

An historic opportunity to eliminate the Iranian threat

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 16.06.2025

The Israeli operation has left the regime in Tehran stunned. The boldness of the move, the depth of the intelligence penetration, the quality and variety of operational capabilities, the breadth of the theater of operations, the pace of strikes and assassinations, the number of targets hit, and the absolute freedom of action in the airspace alongside the replication of the scenes from Gaza and Beirut, now playing out in Tehran, all of this has far exceeded what the Iranians thought possible within what they had expected from a “strike on the Iranian nuclear program.”

The regime’s failure to protect its personnel and assets adds to its failure to deter Israel or prevent and disrupt the assault. Images of thousands of Tehran residents fleeing the city and reports of Russian President Vladimir Putin warning Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei about the peril facing his regime have brought humiliation. Since the start of the operation, the chain of events has exposed the regime’s weakness, not only in the eyes of its own citizens but also to the proxy forces under its patronage and to the countries of the region. The greater the Israeli achievement, the deeper the embarrassment for Iran.

We have reason to be proud of our accomplishments, but under no circumstances should we fall into complacency or overconfidence. The mission is far from over. The ayatollah regime has already proven during its war with Iraq its ability to endure prolonged hardship, even at a high cost. It is less sensitive to attrition when it is the target, and it regularly uses such tactics against its enemies. Furthermore, it is not bound by the moral restraints that the West has imposed on itself. The recent missile launches targeting densely populated areas in Israel served only to reaffirm this reality. It is safe to assume that Iran’s security apparatuses will use any means, target, or theater to exact revenge and restore its honor. Israeli security forces are no doubt preparing accordingly.

Still, Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal – its primary tool for establishing strategic symmetry – is not limitless. In the course of the fighting thus far, it has launched several hundred, and likely lost several hundred more in Israeli strikes. Given the

current situation, it is presumed that Iran will struggle to replenish its stockpiles, limiting its ability to maintain the rate of fire we have seen and to rebalance the asymmetry that is forming vis-à-vis the Israel Defense Forces. While Iran still possesses an additional arsenal of cruise missiles, UAVs, and possibly other strategic projectiles, the challenge they pose is not equivalent to that of the ballistic missiles, whether due to their quantity or performance capabilities. The geographic distance that once posed a challenge to Israel may now become an advantage.

The toppling of the Iranian regime or destabilizing it has not been defined by Israel's Diplomatic-Security Cabinet as an explicit goal of the operation. That is understandable. Nonetheless, in Israel and in parts of the region and the West, the hope that such an outcome will occur, albeit not as a direct or immediate consequence, is hardly concealed.

It is difficult to predict the tipping point for authoritarian regimes. We saw that clearly in the cascade of collapses during what was dubbed the "Arab Spring." And we needn't look that far back: Just six months ago, the world was stunned by the rapid collapse of the Syrian regime following a short surprise attack by opposition forces. This, of course, was aided by Israel's earlier defeat of Hezbollah in Lebanon and by the long-term erosion of Assad's rule since the 2011 outbreak of Syria's civil war. The lesson here is not only how hard it is to pinpoint the moment of collapse, but also the cumulative impact of repeated blows, weaknesses, and cracks.

In any case, the primary declared goals of the operation are to remove the nuclear threat and the strategic threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile program. Israel's actions thus far are progressing as planned, achieving their designated tactical objectives—and more. Reports of significant damage to Iran's nuclear facilities in Natanz and Isfahan are encouraging. The targeting of nuclear scientists is intended to deter other experts, those with or who may yet acquire similar knowledge, from joining any future efforts. A strike on the Fordow facility would leave Iran not only without its unique capabilities but also without a bargaining chip in any future negotiations, should they take place.

Do not push the US

The question of US involvement in offensive operations against Iran, within the

framework of this campaign, is especially sensitive. While the US is offering diplomatic cover, supporting defense efforts, and supplying munitions, this is not the same as active offensive participation.

Israel is well aware of voices within the US warning against American entanglement in a war that is not theirs. It is also aware that, if the US does join, it will not limit itself to military action but will seek to shape the course of the campaign. Still, from Israel's perspective, the balance of risks and benefits leans in favor of American involvement. As long as Israel can manage on its own, it would be wise to maintain the current policy and, at least officially, leave the decision entirely in the hands of President Donald Trump.

Exit strategy

Early talk of an exit strategy plays into the perception of Israel that took root before October 7: Impatient and unable to sustain prolonged conflict.

At this stage, Israel must continue to strike relentlessly, inflicting maximum damage in minimum time. This is the moment to severely impair Iran's weapons development, research, and production capabilities and to strike at all branches of its strategic force.

It is not only acceptable but necessary to take a skeptical view of overtures from Iran or its allies about resuming negotiations with the US. If Israel is drawn into such talks, the appropriate response should be: "Negotiations only under fire."

Israel must aim for the war to end not just with a devastating blow to Iran's nuclear and missile programs but also with enforceable mechanisms that will, for many years, prevent the Islamic Republic from rebuilding its military and strategic capabilities. Operation Rising Lion is a historic opportunity to achieve that.

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