

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

The US-Israel War on Iran and the Emerging Regional Order in West Asia

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S*ummary*

The US-Israel war on Iran has fundamentally reshaped the region's security and strategic landscape. Although Prime Minister Netanyahu has claimed that Israel has achieved its war objectives, several of its core concerns remain unaddressed. Iran has emerged from the conflict with an enhanced image as a resilient and indispensable regional actor. The war has reinforced the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz not only for Gulf regional security but also for the global economy.

Introduction

The US–Israel war on Iran has emerged as one of the most consequential conflicts in West Asia in recent decades, fundamentally reshaping the region’s security and strategic landscape. During the conflict, the United States and Israel employed some of the world’s most advanced military technologies and weapons systems against Iran, targeting a wide range of military and strategic assets. The war destroyed critical military infrastructure and led to the deaths of several senior political and military leaders of Iran, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Despite suffering extensive damage, Iran demonstrated considerable resilience by launching large-scale retaliatory drone and missile attacks against targets in Israel and the US military bases across the Arab Gulf region. The conflict also saw Iran's unprecedented closure of the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting one of the world’s most critical maritime energy corridors, severely affecting global energy supplies, and triggering widespread volatility in international energy markets.

Although the United States and Iran signed an MoU in Geneva on 19 June 2026 to end hostilities, the situation remains volatile. The regional and extra-regional actors are reassessing their security policies and strategic partnerships in response to the evolving situation in the region. More significantly, the war has disrupted the existing regional order. The region’s security architecture and balance of power have been fundamentally challenged.

The Joint US–Israel Attack and Iranian Response

The broad objectives of the United States and Israel were to destroy Iran’s nuclear and missile programme, dismantle its regional network of proxies and encourage popular opposition within Iran to challenge and ultimately overthrow the regime. Both countries viewed these issues as significant threats to their interests and regional security in West Asia. There was a significant disparity in military capabilities and technological sophistication between the United States, Israel and Iran.

The attack—codenamed Operation Epic Fury by the United States and Operation Roaring Lion by Israel—adopted a decapitation strategy aimed at dismantling Iran's command structure by targeting its senior political and military leadership. The simultaneous strikes on multiple targets demonstrated the depth of American and Israeli intelligence penetration within Iran, as well as their military capability to conduct complex and coordinated operations.

Iran's nuclear infrastructure constituted the primary target of the joint US–Israel military campaign. Several key nuclear facilities, including Natanz, Fordow, Arak and Isfahan, were attacked and destroyed. In addition, the United States and Israel targeted a range of military and strategic assets, such as missile launchers, air defence systems, military-industrial facilities and naval assets.¹ Given the significant asymmetry in military capabilities, the United States and Israel were able to establish complete air superiority over Iranian airspace. The destruction of Iran's air defence systems and radar networks enabled them to conduct sustained strikes deep inside Iranian territory with minimal resistance.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has asserted that Israel achieved all the objectives it had set at the outset of the war. According to him, Israeli military operations destroyed critical components of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, eliminated several nuclear scientists, and targeted missile production facilities. He has also claimed that Israel significantly degraded Iran's naval and air capabilities and killed numerous senior military commanders.² President Trump has repeatedly made similar claims.

On the other side, Iran remained defiant and determined to resist the joint US–Israel attack. Facing two of the world's most advanced and technologically sophisticated militaries, Tehran announced Operation True Promise 4. It relied heavily on its extensive missile and drone arsenal to defend itself and to retaliate against United States and Israeli targets. Iran expanded the scope of the conflict by targeting United States military bases and assets located in neighbouring Arab Gulf countries. In several instances, Iranian missile and drone strikes hit non-military targets, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure.³ Tehran's strategic objective in attacking the Gulf states was to impose high costs on the United States and raise the political and military price of its intervention.

However, beyond the conventional calculation of military victory or defeat on the battlefield, Iran has claimed a political victory. In fact, the MoU signed on 18 June appears to reflect a hard bargain struck by Tehran. At the beginning of the war, Iran articulated major principal conditions for ending the conflict, including complete control over the Strait of Hormuz, the cessation of hostilities on all fronts, and the payment of war reparations by the United States.⁴ It appears that these key Iranian

¹ [**“Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine Hold a Press Briefing”**](#), U.S. Department of War, 2 March 2026.

² Nava Freiberg and Lazar Berman, [**“Netanyahu Avoids Criticizing US-Iran Deal, Claims War’s Main Goals Have Been Achieved”**](#), *The Times of Israel*, 16 June 2026.

³ [**“Iran Strikes Hit Energy Infrastructure in Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain”**](#), *Arab News*, 5 April 2026.

⁴ [**“Iran Rejects US Proposal, Lays Out Five Conditions for Ending Imposed War”**](#), *PressTV*, 25 March 2026.

demands have largely been accommodated in the MoU. Consequently, the understanding is that Iran emerged from the war politically strengthened, having successfully negotiated from a position of resilience and defiance despite the military pressure it faced.

Gulf Arab's Dilemma

The conflict also placed Washington's Gulf Arab allies in a highly precarious position. Iran continued its attacks despite repeated protests from the affected Arab states, who argued that the strikes constituted a violation of their sovereignty. The disruption of maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz adversely affected the energy supply of the Gulf Arab states, causing substantial economic costs and economic instability.

The UAE received the most attacks from Iran.⁵ Particularly noteworthy was the targeting of Oman and Qatar, two Gulf countries that have traditionally maintained relatively friendly and accommodative relations with Iran. Both states have frequently acted as mediators between Tehran and Washington and have generally avoided adopting hostile policies towards Iran. Nevertheless, their diplomatic engagement and mediation efforts could not shield them from attacks by Iran, which intended to drag the Arab allies of the United States into the war to put more pressure on the latter to stop the war.

Despite suffering these attacks, the Gulf Arab states largely refrained from retaliating against Iran, as doing so could have been interpreted as direct support for the United States and Israel, thereby risking further escalation and regional expansion of the conflict. Only Saudi Arabia and the UAE undertook a few covert retaliatory strikes against Iran.⁶ This situation has prompted many of America's Arab partners to reassess the effectiveness and reliability of their existing security arrangements and broader regional security policies. Their security has been breached, and the economy is suffering.

To reassure them of the continued American support, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited the region and met leaders of the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain from 23 June to 25 June. During his visit, a US–GCC Joint Ministerial Meeting was held in Bahrain, where the US reinforced its commitment to GCC security and the GCC

⁵ Hussien Elkabany and Omer Erdem, [“Iran Launched Over 5,400 Attacks on US Bases, Critical Sites in Arab Countries in a month: Data”](#), *Anadolu Agency*, 30 March 2026.

⁶ Eric Schmitt and Vivian Nereim, [“Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. Carried Out Secret Attacks in Iran, U.S. Officials Say”](#), *The New York Times*, 14 May 2026.

ministers welcomed the signing of the MoU between the US and Iran. They emphasised reopening the Strait of Hormuz without any fees or tolls imposed by any country. The meeting also expressed concern over the Iranian threat “including its ballistic missiles, drones, and support of proxies in the region”.⁷ On their part, the GCC leaders stressed that any future regional arrangements in the Gulf must address their concerns and safeguard their security and stability.⁸

Crisis in the Strait of Hormuz

Iran used the Strait of Hormuz as a strategic weapon during the war. By blocking the Strait, Tehran caused severe disruptions to maritime traffic entering and leaving the Gulf region. The blockade disrupted the global energy flow, leading to supply shortages and a sharp rise in fuel prices worldwide. In doing so, Iran demonstrated its ability to employ one of its most potent geographical and strategic assets, with consequences for both energy-exporting and energy-importing countries.

The closure of the Strait significantly increased the economic and political costs of the conflict for the United States and its allies, many of whom were directly affected by disruptions to energy supplies and maritime trade. Consequently, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz became a central issue in negotiations between Iran and the United States, contributing to efforts to secure a ceasefire and initiate diplomatic engagement.

The conflict underscored the strategic leverage that Iran derives from its geographic position along the Strait of Hormuz. Despite suffering substantial military losses and facing the combined military power of the United States and Israel, Iran was able to impose a prolonged blockade that neither country could effectively prevent. This demonstrated that even under intense military pressure, Tehran retains the capacity to impose high economic costs on its adversaries.

The war has reinforced the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz not only for regional security in the Gulf but also for global energy and the economy. Iran’s ability to exercise control over the Strait of Hormuz would be a key factor in the decisions of regional and extra-regional powers in West Asia. The future of the freedom of navigation through the Strait and the maritime order in the region remains uncertain.

⁷ [“Joint Statement Following the Ministerial Meeting of the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)”](#), U.S. Department of State, 25 June 2026.

⁸ [“HE GCCSG: Joint Ministerial Meeting Between GCC & United States Discussed Numerous Issues, Foremost of Which Were Regional Developments, Ways to Enhance Security and Stability, and De-escalation and Mediation Efforts”](#), GCC, 25 June 2026.

The US–Iran MoU and Israeli concerns

Under the MoU, both countries have agreed to end hostilities on all fronts, including in Lebanon, immediately. The agreement also provides for the removal of US naval blockades of Iran and for Iran to ensure the safe passage of commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz. On the critical nuclear issue, Iran has agreed not to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. At the same time, its stockpile of highly enriched uranium will be downblended under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran will maintain the status quo of its nuclear programme, and the United States has committed not to impose any new sanctions on Iran or deploy additional military forces to the region.⁹

The agreement further provides for the release of Iran’s frozen assets. In addition, the United States has pledged US\$ 300 billion towards Iran’s reconstruction and economic development. Washington has also agreed to lift sanctions on Iran, including those imposed through United Nations Security Council resolutions, IAEA Board of Governors resolutions and all unilateral US primary and secondary sanctions.¹⁰ As a result, Iran will now be able to export its oil and petroleum products to international markets freely.

Following the signing of the MoU, the first high-level talks were held in Burgenstock, Switzerland. At the Lake Lucerne Summit, both sides agreed to establish a high-level committee to provide political oversight of the mediation, establish a communication line between the parties, and create a de-confliction cell in Lebanon.¹¹

Israeli reactions to the US–Iran MoU have been mixed. Prime Minister Netanyahu has largely avoided directly criticising the understanding, adopting a relatively cautious public stance. In contrast, other members of his government have expressed strong reservations. Defence Minister Israel Katz stated that Israel would not withdraw from southern Lebanon and would continue to maintain its presence in the designated security zones in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza.¹² Similarly, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich strongly criticised the agreement, describing the US–Iran MoU as “bad for Israel and for the entire free world”.¹³

⁹ Alayna Treene, Kevin Liptak and Mostafa Salem, “[US Releases Official Agreement with Iran](#)”, *CNN*, 17 June 2026.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “[Joint Statement by the State of Qatar and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Regarding The Conclusion of Lake Lucerne Summit, First High-Level Committee Meeting with Participation of the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar, 22 June 2026.

¹² Emanuel Fabian, Ariela Karmel and Sam Soko, “[Ministers Say Israel Won’t be Bound by Iran Deal, As Opposition Castigates Netanyahu’s ‘Absolute Failure’](#)”, *The Times of Israel*, 16 June 2026.

¹³ Ibid.

Although Netanyahu has claimed that Israel has achieved its war objectives, several of its core concerns remain unaddressed. Despite the signing of the MoU between the United States and Iran, Israel continues to conduct military operations in Lebanon. As the agreement calls for an end to hostilities on all fronts, including Lebanon, by the US, Iran and their allies, Israel’s continued military actions in Lebanon and Hezbollah’s activities can be viewed as inconsistent with the broader understanding reached between Washington and Tehran. Israel was not a party to the negotiations, but it is facing pressure from the United States to align its actions with the agreement's terms.

At the same time, Israel continues to perceive Hezbollah’s activities in Lebanon as a major national security threat. Consequently, the provisions of the MoU place substantial constraints on Israel’s strategic and military options in Lebanon. This leaves Israel in a difficult situation as it will need to balance its security concerns against the broader regional de-escalation framework established by the US–Iran MoU. At the same time, the MoU does not mention anything about the disarmament of Hezbollah, which is its key security concern.

Most notably, the fate of Iran’s estimated 440 kg stockpile of highly enriched uranium remains uncertain, as the nuclear issue is expected to be addressed separately during negotiations within 60 days of the signing of the MoU. For Israel, the removal of this enriched uranium is a critical objective. While Iran has declared that it does not intend to develop nuclear weapons, Israel remains deeply sceptical of such assurances. Israel believes that Iran can make nuclear weapons in future, as it is allowed to keep the low-enriched uranium.

Another major concern for Israel is the announcement of sanctions relief for Iran. Israel believes that the lifting of sanctions would provide Tehran with greater financial resources, which could be used to support and strengthen its regional proxy networks. This concern is not new. In the past, it had also expressed reservations about the lifting of sanctions under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Israel has always claimed that Iran was using the economic benefits derived from sanctions relief to fund the allied non-state actors across the region.¹⁴

The MoU is also silent on Iran’s missile capabilities and does not refer to addressing the perceived missile threat to Israel. Israel has long regarded Iran’s missile programme as a major security concern. During the war, both the United States and Israel claimed to have destroyed a significant number of missile launchers, as well

¹⁴ [“Netanyahu: Nuclear Deal Gives Iran Billions for Terrorism, Regional Aggression”](#), *Jerusalem Post*, 13 April 2015.

as missile manufacturing and storage facilities, thereby substantially degrading Iran's missile capabilities. Israel has consistently maintained that Iran's missile programme should be curtailed and subjected to greater control. Therefore, the absence of any provisions relating to Iran's missile capabilities in the MoU would remain yet another source of concern for Israel.

Following the signing of the MoU, Israel has come under pressure from President Trump to halt its military operations in Lebanon, as their continuation is interpreted as a violation of the MoU's provision calling for an end to the war across all fronts. Given Israel's security concerns and its assessment of the threat posed by Hezbollah, ending military operations in Lebanon without receiving credible assurances regarding Hezbollah's disarmament would be a difficult proposition. If the United States compels Israel to do so without addressing these concerns, it could be viewed in Tel Aviv as a major strategic setback resulting from the war.

Towards a New Regional Order

A new regional order is emerging in West Asia. Iran, which was under crippling sanctions for more than 20 years, has negotiated their removal. This will provide a boost to the Iranian economy. Although Iran has suffered significant military setbacks during the war, it has nevertheless emerged as a more confident power in the region. Iran's ability to withstand sustained military and political pressure from both the United States and Israel, while simultaneously negotiating an agreement that led to the easing of sanctions and the unfreezing of its assets, has enhanced its regional standing. The outcome of the negotiations demonstrates Iran's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* the United States—the region's dominant military power.

Moreover, Iran not only succeeded in extracting concessions from Washington through tough negotiations but also ensured the survival of a regime that both the United States and Israel had sought to change. Despite the extensive damage inflicted during the war, the core institutions and foundations of the Iranian state remain intact. Iran has emerged from the conflict with an enhanced image as a resilient and indispensable regional actor, compelling other states to acknowledge and accommodate its interests in shaping the future regional order of West Asia. Its control over the Strait of Hormuz gives Iran a crucial geostrategic advantage.

On the other hand, the emergence of a politically and militarily assertive Iran is a matter of concern for the Gulf Arab countries. Their concern is not only about Iran's ability to launch military attacks on them, as it did during the war, but more fundamentally, they will be concerned about Iran's future role in shaping the regional

geopolitics and security architecture of West Asia. Iranian assertiveness has placed the Gulf Arab states in an increasingly difficult strategic position. While these states are likely to continue relying on the United States as their primary security guarantor, it will be equally difficult for them to exclude Iran from any emerging regional security architecture in the Gulf. This evolving reality is likely to reshape the regional balance of power and influence the Gulf Arab states' relations with the United States and other external powers, as they reassess their strategic partnerships and interests in response to a changing regional order.

The United States and the Gulf Arab states have a strong interest in preserving the existing regional order in West Asia, as it has long served their strategic and security interests. Iran, by contrast, views the outcome of the war as an opportunity to reshape the regional order in its favour. Having emerged from the conflict with greater confidence and enhanced regional influence, Tehran seeks to build a new security architecture in which external powers, particularly the United States, play a minimal role and regional affairs are managed primarily by the region's states.

Although the Gulf Arab states have, in recent years, pursued political and economic engagement with Iran, they remain highly sceptical of Tehran's long-term intentions. Their principal concern is that, in the absence of American military presence, Iran would seek to dominate the regional order in the Gulf. Iranian attacks on their territories since the outbreak of the war in February have further reinforced these anxieties. As Iran has become increasingly assertive in projecting its regional authority, the Gulf Arab states have grown more apprehensive about the prospect of an Iranian-led regional order that could fundamentally alter the balance of power in West Asia.

At the same time, US–Israel relations—which have been one of the defining pillars of the regional order in West Asia for decades—appear to be facing growing strains. The United States has also played a central role in facilitating the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Gulf Arab states of the UAE and Bahrain. Consequently, any deterioration in US–Israel relations could have significant implications for the future trajectory of the Abraham Accords.

Accommodating and managing the conflicting interests of each of these individual powers, including Iran, Israel, the Gulf Arab states and external powers such as the United States, in the emerging situation would require a new regional approach. The US–Israel war on Iran has forced the old regional order to change, but the shape of the new order remains uncertain.

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