



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 17 June 2025

Israel's War with Iran Moves out of the Shadows

Unit for Political Studies

Israel's War with Iran Moves out of the Shadows

Series: **Situation Assessment**

17 June 2025

Unit for Political Studies

The Unit for Political Studies is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Political Studie draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports. .

Copyright © 2025 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

The Timing of the Israeli Attack 1

Israel's Goals 3

The US Position 3

Conclusion 4



At dawn on Friday, 13 June Israel launched a full-scale, coordinated military operation against Iran, codenamed "Rising Lion." More than 200 warplanes, including F-35 fighter jets, took part in five waves of airstrikes against approximately 100 targets inside the country. It was soon clear that this was the beginning of a wide-ranging attack that went beyond its stated goal of destroying Iran's nuclear capabilities, one that amounted to an attempt to undermine Iran's economy and topple its regime.

The Israeli campaign was a clear exhibition of the intelligence and technological superiority of Israel (and, of course, the US). On the first day alone, Israel assassinated some 20 senior officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the country's armed forces, including IRGC chief Hossein Salami, Army Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri, and nine nuclear scientists. Israeli strikes also targeted Iranian nuclear sites in Natanz (Isfahan), Fordow (Qom), Parchin (east of Tehran), and Arak (western-central Iran), as well as drone factories and facilities for manufacturing and launching ballistic missiles.

In response, Iran launched Operation True Promise 3, lobbing more than 150 ballistic missiles and sending more than 100 drones toward Israel. Many of these projectiles evaded Israeli and US defence systems, which were helping repel the Iranian response, and struck various areas across Israel including Haifa and Tel Aviv.

The escalation came on the eve of a 60-day deadline set by US President Donald Trump for Washington to conclude an agreement with Tehran on Iran's nuclear programme, postponing a new round of talks that had been set to take place in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Timing of the Israeli Attack

Since his return to power in 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made the destruction of the Iranian nuclear programme a primary goal of every government he has formed, using sabotage operations and assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists to achieve that goal. He has opposed any peaceful settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue, strongly rejecting the 2015 agreement reached by the administration of then-US president Barack Obama, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Netanyahu has sought to undermine and destroy the deal. In May 2018, president Donald Trump obliged, withdrawing from the accord and reimposing economic sanctions on Iran as part of a policy known in the media as the "maximum pressure" campaign, aimed at pushing the Islamic Republic to accept a new, more stringent agreement to monitor its nuclear activities.¹ That same year, Israel publicly unveiled what it claimed was the archive of the Iranian nuclear programme.² In November 2020, it succeeded in assassinating Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, seen by Iran as the "father" of its nuclear programme.³ Although negotiations between Washington

¹ Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned," *The New York Times*, 8/5/2018, accessed on 15/6/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zRHL>.

² Loveday Morris & Karen DeYoung, "Israel Says it Holds a Trove of Documents from Iran's Secret Nuclear Weapons Archive," *The Washington Post*, 30/4/2018, accessed on 15/6/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zS6A>.

³ David E. Sanger et al., "Gunmen Assassinate Iran's Top Nuclear Scientist in Ambush, Provoking New Crisis," *The New York Times*, 27/11/2020, accessed on 15/6/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zRQU>.

and Tehran resumed under president Joe Biden's administration, with the aim of returning to the 2015 agreement, these efforts were unsuccessful, coming to a complete halt following the attacks on Israel led by Palestinian Islamist resistance movement Hamas on 7 October 2023.

In the wake of those attacks, and as the regional confrontation escalated between Israel and Iran throughout 2024, the two engaged in two major aerial confrontations. The first came in April of that year, after Israel bombed the Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing the IRGC's commanders for Syria and Lebanon. Iran responded by launching approximately 200 missiles and drones toward Israel.⁴ The second round of reciprocal strikes erupted in October, in response to Israel's assassination of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran⁵ and its killing of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in the southern suburbs of Beirut.⁶ Israel attempted to exploit Iran's response in the second confrontation to strike at its nuclear programme, but pressure from the Biden administration – which feared it would be dragged into a war with Iran – forced its ally to limit itself to attacking Iran's air defences, particularly those protecting its nuclear facilities in Isfahan, and destroying its facilities for manufacturing solid fuel for ballistic missiles.⁷

By the time Trump returned to power in early 2025, following Israel's successful campaign to weaken Iran's allies across the region, the clock was ticking on an Israeli strike against the Iranian nuclear programme. For decades – and especially since the war of July 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah, in which the latter demonstrated that it was capable of resisting Israel's military might – Iran has relied on a strategy known as "forward defence." This strategy involved building up the military capabilities of Iranian allies or proxies across the region (in Lebanon and Iraq, then subsequently in Syria and Yemen) in order to use them as part of a system of deterrence against any Israeli attack on Iran or its nuclear programme. Hezbollah, in particular, posed a significant impediment to any Israeli attack against Iran, as the movement held a vast arsenal of various missiles that were difficult for Israel to intercept, given their geographical proximity and the short time between their launch from southern Lebanon and landing on Israeli targets.

However, this strategy completely collapsed after Israel succeeded in destroying Hezbollah's military capabilities, killing its military and political leaders, and imposing a November 2024 ceasefire agreement on Lebanon within the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, the truce agreement that had ended the 2006 war.⁸ These setbacks were followed by the fall of the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad, and the withdrawal of Iran and its allies from Syria in December 2024. All

4 "What Provoked Israel's Limited Response to Iran's Attack?" Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 29/4/2024, accessed 16/6/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/understanding-the-constrained-israeli-response-to-the-iranian-attack.aspx>.

5 "Are Israel and Hezbollah Headed for All-Out War?" Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 3/7/2024, accessed 16/6/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/hezbollah-israel-conflict-chances-of-war-breaking-out.aspx>.

6 "After Assassinating Nasrallah, Will Israel Escalate Further?" Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 30/9/2024, accessed 16/6/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/israeli-aggression-in-lebanon-after-nasrallah-assassinated-in-strikes.aspx>.

7 "A Reading of the Biden Administration's Position on a Possible Israeli Attack on Iran," Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 9/10/2024, accessed 16/6/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/PoliticalStudies/Pages/biden-administration-on-expected-israeli-attacks-on-iran.aspx>.

8 "Israel Hezbollah Ceasefire: Drivers and Challenges," Situation Assessment, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 3/12/2024, accessed 16/6/2025, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/hezbollah-israel-ceasefire-drivers-and-challenges.aspx>.

this paved the way for Israel to attack Iran. According to Netanyahu, Israel had planned to carry out such an attack prior to April 2025, but Trump's insistence on a period of negotiations, during which the US imposed a halt on Iran's enrichment activities, postponed the attack for 60 days.

Israel's Goals

Israel has declared that the goal of its operation is to dismantle – i.e. destroy – Iran's nuclear programme, making it impossible for the country to acquire a nuclear weapon. In doing so, it is attempting to maintain its own status as the region's sole nuclear power, in keeping with a strategy under which it destroyed Iraq's nuclear programme (1981), saw that of Libya dismantled (2003), and attacked Syria's programme (2007). However, judging from the nature of the targets Israel struck in the first two days of the military operation, it seems that Netanyahu's government wants to go beyond weakening Iran's military capabilities, bringing down the regime entirely by undermining its legitimacy and shattering its domestic prestige. This goal is one that Netanyahu has explicitly declared, consistently promoted and repeatedly sought to convince Washington to adopt. In a speech following Friday's attacks, he called on the Iranian people to revolt against the regime.⁹ Israel's attacks on Iran's oil infrastructure and energy facilities appears to be in line with this goal, by stirring up domestic discontent with the regime's policies and tightening the noose on the Iranian economy, which is already suffering under the crushing sanctions imposed by the Trump administration.

The US Position

During his first term as US president (2017-2021), Trump took a hardline stance toward Iran. He withdrew from the JCPOA concluded by his predecessor, in the hope of reaching a new agreement bearing his own name, and adopted a policy of maximum pressure to push Iran into signing a new deal. After returning to power in January, he took a renewed interest in reaching an agreement with Iran. In April, he issued an ultimatum, giving Tehran a sixty-day deadline to sign a new agreement or face "devastating consequences," including possible US or Israeli military strikes against its nuclear facilities. That ultimatum was in a message to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself, delivered by an Emirati official, which laid out strict conditions including the dismantlement of Iran's nuclear programme, the halting of uranium enrichment, and an end to Iran's support and arms supplies to the Houthis in Yemen. In return, Trump expressed his willingness to lift economic sanctions and end Iran's international isolation.

Khamenei rejected the ultimatum, considering it a "trick" aimed at imposing US demands on Iran. He did, however, agree to indirect negotiations with the US, which began in April in Oman and continued in Rome for five rounds. However, these negotiations did not yield any tangible progress, due to Washington's insistence that Iran must not conduct any enrichment activities on its own soil. Even as Netanyahu prepared to launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear programme, Trump

⁹ "Netanyahu Calls on Iranians to Unite Against 'Evil and Oppressive Regime'," *Arab News Pakistan*, 13/6/2025, accessed on 15/6/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zSg2>.

asked him to give diplomacy – led by his Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff – a chance. The two appear to have reached an agreement within this framework, whereby Trump would support Netanyahu's plan to attack Iran unless an agreement were reached within 60 days. When the deadline expired in June 2025 without an agreement, Israel launched its operation. Trump praised the attack as "very successful," boasting of the US weapons used in it and warning Iran that "what's coming will be even more devastating" unless it returned to the negotiating table.¹⁰

Accordingly, it seems clear that Trump is using the Israeli military campaign as a tool to pressure Iran to return to the negotiating table and accept his terms. He does not appear to want to overthrow the regime, but rather to bring it into the US camp once it has been stripped of any chance of acquiring nuclear weapons. At the same time, however, he is wary of Israel dragging the US into an unwanted military confrontation with the Islamic Republic, especially given that Israel alone will struggle to achieve one of the most important objectives of its military operation: destroying Iran's nuclear facilities entirely, particularly those buried deep underground in Fordow.

Thus, although Washington gave a green light and threw its weight behind this war, which would not have been possible without this support, it would be a mistake to conclude that Trump is simply using Israel. Israel is also using him: Netanyahu is exploiting the opportunity to expand the scope of the war to serve his own goals, not Trump's, and to escalate the war to the point where the US will be forced to enter the fray, something he has not yet succeeded in achieving.

Conclusion

Israel's attack on Iran is the latest episode in a series of military confrontations the state has initiated since 7 October 2023, with the aim of dismantling the Iran-led "axis of resistance." It was clear that Iran has been completely exposed since the destruction of Hezbollah's military capabilities, the fall of the Syrian regime, and the ouster of pro-Iranian armed factions from parts of Syria near Israeli-controlled territory. Consequently, a direct Israeli attack on Iran was only a matter of time, and became substantially closer following Trump's return to power. However, the outcome of the confrontation between Iran and Israel has yet to be determined. Much depends on the position of Washington and Trump's willingness to get involved, especially if Israel fails to destroy the Iranian nuclear programme or oil prices rise sharply due to Israel's attempts to destroy Iran's oil and gas industry. While the Iranian regime will pay a very high military, economic, and human price, it is possible it could withstand the campaign – providing there is no direct US intervention. However, it is clear that it is not paying the price alone.

¹⁰ "Trump Said US was Aware of Israel's Plans to attack Iran, WSJ Reports," *Reuters*, 13/6/2025, accessed on 15/6/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zSdG>.