

## The Israel–Iran War: Concluded but not Resolved

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The fragile ceasefire between Iran and Israel marks the end of the current—and thus far most severe—phase in the ongoing hostilities between the Islamic Republic and Israel. Israel can conclude this phase of the conflict with a degree of satisfaction: even if Iran still retains a stockpile of uranium enriched to 60%—which it possessed before the campaign and may have transferred to hidden locations—its nuclear program has been significantly set back. Conversely, Iran is expected to portray the battle as a success, regardless of its military outcomes. In the coming weeks, it will become clear whether Israel’s gains can be preserved through diplomatic arrangements, or whether it will need to enforce them militarily. A nuclear agreement under improved terms could anchor the operational successes, allow for tighter oversight of the nuclear program, and reduce total reliance on intelligence. However, such an agreement is unlikely to prevent Iran from renewing efforts to develop military nuclear capabilities through covert means—and may even provide the regime with a lifeline, including greater latitude to continue its destabilizing activities as a result of sanctions relief.

In any case, even if the Israeli and American strikes provided an effective response to the nuclear threat, they are insufficient to address all the threats posed by Iran. Ultimately, a long-term solution to the Iranian challenge to Israel’s security lies in regime change in Tehran—but this depends first and foremost on internal developments within the Islamic Republic. Until then, Israel must prepare to continue its campaign against Iran through diplomatic, economic, covert intelligence, and, at times, military means, in close coordination and cooperation with the United States. This will be necessary to realize all of Israel’s strategic goals vis-à-vis Iran, namely blocking Iran’s path to nuclear weapons, dismantling the pro-Iranian axis, and limiting the missile program.

The ceasefire between Iran and Israel, declared on June 24, 2025, signals the conclusion of the most intense and severe phase to date in the ongoing confrontation between the Islamic Republic and Israel. Israel can claim this round of battle as a significant success. Even if Iran retains a stockpile of uranium enriched to 60%—which it had before the conflict and may have relocated to hidden sites—its nuclear program has been significantly set back. Although it is likely that the two enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow were not totally destroyed, they suffered substantial damage, and the elimination of more than ten senior nuclear scientists will either prevent or, at least, seriously hamper Iran’s ability to break out toward nuclear weapons in the foreseeable future. Iran might still be able to produce weapons-grade fissile material enriched to 90%, but it is doubtful that this alone would be sufficient to enable it to manufacture an actual nuclear weapon. Moreover, the US decision to carry out strikes reflects a historic American resolve to actually use military leverage—an important precedent that may ease the path for future administrations to do the same if necessary.

Conversely, Iran is likely to portray the war as a success regardless of its actual outcomes. Throughout the fighting, Iranian authorities and media emphasized Israeli casualties and the scale of damage inflicted on Israel, in an effort to construct a narrative that the Islamic Republic is capable of withstanding prolonged confrontation with Israel and causing it serious harm in return. Even Hezbollah's defeat last summer continues to be framed in Iran as a "victory," with claims that the organization succeeded in forcing a ceasefire on Israel, which allegedly failed to achieve its key strategic objectives. There is little reason to assume Iran's narrative at the end of the current hostilities will differ. Since the start of the conflict, Iran's leadership has aimed to preserve three key strategic-operational achievements: First, regime survival—perceived as Iran's highest national priority; second, preservation of the nuclear program—seen as an "insurance policy" for regime continuity; and third, survival of critical strategic infrastructures—particularly missile systems, intelligence networks, and command-and-control capabilities, all of which are essential for facing future security challenges.

With the announcement of the ceasefire, it can be argued that the Iranian regime succeeded in preserving internal cohesion, demonstrating resolve, and presenting a united front against the external threat. Iranian public opinion was shaped primarily by images of civilian casualties and destruction, channeling its anger mainly toward Israel rather than the regime itself—partly due to the regime's control of the media and its exploitation of national solidarity. Although Iran's nuclear program sustained a severe setback, Tehran is unlikely to surrender or abandon its nuclear ambitions. On the contrary, it is quite possible that Iran's determination to advance toward military nuclear capability will only intensify. Over the past year, signs have emerged of a shift in Iranian strategic thinking, especially in light of the collapse of the so-called "axis of resistance" and Iran's failure to impose a new deterrence equation on Israel using ballistic missiles and UAVs. Voices in Tehran have grown louder, asserting that improving deterrence requires not only enhancing missile capabilities and rehabilitating Hezbollah and the pro-Iranian axis, but also a shift in nuclear doctrine—including consideration of a breakout toward nuclear weapons, which would provide Iran with the ultimate "insurance policy." These voices are unlikely to recede with the end of the military campaign; rather, they may grow stronger. While Iran's breakout capability may have been damaged in the near term, it is reasonable to expect Tehran will continue advancing its nuclear ambitions—whether under the constraints of an agreement or via a covert pathway.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared this week that Israel remains committed to securing its objectives, whether through diplomacy or force. While the prime minister did not rule out the possibility of a deal to enshrine the gains of the military campaign, he emphasized that in its absence, Israel will maintain these gains through ongoing enforcement—"just as we do in Lebanon." It is worth noting that there is no indication that Iran is currently interested in returning to a negotiated framework—especially not one that would require concessions perceived in Tehran as capitulation to US dictates, foremost among them the relinquishment of Iran's enrichment capabilities. Moreover, it is doubtful that Iran would agree to an intrusive inspection mechanism by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which senior Iranian officials accused during the conflict of cooperating with Israel and the United States and facilitating attacks on Iran.

The prospect of reviving a nuclear agreement poses a difficult dilemma for Israel, although the final decision largely rests on choices to be made in Washington and Tehran in the coming weeks. On one hand, a deal could allow for more stringent oversight of Iran's nuclear program. Without an agreement, Israel will be forced to rely entirely on intelligence capabilities to monitor the program—and it is uncertain whether intelligence alone can reliably detect every potential violation. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the Lebanese model—responding to each violation—can be sustained over time. Will Israel truly respond every time Iran attempts to redeploy a launcher at some remote base? Will it act against every effort to restore enrichment facilities or, worse, break out to a nuclear weapon? Even if, at present, the United States and Israel see eye to eye on the need to block Iran, it is uncertain whether this close coordination can be maintained over time—especially in light of potential political changes in the United States or shifts in its global priorities. In this context, pursuing a nuclear agreement under improved terms may be preferable. Such an agreement would enshrine the significant operational successes achieved by Israel and the United States and allow continued close monitoring of developments in Iran's nuclear program. If no agreement is reached, Israel will have to pursue a long-term campaign, combining kinetic strikes with covert operations to prevent an Iranian breakout.

On the other hand, a nuclear deal in itself does not guarantee Iranian compliance over time. It would also do little to prevent continued progress along a covert path, especially if Iran retains residual capabilities. Moreover, any agreement that results in the lifting (or significant easing) of economic sanctions would offer the regime a lifeline and enhance its capacity to continue its malign activities across multiple arenas. It could also restrict Israel's freedom of action against Iran—unless safeguarded through informal understandings with the United States.

In any case, it must be remembered that the battle against Iran is far from complete. The Israeli and American strikes may provide a temporary response to the Iranian nuclear challenge, but they do not offer a comprehensive answer to the full range of threats posed by the Islamic Republic—which openly calls for Israel's destruction. Ultimately, the long-term solution to the Iranian threat to Israel's national security lies in regime change in Tehran. The fall of the Iranian regime is a goal that serves not only Israel, the region, and the West—but also the Iranian people themselves. While the Israeli military campaign may create new opportunities for Israel and the West to promote political change in Iran, the likelihood of such change depends primarily on internal developments and on an unpredictable trigger event. At most, the West can continue to support initiatives that provide the Iranian public with free access to information and communication, publicly express support for demonstrators (which may embolden their struggle), and prepare—by all available means—for the day when millions of Iranian citizens take to the streets and require every possible form of assistance.

In the meantime, Israel must prepare to continue its campaign against Iran using diplomatic, economic, covert intelligence, and at times military means to ensure the realization of all its strategic objectives. These include blocking Iran's path to nuclear weapons, dismantling the pro-Iranian axis, and limiting the missile project.

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