The window of opportunity on Iran is getting narrower

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 16.11.2026

We find ourselves once again at a crossroads in the longest war in Israel's history. What is at stake is whether the war will bring about a lasting transformation in Israel's standing and in the regional order, or whether, in retrospect, it will prove to have been merely another round of fighting—larger and more intense than its predecessors, but fundamentally no different.

Significant achievements have certainly been made, particularly since Operation Roaring Lion against Iran. To characterize the campaign as a failure, let alone an Iranian victory, would be wholly absurd. Yet it would be equally absurd to claim that we have achieved the necessary outcome, or even any achievement that cannot be reversed.

What, then, has been achieved so far?

It is worth recalling that, before the operation, Iran was making a concerted effort to expand its ballistic missile arsenal while also working to restore its nuclear facilities. Although it was subject to sanctions, Iran had not been cut off from the global economy.

Against this backdrop, several highly significant achievements can be identified: the neutralization of most of Iran's capacity to produce new missiles on a large scale; the elimination of its ability to enrich uranium and manufacture new centrifuges; the elimination of the Supreme Leader, the most senior echelon of the military command and leading nuclear scientists; the neutralization of most of the Iranian navy's vessels; and damage to some of its energy infrastructure.

In addition, as a result of the blockade and economic embargo, Iran is now experiencing an economic crisis unprecedented since the Revolution.

At the same time, regarding Iran's proxy Hezbollah, Israel substantially dismantled its capabilities and seized a security zone in southern Lebanon, establishing its presence with the authorization of the Lebanese government and the United States.

Yet all these achievements remain reversible. The revolutionary Iranian regime remains in power, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has consolidated its position as the principal force in the country's decision-making process.

A quantity of enriched uranium remains on Iranian soil, presumably buried underground. One fortified nuclear facility, "Pickaxe Mountain," remains intact. The regime still possesses thousands of missiles and drones capable of being launched against Israel and the wider region. The Strait of Hormuz has not been fully reopened. Iran's proxies in Iraq remain in place, Hezbollah has not been dismantled and the Houthis have expanded their control in Yemen and continue to threaten the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

The war has undoubtedly elevated Israel's standing as a regional power and demonstrated unprecedented military and intelligence capabilities without parallel anywhere in the world. It has also established Israel as a genuine military partner of the United States, having fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's leading power.

On the other hand, just as the prolongation of the war in Gaza reinforced the erosion of public support for Israel in the United States among Democrats, the prolongation of the war in Iran without a clear victory has contributed to an erosion among Republicans.

As a result, Israel currently finds itself at a low point in American domestic politics. This situation stems less from the decision to launch the Iran war itself, and more as a result of U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to stop short of the regime's overthrow, restrain Israel and open negotiations with Tehran—a move that foreclosed the possibility of achieving victory several months ago.

The question that stands before us is one of the window of opportunity.

Since August, Trump has adopted a strategy of economic strangulation, with the hopes that the regime will eventually implode under the pressure as its income runs dry.

However, despite the severity of its economic crisis, it is far from certain that economic pressure alone will bring about the regime's collapse. It can maintain control over the population through coercion, channel its limited resources toward members of its own apparatus and circumvent sanctions sufficiently to

ensure its survival. It rules by force and it is not sensitive to the unarmed population's suffering.

Up until the recent midterm elections, one could plausibly have argued that we have the two years until the end of Trump's term in office to let the economic pressure have its effect. Some time before then would come a decision point of whether to return to military strikes on the regime's economic base, centers of power and domestic forces. But this timeline has now shortened significantly.

After the new House and Senate are sworn in, Trump will retain the legal authority to order limited military strikes, but his strategic room for maneuver and initiative will be vastly diminished. This would make waging any kind of significant campaign against the Iranian regime nearly impossible.

The new Congress will almost certainly use every means to restrain Trump on Iran, including invoking the War Powers Act to attempt to force an end to the war by limiting funding for continued large-scale deployment in the region.

It could dilute and undermine Trump's economic pressure on Iran by blocking additional sanctions legislation or restricting funding for particular enforcement initiatives. The administration might lose the political room to confront Chinese entities that continue to purchase Iranian oil and facilitate Iranian financial transactions.

Finally, the new Congress will likely challenge Trump on all other major policies of this administration, demanding bandwidth and resources for political battles that will detract from his ability to take initiative on Iran.

Until January, Trump will have greater room for maneuver to resume the campaign and shape his legacy as the president who brought an end to America's most hated and bitter enemy. Otherwise, he risks being remembered as a president who squandered resources in an "unnecessary" war whose gains had evaporated by the end of his term.

If the war that began on Oct. 7, 2023, is to culminate in a genuinely new Middle East, Israel must remain laser-focused on the goal of facilitating the end of the Iranian regime. While close coordination with Washington must be maintained, it is Israel's willingness to act independently that may tip the balance, and it must prepare actions that it can take if Washington prefers not to be involved.

The outcome of this critical juncture will also largely determine whether victory can be secured in the other theaters of Israel's war.

In Lebanon, the only way to bring about lasting change is the collapse of the Iranian regime, which remains Hezbollah's ideological and financial patron. The continuation of the regime would lead to Hezbollah's recovery and the rebuilding of its capabilities to hold Lebanon hostage.

The regime would also continue channeling resources into Gaza, undermining the position of any actor that might replace Hamas, and strengthening hostile elements in Judea and Samaria, as it is already doing.

If Israel hesitates now, in the coming year it may find itself facing mounting pressure to relinquish the gains achieved in all theaters. It will once again confront terrorist organizations working relentlessly to rebuild their capabilities and develop new and unexpected ways to attack the Jewish state, all while Iran moves to restore its missile and nuclear threats under a leadership willing to take considerable risks in its efforts to destroy Israel.

If, however, Israel commits all its capabilities to delivering a decisive blow to the regime while it is at its weakest, it could bring about a historic transformation across the entire Middle East.

The fall of the regime need not lead to regional chaos, as feared in Washington. If handled correctly, it could instead open the way to a new regional order, built on the ruins of the order established in the wake of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, and grounded in the peoples and national communities whose identities and aspirations are not reflected in today's state borders.

Throughout this war, Israel has come to understand that it has no choice but to adopt a broad historical perspective to ensure that this war does not ultimately prove to be just another, larger round of fighting, but rather a watershed moment that transforms Israel's strategic position for generations to come.

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