



# US, Israel, and Iran amidst Escalations in the Middle East

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## Historical Context

The conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States is deeply rooted in historical grievances, strategic calculations, and ideological opposition. Before 1979, Iran and Israel maintained amicable diplomatic and economic relations under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Both were Western-aligned in a region dominated by Arab nationalism. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran radically shifted this dynamic. The newly formed Islamic Republic adopted an explicitly anti-Israel stance, leading to a breakdown in bilateral relations. Simultaneously, U.S.–Iran relations deteriorated dramatically. The 1953 CIA-backed coup against Iranian Prime

Minister Mossadegh and the 1979 hostage crisis poisoned perceptions on both sides. The U.S. considers Iran a state sponsor of terrorism and has imposed various sanctions. While the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) offered a diplomatic opening, the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 under President Trump reignited tensions.

## Geopolitical Rivalries and Proxy Conflicts

Iran and Israel now stand as the principal antagonists in a deeply entrenched struggle for influence across the Middle East. They represent not merely opposing national interests but contrasting ideological visions for the region's future. Iran's strategic approach has relied

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heavily on a network of non-state actors and aligned militias—including the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, as well as various Shia militias in Syria and Iraq. These groups serve as instruments of Iranian power projection, allowing Tehran to encircle Israel and maintain a constant state of pressure without direct military engagement. This reliance on proxies constitutes a deliberate and cost-effective strategy. It enables Iran to entrench its influence within fragile or conflict-ridden states, challenge Western-aligned powers, and deter direct attacks on its territory by dispersing confrontation across multiple fronts. These proxies often engage in asymmetric warfare, including rocket fire, guerrilla tactics, and terrorism, which Israel views as existential threats necessitating immediate and forceful responses. Israel's counterstrategy has been equally assertive and technologically advanced. It includes targeted assassinations, cyber warfare, pre-emptive airstrikes on weapons shipments, and the use of advanced surveillance and missile defence systems. These measures are intended not only to neutralise immediate



threats but also to send a clear deterrent signal to both Iran and its proxies. However, this tit-for-tat pattern of confrontation has contributed to a chronic state of low-intensity conflict that regularly threatens to escalate into full-scale war.

The United States remains an indispensable pillar of Israel's regional security posture. Its unwavering military and diplomatic support—manifested through billions in annual defence aid, intelligence sharing, and veto power at the UN Security Council—strengthens Israel's deterrence and enables bold actions against Iranian-aligned actors. In return, Israel serves as a forward bastion of U.S. interests in a volatile region increasingly contested by global rivals such as Russia

and China. This trilateral dynamic—anchored by Iranian revisionism, Israeli assertiveness, and U.S. strategic backing—has created a geopolitical fault line stretching from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. It fuels a sprawling network of proxy wars, arms races, and political polarisation, ensnaring neighbouring states and complicating efforts at regional integration or collective security. Moreover, the entrenchment of proxy networks undermines state sovereignty in conflict zones and diminishes prospects for long-term stability. Local populations bear the brunt of this geopolitical rivalry, as external agendas perpetuate cycles of violence and impede peacebuilding efforts. Thus, the Iran-Israel-U.S. triangle is not only a driver of confrontation but also a structural impediment to regional normalisation. Its persistence reinforces fragmentation, fuels radicalisation, and inhibits the emergence of a unified and cooperative Middle East.

### **From Shadow War to Direct Confrontation: Recent Escalations**

Recent events have marked a transition from covert hostilities to overt military confrontations. In April 2024, an Israeli airstrike on Iran's consulate in Damascus killed top

Iranian commanders, prompting Iran's first-ever direct missile and drone attack on Israeli soil. In October 2024, Iran retaliated again following the assassination of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. In June 2025, *the 12-Day War*, codenamed **Operation Rising Lion**, marked a major escalation of the conflict. Israel launched multiple strikes targeting Iranian nuclear and military facilities, killing several Iranian nuclear scientists and senior military leaders. Followed by U.S. airstrikes on additional Iranian targets. Iran responded with limited missile and drone attacks, including a strike on a U.S. base in Qatar.

### **Nuclear Tensions and Operation "Midnight Hammer"**

Iran's nuclear program is at the heart of its conflict with Israel and the United States. Israel perceives a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat and has historically used covert operations to sabotage Iranian capabilities. While Iran maintains its nuclear activities are peaceful, scepticism persists among Western and regional powers. In June 2025, the U.S. launched Operation "Midnight Hammer," a coordinated strike on key Iranian nuclear sites including Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan. The operation inflicted what the U.S. described as "extremely severe damage," though Iran minimised the impact publicly. Iran warned of potential retaliation, including closing the Strait of Hormuz, prompting global calls for restraint.

### **Humanitarian Consequences**

In Iran, over 600 people, including civilians and security personnel, were killed, and thousands were injured. Hospitals were overwhelmed amid shortages exacerbated by long-standing sanctions. Internet blackouts further endangered civilians. In Israel, at least 28 civilians were killed and nearly 600 were injured. The conflict has intensified suffering in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, contributing to mass displacement, food insecurity, and infrastructure collapse. The psychological trauma from prolonged exposure to violence adds a hidden but profound layer to the crisis.

### **Diplomatic Isolation and Strategic Alliances**

Diplomatic warfare continues in parallel to physical conflict. Iran opposes Arab normalisation with Israel and attempts to isolate it diplomatically. In contrast, Israel has capitalised on the Abraham Accords to build relations with Arab states, isolating Iran. Tehran has responded by strengthening ties with Russia and China to counterbalance Western pressure. However, the continuation of hostilities presents several concerning possibilities: A full-scale war in the Middle East would constitute a catastrophic regional conflict, drawing in multiple states and non-state actors and resulting in widespread devastation. One of the gravest concerns is the prospect of nuclear proliferation; under continued pressure, Iran may decide to accelerate its nuclear program, potentially triggering a dangerous arms race across the region. Such developments would not only increase the likelihood of nuclear confrontation but also deepen regional insecurities. In parallel, the Iranian government may exploit external threats to consolidate authoritarian control, using the ongoing conflict as justification to suppress internal dissent and curtail the activities of civil society. This trend poses a long-term threat to democratic aspirations and human rights within the country. The economic repercussions of the conflict are equally alarming. Disruptions to oil supplies, combined with infrastructural damage, could precipitate global economic instability. Vulnerable populations would bear the brunt of these effects, facing increased poverty, food insecurity, and loss of livelihoods. Furthermore, the pattern of unilateral military actions by involved states risks undermining international norms and legal frameworks designed to prevent conflict and safeguard

civilians. As these norms erode, the effectiveness of global governance institutions diminishes, making future conflicts more likely and harder to contain.

### **A Path Forward: The Need for a Humane Approach**

A sustainable resolution to the escalating conflict demands far more than tactical military victories; it requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach grounded in diplomacy, law, and human dignity. First and foremost, robust diplomacy must be prioritised. This includes the urgent resumption of nuclear negotiations and the fostering of inclusive regional dialogue aimed at reducing tensions and building mutual trust. Equally essential is a firm commitment to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), ensuring that all parties to the conflict adhere strictly to legal standards designed to protect civilian populations and civilian infrastructure during times of war. Upholding these principles is crucial to minimising human suffering and maintaining a moral compass amid geopolitical confrontation. Support for civil society must also form a central pillar of any long-term solution. Local movements that advocate for peace, democratic governance, and human rights play a vital role in fostering resilience and accountability within affected communities. Strengthening their capacity can help lay the groundwork for more enduring peace. Finally, the international community must ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations, enabling them to deliver essential aid to affected populations. Expanding humanitarian assistance is not only a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for stabilising communities and preventing further radicalisation born of desperation and neglect.

In conclusion, the escalating tensions between the United States, Israel, and Iran transcend the realm of geopolitical strategy or abstract statecraft. They are, at their core, deeply human tragedies that reverberate across borders and generations. Every missile strike, every retaliatory act, and every policy decision carry with it the weight of civilian suffering, disrupted lives, lost families, psychological trauma, and communities pushed to the brink of collapse. These are not just military flashpoints; they are lived realities for millions of people caught in the crossfire of ideological and strategic confrontation. A truly humane and forward-looking analysis must move beyond the logic of confrontation and retribution. Instead, it calls for a coordinated, sustained international response rooted in diplomacy, de-escalation, and respect for international law.

Only through constructive dialogue and negotiated compromise can the cycle of violence be broken. Upholding international humanitarian law is not merely a legal obligation—it is a moral necessity that affirms the value of human life even in times of war. Furthermore, the international community must prioritize the protection and dignity of all affected populations, placing human security at the centre of its strategic calculus. This includes not only safeguarding civilians from harm but also fostering long-term conditions for peace through justice, inclusion, and reconciliation. Ultimately, peace in the Middle East will not be achieved through domination or deterrence alone, but through the collective moral courage to choose diplomacy over destruction, cooperation over coercion, and humanity over hostility.