

The Campaign in Iran and the American Considerations: Between Maximizing Military Achievement and the Need for Restraint

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President Trump's statements in recent days reflect an effort to convey two parallel messages: presenting the campaign against Iran as an advancing success while, at the same time, avoiding a clear definition of its end conditions. This situation illustrates the growing tension within the administration between those pushing to continue the campaign to maximize its military achievements and economic, political, and strategic constraints pushing to shorten it. From Israel's perspective, this is an especially sensitive stage: The greater the pressure in Washington to end the fighting, the greater the risk of a gap between Israel's objective of bringing about a deep and lasting change in its threat equation with Iran and the more limited American goal of weakening, deterring, and containing Iran.

The US–Israeli campaign against Iran has reached a stage in which the discussion is no longer focused only on the question of the extent of the damage caused to Iran's military capabilities but also on how the achievement that would justify ending the war should be defined. In his recent [statements](#), President Trump presented a highly positive picture of the progress of the fighting and even hinted that the campaign could be concluded within a relatively short time, sooner than originally planned. At the same time, however, the president refrained from clarifying the minimum threshold the administration requires to end the fighting, thereby remaining ambiguous regarding the US end-state objectives.

The White House is presenting an almost glowing picture: America is strong, Iran is taking blows, and the policy of “peace through strength” is proving itself. But reality, at least for now, is less comfortable. The campaign is continuing toward the end of its second week; Trump himself continues to demand Iran's “unconditional surrender”; and at the same time, he has also referred to his desire to shape the regime in Iran, almost in the Venezuelan mold—that is, establishing an alternative leadership more convenient for American interests. But the Iranian reality is not Venezuela, and the Iranian system is probably far more resilient than the White House would like to assume. Meanwhile, Iran, which has appointed Ali Khamenei's son as the new supreme leader, has still not broken. According to [a reported classified US intelligence assessment](#), even a broader campaign than the one currently underway would not necessarily bring down the regime in Tehran, because Iran possesses well-established mechanisms of governmental, religious, and security continuity.

This ambiguity in American objectives is not accidental. It reflects the gap between the desired and the possible. From Israel's perspective, the preferred outcome of the campaign is broad strategic change: a deep blow with lasting significance to Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities, a substantial weakening of the network of proxies throughout the Middle East,

and the creation of conditions for regime change—or at the very least, conditions that would make it difficult for the current regime to restore its sources of power. By contrast, from the US perspective, the likely objective is more limited: substantial weakening of Iran, strengthening American deterrence, limiting the regime’s ability to recover, and ending the fighting while avoiding prolonged entanglement. In other words, Israel seeks structural change; the United States may settle for a deterred and contained Iran.

The factors driving the continuation of the campaign can be divided into several categories. The first is threat perception. The US administration fears that stopping the war too early could allow Iran to rebuild some of its capabilities and portray its very survival as a strategic achievement. In the administration’s view, in such a scenario, Iran would continue to pose an ongoing threat to Israel, the Gulf states, and direct American interests, particularly freedom of navigation in the Gulf, the stability of the energy market, and the pro-American regional order.

The second category is political and leadership-related. Trump seeks to present the campaign as proof of the effectiveness of the policy of “peace through strength.” Since the administration tied the use of force to a promise of achieving a clear result, it has a built-in incentive to continue the fighting until it can point to an outcome that can be presented as decisive, or at least as a significant and uncontested achievement. The more political and public capital the administration has already invested in the campaign, the harder it becomes to stop at a stage that cannot be portrayed as a success. Trump has invested considerable effort, through a long series of interviews and speeches, in highlighting the military gains, in part because there is no way to present the American public with tangible achievements on the ground. There may be concern within the administration that a decision to stop early would be perceived publicly not as a demonstration of restraint but as a missed opportunity to defeat Iran with a more decisive blow.

The third category is global-strategic. From Washington’s perspective, the campaign against Iran is not only in the Middle Eastern arena; rather, it is perceived also as part of the broader American message to rival actors, especially China. The ability to use force, protect energy routes, and punish a threatening and destabilizing actor is seen as a central component of projecting comprehensive American power. Therefore, the way the campaign ends could carry significance beyond the narrow Iranian context and even beyond the broader Middle Eastern one.

At the same time, however, real pressures are also mounting in the opposite direction, driven by economic considerations. Disruptions have already become evident in the energy markets, and uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz is causing sharp volatility in oil prices. From the administration’s perspective, this poses a direct political risk. A sustained rise in fuel and energy prices could increase inflationary pressures, hurt the American consumer, and quickly turn the campaign from a display of strength into a domestic political burden, especially ahead of the midterm elections scheduled for November 2026. [Reports of American unease over Israeli strikes against oil and fuel facilities in Tehran](#) illustrate just how sensitive the administration is to any additional shock in the energy market. In any case, President Trump was given a clear demonstration of this on March 9, when even a vague promise on his part that the war would end soon triggered an immediate drop in oil prices. Conversely, concern

that Trump is not keeping his word could quickly produce the opposite effect and work against him.

This consideration is reinforced by [public opinion](#). In the United States, support for a prolonged war appears to be limited. There is some willingness to support limited strikes but not necessarily a long, costly campaign with no clear endpoint. This sensitivity increases as the confrontation entails tangible costs in the form of fuel prices, risks to American forces, and the geographic expansion of the conflict. The implication is that the window of public legitimacy for the operation will be relatively short.

At the same time, it is important to distinguish between general public opinion and the position of the center of gravity of the conservative Republican system. At present, despite the existence of some critical voices in the MAGA camp and the conservative media, [the center of gravity of that camp is still lining up behind Trump and granting legitimacy for continuing the campaign](#), so long as it is presented as limited in time, based mainly on air power, and not sliding into broad ground involvement or an “endless war.” This support rests to a large extent on Trump’s own leadership: If the president changes course or signals that his objectives have been achieved, large segments of the conservative camp will likely fall into line quickly with a policy of restraint and termination as well.

Beyond that, there is a limitation related to the campaign’s strategic utility. Even if the military effort continues to inflict substantial damage on Iran, there is no certainty that its achievements will translate into regime collapse or a fundamental change in its policy and conduct. If it indeed becomes clear that the achievements of the fighting are accumulating primarily at the level of weakening rather than decisive victory, the American tendency to define the end in terms of a sufficient achievement rather than full maximization will grow stronger. In such a situation, the likelihood of a gap will increase between the outcome the United States would be prepared to accept and the outcome Israel would regard as necessary.

This is what gives the coming period its importance. The next few days could be a key test not only militarily but also diplomatically and politically. If the administration can point to another achievement that can be interpreted as meaningful progress toward the war’s objectives, it may try to leverage it into an exit point. If not, it will face a difficult choice between expanding the campaign and ending it under conditions that do not fully realize the ambitions and objectives set at the outset.

Implications for Israel

From Israel’s perspective, the central conclusion is that the American time window for the campaign should not be assumed to be unlimited. Therefore, Israel must act simultaneously on two levels. First, it should strive to maximize as quickly as possible those gains that it would regard as vital components of an acceptable end-state: cumulative damage to Iran’s nuclear, missile, and proxy capabilities, as well as the preservation of freedom of action for continued enforcement and interdiction. Second, it must conduct an intensive dialogue with Washington to reduce as much as possible the gap between the Israeli objective and the American threshold for what constitutes a sufficient achievement.

At the same time, Israel must take into account that steps perceived in Washington as an uncoordinated expansion of the campaign’s objectives—particularly those liable to affect the

global energy market—could increase American pressure to restrain the campaign. Therefore, alongside the desire to maximize the achievement, it is important to avoid moves that could accelerate an American shift from a policy of maximizing military achievement to one of restraint.

In conclusion, the central issue for Israel is not only the scale of the military gains achieved in Iran but also its ability to influence how the campaign's end is defined in Washington. The clearer it becomes that, for the US administration, "victory" means weakening and containment rather than deeper change, the greater Israel's challenge will be in ensuring that the end does not leave Iran merely temporarily weakened but restrained over time.

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