



Six Months into Operation "Roaring Lion:" An Assessment

Strategic Insights, Lessons Learnt,
and Implications for Israel

By Dr. Raphael BenLevi | October 2026



A US Marine Corps F-35 takes off from an amphibious assault ship (Photo: Faizinraz)

Key Points

- Iran is weaker than at any point since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.
- Its military and nuclear capabilities have suffered severe damage, but the regime has survived and it retains significant offensive capabilities.
- The Strait of Hormuz has lost much of its value as a strategic Iranian lever.



- The blockade caused economic damage and drove up energy prices, but it failed to trigger a global economic crisis.
- Iran's weakening has shifted the regional balance of power in favor of the Sunni axis, particularly Turkey.
- Ankara emerged from the campaign without suffering the damage sustained by the Gulf states, while its principal rival Iran was weakened.
- The United States remains the world's leading military power and is now better positioned strategically for a potential confrontation with rival powers.
- The war exposed significant limitations in its ability to sustain a prolonged campaign, including finite stocks of interceptors and munitions, the vulnerability of American bases, and sensitivity to domestic economic and political costs.
- Damage to energy and transportation infrastructure in the Gulf demonstrated that the Iranian threat is not merely a military problem, but a threat to the economic model on which the Gulf states depend.
- China and Russia have supported Iran but remain unwilling to risk a direct military confrontation with the United States on its behalf. Both provided Tehran with support in various forms but refrained from direct military intervention.
- The war has strengthened Israel's standing as a strategic asset for the United States and its allies.
- Israel is not isolated, but international attitudes toward it are increasingly polarized, and its standing in American public opinion is at a low point.
- Israel is deepening strategic partnerships with India, the Gulf states, Greece, Azerbaijan, Somaliland, and additional countries in Europe and South America.
- Israel has established a deep security zone in Lebanon and thwarted Iran's attempts to link the different fronts.
- Israel must prepare for the possibility that a weakened Iranian regime will seek to alter the strategic balance through escalation.

Introduction



The war with Iran, which began with Israel's Operation Roaring Lion and the United States' Operation Epic Fury, remains unresolved more than seven months later, and high-intensity fighting could resume at any time. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify strategic insights and lessons concerning the various actors directly and indirectly involved, and to assess how the war has affected the international system as a whole and Israel's position within it.

Phases of the War

The war has passed through several phases over the past seven months. To take a broad view of its course, the campaign can be divided as follows:

- **Intensive fighting (March-April)** – Strikes against Iran's leadership and key sites; Iranian attacks across the region; and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **A "Middle Eastern" ceasefire (April-May)** – The United States imposed a naval blockade against Iran in the Strait of Hormuz, alongside sanctions and economic pressure. Iran retained leverage through its control over access to the Strait of Hormuz, while Israel conducted ground operations in Lebanon.
- **"Coercive diplomacy" (June)** – The United States sought to ease the war's economic impact while threatening escalation, pursuing a memorandum of understanding with the regime that offered substantial sanctions relief conditional on Iran meeting US demands. Iran attempted unsuccessfully to link the Strait of Hormuz to the Lebanon front. An agreement was signed between Israel and the Lebanese government.
- **Friction in the Gulf (July)** – Iran attacked vessels and asserted sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz; the United States struck Iranian capabilities in the Gulf region.
- **Intense economic pressure (August)** – The United States shifted to a strategy of comprehensive economic pressure, succeeded in partially reopening the Strait of Hormuz and restoring a substantial share of shipping traffic, and pushed Iran into a deep economic crisis.
- **Iran backed into a corner (September)** – The Houthis launched a campaign against Saudi Arabia, apparently in coordination with Iran, and threatened freedom of navigation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.



What Has and Has Not Been Achieved?

In February 2026, before the operation began, Iran was engaged in an extensive effort to expand its ballistic missile arsenal and rebuild its nuclear facilities. It was subject to sanctions imposed by the US administration but had not been completely cut off from the global economy. Iran continued to sell oil to China, while smuggling networks and indirect trade channels enabled the regime to continue generating revenue.

Concrete achievements include: neutralizing most of Iran's capacity to manufacture new missiles on a large scale; eliminating its ability to enrich uranium and produce new centrifuges; killing the Supreme Leader, senior military commanders, and leading nuclear scientists; neutralizing most of the Iranian Navy's vessels; and damaging parts of Iran's energy infrastructure. In addition, Iran is now experiencing an economic crisis unprecedented in scope since the Islamic Revolution. Beyond the direct achievements against Iran, Hezbollah's intervention in the war led Israel to establish a substantial security zone in southern Lebanon and to substantially degrade Hezbollah's military capabilities, with the approval of the Lebanese government and the United States.

Despite these achievements, several major threats and unresolved issues remain: the revolutionary regime has survived, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) having further consolidated its position as the principal decision-making authority; the continued presence of enriched uranium on Iranian soil, probably buried underground; the survival of one intact, heavily protected nuclear facility ("Pickaxe Mountain"); the regime's retention of thousands of missiles and drones that can be launched against Israel and the region; the failure to fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz; and the continued existence of militias in Iraq loyal to the regime. Hezbollah has not been fully dismantled, and the Houthis continue to threaten the Bab el-Mandeb Strait while having expanded the territory under their control.

What Have We Learned About the United States?

The United States remains the world's leading military power and is now better positioned strategically for a potential confrontation with rival powers – For the first time, the United States 'crossed the Rubicon' and entered a direct war against the Iranian regime, following decades of covert operations, economic pressure, and threats



of military action. This marked an unprecedented step in US relations with the Iranian regime and the most extensive deployment of American military force in the past twenty years. In doing so, the United States demonstrated that it remains the only military power capable of waging high-intensity warfare thousands of kilometers from its own territory. Ultimately, Iran's diminished capabilities have left the United States in a stronger strategic position in the event of a confrontation with China.

The United States is not currently equipped for sustained, high-intensity warfare and is vulnerable to missile attacks on its bases – During the first month of fighting, constraints on interceptor and munition stockpiles became apparent. The war further exposed a defining feature of modern warfare: missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) can inflict significant damage at relatively low cost, while defending against them is considerably more expensive. Trump has been cautious about further escalation because he is unwilling to bear the costs of Iranian retaliation against American bases and critical infrastructure in the Gulf.

The American public is reluctant to bear the costs – The United States is highly sensitive to domestic economic pressures, and much of the American public remains unconvinced that it should bear the economic costs for a preventive war fought far from home, in the absence of a prior direct attack on the United States. In practice, although sympathy for the Iranian regime is scarce, most Americans do not understand why the war is necessary. The administration sustained high-intensity combat for only a few weeks before shifting toward a negotiated settlement. By the end of August, approximately one-third of Americans appeared to support the war, compared with around 70% of Republicans. For most Americans, the most tangible issue was the price of gasoline.

Crude oil prices rose, but less dramatically than might have been expected – Global crude oil prices rose from \$72 to a peak of \$120 per barrel, fell back to \$82 during the summer, and then rose again to \$100 following the escalation involving Saudi Arabia. Oil prices were therefore significantly affected by the course of the fighting, but in both directions: a sharp increase was followed by a substantial decline. Even the peak of \$120 per barrel did not constitute an extreme or catastrophic increase by historical standards.



US retail fuel prices remained elevated even after crude oil prices declined – The price of gasoline in the United States rose from approximately \$3 per gallon to around \$4.50 and remained at that level. Diesel prices climbed from \$3.70 to \$6.30 per gallon – a steeper increase with broader implications for transportation costs, agriculture, and consumer prices.

The Trump administration is navigating between the need to avoid capitulating to Iranian demands and the need to prevent a wider regional war – Although the administration likely did not anticipate a prolonged campaign, it adapted its strategy to developments and Iranian actions without triggering a severe economic crisis, deploying ground troops for an invasion, or making significant concessions to Iran in negotiations.

The critical decisions in this regard included countering Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz with a naval blockade targeting Iranian shipping; insisting that the memorandum of understanding require Iran to meet US conditions before any concessions would take effect; taking measures to restore energy exports from the Gulf; and deciding to intensify economic pressure.

The war has deepened the crisis of trust between the United States and its NATO allies – The refusal of many NATO countries to assist in the war effort against Iran, particularly restrictions imposed by some on American use of their bases and airspace, reinforced a perception in Washington that they benefit from American protection but are unwilling to support the United States when needed. Spain and France notably opposed the use of their territory for offensive operations; Italy and Britain also restricted their assistance, although Britain later partially revised its position. Other countries permitted American operations under existing agreements. Even countries that granted access to their bases did not join the campaign itself.

The dispute revived questions about the reciprocity underpinning the alliance. European governments justified their positions by citing the lack of prior consultation and concerns about being drawn into a war whose objectives were unclear. The US administration, by contrast, viewed their stance as undermining the credibility of the strategic partnership. The crisis could accelerate a reassessment of the American military presence in Europe and the nature of the US commitment to the continent's security. Ultimately, the war has demonstrated both the extraordinary reach of American



military power and the constraints on sustaining a prolonged campaign, particularly finite munitions stockpiles and the vulnerability of US bases. Iran's weakening has nevertheless strengthened Washington's strategic position relative to its rivals.

What Have We Learned About Iran?

Iran is in its weakest and most vulnerable position since the Revolution, but it remains highly dangerous – Iran is now in its weakest and most vulnerable position since 1979. Nevertheless, it still retains dangerous capabilities, and factions favoring a more aggressive military posture have become dominant in the decision-making structures. At the same time, the country is grappling with extreme inflation and shortages of fuel for domestic consumption. Average household income is estimated to cover only about one-third of basic household expenses. The country also faces shortages of food and medicine.

The war has exposed the weaknesses of Iran's long-standing strategy – The results so far reveal the weaknesses of Iran's strategy since 1979, which sought to compensate for conventional military inferiority through threats of escalation designed to convince stronger adversaries that confronting Tehran would be prohibitively dangerous and costly.

This strategy rested on building proxy organizations capable of carrying out attacks while obscuring Iranian responsibility; developing missile and drone arsenals designed to strike civilian populations and critical infrastructure in neighboring countries; and threatening freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz in order to disrupt energy markets and impose costs on governments far from the Gulf. All of this was accompanied by the pursuit of nuclear weapons, intended to secure immunity for the regime as it sought to extend its control across the region.

Iran's attacks on countries across the region have alienated their governments – Iran's missile and drone attacks inflicted damage on numerous states but also generated widespread hostility toward Tehran that is unlikely to dissipate soon. As far as Israel is concerned, however, the successful interception of large missile salvos has substantially reduced the fear associated with this threat.

By closing the Strait of Hormuz, Iran has diminished the future value of this threat – The closure of the Strait of Hormuz caused economic damage, but proved not to be



catastrophic. The world drew on oil reserves, Gulf states redirected some energy flows through alternative overland routes, and the United States took military action to open a protected shipping corridor. Together, these measures contained the economic damage. In June, the US administration feared that the crisis could escalate into a full-scale economic crisis if no solution were found, but that scenario was averted. By September, outward energy flows from the Persian Gulf, across all available routes, had recovered to approximately 80% of prewar levels.

The ability to close the Strait was Iran's most important and dangerous strategic lever, serving for years as a means of deterring the United States from taking military action against it. Now that the threat has been carried out, it will be difficult to use it with the same effectiveness again. States will not readily return to a situation in which Iran can threaten to plunge the global economy into crisis. The blockade has also accelerated efforts by regional states to develop alternative routes and prepare for the possibility of another closure. These routes include Saudi Arabia's East–West Pipeline, which reaches the Red Sea; the Emirati-Omani route through Fujairah; and the northern overland route through Iraq.

Iran is far more exposed and vulnerable than it sought to portray – The war exposed a series of vulnerabilities that the Iranian regime had tried to conceal for years. It became clear that Iran's air defenses could be penetrated, its naval capabilities destroyed, its missile and drone infrastructure attacked, and its ability to export oil curtailed. This revealed vulnerabilities across several core elements of Iran's military and economic strategy.

The Iranian regime has demonstrated greater resilience than expected – Despite the deep economic crisis, the regime's collapse cannot be taken for granted. It can still maintain control through force, direct its limited resources toward its own apparatus, and circumvent sanctions sufficiently to survive. If pressure intensifies, the regime may prefer to make concessions over the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for sanctions relief, and the Trump administration may be willing to accept such an arrangement.

Conversely, another scenario involves a return to widespread protests and a popular uprising, accompanied by the regime's internal fragmentation into rival factions and economic bankruptcy. Thus, despite Iran's unprecedented weakness, the question of whether the regime will survive remains open.



What Have We Learned About the Regional States?

The Gulf states are far more vulnerable than Israel to missile and drone threats –

Unlike Israel, which succeeded in defending itself to a considerable extent against Iranian missile barrages, the Gulf states suffered strikes on vital sites and strategic infrastructure. At the outset of the campaign, they hoped the United States would act to topple the Iranian regime. However, as it became clear that the campaign was unlikely to end quickly and the scale of Iran's retaliation became apparent, they changed course and pressed Washington to avoid further escalation.

For the Gulf states, the Iranian threat to critical infrastructure is not merely a matter of physical damage and reconstruction costs. It strikes at the heart of their national strategies. Gulf economies remain heavily dependent on energy exports, while simultaneously seeking to attract foreign investment, international companies, and businesses, and to transform themselves into hubs for advanced industries and knowledge-based economic activity. All these ambitions depend on foreign investors and companies having confidence in the region's security. Iran's ability to threaten ports, energy facilities, aviation, and other critical infrastructure could therefore undermine not merely individual assets, but the entire economic model.

The Gulf states look to diversify their security partnerships – The war reinforced their recognition that the United States is essential to their security, but cannot, on its own, prevent Iran from inflicting damage on them. This strengthened a trend already underway in recent years: hedging against risk by cultivating a broader network of partnerships. The United States remains the anchor of their security; Israel provides technology, intelligence, and defensive capabilities; and China offers economic ties and investment.

Saudi Arabia faces sharper choices over its security partnerships – Even before the war, Riyadh harbored doubts about America's ability to protect it in the event of a direct confrontation with Iran. The war deepened these doubts, and Saudi Arabia moved to deepen its security ties with Pakistan and Turkey, signing a trilateral defense agreement with them known as the "Mecca Defence Alliance." This does not necessarily mean that these countries would be able or willing to provide Saudi Arabia with military



protection in the event of an all-out war, but they do offer additional layers of security and diplomatic cooperation.

Meanwhile, developments in Yemen have exposed the costs of Saudi policy in recent years. Saudi Arabia opposed the Emirati approach in Yemen, which focused on strengthening local tribes and preventing the Houthis from consolidating their position, and instead relied heavily on Sunni Islamist actors.

The UAE has shifted from managing the Iranian threat to confronting it more directly – During the campaign, the UAE itself took a more active role in confronting Iran, reportedly carrying out covert strikes against dozens of targets inside Iran in coordination with the United States and Israel. In April, the UAE also withdrew from OPEC (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), a move that strengthens its autonomy in energy policy and reduces, to some extent, its dependence on Saudi policy at a time of volatility in oil markets.

A significant shift has also taken place in the economic sphere. For years, Dubai served to a considerable extent as a commercial and financial gateway for Iran, with the Emirati financial and commercial system enabling Tehran to circumvent some American sanctions. In August, the UAE announced the suspension of financial and economic transactions with Iran. This signals a move away from the attempt to manage the Iranian threat through economic ties alone.

Qatar continues to hedge between rival camps. Even after the outbreak of the war, Qatar continues to maintain both its relationship with the United States and its ties to the Turkish axis and Sunni Islamist actors. It is thus continuing a policy that characterized it even before the war: avoiding an unambiguous commitment to a single camp while preserving channels of influence with rival actors.

Under the CENTCOM framework, security cooperation between Israel and regional states has strengthened in the fields of intelligence, air defense, and countering Iranian threats. For the first time, Israel directly assisted the UAE by deploying an air defense system on Emirati territory during the war.

Iran's weakening strengthens Turkey and the Sunni axis – Turkey emerged from the war without suffering the damage sustained by the Gulf states, while its principal regional rival, Iran, was significantly weakened. At the same time, Iran's diminished position enables Turkey to expand its influence in Syria and consolidate its standing as



the leading power center of the Sunni axis. From Ankara's perspective, the war has reshaped the regional balance of power in ways that expand its room for maneuver.

What Have We Learned About the World's Major Powers?

China wants Iran to remain strong enough to resist the US, but not at the cost of a US-China war over Iran – China provided Iran with economic, technological, and diplomatic support and helped it circumvent sanctions. Even after the war began, the trade mechanisms through which Iran supplied oil and China supplied goods remained in operation. However, Beijing refrained from direct military intervention on Iran's behalf.

This illustrates the limits of the Chinese-Iranian partnership. China has an interest in cheap Iranian oil, in the Iranian market, and in a partner that challenges American hegemony in the Middle East. But it has no interest in being drawn into a direct war with the United States over Iran. From Beijing's perspective, the partnership with Tehran is a strategic instrument, but it does not justify sacrificing China's broader interests.

China has gained insights into both the strength and the limitations of American power in a distant war – The war gave Beijing a close-up view of America's power-projection capabilities, but also of the costs involved: the expenditure of munitions and interceptors, the vulnerability of military bases, economic costs, and the strain of sustaining operations over time. At the same time, China is a massive consumer of energy from the Gulf and is therefore vulnerable to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Its likely conclusion will be to invest even more heavily in diversifying its energy sources, a process that could gradually diminish Hormuz's international importance.

The war also raises a broader question for China: if the United States is reluctant to sustain a prolonged campaign and regards a distant war as costly, how willing would Washington be to sustain a much longer conflict with a major power such as China? And what costs would China itself be prepared to bear in such a confrontation?

Russia benefits from disruptions in energy markets but is unwilling to confront the United States directly over Iran – Russia provided Iran with diplomatic, intelligence, and logistical support but refrained from direct confrontation with the United States. From Moscow's perspective, disruptions to energy supplies from the



Gulf and rising oil prices offer an economic advantage by increasing its revenues from energy exports. However, this advantage is limited: Ukraine continues to undermine Russia's energy production and refining capacity, while the war in Iran does nothing to reverse the strain of Russia's war in Ukraine or its growing dependence on China.

India has demonstrated a preference for strategic flexibility over choosing sides –

India sought to remain neutral during the war, yet was highly exposed to its consequences. Nearly ten million Indians live and work in the Gulf states, thousands of Indian seafarers work aboard ships operating in the region, and at least ten Indians were killed. A significant share of India's trade passes through the Gulf, and the country depends heavily on energy imports.

Nevertheless, New Delhi did not fully align itself with the United States. Instead, it continued engaging with all sides while also purchasing discounted Russian oil. The war thus highlighted a defining feature of Indian strategy: preserving strategic autonomy and avoiding an exclusive commitment to any single camp. Pakistan's role is also noteworthy in this context: India's principal rival in South Asia suddenly became an intermediary on whom the US president relied to help resolve a conflict in the Middle East.

What Have We Learned About Israel and Its Relations with the US?

Israel has proven itself to be the United States' leading military partner in the

region – Israel has not only demonstrated unique military capabilities in the Middle East, but has also fought shoulder to shoulder with the world's leading military power. This enhances Israel's strategic value both to the United States and to Washington's regional allies. Other countries are already asking how they can become the United States' primary security partner in their respective regions, as Japan aspires to be in the Pacific.

The war has elevated Israel's standing as an asset for the Gulf states –

The Gulf states did not blame Israel for the outbreak of the war, but recognized that Iran was the source of the threat they faced. The exposure of their own vulnerability to Iranian attacks has, in fact, reinforced the value of Israel's capabilities in air defense, intelligence, and technology. The more they recognize that they cannot rely on the



United States alone to prevent Iran from attacking them, the more important direct cooperation with Israel becomes.

Israel succeeded in expanding its freedom of action in Lebanon despite Iran's attempts to link the different fronts – During the war, Israel expanded its presence in southern Lebanon, declared the establishment of a security zone, and secured the approval of the Lebanese government, with the backing of the US administration. Iranian threats of broader escalation, intended to pressure Israel into withdrawing, also failed to achieve their objective. This reinforced the understanding that the threat of escalation is not necessarily sufficient to compel Israel to withdraw when it believes withdrawal would compromise its security. Israel did, however, refrain from intensifying the campaign to the point of completely eliminating Hezbollah through high-intensity warfare, and had to settle for establishing the security zone and neutralizing most of Hezbollah's capabilities.

Israel is not isolated, but international attitudes toward it are increasingly polarized, and its standing in American public opinion is at a low point – Despite repeated claims that Israel is more isolated than ever, the war reveals a more complex picture. Israel is indeed at a low point in its relations with segments of the American left and with left-wing governments in Western Europe. It is also confronting the growing influence of isolationist, anti-Israel, and even antisemitic voices on the American right—voices that were once on the margins but have now become a more prominent and vocal minority.

At the same time, however, in the eyes of right-wing circles in the United States and Europe, as well as in many countries around the world, Israel has become an asset and a focal point for security and diplomatic cooperation. The war has therefore highlighted a growing divide between countries and publics that view Israel's strength as an asset and those that view it as a problem.

India continues to deepen its strategic ties with Israel – Despite the war and international pressure, India has deepened its security cooperation with Israel. The relationship also enjoys relatively broad support among the Indian public, demonstrating that the relationship rests on a broad foundation that extends beyond cooperation between the two governments.



Israel's regional circle of strategic partners has expanded – Beyond the Gulf states, cooperation with additional countries has developed to a strategic level. The UAE, Somaliland, Azerbaijan, and Greece stand out in this regard, with security cooperation in some cases extending to joint preparations to counter the threats posed by Turkey. This has expanded Israel's network of partnerships beyond its Arab partners.

New centers of cooperation have also emerged in Europe – Alongside tensions with some Western European governments, ties have deepened with countries such as Slovenia, Finland, Germany, and states in Eastern Europe. The trend is not uniform across the continent, but it indicates that relations with Israel are not necessarily moving toward isolation.

Signs of a broader diplomatic shift are emerging in South America – The war is unfolding against the backdrop of a broader shift in Israel's relations with South American countries. Argentina and Colombia are undergoing significant changes in their relations with Israel, alongside developments involving Bolivia and even steps toward restoring relations with Venezuela. If this trend continues, it could signal a broader shift in Israel's diplomatic standing on a continent where Israel has struggled for years to build stable diplomatic support.

What Comes Next?

A political alternative to the Iranian regime must be developed – The regime's growing weakness creates an opportunity to build, over time, a political alternative capable of replacing it. However, it is important to distinguish between the weakening of the regime and its uncontrolled collapse. The United States has no interest in a scenario in which the state disintegrates into chaos. Iran is a country of approximately 90 million people, with extensive energy and civilian infrastructure, and such a collapse could trigger a series of unpredictable developments with consequences for regional and global stability.

The Iranian regime may seek to escalate precisely as its political position weakens – If the regime feels that it is beginning to disintegrate, it may conclude that it has nothing left to lose and attempt to forcibly alter the strategic balance. US domestic politics may also shape this calculation: the regime may seek to escalate in the run-up



to the US midterm elections in an effort to damage Trump politically and impose a domestic political cost on him for continuing the war.

The United States retains the capability to resume intensive combat – Trump's decision to keep US naval forces deployed in the region indicates that he is preserving his options for further action. Once the midterm elections are over, reduced electoral pressure could give Trump greater political latitude to resume high-intensity combat. Toward the end of 2026, the administration is expected to assess the impact of the economic blockade, the degree of pressure it is exerting on the Iranian regime, and the regime's ability to continue functioning.

Israel must prepare for the possibility of another Iranian escalation – Israel must prepare for the possibility that the regime, precisely because of its weakness, will attempt to escalate. Preparations should include developing plans and capabilities to strike high-value targets and key regime power centers, providing military support to the Iranian opposition, and preparing to defend regional countries that have become partners of Israel and the United States in confronting Iran.

Assistance to Saudi Arabia should be conditional on a clear strategic choice – If Saudi Arabia seeks assistance and protection from Israel and the United States, it must make a clear strategic commitment to the United States and Israel. As part of this commitment, it should stop making the Palestinian issue a central precondition for security and strategic cooperation with Israel.