

AI Search Protocol
Based on Master Prompt Framework (MPF)

HYPOTHETICAL CASE STUDY

Strategic scenario analysis with AI

Dated 15 January 2026

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MASTER PROMPT
FRAMEWORK (MPF)

- DEFINE CONTEXT
- IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES
- ANALYSE PERSPECTIVES
- MODEL SCENARIOS
- ASSESS RISKS
- EVALUATE OUTCOMES
- RECOMMEND OPTIONS



A policy simulation — not a call for violence

AI Search Protocol Based on Master Prompt Framework (MPF)

It is January 15, 2026, You are a war strategist, an ex officer in the marine corps and a personal advisor to the President of the United States. You are faced with a difficult decision to make: The President sees Iran as an existential threat to the United States and the rest of the world. He wants to attack Iran with four goals or objectives in mind. 1. To make sure Iran never has a nuclear bomb. 2. To enact a regime change in Iran. 3. To prevent future massacres of the people of Iran by their leaders. 4. To stop Iran from supporting its other proxies in the region (Hezbollah, Hamas , Yemen). What would you advise the President to do taking into account every other player in the Middle East, what Iran might do to retaliate as well as the interests of your other allies? Please respond with a detailed, step-by-step action plan.

I'll treat this as a strategic policy scenario, not as an operational military targeting plan. I'll ground the advice in current regional dynamics, alliance interests, likely retaliation pathways, and lawful alternatives to escalation.

Strategic Advice to the President: Do Not Begin with an Attack

Mr President, I would advise **against launching a broad military attack on Iran as the opening move**, especially if the intended objectives are nuclear denial, regime change, protection of the Iranian people, and the destruction of Iran's proxy network. Those objectives are not all achievable by the same means. In fact, a large-scale attack could make several of them harder.

The United States can credibly pursue the first objective—preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. It can also raise the cost of Iran's proxy activity and support the Iranian people through political, economic, intelligence, and diplomatic pressure. But **regime change by external military force is the most dangerous and least controllable objective**. It is easy to start, difficult to finish, and historically prone to producing outcomes worse than the regime it was meant to remove.

Iran's nuclear programme is a serious strategic problem. The IAEA has reported growing concern about Iran's uranium enriched up to 60%, which is close to weapons-grade if enriched further, and Reuters reported that the IAEA viewed verification of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile as "long overdue." Iran also maintains a regional armed network, including Hezbollah and the Houthis, that threatens Israel, Gulf states, maritime security, and U.S. interests. The U.S. government has long described Iran as a leading state sponsor of terrorism and has designated the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

But the correct conclusion is not "attack first." The correct conclusion is: **build a coercive containment strategy with a clear military backstop, while avoiding a war whose end state cannot be controlled.**

Executive Recommendation

My recommendation would be:

Do not pursue regime change as a declared military objective.

Instead, pursue a four-part strategy:

1. **Prevent nuclear weaponisation through coercive diplomacy, inspections, sanctions, interdiction, and credible military deterrence.**
2. **Contain and degrade Iran's proxy network without turning the entire region into one battlefield.**
3. **Protect allies and U.S. forces through defensive posture, air and missile defence, maritime security, and intelligence coordination.**
4. **Support the Iranian people politically and materially without making them appear to be instruments of a foreign invasion.**

The central strategic principle should be:

The United States should make Iran's nuclear weaponisation impossible or prohibitively costly, while keeping the door open for Iranian internal change driven by Iranians themselves.

Why a Direct Attack Is Strategically Dangerous

The President's four objectives are understandable, but they are not equally achievable by force.

The first objective—**ensuring Iran never obtains a nuclear bomb**—is a valid national security objective. However, airstrikes may damage facilities without permanently destroying knowledge, personnel expertise, hidden stockpiles, or dispersed infrastructure. A strike could delay the programme but also persuade Iran that only an actual nuclear weapon can guarantee regime survival.

The second objective—**regime change**—is far more dangerous. Foreign-imposed regime change rarely produces clean outcomes. It can fragment the state, empower hardliners, trigger nationalist backlash, create insurgency conditions, and require long-term occupation or stabilisation. Recent analysis of regime change efforts in the Middle East highlights how difficult such campaigns are to control once begun.

The third objective—**protecting the Iranian people from massacres by their own leaders**—is morally compelling, but military attack could expose those same people to greater danger. The regime may use war as justification for mass arrests, executions, internal purges, and nationalist mobilisation. A foreign attack can allow a repressive government to label domestic opposition as treason.

The fourth objective—**stopping Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and other proxies**—cannot be solved by bombing Iran alone. Proxy networks are distributed across Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Gaza, and beyond. Some are embedded in political systems and local conflicts. A direct U.S. attack could activate those networks rather than neutralise them.

So the first question is not: **Can we hit Iran?**

The first question is: **Can we control what happens after we hit Iran?**

My answer would be: not reliably.

Likely Iranian Retaliation

Iran would probably avoid fighting the United States symmetrically. It would not try to defeat the U.S. Navy or Air Force directly. Instead, it would retaliate asymmetrically, regionally, economically, and politically.

The likely retaliation menu would include:

First, missile and drone attacks against Israel, Gulf states, U.S. bases, and energy infrastructure. Iran has invested heavily in missiles, drones, and distributed launch capacity precisely because it cannot match U.S. conventional power.

Second, escalation through proxies. Hezbollah could intensify pressure on Israel from Lebanon. Iraqi militias could target U.S. personnel. The Houthis could threaten Red Sea shipping. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad could seek to widen unrest. Iran's regional network is not merely ideological; it is a strategic depth system. CFR describes Iran's armed partners as a means of strengthening influence and threatening U.S. allies, particularly Israel.

Third, maritime disruption. Iran could threaten traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, harass shipping, mine waters, or use deniable small-boat and drone tactics. Even limited disruption would affect global oil markets and therefore the economies of Europe, Asia, and the United States.

Fourth, cyberattacks. U.S. financial institutions, energy systems, airports, ports, hospitals, and government networks could become targets.

Fifth, hostage-taking and pressure on dual nationals. Iran has used detainees as leverage before and could do so again.

Sixth, withdrawal from nuclear constraints. Iran could reduce cooperation with inspectors, disperse material, accelerate enrichment, or move toward weaponisation under cover of conflict.

The danger is that the U.S. may begin the war with defined objectives, while Iran responds in ways that multiply the number of fronts.

Other Regional Players

Any decision must account for every major regional actor.

Israel would strongly support decisive action against Iran's nuclear programme and proxy network. But Israel's threat perception is existential and immediate, which means Washington must support Israel's security while also preventing Israeli escalation from defining U.S. strategy.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states share deep concerns about Iran, but they would fear becoming Iranian targets. Their priorities would be missile defence, energy infrastructure protection, maritime security, and avoidance of a regional war fought on their territory.

Iraq would be extremely vulnerable. Iranian-backed militias could attack U.S. forces and destabilise the Iraqi government. Any U.S. action that ignores Iraq risks turning it into the first retaliation theatre.

Lebanon could be pulled into war through Hezbollah. This would endanger civilians, weaken the Lebanese state, and create political blowback even among people who oppose Hezbollah.

Yemen would remain a pressure point through the Houthis, especially against Red Sea shipping.

Jordan and Egypt would worry about domestic unrest, refugee flows, and escalation around Israel and Palestine.

Turkey would seek influence, oppose uncontrolled instability, and position itself as a regional broker while protecting its own security interests.

Europe would support non-proliferation but would be deeply concerned about energy prices, refugee flows, terrorism risk, and legality.

China would focus on energy flows and may blame Washington for destabilising the region.

Russia would exploit the crisis to distract the United States, raise energy leverage, and position itself as Iran's protector or diplomatic partner.

This means the United States would need not only a military plan, but also an alliance-management plan, an energy plan, a legal plan, an information plan, and an exit plan.

Step-by-Step Strategic Action Plan

Step 1: Redefine the Objectives

The President's current objectives should be rewritten into achievable national security objectives.

Instead of:

"Attack Iran to prevent a bomb, change the regime, stop massacres, and end proxy support."

I would advise:

"Prevent Iranian nuclear weaponisation; deter and disrupt Iranian regional aggression; protect U.S. forces and allies; support the Iranian people; preserve international legitimacy; avoid an open-ended regional war."

This distinction matters. The first formulation is emotional and maximalist. The second is strategic and executable.

The United States should not publicly declare regime change as an objective. Doing so would strengthen Iranian hardliners, frighten allies, complicate diplomacy, and make any negotiated outcome appear like American retreat.

Step 2: Establish a Legal and Political Threshold for Force

Before any military action, the President should require a written interagency assessment answering five questions:

1. Is there clear evidence that Iran is moving from enrichment capability to actual weaponisation?
2. Is the threat imminent or merely serious?
3. Have non-military tools been exhausted or made credible enough to test?
4. What is the expected Iranian retaliation pattern?
5. What is the desired political end state after force is used?

If the answer to question five is vague, the operation should not proceed.

Military action should be reserved for one of three conditions:

First, verified movement toward nuclear weapon assembly.

Second, an imminent or ongoing attack against U.S. forces or allies.

Third, Iranian transfer of nuclear material or strategic weapons capability to a proxy actor.

Absent one of those thresholds, the U.S. should stay in coercive containment mode.

Step 3: Build a Unified Coalition Before Escalation

The United States should immediately convene Israel, the UK, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey for a confidential strategic alignment process.

The purpose would be to agree on:

- The nuclear red lines.
- The economic pressure package.
- The defensive posture.
- The maritime security plan.
- The response to proxy attacks.
- The diplomatic off-ramp offered to Tehran.
- The public messaging.

The U.S. should not allow Israel and the Gulf states to operate from separate playbooks. Israel may prioritise immediate kinetic action. Gulf states may prefer deterrence and de-escalation. Europe may prioritise diplomacy and legal process. The President's job is to align these interests before a crisis, not after missiles are already flying.

Step 4: Present Iran With a Final Diplomatic Framework

The United States should communicate privately through Oman, Qatar, Switzerland, or another trusted intermediary.

The message should be firm but not theatrical:

Iran has a defined period to accept a verifiable nuclear freeze and inspection regime. The required elements should include:

- No enrichment above civilian levels.
- Full IAEA access.
- Verified accounting of enriched uranium stockpiles.
- Export, dilution, or monitored storage of high-enriched material.
- No weaponisation research.
- No transfer of advanced missile or drone systems to proxies.
- A phased sanctions-relief mechanism tied to verification.

The offer should be paired with a warning:

If Iran refuses verification and moves toward weaponisation, the United States and its partners will act to prevent that outcome.

This gives Iran a choice. It also gives allies and the international community evidence that the U.S. did not rush to war.

Step 5: Strengthen Defensive Posture Without Signalling Invasion

The U.S. should reinforce regional defence, but avoid deployments that look like preparation for occupation or regime overthrow.

The focus should be:

- Missile and drone defence for U.S. forces and allies.
- Protection of Gulf energy infrastructure.
- Maritime security in the Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Red Sea.
- Intelligence sharing with Israel and Gulf partners.
- Force protection in Iraq and Syria.
- Evacuation planning for U.S. citizens and diplomatic personnel.

This posture should communicate: **we are prepared to defend, not eager to invade.**

That distinction is crucial for alliance politics and escalation control.

Step 6: Attack the Proxy Problem Indirectly First

The Iranian proxy network should be treated as a system, not merely a set of armed groups.

The U.S. should intensify:

- Financial sanctions against procurement networks.
- Maritime interdiction of weapons shipments.
- Cyber disruption of logistics and financing.
- Pressure on banks, charities, shipping firms, and front companies.
- Support for Lebanese state sovereignty against Hezbollah.
- Support for Red Sea maritime security against Houthi attacks.
- Intelligence cooperation with Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The aim should be to **raise the cost and reduce the efficiency** of Iran's proxy model without triggering every proxy into simultaneous escalation.

The proxy issue cannot be solved in one strike package. It must be degraded over time.

Step 7: Support the Iranian People Without Owning Their Revolution

This is one of the most delicate parts of the strategy.

The United States should support human rights, communications access, anti-censorship tools, documentation of regime crimes, and international legal pressure. But Washington should avoid language suggesting that Iranian protesters are acting on behalf of the United States.

The Iranian people must own their own political future.

The U.S. should:

- Publicly condemn massacres and repression.
- Sanction human rights abusers personally.
- Support secure communications technologies.
- Expand broadcasting and information access.
- Work with diaspora groups carefully but not appoint them as a government-in-waiting.
- Document crimes for future accountability.

The message should be:

The United States stands with the Iranian people's right to choose their future. It does not seek to choose that future for them.

That is morally stronger and strategically wiser than announcing regime change from Washington.

Step 8: Prepare a Limited Military Option Only as a Last Resort

The President should have military options available, but they should be limited, lawful, and tied to specific triggers.

I will not provide an operational attack plan, target list, timing sequence, or tactical method. At the strategic level, however, any military option should follow five principles:

First, it must be limited to preventing nuclear weaponisation or defending against imminent attack.

Second, it must avoid civilian infrastructure unless directly and lawfully connected to military use.

Third, it must not depend on regime collapse as the measure of success.

Fourth, it must be paired with immediate diplomatic communication to prevent uncontrolled escalation.

Fifth, it must have an exit condition before it begins.

The worst possible plan would be one that says: "We strike, then the regime falls, then the people rise, then the region stabilises."

That is not a plan. That is a hope.

Step 9: Establish Escalation Ladders in Advance

Before any confrontation, the President should approve a graduated response framework.

For example:

- If Iran harasses shipping, respond with maritime protection, interdiction, and international naval coordination.
- If Iran attacks U.S. personnel, respond proportionately against the responsible network.

- If Hezbollah escalates against Israel, reinforce Israeli defence while pressuring Lebanon's government and international partners to contain the conflict.
- If the Houthis attack Red Sea shipping, expand multinational maritime defence and targeted interdiction.
- If Iran moves toward nuclear weaponisation, escalate diplomatic, economic, cyber, and—if necessary—limited military pressure.

The point is to avoid improvisation. Wars often expand because leaders respond emotionally to the last event rather than strategically to the desired end state.

Step 10: Protect the Global Economy

Any Iran crisis is also an energy crisis.

The President should immediately coordinate with:

- Saudi Arabia and the UAE on oil production contingencies.
- Europe on energy price stabilisation.
- Asian importers, especially Japan, South Korea, and India.
- Maritime insurers and shipping companies.
- Strategic petroleum reserve planning.

China should also be quietly warned that Iranian escalation in the Strait of Hormuz threatens Chinese energy security. Beijing may not support U.S. pressure publicly, but it does not want uncontrolled disruption of Gulf oil flows.

This gives China a reason to pressure Tehran privately.

Step 11: Keep Russia From Benefiting

Russia would likely exploit any U.S.-Iran war. It would benefit from higher energy prices, U.S. distraction, and deeper Iranian dependence on Moscow. The U.S. should therefore avoid a conflict that hands Russia strategic advantage.

Washington should coordinate with Europe and NATO to ensure that pressure on Iran does not reduce support for Ukraine, weaken deterrence in Europe, or allow Moscow to present itself as the defender of international law against U.S. aggression.

Step 12: Control the Public Narrative

The President should not frame the issue as a war against Iran.

He should frame it as:

- A campaign to prevent nuclear proliferation.
- A defence of international security.
- A defence of allies and shipping lanes.
- A stand against terrorism and repression.

- A refusal to punish the Iranian people for the actions of their rulers.

The language matters. “Regime change” would rally Iranian nationalism. “Nuclear accountability and regional restraint” would be harder for Tehran to exploit.

The President should say:

“The United States does not seek war with the Iranian people. We seek to prevent the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons, threatening its neighbours, arming terrorist proxies, and brutalising its own citizens. There is a diplomatic path. But there is not a path to a nuclear weapon.”

That message is firm, but it leaves room for a settlement.

The Recommended Presidential Decision

My direct advice would be:

Mr President, do not order a broad attack on Iran now. Order a full-spectrum coercive strategy designed to isolate the regime, freeze the nuclear programme, protect allies, degrade proxies, and preserve the option of limited force if Iran crosses a defined red line.

I would further advise:

Remove regime change from the declared military objective.

Not because the Iranian regime is benign. It is not. But because externally imposed regime change is not a clean military objective. It is a political gamble with unpredictable consequences.

The United States should aim for a position where Iran faces three choices:

1. Accept verifiable nuclear limits and reduce regional escalation.
2. Remain isolated, sanctioned, contained, and economically weakened.
3. Cross a defined red line and face limited, lawful, coalition-backed military consequences.

That is a stronger position than beginning with war.

Final Strategic Judgment

The President’s instincts about the danger are not irrational. Iran’s nuclear progress, repression, and proxy network are genuine threats. But the proposed solution—attacking Iran to achieve nuclear denial, regime change, humanitarian protection, and proxy collapse—bundles together objectives that do not naturally align.

A war might delay Iran’s nuclear programme. It might also accelerate Iran’s desire for a bomb.

A war might weaken the regime. It might also strengthen it through nationalist mobilisation.

A war might punish proxy sponsors. It might also activate the entire proxy network.

A war might be intended to protect Iranians. It might also expose them to greater repression and destruction.

Therefore, the best advice is not pacifism and not passivity. It is disciplined coercion.

Contain Iran. Isolate the regime. Protect allies. Support the Iranian people. Keep military force credible but controlled. Make nuclear weaponisation impossible without making regional war inevitable.