

What Can We Learn from Israel's Attack on Iran

Eyal Tsir Cohen and Jesse R. Weinberg | June 18, 2025

Israel's swift strike on Iran was marked by precision and maximum surprise. While it has secured significant gains including degrading Iran's ballistic missile capabilities, Israel must remain focused on its primary objective: delivering a decisive blow to Iran's critical nuclear infrastructure. To achieve this, Israel should leverage its military campaign—alongside the credible threat of American involvement—to pursue a sustainable diplomatic outcome that denies Iran the capacity to have a nuclear weapon for many years to come.

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched a direct and sustained attack on Iran—a calculated and multi-layered military operation that marked the culmination of years of strategic buildup, intelligence assessments, and unheeded warnings. While the world debates the implications, the more important question is: What can we learn from this operation?

Why Now?

To understand the timing, one must recognize the growing urgency in Israeli assessments over the past year. Iran had been accelerating its nuclear enrichment program and advancing weaponization research at an alarming pace. At the same time, it became increasingly immune to deterrence. Iran dismissed US efforts to signal a credible military threat and interpreted international caution as strategic paralysis.

Most critically, Tehran misjudged Israel's resolve. In the wake of the October 7th attack by Hamas—a day that fundamentally changed Israeli strategic thinking—it became clear that existential threats would no longer be managed with ambiguity. For Israel, the combination of unchecked uranium enrichment and Iranian defiance left no option but military action. War, at this point, was not a question of preference it was a matter of national survival.

How Did Israel Strike?

The Israeli campaign was defined by one crucial military principle: surprise. The initial phase of the operation targeted Iran's ability to respond. Israel sought to decapitate both the leadership and the operational infrastructure that could enable a counterstrike. The groundwork for this was laid months earlier, on October 26, 2024, when Israel covertly dismantled key segments of Iran's air defense systems. This preliminary strike created a corridor of vulnerability, enabling a stealth offensive when the time came.

This was not a one-night strike. It was the opening move in a rolling campaign—and success demanded a wide spectrum of capabilities. By degrading Iran's layered air defense networks, Israel expanded the operational freedom of its air force for the critical days and weeks that would follow.

Protecting the Home Front

One of Israel's most acute vulnerabilities is its densely populated home front. Iran's missile and drone arsenals—coupled with its regional proxies—pose a persistent threat to Israeli cities. As such, neutralizing Iran's missile launch platforms was a core objective in the early stages of the campaign. Minimizing casualties and economic disruption at home is not just a humanitarian goal; it is essential for national endurance in a protracted conflict. Israel's capacity to sustain operations depends, above all, on its ability to shield and protect its civilians.

Targeting the Nuclear Core

Finally, the crown jewel of the operation: the targeted strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Though tactically sequenced later in the campaign, these targets topped the strategic priority list. Israel deployed precision strikes on a series of installations that collectively form the backbone of Iran's nuclear production line—facilities tied not just to enrichment but to weaponization infrastructure as well.

The War Israel Tried to Avoid

While the June 13th operation may appear to some as a rush to conflict, the reality is quite the opposite. Israel invested years—especially during the Trump administrations—in trying to avoid war by projecting a credible military threat (CMT). The objective was clear: to compel Iran to reach a negotiated agreement by demonstrating that military consequences were not theoretical but real.

Israeli defense officials worked in tandem with Washington to build diplomatic leverage. Wargames were conducted, exercises publicly showcased, red lines articulated—all to signal that if diplomacy failed, force would follow. But this strategy met a cultural wall. In the Middle Eastern strategic mindset, a threat is

only credible if it is executed. Warnings, even those paired with visible military readiness, were dismissed unless accompanied by action. Tehran viewed restraint as weakness and delay as hesitation.

What Israeli leadership learned—painfully—is that in this region, only the use of force validates the threat of force. And so, after exhausting the diplomatic clock and trying every avenue short of open conflict, Israel concluded that further delay would not buy peace—it would only embolden Iran. The war was not the first option. It was the last resort.

The Price of Miscalculation in the Middle East

The Middle East has never been forgiving to those who misread the intent—or the pain threshold—of their adversaries. Israel learned this the hardest way possible on October 7, 2023. The price of underestimating Hamas's intentions and capabilities was catastrophic. The attacks of that day left Israel wounded, grieving, and stunned. Many questioned whether it could rise from the ashes, let alone fight back with coherence and resolve.

But what was difficult to predict then has now become clear: Israel's enemies would soon make the same mistake.

Iran miscalculated—profoundly. It failed to internalize how deeply the October 7 trauma reshaped Israel's national psyche and strategic posture. More crucially, it underestimated the degree to which Israel was prepared for this moment. In the years since October 7, Israel worked brick by brick, quietly and methodically, to put all the necessary pieces in place—in intelligence, cyber, air power, long-range strike capabilities, and regional coordination.

When the operation commenced, these assets were not scrambled in haste—they were released like a slingshot long-held in tension, unleashing a series of calibrated, painful, and irreparable blows to the core of Iran's defense and nuclear infrastructure.

Perhaps the greatest Iranian misjudgment was its blindness to the depth of Israeli penetration. The level of access, the intelligence precision, and the operational reach achieved by Israel ahead of this campaign were far beyond what Tehran had even begun to imagine.

In the Middle East, miscalculation is often fatal. October 7 taught Israel that. June 12 will teach Iran the same.

The Fight Is Far From Over

Yet even amid operational success, it is critical to curb any sense of triumphalism. The fight is far from over. Israel's primary objective—the full dismantlement of Iran's nuclear infrastructure—has not yet been achieved. Key elements of the program, especially the fortified facility at Fordow, remain intact.

This reality demands not only continued military resolve but national endurance and resilience. The campaign ahead will require sustained commitment from Israeli decision-makers and civilians alike. Iran will go to great lengths to stall, deceive, and counter Israel's actions—all in an effort to deny the operation its most vital strategic goal. What has been achieved so far is significant but insufficient. The most difficult phase may still lie ahead.

A Sovereign Decision

While American support was indispensable—particularly in bolstering Israel's air defense systems, resupplying ammunition, and providing essential political cover on the international stage—the decision to strike Iran was Israel's alone. This underscores a core tenet of Israel's national security doctrine: that despite its strategic partnership with the United States and the critical support it receives, Israel ultimately relies on its own capabilities to defend itself.

The cooperation, communication, and strategic coordination with Washington were real and ongoing. But the final judgment was made in Jerusalem, not in Washington. That distinction matters. It underscores Israel's status as a sovereign actor, willing and able to defend its national interests, unilaterally when necessary. In the eyes of both allies and adversaries across the Middle East, this reinforces the credibility of Israeli deterrence—and the independence of Israeli resolve.

The Diplomatic Endgame—But Not Yet

Israel's endgame is not endless war; rather it seeks to utilize its successful campaign together with the credible threat of American involvement to achieve a diplomatic solution that is advantageous to Israel—inhibiting Iran's ability to enrich uranium. Most critically, a diplomatic resolution must follow Israel's campaign to dismantle Iran's critical nuclear infrastructure. A premature settlement forced under duress would risk leaving the core threat intact and give Iran the ability to reconstitute its nuclear program.

While some voices may speculate about regime change in Iran, that is not Israel's stated or implied objective—and at this stage, such an outcome remains speculative at best and dependent on forces beyond Israel's control. The task at

hand is far more immediate and narrowly defined: to deny Iran the capability to produce a nuclear weapon. Only when that goal is accomplished can diplomacy play its proper role—not as a shield against action but as a tool to solidify its outcomes.

Regionally, Israel's actions and its operational successes can serve as a foundation for expanded regional engagement with its moderate Sunni partners—expanding the Abraham Accords, promoting regional political and economic integration, all while positioning Israel as a central pillar within an American-led regional architecture.

Strategic Implications

Israel's attack on Iran was not just a military action. It was a declaration of intent. It signaled that, while diplomacy and deterrence are always preferable, Israel will not outsource its security—especially when faced with existential threats. The operation underscored the value of surprise, strategic patience, and careful sequencing. It demonstrated that in today's evolving threat environment, deterrence is only credible when backed by visible, decisive action.

For defense professionals, policymakers, and observers alike, the lesson is clear: Ignoring clear and present dangers may delay war, but it makes eventual conflict more costly. Israel chose to act—not because it wanted war, but because the alternative was far worse.

** This article was originally published on June 17, 2025 through [RealClear Defense](#)*