iran can emerge from 2025 without new UN shackles and with its nuclear program intact under reasonable limits. The stakes are undeniably high. But Iran has navigated many such inflection points over the past decades. With prudent strategy, it can prevent the snapback crisis from derailing its national interests and set the stage for a more stable equilibrium with the world powers in the years ahead.