

Israel learned the lesson Europe forgot

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 06.04.2026

In the period between the two World Wars, the Czech people established a democratic, enlightened, tolerant, and peace-seeking republic at the heart of Europe. The leaders of Czechoslovakia were not naïve. They were acutely aware that their country bordered Germany, which had already demonstrated its aggressive character during the First World War. Czechoslovakia maintained a defense alliance with France and assumed that Britain would not remain indifferent should it come under German attack.

However, Britain at the time pursued a policy of containment and appeasement toward Nazi Germany, which demanded that Czechoslovakia cede the Sudetenland. It was clear that France alone could not withstand Nazi Germany. Indeed, the two powers cooperated within the framework of the Munich Conference and compelled Czechoslovakia to make far-reaching concessions.

These concessions failed to restrain Nazi Germany; on the contrary, they only whetted its appetite. Within a year of the Munich Agreement, the most devastating war in human history, World War II, erupted. During this conflict, Nazi Germany sought to implement the “Final Solution” against the Jewish people. Ultimately, it was the leadership of Churchill and Roosevelt that mobilized the forces of freedom to confront and defeat the Nazi regime and its allies.

It was widely believed that the lessons of this period had been internalized, that democracies would no longer permit tyrannical and aggressive regimes to impose their will upon the international system through force, coercion, and terror.

Yet the emergence of the Ayatollah regime in Iran has cast doubt on this assumption. The regime has openly declared its intention to annihilate the “Zionist entity.” After years of containment, it has once again become evident that the Ayatollahs are not oriented toward reconciliation, but rather toward a violent confrontation with their adversaries worldwide.

At what appeared to be the final moment—mere weeks before Iran was expected to attain nuclear weapons capability—two leaders, President Donald Trump and

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, initiated a comprehensive campaign against Iran. They sought to enlist European states—particularly Britain, Germany, and France—into this effort. However, these countries made it clear that “this is not our war,” preferring to stand aside and allow Israel, alongside the United States, to bear the burden.

At first glance, this position seemed to rest on a certain strategic logic. Europe assumed that it lay beyond the effective range of Iranian missiles. Yet reality soon proved otherwise. Iran launched missiles toward British bases in Cyprus and even toward Diego Garcia, some 4,000 kilometers from its territory. The message was unmistakable: the Ayatollah regime already possesses the capability to strike targets across Europe.

Even this development failed to alter Europe’s stance. This week, however, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson sharply criticized Britain’s detached approach toward its historic ally, the United States. Britain, Johnson argued, possesses deep historical familiarity with the Gulf states, and had it cooperated with Washington, it might well have influenced the conduct of the military campaign undertaken by the United States and Israel. Such cooperation, he noted, characterized British leadership under Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair during the conflicts of 1991 and 2003.

Johnson further contended that the policy of the current British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, reflects not only short-sightedness but also a degree of ingratitude. The United States assisted Britain in defeating Argentina during the Falklands War and played a decisive role in interventions in Kosovo and Bosnia, despite widespread American sentiment at the time that these were not America’s wars. “It is an illusion,” Johnson concluded, “to believe that we can bury our heads in the sand.”

In light of these developments, one cannot but recall with appreciation the leaders of Israel, from David Ben-Gurion to Golda Meir, who steadfastly refused to relinquish the country’s capacity for self-defense in favor of reliance on uncertain guarantees, defense alliances, or presidential assurances of support in times of crisis.

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