

# Israel, Iran and the US: A game of war and peace



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After a historic, unprecedented direct bombing by the US on Iranian nuclear sites, including Fordow, on June 21, the world awaited Iran's response. On June 23, Iran responded by striking the largest US military base in the Middle East, Al-Udeid, in Qatar, with prior warning given to Qatar to minimise casualties. Satellite images captured by Planet Labs, a San Francisco-based Earth imaging company, further corroborated that the base was nearly empty of aircraft ahead of the attack. While the US used Massive Ordnance Penetrator bunker busters and Tomahawk cruise missiles, Iran's reprisal was limited in scope. Trump thanked Iran in a post on Truth Social after the strikes for giving early warning, and hours after, Trump announced a ceasefire between Israel and Iran. The world sitting at the edge of its seat as Iran hit US base, witnessed panic of wider war turn into a path for peace within hours.

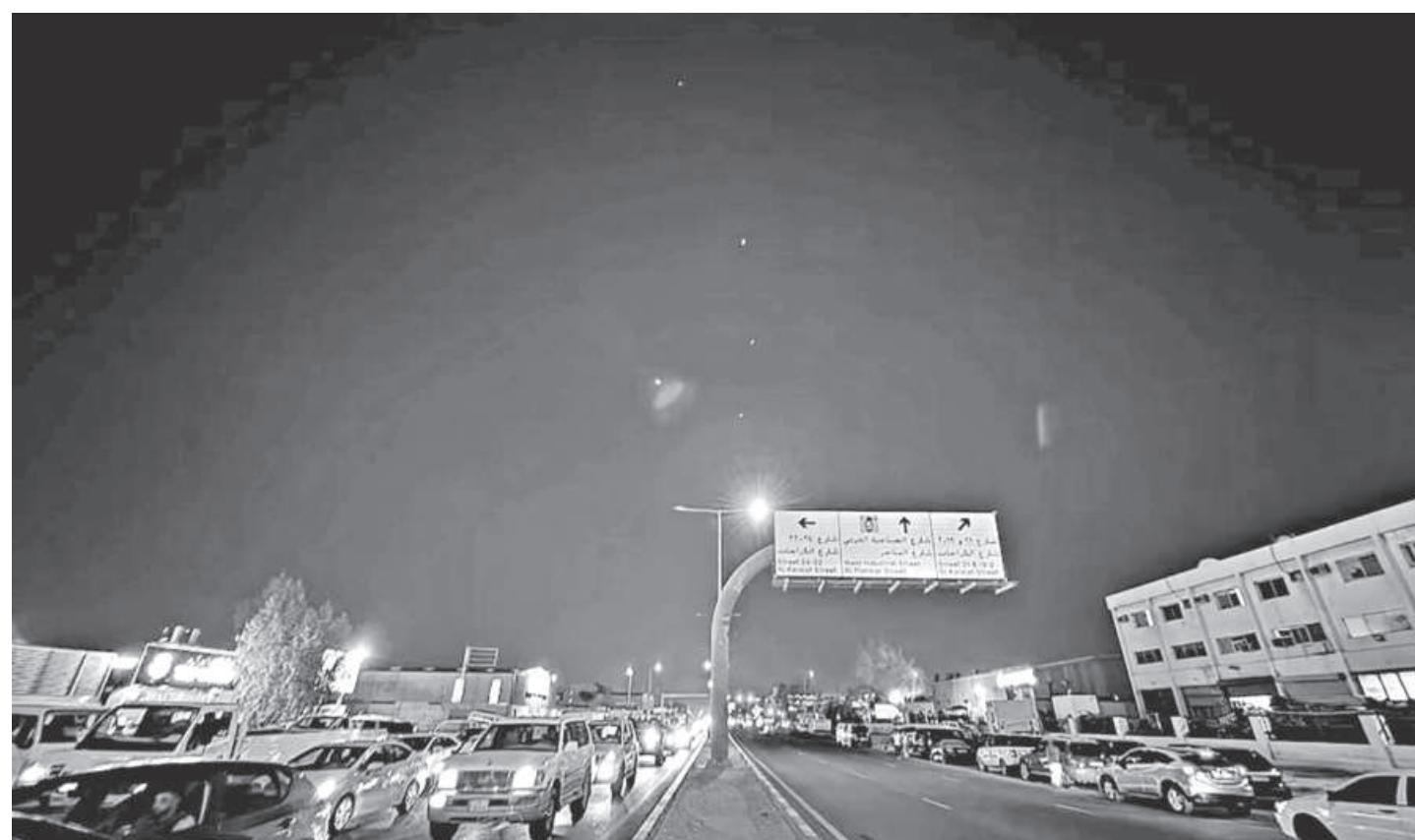
Iran's limited retaliation echoes their previous response to the US assassination of Maj Gen Qassem Suleimani in 2020. The country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed a "forceful revenge." But days later, when Iran fired a series of ballistic missiles at US troops in Iraq, it gave Iraq's prime minister at the time, Adel Abdul Mahdi, prior notice of the impending attack.

But whether the current course of events will follow the course of 2020, cannot be said

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with certainty.

Iran's retaliation came a day after Trump took a turn from war on Iran's nuclear programme, to confusingly embracing the regime change rhetoric pursued by Israel in its actions. An audio recording obtained



Traces are seen in the sky after Iran's armed forces say they targeted the Al-Udeid base in a missile attack, as seen from Doha, Qatar on June 23, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

by *The Washington Post* revealed the covert campaign—carried out alongside its strikes—by Israeli intelligence to divide Iranian military officials and push for regime change. The audio recording shows an Israeli intelligence official threatening an unnamed Iranian general on June 13, when Israel began the strikes: "I can advise you now, you have 12 hours to escape with your wife and child." The overall operation, dubbed "Rising Lion" by the Israeli government, relied on the activation of clandestine intelligence teams, pre-positioned weapons caches and other capabilities that had lain dormant inside Iranian territory for weeks or even months, Israeli officials told *The Washington Post*.

After joining Israel's strikes and directly involving the US, Trump posted on Truth Social on June 22, stating, "It's not politically correct to use the term 'Regime Change.' He added, "But if the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN,

been pushing for. Yet, according to *Time* magazine, a statement—by advocates of a democratic Iran that answers to its people—condemned the attack on Iran and voiced "serious opposition to foreign interference." Twice-jailed Isa Saharkhiz, referring to Israel's military assault, said, "it's exactly what the hardliners wanted. Trump's withdrawal from Obama's negotiation pact had emboldened Iranian hardliners who in April alone carried out at least 110 executions, and crowded Evin Prison with political prisoners—some of whom were reportedly injured by Israel's strike on the facility.

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its response to Israel, provided it "stops its illegal aggression against the Iranian people." Hours later, on June 24, Israel agreed to the ceasefire. Netanyahu claimed to have achieved "all aims" of its campaign against Iran, according to an official statement, which also mentioned that all "imminent threats" of a nuclear Iran have been removed. And nearly minutes after the world breathed a sigh of relief, Israel's Defense Minister Katz announced that Israel had detected Iranian strikes—though it's unclear which strikes he refers to—and said he instructed the Israel Defense Forces to "respond forcefully to Iran's violation of the ceasefire with intense strikes against regime targets in the heart of Tehran." Iranian state media has refuted such allegations, saying that Iran has not violated the ceasefire.

Things are changing rapidly, from extreme war and peace, like a dizzying game of chess. It's unclear what Israel's aims were in the first

place—as there was no evidence of "imminent" nuclear threats, and Israel deployed a great deal to weaken the Iranian regime. The exact damages to Iran's nuclear sites, by the US, are also not confirmed. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had said that the US bombs "obliterated" Iran's nuclear ambitions, while Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen Dan Caine said that it will "take some time" to assess how much damage has been done. A high-level European weapons systems and ballistics expert told ABC News that it seems "highly unlikely" that the bombs detonated in close vicinity to Fordow's underground structure, based on the calculated performance of the GBU-57, or the "bunker buster" bomb, as the bomb cannot penetrate more than 65 feet while Fordow enrichment site was up to nearly 300 feet beneath the ground.

The exact terms of the ceasefire deal, brokered by Qatar and the US, are not known, so "peace and harmony," as Donald Trump claims, stands on ice. For Iran to come to the negotiating table, a lot more damage has to be repaired. And if the ceasefire has already collapsed, they're back to square one. The tense situation calls into question: can peace be achieved with war in the first place? The past 12 days have significantly blemished international diplomacy and it cannot be fixed within minutes after the full-blown unprecedented violent exchanges within two nations, that have been in a shadow war for over a year.

The Islamic Republic is weakened, but Iran still holds a range of cards in its own target deck. Middle East security expert Burcu Ozcelik at the UK's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) told CBS News, "Unlike Iran's targeting of Israel, which is far more difficult geographically due to the distance, Iran's stockpile of arsenals of short-range ballistic missiles makes American military installations in the Gulf more vulnerable. They're softer targets in that sense." Iraq, which shares a nearly 1,000 mile porous border with Iran to the east, "tends to be seen as the next potential frontline in where the conflict can escalate," she said, because of "a number of Iran-linked Shia paramilitary groups" that may act independently from the Iranian government. Such groups have in the past attacked the US Al Asad Air Base in Iraq and the US embassy in Baghdad.

Before US airstrikes, Iran had warned Trump that it might activate terrorist "sleeper cells" inside the US if it were attacked, sources said. Major cities in the US remain on high alert. The New York Police Department, the nation's largest municipal police force, issued security advisories and increased patrols around religious, cultural and diplomatic sites the night of US airstrikes. The Department of Homeland Security issued warnings all across the nation. The dangers are high; and each nation's civilians are at risk from further military activity. What remains urgent is a strong call-to-action by the international community to de-escalate; any sort of cessation of violence will likely be temporary.

## Israel manipulated the US into war

And why it's a long-term loss for the US



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On June 21, 2025, the US attacked three major nuclear sites of Iran. With these targeted strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, the US formally joined Israel in its war against Iran. The decision, authorised by Donald Trump, may have been justified publicly under the banner of "national security," but make no mistake, it wasn't America's war. It was Israel's war, and Trump was pulled into it.

US President Trump, financially and politically tied to a foreign power, allowed that power to use American military might to settle its own scores. Though he has claimed to have achieved a ceasefire on June 24, 2025, there is long-term damage such entanglements will inflict not just on US credibility, but on its economy, military, and domestic cohesion.

Donald Trump has long branded himself as the most pro-Israel president in US history and this wasn't merely out of ideological conviction. His alignment with Israeli leadership, particularly Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has always been both strategic and transactional. Behind the scenes, wealthy pro-Israeli donors including figures like businessman and casino owner Sheldon Adelson and other major contributors to Trump-aligned Super PACs have bankrolled his political campaigns. Miriam Adelson's Preserve America PAC is claimed to be the biggest pro-Israeli spender, pouring over \$215 million into US presidential elections to help Trump. These donations didn't come without expectations. In politics,

influence is the return on investment.

Trump's past gestures to Israel went beyond symbolic diplomacy. During his first term, Trump moved the US embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. He recognised the annexation of the Golan Heights, and brokered the Abraham Accords to push for Israel's normalisation with Arab nations, sidelining Palestinians. He went against his Western allies and pulled the US out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, where Iran agreed to dismantle most of its nuclear programme in exchange for the relief of economic sanctions. Trump's basis was Netanyahu's presentation, claiming he obtained secret Iranian documents that showed "Iran had lied about the extent of its past nuclear weapons programme." Trump bent over backward to align US foreign policy with Netanyahu's interests that often diverged from the US.

So, when Israel launched its first strikes against Iranian targets this year, it wasn't surprising that Netanyahu backhandedly called on Trump to finish the job. The Israeli military lacked the bunker-buster bombs to strike Iran's underground nuclear facility at Fordow. Only the US could do that. It's no secret that Israel's survival strategy relies heavily on military pre-emption. What's new is how explicitly and effectively it has outsourced parts of that strategy to the US military. Israel doesn't just share intelligence with the US; it filters it. Trump's view of Iranian nuclear capabilities was shaped by Israeli briefings, crafted to create a sense of urgency

and fear. Israel's strikes on Iranian military leaders reportedly also killed Ali Shamkhani, a nuclear adviser who was part of the committee for US-Iran nuclear negotiations. Israel's targets were designed not just to disable, but also to derail diplomacy.

This war wasn't inevitable, it was orchestrated. Netanyahu's public support has been collapsing dramatically with polls showing that approximately 60 percent

Prime Minister Modi, who contradicted Trump's claims that he mediated the ceasefire with Pakistan. Netanyahu fed Trump's insatiable hunger to show his power at the right time. Striking Iran gave Trump something to brag about, a short-term "win" that MAGA media could spin.

Trump's base, primarily working-class, anti-interventionist Americans, has tolerated his "shock and awe" tactics in the past. They

how "America First" somehow became "Israel First."

The costs will rise quickly. Oil prices are already climbing. A blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, even temporary, could tip the global economy into recession. Regional allies like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are nervous, not out of sympathy for Iran, but out of fear that their infrastructure could become collateral damage.

This war, if it escalates further, will not bring about regime change in Iran. If anything, US and Israeli strikes are consolidating nationalist sentiment within Iran, making diplomacy even more difficult.

Moreover, this entanglement is exposing the limits of US control. Israel continued assassinating Iranian officials, striking infrastructure, and still pushing for regime change, goals that Trump publicly denied and then embraced. It is Israel pulling him, not the other way around. The tail is wagging the dog. The war is being driven by Tel Aviv, not Washington—the superpower.

And what does the US gain? Nothing but the privilege of paying the bill.

The US is hemorrhaging its moral capital, dragging itself into another endless back-and-forth conflict, and stretching its military thin, all at the request of a "partner" who appears far more committed to its own survival than to US stability or interests. China and Russia, meanwhile, watch gleefully from the sidelines as US credibility burns.

The biggest tragedy in all this is the loss of strategic independence. The US no longer dictates the terms; Netanyahu's Israel does. In the months ahead, we may see a temporary resolution, but we may also witness more attacks, more casualties, and more pressure on Trump to "finish the job." The damage has already begun. The US is no longer acting with calculated self-interest. It is being used. If history teaches us anything, it's that wars built on manipulation don't end well for anyone.



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

of Israelis want him to resign. The Israeli leader saw the war with Iran as a way to shift attention and regain control. He has spent most of his political career obsessed with the threat he believes Iran poses to Israel. He has spent much of the last 15 years attempting to persuade the US that only military action could destroy Iran's nuclear weapons programme.

Trump, meanwhile, sought a win. He hadn't succeeded in ending the war in Ukraine, hadn't brokered lasting peace in Gaza, and had been humiliated by Indian

cheered when he took out General Qassem Soleimani. They rallied behind the idea of a quick, decisive strike. But this time is different.

This isn't a one-time strike war. This is a brewing conflict with a state that has powerful proxies, advanced missiles, and real capacity for asymmetric retaliation. Already, 40,000 US service members in the region are vulnerable. And if American blood is spilled—not in a surgical drone strike, but in missile attacks on bases or retaliatory assaults by militias in Iraq—Trump will have more than a public relations problem. He'll have to explain