

Policy Brief

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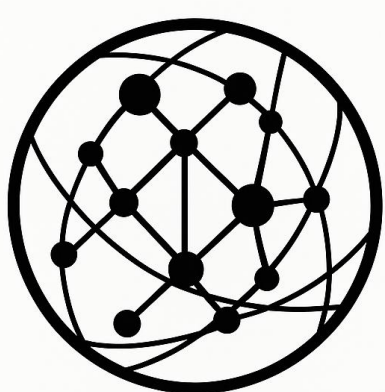
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Ceasefire Under Conditions of Non-Enforcement:

Time Arbitrage, Negotiation Dynamics, and Controlled De-escalation in the U.S.–Iran Conflict with Israeli Structural Constraints

Author: Shaoyuan Wu

Affiliation: Global AI Governance and Policy Research Center, EPINOVA LLC

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Key Judgments

- **Ceasefires without enforcement are design problems, not trust problems.** In the absence of a credible guarantor, stability depends on structural design rather than assumptions of compliance.
- **Negotiation redistributes temporal advantage.** Ceasefire periods function as arenas of time arbitrage, enabling actors to reconstitute capabilities and reshape operational tempo.
- **Asymmetric pauses generate strategic instability.** Unilateral or uneven de-escalation creates imbalances that favor recovery for one side while increasing exposure for the other.
- **Stability requires structural constraints, not voluntary restraint.** Effective ceasefire design must incorporate simultaneity, force freezes, reversibility, and incremental exchange mechanisms.

Executive Summary

In the absence of an enforceable guarantor, ceasefire negotiations between the United States and Iran cannot rely on trust or third-party enforcement. They must instead be understood as self-enforcing strategic arrangements designed to regulate time, cost, and escalation dynamics under adversarial conditions.

This policy brief develops a structural interpretation of ceasefire dynamics based on three core propositions.

First, the principal risk of ceasefire lies not in continued conflict, but in asymmetric pauses that enable force reconstitution and strategic repositioning.

Second, negotiation functions as a form of time arbitrage, in which actors compete to reshape operational tempo, redistribute temporal advantage, and influence the conditions of future engagement.

Third, the optimal outcome is not full cessation of hostilities, but controlled, conditional, and reversible de-escalation, in which escalation pathways remain constrained without eliminating deterrence.

To operationalize these insights, the brief introduces the Six-Layer Lock Mechanism (SLLM), a structured framework that organizes negotiation as a sequence of synchronized, verifiable, and reversible exchanges, thereby constraining exploitation while preserving strategic balance.

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1. The Core Problem: Does Negotiation Matter Without a Guarantor?

A defining structural condition of the current U.S.–Iran conflict is the absence of any actor capable of enforcing compliance.

Countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Egypt may serve as mediators or facilitators, but none possess the capacity to compel restraint from either the United States or Israel. As a result, ceasefire arrangements cannot depend on external enforcement mechanisms.

This condition produces three key implications:

- No party can externally enforce restraint
- Any ceasefire is inherently self-enforcing
- Stability must derive from institutional design rather than political trust

Accordingly, the purpose of negotiation must be redefined.

Negotiation is not about belief in compliance—it is about restructuring time, cost, legitimacy, and strategic interaction under conditions of non-enforcement.

2. Mediators Without Enforcement Power: Pakistan, Turkey, and Egypt

In the absence of an enforceable guarantor, third-party actors can serve only as mediators or facilitators rather than providers of binding security guarantees. Their role is therefore inherently limited, but not insignificant.

In such environments, mediators perform three primary functions:

- Signal transmission between adversaries
- Miscalculation reduction through communication channels
- Minimal political endorsement that lends procedural legitimacy to negotiations

However, their effectiveness varies significantly across cases, depending on access, capability, credibility, and alignment of interests.

Table 1. Comparative Assessment of Mediators Without Enforcement Capacity

| State | Access | Capability | Credibility | Protective Effect for Iran |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Pakistan | Strong channels to both sides | Militarily capable, but regionally external | Relatively balanced, but U.S.-linked | Moderate (information mediation, limited enforcement capacity) |
| Turkey | NATO member and regional power | High diplomatic and military flexibility | Strategically fluid and transactional | Low–moderate (negotiation leverage, limited reliability) |
| Egypt | Core Arab state actor | Strong stabilizing and coordination role | Conservative and U.S.-aligned | Low (prioritizes systemic stability over Iranian interests) |

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While mediators can facilitate communication and reduce escalation risks, none possess the capacity to constrain the strategic behavior of primary actors.

As a result, negotiations remain vulnerable to exploitation as windows for force reconstitution and strategic recovery.

3. Negotiation as a Time Arbitrage Game

In the absence of enforceable constraints, negotiation ceases to function as a mechanism of trust-building and instead becomes a competition over temporal advantage.

It is best understood as a time arbitrage game—a strategic contest over who derives greater benefit from pauses, delays, and shifts in operational tempo.

Table 2. Strategic Pathways Under Time Arbitrage Dynamics

| Scenario | U.S./Israel Payoff | Iran Payoff |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| No negotiation | Sustained high operational cost | Sustained high loss exposure |
| Negotiation + full ceasefire | Operational recovery window and force regeneration | Strategic vulnerability (worst case) |
| Negotiation + partial de-escalation | Tempo control and escalation management | Sustained pressure and deterrence retention |
| Negotiation + violation | Legitimacy framing and narrative advantage | Escalation justification and legal positioning |

The most dangerous outcome is not escalation, but unilateral stillness.

If Iran pauses while its adversaries retain operational flexibility, the balance of advantage shifts rapidly:

- Force rotation and redeployment continue under reduced pressure
- Air defense and strike networks are repaired and re-integrated
- Strategic narratives are reshaped in the international arena
- Future attack timing is optimized under improved conditions

A ceasefire without constraints on force posture and redeployment effectively functions as a preparation phase for renewed conflict.

4. The Real Function of Negotiation: Structural Reconfiguration

Under conditions of non-enforcement, negotiation does not primarily function to terminate conflict. Instead, it operates as a mechanism for **structural reconfiguration**, reshaping the parameters within which conflict unfolds.

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In this context, negotiation performs four systemic functions:

- **Reconfiguring Time:** Fragmenting continuous operational advantage into discrete, controllable intervals, thereby limiting the opponent's ability to exploit sustained tempo superiority.
- **Reconfiguring Cost:** Increasing the cost of violation while simultaneously reducing its expected strategic returns.
- **Reconfiguring Legitimacy:** Transforming the attribution of violation into a usable strategic asset in diplomatic, legal, and informational domains.
- **Reconfiguring Internal Alignments:** Exploiting divergences in objectives, timelines, and risk tolerance between the United States and Israel.

The optimal outcome is not cessation of hostilities, but controlled, conditional, and reversible non-cessation.

5. Designing a Non-Exploitable Ceasefire Structure

A viable ceasefire under conditions of non-enforcement must adhere to two core principles.

First, ceasefire should not precede negotiation; rather, de-escalation must be implemented through phased and synchronized exchanges.

Second, stability cannot rely on verbal assurances, but must be grounded in incremental exchange, verifiable actions, and built-in reversibility.

Under these conditions, stability cannot be guaranteed by external actors. It must be engineered through structure. These principles necessitate a structured operational framework.

5.1 Six-Layer Lock Mechanism (SLLM)

The **Six-Layer Lock Mechanism (SLLM)** provides a modular, self-enforcing architecture designed to constrain exploitation, preserve deterrence, and enable controlled de-escalation under conditions of non-enforcement.

The SLLM is intended as a generalizable framework applicable to conflicts characterized by non-enforcement conditions and asymmetric escalation dynamics.

a) Layer 1 — Simultaneity

No unilateral pause is permitted.

All de-escalatory measures must be implemented simultaneously and reciprocally.

Purpose: Prevent asymmetric advantage during transition phases.

b) Layer 2 — Force Freeze

The following actions must be explicitly prohibited:

- Deployment of additional strategic assets (e.g., carriers, bombers, missile systems);
- Expansion of operational bases;
- Forward positioning or upgrading of air and missile defense systems.

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Rationale: Without force posture constraints, a ceasefire becomes a rearmament and redeployment window.

c) Layer 3 — Deterrence Retention

Iran must retain a minimum level of credible deterrence:

- Preservation of mobile and survivable strike capabilities;
- Avoidance of full operational transparency;
- Maintenance of latent mobilization capacity.

Purpose: Prevent deterrence collapse during partial de-escalation.

d) Layer 4 — Immediate Reversion Clause (IRC)

Any violation must automatically trigger:

- Immediate suspension of ceasefire conditions
- Restoration of full operational rights
- Rapid attribution mechanisms (political and informational)

Function: Ensure reversibility and credibility without reliance on external enforcement.

e) Layer 5 — Israeli Structural Constraints

A separate and explicit protocol must apply to Israel, including:

- Prohibition of preemptive strikes
- Ban on targeted killings
- Restrictions on attacks against critical infrastructure

Rationale: Address asymmetries in escalation patterns and preemption doctrines.

f) Layer 6 — Immediate Incentives

Ceasefire implementation must be tied to tangible and immediate benefits, including:

- Release of frozen financial assets
- Restoration of maritime access and shipping security
- Limited and reversible sanctions relief
- Establishment of protected or de-confliction zones

Purpose: Anchor compliance in material incentives rather than political commitment.

SLLM illustrates a modular, self-enforcing ceasefire architecture designed to prevent exploitation under conditions of non-enforcement. Each layer constrains a distinct dimension of strategic risk, collectively enabling controlled, conditional, and reversible de-escalation.

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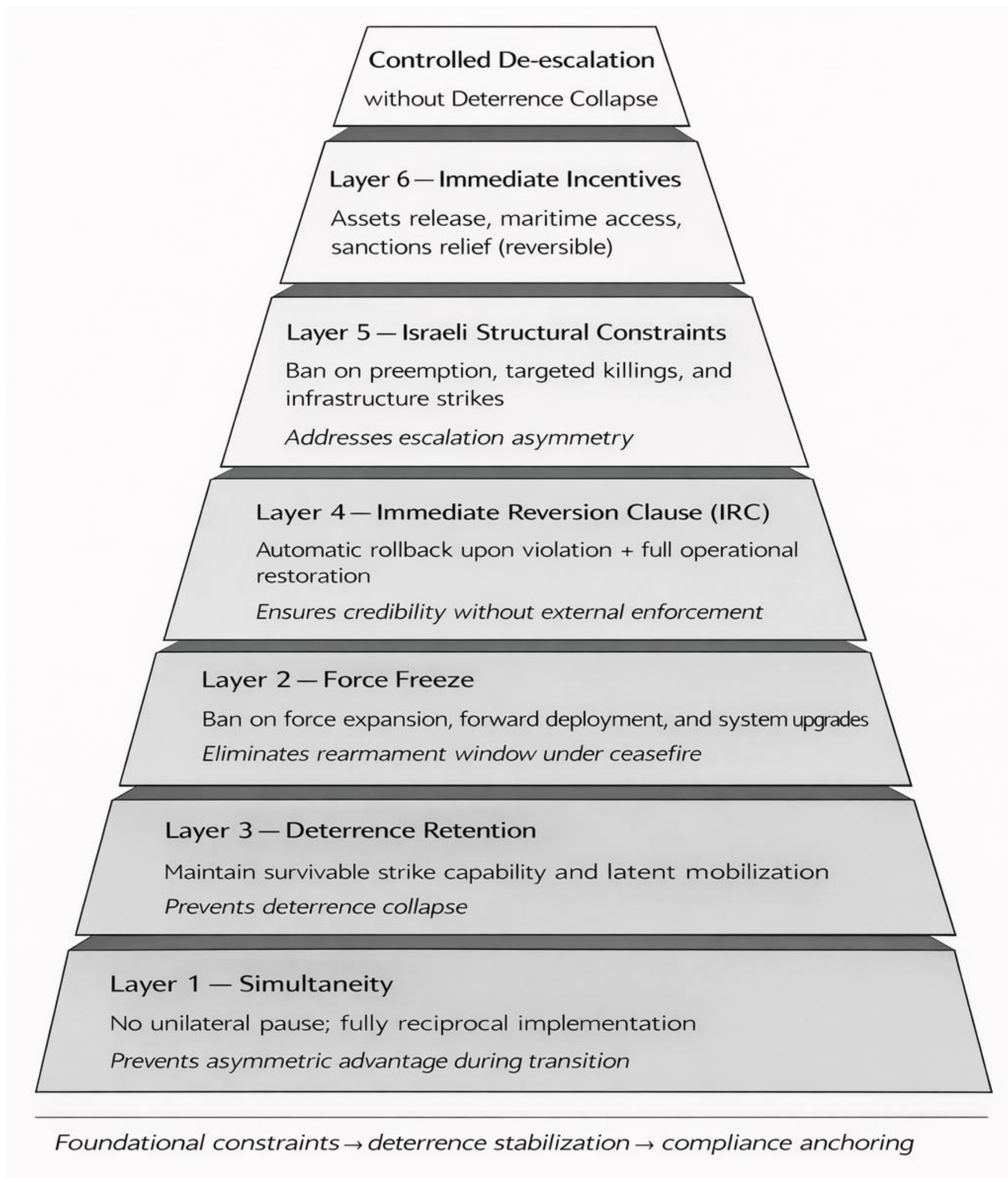


Figure 1. The Six-Layer Lock Mechanism for Non-Exploitable Ceasefire Design

6. The Optimal Negotiation Formula

Under conditions of non-enforcement, ceasefire design must prioritize control, reversibility, and bounded exposure.

The optimal negotiation structure can be summarized as: **“Limited ceasefire + limited exchange + limited verification + limited concessions + automatic reversion.”**

This contrasts sharply with the conventional model: **“Full ceasefire + deferred negotiation,”** which creates incentives for strategic exploitation and asymmetric recovery.

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6.1 Operational Model

A viable implementation pathway should follow a short-cycle, reversible structure:

- **Time-bound ceasefire (e.g., 72 hours, fully reversible)**
- **Simultaneous implementation of three core measures:**
 - Halt in escalation activities;
 - Freeze on force deployments;
 - Delivery of immediate, tangible benefits.
- **Rapid verification cycle (≤ 24 hours)**
- **Conditional and iterative extension based on compliance**

Logic: Short cycles reduce time arbitrage opportunities and sustain continuous strategic leverage.

A full structured draft of the proposed ceasefire framework is provided in **Annex A**.

7. Policy Implications

For policymakers engaged in ceasefire negotiations under conditions of non-enforcement, three core implications follow:

- **Avoid Unconditional Ceasefire Commitments:** Agreements that require unilateral or front-loaded restraint create structural incentives for exploitation, enabling adversaries to convert pauses into opportunities for force reconstitution and strategic repositioning.
- **Prioritize Simultaneity and Reversibility:** Ceasefire arrangements should be structured as iterative, reciprocal, and reversible exchanges, rather than one-time commitments. This approach preserves leverage, limits exposure, and aligns with the logic of short-cycle negotiation under time arbitrage conditions.
- **Incorporate Force Posture Constraints:** Without explicit limitations on redeployment, reinforcement, and force reconfiguration, ceasefire periods are likely to function as operational recovery windows, undermining stability and increasing the risk of renewed escalation.

Conclusion

In conflicts where no enforceable guarantor exists, ceasefire cannot be understood as a trust-based mechanism. It is instead a problem of strategic design under adversarial conditions.

The central challenge in U.S.–Iran negotiations is not whether parties are willing to de-escalate, but whether de-escalation can be structured to prevent time arbitrage, force reconstitution, and asymmetric advantage. Under such conditions, conventional ceasefire models, based on sequential concessions or deferred verification, are not only ineffective, but potentially destabilizing.

A viable approach must therefore shift from outcome-oriented settlement to process-oriented control. Rather than pursuing full cessation of hostilities, the objective is to sustain bounded interaction in which escalation pathways are constrained and operational tempo remains controllable.

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The proposed SLLM offers one such model. By embedding simultaneity, force posture constraints, reversibility, and incremental exchange into the structure of negotiation, it reduces incentives for exploitation while preserving deterrence.

Ultimately, stability in the absence of enforcement does not emerge from goodwill or credibility, but from the alignment of incentives within a constrained, self-enforcing system.

The objective, therefore, is not to end the conflict, but to prevent it from becoming strategically uncontrollable.

Final Statement

Under conditions of non-enforcement, the central problem is not how to secure peace, but how to structure conflict.

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Annex A. Draft Ceasefire Agreement

Proposed Framework for a Self-Enforcing Ceasefire Under Conditions of Non-Enforcement

1. Scope and Applicability

This agreement applies to all direct and indirect military interactions between the parties within the defined operational theater, including but not limited to:

- Air, missile, and drone operations;
- Maritime security activities;
- Cyber and information-domain actions directly linked to kinetic operations.

This agreement is designed as a **limited-scope, reversible, and conditional ceasefire framework**, rather than a comprehensive conflict termination mechanism.

2. Core Implementation Principle

All measures under this agreement shall be governed by the following principles:

- **Simultaneity:** No party shall implement de-escalatory measures unilaterally;
- **Reciprocity:** All actions must be matched in scope and timing;
- **Conditionality:** Continuation is contingent upon verified compliance;
- **Reversibility:** Any violation triggers immediate reversion mechanisms.

3. Simultaneous De-escalation Obligations

Upon entry into force, all parties agree to:

- Suspend defined categories of offensive operations simultaneously;
- Refrain from initiating new escalation cycles;
- Maintain existing defensive postures without forward expansion.

No party shall gain operational advantage through phased or delayed implementation.

4. Force Posture Freeze Provisions

During the ceasefire period, the following actions are prohibited:

- Deployment of additional strategic or long-range strike assets;
- Expansion or forward establishment of operational bases;
- Upgrading, forward positioning, or integration of air and missile defense systems beyond existing baselines.

These provisions are binding and constitute a core condition for maintaining ceasefire integrity.

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5. Deterrence Retention Clause

This agreement does not require:

- Full disclosure of operational capabilities;
- Disarmament or demobilization of forces;
- Reduction of survivable or mobile strike assets.

Each party retains the right to maintain **minimum credible deterrence** to prevent destabilizing asymmetry.

6. Immediate Reversion Clause (IRC)

Any verified violation shall automatically trigger:

- Immediate suspension of ceasefire conditions;
- Restoration of full operational rights for affected parties;
- Public and diplomatic attribution of violation within an expedited timeframe.

This clause is **self-executing** and does not require third-party authorization.

7. Israel-Specific Operational Constraints

Given asymmetries in escalation dynamics, the following additional provisions apply:

- Prohibition of preemptive or preventive strikes;
- Prohibition of targeted killings against military or political leadership;
- Restrictions on attacks against critical civilian and strategic infrastructure.

These provisions are binding and subject to the same verification and reversion mechanisms.

8. Verification Mechanism

Verification shall be:

- **Limited in scope**, focusing on observable indicators of compliance;
- **Rapid in execution**, with a standard verification cycle not exceeding 24 hours;
- **Politically mediated**, rather than reliant on intrusive inspection regimes.

Third-party actors may facilitate information exchange but do not possess enforcement authority.

9. Incentive Delivery Mechanism

Compliance shall be linked to immediate and tangible benefits, including:

- Release of designated financial assets;
- Restoration of maritime access and commercial shipping security;

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- Time-bound and reversible sanctions relief;
- Establishment of protected or de-confliction zones.

Incentives shall be delivered **incrementally and conditionally**, aligned with verified compliance.

10. Duration and Renewal

- The initial ceasefire period shall not exceed **72 hours**;
- Extension requires explicit, mutual, and verified agreement;
- Renewal is **non-automatic** and contingent upon performance in the preceding cycle.

11. Violation and Attribution Framework

A violation shall be defined as any action inconsistent with the obligations set forth in this agreement, including:

- Unauthorized offensive operations;
- Breach of force freeze provisions;
- Non-compliance with simultaneity or reciprocity requirements.

Attribution shall be conducted through:

- Rapid information sharing;
- Public signaling mechanisms.

Diplomatic channels coordinated by mediating actors

12. Legal and Political Status

This agreement:

- Does not constitute a formal peace treaty;
- Does not alter the legal positions of the parties.

Functions as a **self-enforcing operational arrangement** under conditions of non-enforcement