

The United States Did Not Lose the War Against Iran: The Harder Part is Postwar Peacemaking

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Recently, it has become fashionable in [news commentary](#) and in [political pronouncements](#) by members of Congress, among others, to claim that the United States' conflict with Iran is a defeat and a debacle. Ironically, sources that criticized the Trump administration for Operation Epic Fury starting on February 28, 2026, are now criticizing the President and his advisors for capitulating to Iran on issues like Iran's nuclear program, shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, and funds for Iranian reconstruction. Other critics argue that the regime in Tehran [remains in power](#) and that Iranian proxies, especially Hezbollah in Lebanon, keep attacking Israel, America's key ally in the Middle East.

There is no question that this war was started without many of the diplomatic and military precursors seen in past conflicts, such as consulting with major allies, the United Nations (UN), and briefing Congressional leaders beyond those required by the War Powers Act. There was also an ambitious list of political and military goals announced from the start, including hopes that Iran's internal politics could be stirred into rebellion against the Ayatollahs, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and other parts of the ruling theocracy. [Official objectives](#) included destroying Iran's missile capabilities and its capacity to produce brand new ones; annihilating its navy; ensuring that the world's number one sponsor of terror can never obtain a nuclear weapon; and ensuring that the Iranian regime cannot continue to arm, fund, and direct terrorist armies outside of its borders. Additionally, Israel sought to weaken or remove Hezbollah in Lebanon, and both the U.S. and Israel intend to further contain other Iranian proxies, such as the Houthis in Yemen and Hamas in Gaza.

[The Memorandum of Understanding](#) reached between the United States and Iran in mid-June expedited shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to provide immediate relief for global trade and, inevitably, generated significant revenue for Iran from its oil sales to China and other buyers. U.S. officials pointed to declining domestic gas prices as a positive sign, which also fostered a more optimistic economic outlook ahead of the U.S. midterm elections. President Trump continued to reassure Americans and others that the upcoming sixty-day negotiation period between Washington and Tehran would prevent Iran from developing or obtaining nuclear weapons. The U.S. claimed that Iranian negotiators had agreed to future inspections of Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities by UN atomic inspection experts, though Washington also emphasized the need to include American inspectors. Some Iranian officials denied agreeing to this inspection requirement, but these denials might have been aimed at appeasing hardliners within Tehran's postwar regime.

Now comes the harder part. Negotiating the end of a war involves more complexity than most observers may realize. This is true even when the stronger power, in military terms, has the capacity to inflict greater damage on the relatively weaker power. Losing powers, not fully defeated, may still retain bargaining chips. The weaker side can influence the transition from

midgame to endgame, making it more or less costly for the stronger power, depending on how willing the stronger power is to negotiate and trade concessions rather than simply enforce a diktat.

Regarding Iran, the first aspect of its ongoing ability to stir trouble lies in its close influence over Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen. Israel continues to respond strongly to attacks by Hezbollah, and this back-and-forth creates a distracting layer for the ongoing U.S. negotiations with Iran. A second aspect of Iran's postwar influence is its capacity to strike regional neighbors that support U.S. military bases or wish to maintain friendly relations with the U.S., including the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. Third, Iran is already suspected of supporting assassination plots against President Trump or planning other anti-American terrorist activities. Fourth, Iran has used its own narratives about the war with the U.S. to portray its regime as a victim of a bullying superpower, a storyline that appeals to many observers who were already critical of U.S. support for Israel's war against Hamas following the October 7, 2023, massacre by the latter. Fifth, Iran's proximity to the Strait of Hormuz presents potential opportunities for disruptive actions against merchant ships and U.S. or other naval forces. Lastly, Iran's ongoing close ties with Russia and China will gradually enhance its postwar military capabilities and economic rebuilding, while also reinforcing the stability of its political regime.

Notwithstanding the preceding cautionary notes against premature American irrational exuberance over Operation Epic Fury, a pessimistic assessment of U.S. military effectiveness, and talk of postwar U.S. political defeat, is unwarranted. Iran's military capability has been seriously degraded, and major components of its nuclear program are buried under rubble, pushing back the estimated time for weaponization. Several rounds of anti-leadership targeting have scrambled the decision-making process within an already complexified regime structure. It is likely the regime will continue to maintain its powerful grip over the population unless, or until, home-grown opposition becomes much more motivated, better organized, and widespread. Meanwhile, we can assume that U.S. Central Command will maintain vigilant regional overwatch to keep Iran's mischief within acceptable bounds.

Going forward, the endgame in Iran will test the ability of the United States and Israel to exercise both statesmanship and military power. Politics in the Middle East is as challenging as any. War in the Middle East, from ancient times to today, has been the graveyard of imperial ambitions and the source of frustration for efforts to spread democracy. Reshaping Middle Eastern political alliances for international peace and security requires high-stakes diplomacy, cultural understanding, and a strong dose of diplomatic and strategic realism. In the post-Epic Fury world, we stand on the brink of potentially historic breakthroughs that could lead to lasting regional peace, free from nuclear coercion, or, if they fail, sustain the cycle of theocratically motivated conventional or unconventional warfare.

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