

# Trump declares Iran beaten, but Gulf leaders worry the job is unfinished

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 29.03.2026

"We destroyed Iran, we took them out of the game. They're out, and in a big way. We need to move now on the Abraham Accords," President Donald Trump told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

In a speech in Florida over the weekend, the US president described his contacts with the Saudi leader. Trump said the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, were cooperating closely with Washington in the campaign against Iran, and voiced hope that all of them would join the Abraham Accords.

Yet the main concern among Gulf rulers these days is the possibility that the US and Israel will stop the war without "finishing the job." In that case, the Iranian regime would recover, do everything possible to protect itself from future attacks and settle scores with everyone who helped carry them out. In that scenario, they believe, their countries would rank high on Iran's target list.

Arab leaders in the region also see matters through the lens of time. Trump will leave office in 33 months, and no one knows what comes after him. Iran's leadership, by contrast, does not operate on electoral terms; patience and endurance are natural elements of its conduct. That is why these leaders would rather absorb Iran's blows in silence, despite the humiliation that comes with them. It is reasonable to assume they shrink in their seats every time Trump praises their contribution.

If bin Salman and other Gulf rulers join the Abraham Accords now, it will be only out of a desire to secure protection now against Iran's future threats. They would certainly prefer the war to end only after the regime is toppled, bringing an end to the era of fear it has imposed.

From Israel's point of view, its strategic position is far better today than it was on the eve of the war: Iran's strategic capabilities have suffered a severe, even if not irreversible, blow; the regime's stability has been shaken, even though it is still

standing; and Israel has once again demonstrated its military strength and established itself as a major strategic partner of the US, not a dependent or a client state.

As for the aspiration to replace the regime, it should not be abandoned. Otherwise, everything achieved so far could prove temporary. Israel needs to frame the current campaign as a milestone in the process of replacing the regime, a process that may be delayed but will ultimately come.

In the meantime, Israel is making the most of the opportunity to deepen the damage to Iran. In addition to sites linked to the nuclear program and military industries, Israel has also acted against major economic facilities, without violating the temporary immunity Trump granted to energy infrastructure. Thus, the strike on Iran's three largest steel plants, the second most important sector in the Iranian economy, caused damage estimated in the billions of dollars, as did the attack on the heavy water production plant in Arak, which generated tens of millions of dollars a year in profits for the regime in Tehran. These strikes do allow the regime to rally the public against Israel, but they also deepen its distress and preserve the potential for protest against it.

Trump's range of options now runs from reaching a comprehensive arrangement with the Iranian regime to escalating the fighting, with the possibility in between of ending the war through a ceasefire without a broader agreement. Under all of these scenarios, Israel's interest is that as long as the current Iranian regime remains in place, the sanctions imposed on it should not be lifted, no limits should be placed on Israel's freedom of action against it or its proxies, and the partnership with the US should not be harmed.

## **Do not let the Houthis divert attention**

The Houthis' entry into the war should not have come as a surprise. In fact, their prolonged restraint was what raised questions. Two active arms of the Iranian octopus, the Hezbollah terrorist organization and the Houthis, are willing to pay a heavy price to prevent the worst possible outcome: being left without leadership.

From Tehran's perspective, it is reasonable to assume that bringing in the Houthis was meant not only to open another front against Israel, but also to improve the regime's bargaining position with the US. Blocking the Bab el-Mandeb

Strait and disrupting commercial shipping in the Red Sea could harm a route that partially compensated for the restrictions imposed on transporting oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Houthis can threaten naval reinforcements the US may send through the Mediterranean, and they can take part in coordinated launches toward Israel and other countries in the region, similar to the model that emerged with the Hezbollah terrorist organization.

Be that as it may, Israel's focus should remain on Iran. It is the cornerstone of the threats, and it is where the main opportunity lies. The day of reckoning with the Houthis, the Hezbollah terrorist organization and the rest of the proxies will come, and it is better for that to happen when the Iranian regime has become, for them, a broken reed.

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