

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel. The war marked not only the most severe peak so far in the ongoing confrontation between the two states, but also the most traumatic event for Iran since the end of the Iran–Iraq War in 1988. The war, and especially the heavy salvos of missiles launched from Iran toward Israel, also heightened fear and anxiety within Israel—already traumatized by the October 7 massacre and the ongoing campaign on seven fronts. Following the war, a debate emerged regarding its results. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the outcome of the war with Iran as “a historic victory that will stand for generations.” He declared that Israel had succeeded in removing two immediate existential threats: the threat of annihilation by nuclear bombs and the threat of annihilation by 20,000 ballistic missiles, and that Israel had dealt “crushing blows to the evil regime” in Tehran.¹

US President Donald Trump went even further, declaring that the nuclear facilities had been “completely destroyed” and that the United States had set back Iran’s nuclear program by decades.² Others, however, raised doubts about the removal of the Iranian threat. A senior Israeli intelligence official expressed satisfaction with the campaign’s achievements but emphasized that it was neither correct nor responsible to declare the “removal of the threat.”³ Rafi Meron, former Deputy Head of the National Security Council for Technology and Special Affairs, likewise voiced skepticism regarding the

1 Prime Minister Netanyahu in a statement to the media. “Statement by PM Netanyahu – 24 June 2025.” Prime Minister’s Office. <https://tinyurl.com/5cbr9m8k>

2 “Israeli lawmaker denies Trump claim Iran’s Fordow nuclear site destroyed,” *Ynet*, June 25, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/4dv6sych>

3 Ronen Bergman, “Convoluting phrasing, messages from the most secretive body: ‘To say that the threat has been removed? That is neither correct nor responsible.’” *Ynet*, June 27, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/45nrc8ae>

elimination of the nuclear threat to Israel, arguing that the war's objectives had not been achieved.⁴

If in Israel—the side whose operational achievements in the war are beyond doubt—the war sparked debate over its implications and lessons, then in the Islamic Republic it was perceived as a profoundly destabilizing event. The Israeli strike on June 13 and the United States' entry into the campaign a few days later took Tehran by surprise. For years, Iran had assessed that while Israel wished to attack its nuclear facilities, it lacked the capability to achieve meaningful results; the United States, by contrast, had the operational capacity but no desire to become entangled in another Middle Eastern conflict.

The air superiority achieved by Israel during the war, together with the intelligence penetration it revealed, astonished senior Iranian officials and citizens alike. The intensity of the shock was reflected in the name given to the war in Iran: “The Imposed War” (جنگ تحمیلی); the same term used to describe the eight-year Iran–Iraq War of the 1980s. That war is still perceived in Iran as a national trauma embedded in the collective memory. Thirty-seven years after its end in 1988, millions of Iranians from a generation that did not experience the first “Imposed War” were exposed to the horrors of the second “Imposed War.” A member of the Iranian Psychologists Association reported a 40% increase in calls to psychological treatment centers after the war.⁵

An article published shortly after the war on the *Iranian Diplomacy* website compared the two “Imposed Wars,” arguing that despite significant differences in means and methods of warfare, the similarities between them are striking. Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein attacked Iran in the hope of achieving a swift victory, based on the assessment that the country had been weakened by the Islamic Revolution and would collapse quickly. Similarly, Israel believed that

4 “The objectives of the war have not been achieved.” *103FM*, June 24, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/kdv8ekc2>

5 “The psychological injuries of the 12-Day War: From PTSD to increased cigarette consumption.” *Hamshahri*, July 22, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3wvyh6wf>

eliminating Iran's senior command echelon would paralyze the country and lead to its disintegration. Then, as now, the enemy enjoyed the support of global powers, while Iran was left almost alone. Yet, as then, Iran managed to regain control rapidly. In the 1980s, it succeeded in reclaiming occupied territories within about two years; this time, its armed forces managed to stabilize the situation within a week and exact a heavy price from Israel. Moreover, in both cases, it was demonstrated that through internal cohesion, wise and unified leadership, the heroism of its fighters, and effective deterrence based on military buildup, advanced weaponry, alliances with other countries, and security agreements with regional states, Iran was capable of overcoming the crisis and inflicting defeat upon its enemies.⁶

The Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army for Coordination, Amir Habibollah Sayyari, also pointed to the similarities between the two wars. He noted that the enemy's objective in both was to defeat the revolution and undermine Iran's territorial integrity. In both cases, all necessary resources were made available to the enemy. In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein was supported by all Western countries, from both the eastern and western blocs, and today Israel is supported by NATO and the Western states. Then, as now, Iran was forced to fight not against small enemies but against global imperialism as a whole.⁷

Just as the Iran–Iraq War shaped Iran's national security doctrine and national consciousness, it is reasonable to assume that the 12-Day War is also likely to shake the Islamic Republic in the coming years and leave a significant mark on its military-security, political, regional, and domestic arenas. The importance of the war can be inferred from the words of the Commander of the Iranian Army, Amir Hatami, who said in a meeting with

6 "The similarities between the two imposed wars." *Iranian Diplomacy*, September 25, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/5ebsj7ue>

7 "Analysis by the Chief Coordination Officer of the Army regarding Iran's two imposed wars." *Khabar Online*, September 25, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/ym7594ha>

members of the Majlis Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy that the 12-Day War taught Iran lessons equivalent to 12 years of experience. He noted that Iran had experienced a fully integrated war, in which the enemy combined advanced technology with political, media, security, and intelligence components, and that based on these lessons, Iran had adopted new approaches to deal with all types of threats, which would lead to more effective action against the enemy.⁸

The primary aim of this memorandum is to examine the lessons that Iran is drawing from the war and its implications in four main areas: the nuclear program, strategic military systems, the regional arena, and the domestic arena—and to assess how the war has influenced Iran’s national security concept. To this end, I have relied primarily on statements by senior Iranian officials and on reports and analyses in Iranian and Western media regarding the war and its consequences. I have also drawn on the work of the INSS Operation Rising Lion Lessons Study Teams, which convened at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) immediately after the war.

Naturally, assessing the implications of the war only a few months after its conclusion is a challenging and problematic task, given the absence of sufficient perspective, ongoing uncertainty and rapid developments that could alter the rules of the game both in Tehran and in Jerusalem. The Iranians are still in the relatively early stages of drawing lessons from the war and shaping the emerging reality, and it is too soon to reach firm or definitive conclusions regarding the war’s consequences and its impact on Iran’s evolving strategy. Nonetheless, the importance of the subject and the potential for renewed hostilities require an examination of Iran’s learning and assessment process even at this early stage. Moreover, it is already possible to identify key trends in Tehran’s strategic thinking and lesson-learning processes, providing a basis for continued monitoring and research on the war and its ramifications.

8 “General Hatami: The 12-Day War taught us lessons equal to 12 years of experience.” *Mehr*, October 13, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/87yrjx7s>

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