

Iran is asking to be destroyed

written by Col. (res.) Dr. Hanan Shai | 15.04.2026

The claim now echoing around television studios – that the war against Iran has gone off the rails – does not withstand scrutiny.

The clear objective of this war from the outset has been to remove three threats: Iran's nuclear program, its ballistic missile arsenal, and its network of proxy armies across the Middle East.

Certainly, the US and Israel understood in advance that war involves many unknowns. Thus, neither country can fully control the duration of the conflict, and the pre-war intelligence picture is never complete.

Taken together, the US and Israel certainly knew that the elimination of Iranian threats would inevitably be partial rather than absolute.

Regime change was never formally defined as a goal of the war. Consequently, it was understood that once the strikes concluded, Iran would begin rebuilding – whether its losses were modest following a short war or significant following a longer war.

To limit Iran's military recovery, a sustained effort of preemptive disruption will be necessary to neutralize risks in their infancy before they mature into major threats.

Had Iran refrained from attacking its neighbors and closing the Strait of Hormuz, it is entirely plausible that President Donald Trump might have moved to end the operation, to declare victory (albeit a victory limited in time, say for a decade), and shift to a long-term strategy of containment and periodic “mowing the grass.”

By striking regional states and choking a vital maritime artery, it echoed strategic blunders of the past: King Hussein of Jordan's decision in 1967 to join a war he had been warned against, costing him the West Bank his grandfather had secured, and Tsar Nicholas II's entry into World War I, which ultimately cost him his throne.

Toward a more decisive phase

If Iran persists in refusing to surrender on US terms, the nature of the conflict is likely to shift. What has thus been conducted along a spectrum between “deterrence” and “attritional degradation” could evolve into a war of “decisive annihilation.”

Such a campaign will not be based on large-scale ground maneuvers but on systematic destruction – a methodical, almost phalanx-like destruction – aimed, in

the president's own words, at "sending Iran back to the Stone Age."

In practical terms, this would mean stripping Iran within days of not only its military capabilities but also of its capacity to sustain its economy and population. Such an outcome could, even if not originally intended, trigger internal unrest leading to regime collapse.

Yet this creates a fundamental moral contradiction. The notion of reducing Iran to ruin sits uneasily alongside declarations of solidarity with the Iranian people.

For that reason, if the United States moves to destroy Iran's economy and more, it bears a moral responsibility to complete the process through regime change - liberating Iranian citizens from the rule of the ayatollahs.

Given its geostrategic position, a devastated Iran could invite in China, Russia, and North Korea to rebuild its military and economy. Western states, too, might be tempted to assist in exchange for secure passage through Hormuz.

For this reason, Washington cannot rely on an organic internal uprising. It must act decisively - perhaps through creative mechanisms such as the transfer of sovereignty - to ensure rapid and controlled transition.

In such a scenario, the US and Israel will have to apply a doctrine of constant security enforcement, continuously "mowing the grass," but going beyond it toward uprooting threats at their emergence.

Even a decisive campaign will not eliminate all dangers. Residual Iranian military capabilities, hidden deep within Iran's mountainous terrain, could still be used to strike at Israel and Gulf states.

Proxy networks in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq would remain active, and there is a real possibility of unconventional retaliation, including the activation of covert terror cells embedded worldwide, potentially even within Israel itself.

The reality is undeniably complex but manageable. Neither Israel nor the United States ever intended to conduct a large-scale ground invasion of Iran. A methodical, stand-off campaign was always the more plausible path.

Paradoxically, credit for this escalation - from attrition to decisive destruction - must be given to Iran itself. And the transition to decisive destruction, which could require repeat military engagement if the regime does not disintegrate, may endure for more than a decade.

But this does not mean that war has gone wrong. Just the opposite. The war has not failed but has been upgraded - by Iran itself. Published in The Jerusalem Post, April 13, 2026.*The opinions expressed in Misgav publications are the authors' alone.