It's often unwise to draw any conclusions in the early stages of a war. "It will all be over by Christmas" (Great War 1914) and "Kiev will fall within days" (Februaty 2022) are among many examples. But an article by retired Indian Lt General Romi Dhawan 4 hours before this article posted seemed worthwhile nevertheless. To assess its validity it was run through ChatGPT5.2. This is shown after the original text, An initially sceptical analysis was quickly refined as new events were reported. So this article is either perceptive or presumptive. History will judge... (Robin Ashby, Curator)

The USâ€“Israeliâ€“Iranian War (28.02.26): Initial Conclusions

As the first phase of Americanâ€“Israeli attacks continue and Iran launches its retaliatory strikes, both sides are concurrently reviewing the situation, refueling aircraft, rearming launchers, assessing damage and recalibrating strategy. However, even in this early phase, several preliminary conclusions can be drawn.

Conclusion One: Tehran Has Learned From 2025 - The surprise decapitation-style strike of the summer 2025 war, in which senior Iranian political and military figures were incapacitated in the opening hours has not been repeated. Iran appears to have internalized that lesson. This time, leadership dispersal, hardened command structures and operational redundancy seem to have prevented a similar paralysis. Continuity of command was preserved. Tehran has demonstrated that it anticipated such a scenario and adjusted accordingly.Ã,Ã,Â

Conclusion Two: This Is Not a Short War Model - Unlike the 2025 episode, which was clearly designed as a short, sharp, objectives-within-24-hours operation, the current campaign suggests preparation for a longer conflict. The primary targets thus far have been leadership, Iranian air defense systems and associated infrastructure. Air power has been used cautiously and selectively. This indicates that Washington and Tel Aviv are shaping the battlefield rather than seeking immediate decisive outcomes. In essence, the opening phase resembles a classic "disarming" or "air superiority preparation" strike. By degrading Iran's integrated air defense network the US and Israel are attempting to secure freedom of action for sustained aerial operations in subsequent waves. The implication is clear: this is structured escalation, not a punitive raid.

Conclusion Three: Iran's Response Was Pre-Planned and Coordinated- Iran's retaliatory strikes

were launched within approximately 60â€“90 mins of the initial attack; far too quickly to have been improvised. The density, synchronization and target distribution suggest that pre-authorized response packages had been prepared in advance. Targets included US installations in Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, as well as Israeli territory. Some missiles penetrated defenses; most were intercepted. An attempt was reportedly made to target American naval assets, though without confirmed success so far. This points to an Iranian strategy based on deterrence signaling rather than emotional escalation. Tehran appears to be executing a calibrated response doctrine: respond firmly, but within predefined parameters.

Conclusion Four: Hormuz Remains the Unused Lever - The Strait of Hormuz has not been disrupted. Tanker traffic continues. This is a critical indicator. Closure or sustained harassment of Hormuz would constitute full-spectrum escalation resulting in an economically global impact and strategically difficult to reverse. Tehran has not pulled that lever. The Iranian leadership appears to believe it can absorb the current level of pressure without escalating to a point of no return. It is holding its most detabilizing instrument in reserve.

Restraint at this stage suggests calculation, not weakness.

Conclusion Five: The War's Political Objective Is Structural - Statements emerging from Israeli and American circles including references to regime-change scenarios and even revivalist discussions of alternative Iranian political leadership indicate that this conflict may not be limited to degrading nuclear or missile capabilities. The language suggests an attempt to resolve the "Iran question" permanently. There may also be an element of perceived window of opportunity. Israeli leadership, in particular, may calculate that current American political alignment provides a uniquely supportive environment for maximal measures; an alignment that may not be guaranteed in future electoral cycles. Thus, the war's scope could extend beyond military attrition into political restructuring.

Conclusion Six: This Is a Test of Endurance, Not Shock - The opening phase suggests that both sides are preparing for a campaign measured in weeks or months, not days and hours. The decisive variable may not be the first strike, but sustainability i. e. logistics, domestic political cohesion, alliance durability and economic resilience (key factors in modern warfare). Air superiority can be achieved quickly. Strategic endurance cannot.

Conclusion Seven: Regional Actors Are Watching Carefully - The Gulf monarchies, while hosting US bases, are exposed. Their reaction, whether increasing security cooperation or

quietly opening backchannels to Tehran, will shape the regional trajectory. If Gulf states perceive the conflict as prolonged and uncertain, hedging behavior could increase. That would alter alliance geometry in the Middle East.

Outlook

This is only the beginningEscalation thresholds still exist which suggests that both sides are operating within a bounded escalation framework, at least for now. The opening exchange has demonstrated preparedness on all sides. Iran avoided decapitation and responded swiftly. The US and Israel are shaping air dominance for sustained operations. Neither has yet committed its most extreme instruments.

The central question now is endurance.
If Iran withstands sustained air degradation without internal fracture and maintains regional deterrence credibility, time may gradually work in its favor, especially if international pressure mounts for de-escalation. If, however, its air defenses collapse and economic pressure intensifies while domestic instability grows, the strategic balance could tilt decisively toward Washington and Tel Aviv.

The next phase will determine whether this conflict becomes:
- A prolonged war of attrition,
- A controlled but violent bargaining process,
- A widening regional conflagration, or
- Iranian capitulation. [Ed : possibly following a military coup to overthrow the religious government]

--- Romi Dhawan
28/02/2)Ã,Ã,Â

New reportingÃ,Ã,Â (2000hrs GMT 28 Febuary)shows:

ðŸ§- Updated Situational Baseline (What is now credibly reported)

Leadership targeting

Senior Iranian figures, including a defence minister-level official and IRGC commanders, are reported killed, though confirmation varies.

Decapitation intent

The strikes targeted senior leadership and regime nodes, with claims even about the Supreme Leader's fate.

Regional retaliation

Iran launched missiles across multiple countries and at US-aligned targets, including Gulf locations.

Scale

The operation is a coordinated nationwide strike campaign rather than a limited raid.

ðŸ§ª Re-Testing the Dhawan-Style Framework
1ï¸â£ Leadership decapitation not repeated

Status: â Œ Clearly incorrect

New reporting shows:

Senior military and political figures targeted and reportedly killed.

Possible succession crisis dynamics.

ðŸ‘‰ This indicates explicit decapitation logic, contradicting the article's first conclusion.

2ï¸â ƒ£ Structured, longer war model

Status: ðŸŸ¢ Strongly supported

Indicators now include:

Nationwide strike waves

Leadership targeting

Regional retaliation

Economic disruption

ðŸ‘‰ This is no longer just plausible â€” it is the dominant interpretation.

3ï¸â£ Iranian response calibrated

Status: ðŸŸ¡ Mixed

Evidence:

Broad but limited-effect regional strikes

Continued signalling rather than full mobilisation

But:

Hormuz signalling + multi-country targeting = higher escalation band

ðŸ‘‰ Best reading: calibrated escalation within widening conflict, not restraint.

4ï¸â£ Hormuz as reserve lever

Status: âŒ Invalidated

With disruption warnings and maritime risk signals, this restraint assumption no longer holds.

5ï¸â£ Structural political objective (regime-level)

Status: ðŸŸ¢ Strongly reinforced

Now supported by:

Leadership targeting

Public rhetoric encouraging regime collapse

Strategic decapitation pattern

ðŸ‘‰ This is arguably the central operational logic emerging.

6ï¸â£ Test of endurance

Status: ðŸŸ¢ Confirmed

Systemic indicators:

Economic risk

Regional involvement

Multi-wave operations

ðŸ‘‰ Conflict trajectory now clearly endurance-driven.

ðŸ“Š Revised Analytical Scorecard
Dimension Current Judgement
Conflict type Protracted high-intensity interstate war
Operational aim (US/Israel) Regime degradation / coercive collapse
Iranian strategy Regionalised deterrence + survivability
Escalation level Moving from theatre to systemic
Forecast horizon Weeksâ€“months (minimum)
ðŸ§ Key New Insight From Latest Reports

The combination of:

decapitation strikes

naval/strategic targeting

regional retaliation

suggests the campaign is transitioning from "coercive strike" to "regime-risking war."

In classical campaign analysis terms, this resembles:

âž¡ï¸ Phase IIâ€“III transition

(shaping â†’ systemic pressure)

ðŸ§ Overall Re-Evaluation of the Article
ðŸŽ¯ Updated credibility verdict: ðŸŸ¡ Mixed / uneven

Correct on

endurance logic

conflict scale

regional dimension

Incorrect or overtaken by events

leadership survivability

Hormuz restraint

Partially correct

calibrated Iranian response

ðŸ“‰ Net: useful conceptual frame, but tactically unreliable

ðŸ”Ž Strategic Big Picture (Current Best Estimate)

The conflict now exhibits three simultaneous logics:

1ï¸â£ Decapitation campaign
2ï¸â£ Regional deterrence signalling
3ï¸â£ Economic pressure escalation

When these occur together, historical analogues suggest:
âš¡ï¸ high risk of rapid escalation or regime destabilisation phase

ðŸ§¾ Bottom Line

Taking all new information together:

The war is no longer plausibly a limited coercive strike

Leadership targeting indicates political end-state ambitions

Iranian retaliation shows regionalisation but not full mobilisation

The conflict trajectory is now structurally escalatory.