



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

situation Assessment | 23 June 2026

US-Israeli Differences Over Iran: Strategically Parting Ways or a Temporary Divergence?

Unit for Political Studies

US-Israeli Differences Over Iran: Strategically Parting Ways or a Temporary Divergence?

Series: [situation Assessment](#)

23 June 2026

Strategically Parting Ways or a Temporary Divergence?

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 Policy Studies 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: Situation Assessment, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports.

Copyright © 2026 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-Dayeen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

Divergent Objectives: War versus Negotiation	1
The Core of the Dispute: What Comes Next?	3
Key Points of Contention	3
Potential Outcomes of the Dispute	4
Conclusion	5

A memorandum of understanding ending three months of hostilities between the United States and Iran has revealed divergent US and Israeli perspectives over the trajectory of the war with the Islamic Republic. This divergence was clearly on display in a campaign by the Israeli government's most hardline members, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, against the memorandum and the policies of President Donald Trump's administration in general. It was also starkly reflected in a response from US Vice President JD Vance, who remarked that: "If I was in the cabinet of the Israeli government, I might not be attacking the only powerful ally that I have anywhere left the entire world," pointing out that "two-thirds of the defensive weapons that have protected your homeland have been built by American hands and paid for by American tax dollars."¹

These statements and their new tone reflect clear differences in how the US and Israel assess the war's outcomes, and their objectives for the next phase of dealings with Iran. While the US administration has presented the MoU as a necessary step to end the war and open a diplomatic path toward addressing Iran's nuclear programme, Israel views it as granting Iran significant political and economic gains – without guaranteeing that the war's objectives will be achieved. These public disagreements have also raised significant questions over the potential extent of the rift between the two allies over Iran, and its broader impact on US-Israeli relations.

Divergent Objectives: War versus Negotiation

The US and Israel launched their offensive against Iran with objectives that were aligned, if not identical. While Israel's goals were relatively clear, those of the US were less well-defined and more erratic.² A month into the war, Trump came to realise that the narrative Israel had promoted in Washington to persuade him to launch the war – namely, that eliminating Iran's political, security, and military leadership would trigger a popular uprising leading to the regime's collapse or, at the very least, its subjugation – had failed to materialize.³ The war, initially envisioned as short, swift, and decisive, threatened to drag on. Moreover, it had significant political and economic repercussions, such as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and rising energy prices in the US, which is preparing for crucial midterm elections later in the year. Consequently, Trump was compelled to seek a political solution focused on more realistic objectives, limited to addressing Iran's nuclear programme, having failed to achieve the war's initial aims through military force.

This gave rise to the first signs of a rift with the Israeli government, which sought to continue the war until the Iranian regime was toppled – a goal championed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since the early days of his political and diplomatic career.⁴ For over four decades, Netanyahu has persistently called for the dismantling of Iran's nuclear programme through harsh economic sanctions, while advocating for the use of military force should economic pressure fail to compel Tehran to abandon the programme. In line with this stance, he opposed the JCPOA nuclear deal concluded between Iran and world powers including President Barack Obama's administration in 2015, engaging in a public confrontation culminating in an infamous address that year to the US Congress, in which Netanyahu condemned the agreement as dangerous and

¹ "Vance says U.S. isn't giving Iran 'a cent' as he defends Trump peace deal," *CNBC*, 19/6/2026; accessed 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1Cex>

² "Trump and Netanyahu's Iran Gambit: The Strategic Calculations behind Epic Fury," Situation Assessment, ACRPS, 5/3/2026, accessed 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9PH>

³ Jonathan Swan & Maggie Haberman, "How Trump Took the US to War with Iran," *The New York Times*, 7/4/2026, accessed on 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxMwhq>.

⁴ "Israel's War on Iran and Netanyahu's Role," Situation Assessment, ACRPS, 10/3/2026, accessed 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1D4V>.

paving the way to Iran acquiring the capability to produce a nuclear bomb.⁵

Netanyahu sought not only to destroy Iran's nuclear programme, curb its ballistic missile manufacturing capabilities, and dismantle its regional alliances, but also to topple its regime. He viewed Trump's presidency as a golden opportunity not to be missed, and leveraged Washington's entry into the war alongside Israel in February 2026 to destroy the institutions of the Iranian regime, as well as the administrative and economic infrastructure - particularly in the vital oil sector – underpinning its rule over Iran. Washington did not share this vision, as it would have resulted in the complete removal of Iranian oil from global markets for an extended period, regardless of whether the regime survived or fell, thus leading to long-term impacts on global energy prices, in addition to the risk that Iran would carry through on its threats to strike energy facilities in Arab Gulf states in retaliation. Disagreements between the US and Israel also extended to the fate of the Iranian regime itself. While the Trump administration wanted to bring about change from within the regime and a shift in its policies, preserving its structure to avoid a power vacuum that could lead to chaos or even civil war, Israel sought to topple the regime – regardless of the risk of such outcomes.

Throughout the war and since the ceasefire, Israel has acted as an invading colonial entity determined to re-engineer the region in alignment with its own interests and vision, regardless of the cost to the region's peoples. It has shown indifference to international norms and obligations, and made no hesitation about disregard its won pledges – or even the interests of its allies - whenever they conflicted with its own strategic ambitions. Consequently, when Trump agreed to a ceasefire brokered by Pakistan on 8 April 2026, Netanyahu quickly moved to sabotage the negotiation process and derail any potential agreement by ordering the assassination of Ali Larijani, the Secretary-General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, who had led the negotiations between Washington and Tehran prior to the outbreak of the war.⁶

Furthermore, even before Trump's deadline for striking Iranian energy facilities had expired, Netanyahu had launched an attack on 6 April 2026 against Iran's largest petrochemical complex in Asaluyeh, a city in Bushehr province – a facility responsible for approximately 50 percent of Iran's total petrochemical output. His aim was to provoke a major Iranian response that would diminish the chances of an agreement to end the war, while simultaneously sending a message to Tehran regarding the seriousness of the threat to destroy Iranian infrastructure.⁷ Netanyahu also refused to abide by the first clause of the truce agreement announced by the Pakistani Prime Minister on 7 April 2026, which called for an immediate ceasefire between Iran and the US. During a phone call prior to the ceasefire announcement, Netanyahu informed Trump that he would abide by the truce, but emphasized that the agreement did not extend to the Lebanon front⁸ - a point that had been a condition for Iran to accept it in the first place. In a further effort to sabotage the agreement, once the ceasefire took effect on 8 April, Netanyahu launched over 100 airstrikes on Beirut and its suburbs, killing and wounding hundreds of people. He repeated this pattern when the memorandum of understanding between Washington and Tehran was announced on 18 June 2026.

5 "Watch and Read: Netanyahu's Full Speech to Congress," *The Times of Israel*, 3/3/2015, accessed on 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9Uu>.

6 "Israel's War on Iran and Netanyahu's Role."

7 Dov Lieber, "Israel Strikes Iran's Largest Petrochemical Facility, Defense Minister Says," *The Wall Street Journal*, 6/4/2026, accessed on 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLNv>.

8 Alexander Ward & Michael Amon, "Israel Says Cease-Fire Doesn't Extend to its Invasion of Lebanon," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7/4/2026, accessed on 22/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxMwjI>.

The Core of the Dispute: What Comes Next?

The disagreement between the US and Israel relates not only to the objectives of the war with Iran; it also extends to the means of achieving those objectives. Washington sought to weaken Tehran's military capabilities, thereby compelling it to return to negotiations from a position of weakness, all while avoiding a protracted war or entanglement in a project to reshape Iran domestically. By contrast, Israel viewed the war as an opportunity to bring about a permanent strategic shift in the regional balance of power by altering the Iranian regime and its political alliances - or, in Netanyahu's words, "changing the face of the Middle East." However, the results of the war led him and Trump to different conclusions. The US administration believes that the military strikes, accompanied by an economic blockade and direct threats, had achieved the desired objective: pushing Iran to agree to new negotiations. From this perspective, Washington viewed the shift towards a political settlement as building on what had been achieved militarily, rather than squandering it.

Conversely, Israel saw the MoA as prematurely ending the war before its objectives could be fully realized. The agreement does not stipulate the dismantlement of Iran's nuclear programme, nor does it impose definitive limits on uranium enrichment; furthermore, it fails directly to address Iran's ballistic missile programme or its network of regional allies, which Israel views as part and parcel of the Iranian threat. Moreover, Trump views the agreement less through the lens of regional power balances than through the prism of the costs associated with US involvement in the Middle East. Since the start of his second term, he has sought to portray himself as a president who ends wars rather than starts them, in order to focus his country's resources on other priorities - first and foremost, its rivalry with China.

From this perspective, Trump views the MoU as part of a broader strategy aimed at containing Iran, rather than seeking to topple its regime or engage it in an open confrontation. Prolonged warfare would entail significant economic risks, threatening energy market stability and draining US military resources at a time when the Indo-Pacific region is becoming increasingly vital to American national security. Consequently, Trump chose a path seen by his administration as an embodiment of the "America First" doctrine and a rejection of efforts to use the US to wage war on Israel's behalf in the service of interests that do not necessarily align fully with those of the US. Herein lies the essence of the disagreement between Trump and Netanyahu, who believes the war created a rare opportunity to reshape Israel's strategic environment, and that returning to negotiations before resolving fundamental issues would give Iran a chance to rebuild its capabilities and regain some of its regional influence. Thus, Israel's opposition to the truce pertains not only to the specific terms of the MoU, but also its underlying premise: that it is possible to reach an understanding that compels Iran to make concessions ending its nuclear programme within 60 of negotiations - even after a war that has effectively dismantled that programme.

Key Points of Contention

Israel rejects the path of negotiations on principle, but its objections to the MoU specifically centre on two main issues. The first is that it defers addressing core issues regarding Iran's nuclear programme to subsequent negotiations. From the Israeli perspective, the agreement neither determines the fate of the highly enriched uranium stockpile, nor includes a commitment to close and dismantle key nuclear facilities - specifically those at Isfahan, Natanz, and Fordow. Nor does it prevent Iran from retaining its enrichment capabilities. Yet this argument indicates a degree of demagoguery: the core of the Israeli objection lies less in the memorandum's content than in its flat refusal to halt the war or to shift to negotiations at all.

Israel fears that the US-Iranian negotiations in Switzerland will result in a new version of the 2015

JCPOA: that is, an agreement that merely places temporary constraints on the Iranian programme, without terminating it. Conversely, the Trump administration maintains that addressing these issues requires a long, complex process of negotiations, and that the alternative is a return to war. Thus, the disagreement with Israel concerns not the ultimate goal - that of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons - but the path to achieving it.

The second issue relates to the regional aspect of the memorandum, particularly the clause calling for an end to military operations on all fronts, including Lebanon. Washington deemed the inclusion of Lebanon in the comprehensive de-escalation framework as essential to preventing the agreement from collapsing and enhancing the prospects for regional stability, even though it does not demand an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory. The US also insists on eliminating Hezbollah as an armed presence. Israel, for its part, was quick to assert that it does not consider itself bound by any arrangements regarding Lebanon reached within the framework of the US-Iran understanding. This is linked to its insistence that it retains the freedom to take military action against Hezbollah, and that it will maintain its military presence in areas it has seized over the course of the war. This divergence reveals that the dispute between the two parties extends beyond the nuclear file, encompassing their respective visions for the future of the regional order. While the US favours integrating various issues into a broader settlement, Israel insists on addressing them separately to ensure it preserves its freedom of military action, allowing it to continue its strikes across the region whenever and wherever it chooses, as it has done consistently in recent years.

All of this is unfolding against a backdrop of declining support for Israel among broad segments of the American public, a trend reflected repeatedly in public polling over the past two years. This shift now includes a majority of Democratic Party supporters, but also relatively large segments of the Republican base, a development that has become a source of concern for Israel.

Potential Outcomes of the Dispute

Despite the intensity of Israeli criticism regarding the truce agreement, it is premature to speak of a strategic crisis between the US and Israel. The long-time allies remain in agreement over the fundamental objectives of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and containing its regional influence. Israel continues to rely almost entirely on US military and political support, while acting as if Gaza, Lebanon, and southern Syria were its own spheres of influence. Most notably, the Arab factor is entirely absent: there have been no official Arab attempts to capitalize on this rift, and the Arab states that have normalized relations with Israel appear indifferent to the dispute, as well as to Israel's conduct in Lebanon and Gaza.

The current disagreement may signal a growing divergence in priorities between the US and Israeli administrations. The former appears more focused on ending wars and managing great-power competition, whereas Israel is intent on seizing the current moment to bring about lasting changes in its regional environment. These differences are likely to widen as US-Iranian negotiations progress, particularly if Washington moves to offer Iran further concessions on economic or nuclear issues as a means of containing it. Conversely, Israel may leverage its political and security tools as a means to pressure the US administration and prevent it from going too far down the path of a settlement.

The rift is also likely to intensify due to personal factors linked to domestic and electoral agendas, given that both Trump and Netanyahu face critical elections this autumn. Trump fears that an ongoing war and the resulting global energy market chaos and price hikes could damage his party's prospects in midterm congressional elections scheduled for early November. He also worries that a Democratic Party victory in the House, the Senate or both could trigger impeachment proceedings against him, as some Democrats

have threatened. Conversely, Netanyahu's political survival hinges on the war continuing; he appears likely to face defeat in Knesset elections set for October, which could not only cost him his political future, but lead to his imprisonment on corruption charges.

Conclusion

The rift between Trump and Netanyahu regarding Washington's MoU with Iran reflects a divergence in their respective assessments of the war's outcome and their priorities for the next phase, rather than a disagreement over the nature of the Iranian threat itself. The US administration believes that the war has achieved its primary objective by compelling Iran to negotiate, whereas Israel views the war as having ended before its strategic goals were achieved. Consequently, the future of US-Israeli relations regarding Iran will largely depend on the outcome of the negotiations currently underway in Switzerland. If Washington succeeds in extracting substantial concessions from Iran on the nuclear issue, the intensity of their dispute could subside. However, if the memorandum becomes the basis for a settlement that grants Iran economic and political gains without imposing strict constraints on its nuclear programme, tensions between the two allies are likely to escalate, potentially turning the matter into a major source of friction within the US-Israeli alliance in the coming months.