The United States and Israel's Military Escalation against Iran and Its Geopolitical Implications for the Middle East

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Abstract:

This study examines the geopolitical dynamics of US-Israeli military escalation against Iran, with a focus on the events of February 28, 2026, one of the most significant confrontations in the Middle East since the Iraq War.

The article looks at these countries' policies, economic interests, and security concerns in order to understand how they interact with each other. This includes maintaining regional dominance, protecting oil supplies, supporting Israel's territorial goals, and countering threats to Western nations. On February 28, 2026, military strikes were expected to hit Iran's military and nuclear sites. These resulted from years of sanctions, pressure, and attempts to weaken Iran.

To demonstrate how actions by the United States and Israel have created issues in the region, this article also examines Iran's choices and their impact on security in the Middle East.

Keywords: February 2026 attacks- ceasefire- hegemonic retreat- Iran's nuclear weapons- peace talks in Islamabad- The Greater Israel Project.

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Introduction

In February 2026, Israel and the United States attacked Iran's military and nuclear facilities. This was the most significant Middle East event since the Iraq War in 2003. These assaults are not random, though. They were the outcome of years of conflict and attempts to undermine Iran. We must examine the history and the various elements -economic, security, and ideological- that shaped US-Israeli policy against Iran to comprehend this attack.

Since the middle of the 20th century, there have been significant changes in the relationship between the United States, Israel, and Iran. During the Shah's reign, it was a cordial friendship, but following Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, it became a source of animosity. Conflicts that still exist now are a result of this shift in regional dominance. Nuclear technology is not only causing the current problem; deeper issues include resource competition, control over the region, and perspectives on Middle East politics.

This study examines Israeli and American actions against Iran, highlighting regional power struggles and security concerns that result in armed conflicts. It demonstrates how economic interests influence decisions and how American policies have imperial objectives. Instead of aiding individuals, these interests prioritize military assistance and backing Israel.

This paper helps us understand the reasons for the struggle that preceded the military strikes in 2026. To make this possible, we must inquire: Do the 2026 US-Israeli military strikes against Iran represent an answer to an imminent problem? Or a strategic culmination of decades of geopolitical and economic rivalries? And what are the plausible scenarios for regional order in the post-strike era?

To address these questions, my work is based on several hypotheses across different analytical angles:

- The strikes were not motivated by nuclear security concerns but influenced by American and Israeli interests in maintaining control over the strategic resources and geopolitical architecture in the region.
- Instead of isolating Iran, the 2026 attacks strengthened its strategic alliances with Russia and China, reshaping the regional power dynamics against Western interests.
- The post-strike context created an opportunity for a new regional security architecture through bilateral negotiation, as the United States and Iran faced unsustainable escalation costs.

I begin this article with an overview of the relationship between the United States, Iran, and Israel over time, leading up to Donald Trump’s rise to power and ending with the attack on February 28, 2026. I conclude the article with a few scenarios for how this crisis might end.

Firstly: Iran in the US-Israel concerns: An overview to understand the triangular relationship

In a realist geopolitical viewpoint, the US-Israel assault against Iran is a reflection of the dynamics of power competition and the quest for regional hegemony in the Middle East. Since the end of World War II, the United States has worked to keep its position as the region's leading external power, seeing the Middle East as essential to international trade routes, global energy security, and the balance of power. This hegemonic project is directly threatened by Iran's rise to prominence as an independent regional force pursuing its own goals and opposing American preferences [1].

The concept of "hegemonic retreat" is, actually, a crucial background to understand the current US strategy in Iran and the Middle East. To preserve a favorable regional order, US strategy has switched from direct military occupation to reliance on regional allies, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia, as American relative power has decreased and public support for military interventions in the Middle East has diminished. The United States has maintained a military presence and shown willingness to employ force when key interests are in danger, but this retreat has been selective and contentious [2].

Israel's strategic interests in confronting Iran are a reflection of both wider aspirations for regional supremacy and security concerns. Israel aims to stop any regional force from emerging that could undermine its military power and endanger its security. One such risk is Iran's development of sophisticated military weapons, including ballistic missiles and assistance for proxy forces along Israel's borders. As a result, Israeli strategy has focused on preserving a superior military advantage through cutting-edge weaponry, a nuclear monopoly in the region, and a readiness to use preemptive force against perceived threats to maintain its hidden strategy alive [3].

Indeed, in Israel's hidden strategy, it is non-negotiable to let any country in the region be supreme over it.

1. The Israeli hidden reason: "The Greater Israel Project."

In American-Israeli policy in the Middle East, the concept of "Greater Israel" and Israel's aspirations to enlarge its territory are disputed issues. According to this concept, Israel desires authority over regions beyond its present boundaries, including portions of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Even though Israel's policy does not explicitly endorse these expansive territorial claims, it is contended that the expansion of settlements, military operations, and strategic plans indicate a desire to do so. The United States argues that weakening neighboring countries, especially Iran, is necessary to safeguard Israel's strategic interests and maintain regional supremacy [4].

There is a complicated relationship between the Greater Israel concept and Iran policy. Iran restricts Israel's activity in the region by supporting Palestinian

organizations and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Reducing Iran's influence would help Israel accomplish its objectives and undermine Iran-backed opposition organizations. According to this perspective, American-Israeli activities against Iran are intended to both prevent nuclear weapons and strengthen Israel's position in the region [5].

The idea of Greater Israel is important for understanding the relationship between the United States, Israel, and Iran. It clarifies the larger context of their disputes. To address legitimate concerns, the United States should back Israel and take action against Iran if Israel's actions are deemed defensive and security-oriented. However, US support appears to be assisting Israel in controlling the region, which is against both International Law and Palestinian rights, since Israel's policies include enlarging its territory by undermining neighboring nations and restricting Palestinian rights. People's perceptions of America-Israel's activities toward Iran are influenced by this debate on Israel's objectives [6].

From my perspective, this hidden reason -the Great Israel Project- is the most important reason behind the February 2026 attacks at the same level as stopping Iran from producing nuclear weapons.

2. The economic considerations and the nuclear dynamics

Beyond these security considerations, Israel's economic interests in opposing Iran include preserving its standing as an ally and receiver of military assistance from the United States. In fact, the United States provides Israel with over $3.8 billion in military aid each year [7], which is justified by portraying Iran as an existential threat. It also bolsters the case for preserving Israel's superior military advantage over possible enemies. Furthermore, the creation and export of weapons systems intended to counter Iranian threats benefits Israeli defense firms, providing financial incentives for sustaining high levels of tension [8].

The focus on Iran's nuclear program obscures these economic interests and portrays policy as being motivated by security and non-proliferation goals. Policymakers in the United States, Israel, and even Western countries can avoid questions about how oil interests, military sales, and economic competition shape harsh policies toward Iran by concentrating on nuclear issues. Additionally, this framing makes it possible to describe military action as necessary and defensive rather than as advancing specific economic goals [9].

However, the larger context of regional nuclear dynamics and the significance of Israel's own nuclear arsenal must be taken into consideration while analyzing the security discourse around Iran's nuclear program. Despite being believed to have a sizable nuclear arsenal estimated at 80 - 400 warheads [10], Israel has maintained a policy of nuclear opacity, neither acknowledging nor denying possession of nuclear weapons. As the ultimate deterrent against existential threats, this nuclear monopoly has been a pillar of Israeli security strategy. Israel believes that a condition of mutual deterrence would be untenable if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, ending this monopoly [11].

On one hand, considering Iran's nuclear program dangerous while downplaying or disregarding Israel's nuclear weapons is a "double standard" in the non-proliferation strategy. On the other hand, Israel, which has never ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and owns nuclear weapons, is not under the same level of international pressure as Iran, a signatory to the NPT, which has been the target of intense international sanctions for nuclear activities that it claims are peaceful.

Beyond nuclear issues, Iran's conventional military capabilities -specifically, its ballistic missile program and assistance for proxy forces across the region- are the main focus of US-Israel security concerns. Iran has produced highly advanced missiles that can hit targets in the Middle East with ever-increasing accuracy, posing an intolerable threat to military sites, civilian populations, and vital infrastructure [12]. Iran's backing of Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq, and Houthi forces in Yemen establishes a network of Iranian influence that poses a challenge to Israeli and American interests on several fronts [13]. Iran is really attempting to create an alternative power center that can withstand US-Israel hegemony through its support of these groups. A regional system marked by ongoing instability and a continual risk of escalation to direct military confrontation has resulted from this struggle, which has taken the form of proxy conflicts across several States [14].

From Iran's point of view, defensive military preparations and assistance for regional allies are warranted due to the American military's presence throughout the region, Israeli military superiority, and the history of Western meddling in Iranian affairs. However, the United States and Israel see Iran's actions as aggressive threats that call for countermeasures, resulting in a spiral of escalation that raises the possibility of confrontation [15], and sanctions must be taken.

3. Key Sanctions used against Iran

For more than forty years, the United States has used economic sanctions against Iran. These sanctions are similar to economic warfare and aim to force Iran to change its policies by causing economic harm, covering almost every part of Iran's economy. The sanctions included restrictions on oil exports, cutting Iran off from global financial systems, freezing assets, and punishing any country that does business with Iran [16].

Let’s keep in mind that Iran is a major energy power with the potential to impact global markets, as it has the second-largest natural gas reserves and the fourth-largest oil reserves in the world. The system of energy governance that has benefited Western consumers and companies since the middle of the 20th century is threatened by an Iran that functions independently of Western supervision and pursues its own economic goals. [17].

Additionally to the oil exports that drastically decreased, Iranian banks are no longer able to access the SWIFT system, which makes it challenging for Iran to engage in international commerce and financial transactions. Iran's currency lost

value, unemployment and inflation rose, making it more difficult for Iranians to acquire technology and goods [18].

The effectiveness of sanctions in achieving policy objectives is still up for discussion, though. Sanctions have harmed Iran's economy, but they have not altered Iran's regional or nuclear policies. Rather, they have boosted Iranian pride, given the regime someone to blame for economic issues, and encouraged covert trade with nations like China and Russia, which has helped Iran get around some of the economic difficulties brought on by sanctions [19].

To destabilize Iran further, the United States and Israel employ covert operations and indirect confrontation. These include attacking Iranian forces in Syria and other locations, killing Iranian nuclear scientists to impede Iran's nuclear development, using cyberattacks to destroy nuclear facilities, like Iran's Natanz nuclear plant in 2010, and showing how cyberattacks can be used for sabotage [20].

In parallel, Israel has launched airstrikes on Hezbollah and Iranian forces in Syria. Their goal was to stop Iran from building a military installation close to Israel. American soldiers have frequently faced Iranian-backed organizations in Iraq, which were using drones and rockets to strike American facilities. Also, the United States is still backing the Saudi side in the conflict between Houthi forces and a Saudi-led organization in Yemen, which is regarded as a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia [21].

These hidden and indirect strategies were put against Iran to avoid public debate or approval. However, these strategies can lead to mistakes, unchecked escalation, and more violence, making peace negotiations more challenging [22].

There have been many ups and downs in the relationship between the United States, Israel, and Iran over the years, especially after World War II, and that is exactly what I will discuss in the following points.

Secondly: The historical Context from the 1940s to the 2003 invasion of Iraq

The foundations of the current relationship among the United States, Israel, and Iran began to develop post-World War II, particularly following the establishment of the illegal state of Israel in 1948. This alteration impacted the region for many years. During that period, Iran, under the leadership of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, had good relations with both the United States and Israel. They established a "triangular alliance" due to their mutual objectives against communism and aligned strategic interests [23], including regional stability and economic collaboration, which fortified their diplomatic relations during the Cold War.

In 1953, the United States facilitated the overthrow of Iran's elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, via an operation named "Operation Ajax". The cause was Mosaddegh's nationalization of Iran's oil industry, which alarmed Western nations regarding their economic interests. The coup overthrew Mosaddegh and reinforced the Shah's authority, transforming Iran into a "Western imperial holding" that catered to American interests [24].

The 1953 coup demonstrated how Western nations got involved in Iranian affairs, which eventually resulted in significant changes. A harsh regime that put foreign interests ahead of the demands of the populace was established by the United States and its allies. This paved the way for a revolution that changed Iran's political landscape and its place in the world. The coup also brought attention to how crucial energy and oil are to Western objectives in the Middle East, a factor that still affects choices today [25].

During the 1950s and 60s, Israel was referred to as a capitalist outpost. Its purpose was to safeguard European and American interests in the Middle East. Consequently, Israel became an important ally of Western nations and sought control of a region rich in energy resources. The special relationship between the United States and Israel during this period grew stronger, particularly through military cooperation, economic relations, and shared Middle East objectives [26].

Iran collaborated closely with Israel and the United States from the 1953 coup until the late 1970s. It was a "treacherous alliance," with intricate plans and covert transactions [27]. Iran played a significant role in the US Middle East strategy during this period. Indeed, during the Cold War, it served as a bulwark against Soviet influence and a regional enforcer. Due to substantial military assistance from the United States, the Shah's regime had an extremely powerful military [28].

At the same period, Iran and Israel maintained close relations despite their lack of official recognition. Concerned about both Soviet expansion and Arab nationalism, they traded, exchanged intelligence, and collaborated strategically. The Shah viewed Israel as a useful friend with cutting-edge military equipment and close links to Washington, while Israel saw Iran as a valuable non-Arab ally in the region. To prevent upsetting the Iranian people and Arab nations, this collaboration was kept secret [29].

As a pro-Western monarchy, Iran backed American objectives to secure oil, thwart communism, and maintain regional stability for Western interests. Although this created some difficulty in Iran, Israel was a natural ally of Iran's Shah because it was a Western-friendly state in the region. But during the 1979 revolution, this relationship collapsed [30].

Iran's government and its relations with the United States and Israel were altered by the 1979 Islamic Revolution, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who disapproved of the Shah's close relations with Israel and the United States as well as his support for the West. The Islamic Republic of Iran was against Israeli rule over Palestinian territory and American influence. The politics of the region were influenced by this change [31].

Iranian revolutionaries took control of the US embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and held hostages for 444 days. The relationship between the United States and Iran deteriorated because of this incident. This caused long-lasting animosity and altered American perceptions. Iran used the hostage situation as a means of

expressing its wish to be independent of Western rule. This action was a major violation of diplomatic norms and a danger to the United States' authority [32].

Talking of Israel and Iran's relationship, it underwent a dramatic transformation following the revolution. The new Iranian leadership rejected Israel as a legitimate state and backed the Palestinians by becoming an advocate for their rights. As a result, Iran began to back Palestinian resistance organizations and eventually Hezbollah in Lebanon. This posed a serious threat to Israel. The Middle East saw a significant movement from covert allies to overt adversaries [33].

Relations between the United States and Iran were impacted by the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which complicated the region. Despite claiming to be neutral, the United States supported Saddam Hussein in Iraq; In fact, Iraq received diplomatic, financial, and intelligence backing from the United States. Even if it meant endorsing a dictator, they felt that a weakened Iran was better for the West. Although the war did not succeed in overthrowing Iran's government, it did bring serious harm to both Iran and Iraq. Rather, it reinforced Iran's revolutionary beliefs and increased nationalism [34].

Even with the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the end of soviet hegemony, tensions between the United States and Iran persisted. Iran was subject to economic sanctions by the United States during this period. This was an attempt to break diplomatic and economic ties with Iran. In addition to being concerned about Iran's influence and its early nuclear program, the United States was still furious about the hostage situation [35].

Following the end of the Cold War, Iran's nuclear program became a major concern. Iran asserted that its nuclear efforts were for energy and peace. However, Israel and the United States were skeptical about this and worried about the development of weapons. The greatest strategic competition included the nuclear question. Iran's nuclear aspirations were seen as a danger to Israeli security and regional stability, while Iran maintained that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty gave it the freedom to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes [36].

This perspective aids the United States in defending sanctions, forming coalitions against Iran, and maintaining military alternatives. Israel guarantees American support for its military power in the region and promotes aggressive measures against Iran.

According to what precedes, we can say that the nuclear problem serves to uphold Western domination and keep Iran from developing into a powerful, independent nation capable of challenging American-Israeli hegemony [37]. This strategy advocated for harsh measures against all the nations that constitute a threat to Israel (Iraq, Syria, and Iran). This larger strategy to use military force to transform the Middle East included the 2003 invasion of Iraq [38], and the American-Iranian relations were directly impacted by this invasion. The United States and Israel sought to restrict Iran's dominance and alter the Middle East. But Iran was strengthened by

the war. Saddam Hussein was overthrown, allowing Iran to back Shia organizations in Iraq. As a result, the region's power dynamics were altered [39].

The long conflict in Iraq, the violence between groups, and the failure to create a stable government in Iraq illustrate the difficulties of using force in the Middle East and show the limitations of American military power. Iran saw the conflict in Iraq as a chance to seize power as well as a warning about the dangers of going up against the United States. From all that precedes, Iran's influence in the region grew [40].

Thirdly: Donald Trump's Policy toward Iran from 2017 to February 2026

When Donald Trump took office as president of the United States in January 2017, the nation's strategy toward Iran was altered. The United States employed economic sanctions and military threats instead of negotiations and agreements, increasing tensions between the two nations and adopting a more combative foreign policy. Trump withdrew the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018 (JCPOA, an agreement about nuclear weapons signed in 2015 between Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, China, and Russia; in this agreement Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program, in return, other countries agreed to remove economic sanctions that were hurting Iran's economy). Israel's pressure and Trump's advisors influenced his choice [41].

Re-imposing sanctions and exiting the JCPOA were perceived as a return to utilizing aggressive methods against Iran. The goal of the "maximum pressure" approach was to persuade Iran to accept a more stringent agreement [42]. This new agreement would address Iran's missile program and regional activities in addition to nuclear matters. However, this strategy failed, escalating tensions and raising the possibility of a military confrontation. Iran responded by expanding its nuclear program, enriching more uranium, and beginning to disregard several JCPOA regulations [43].

At this time, the Trump administration collaborated closely with the administration of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to form an anti-Iranian coalition by concluding diplomatic achievements. We are talking here about the Abraham Accords. This Accords strengthened and normalized the relationships between Israel and several Arab countries in the region. However, they also sought to forge regional alliances and isolate Iran. This process helped Israel's strategic goals but ignored Palestinian issues and strengthened the anti-Iran group in the region [44]. The future of these accords is still up in the air, though. Regional circumstances may influence strategic choices, and there is public opposition in Arab countries to restoring relations with Israel [45].

During the Trump presidency, military tensions were at their maximum. Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, was assassinated by the United States in a drone attack near Baghdad in January 2020. The United States and Iran nearly engaged in direct military combat as a result of this significant escalation. Iran responded by attacking US military installations in Iraq with missiles, proving

that it could hit American objectives. This crisis demonstrated the region's instability and the speed at which things could get out of control [46].

January 2021 marked the beginning of the Biden administration. In exchange for Iran adhering to the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it sought to engage in dialogue with Iran. However, differences over what should be included and how to verify compliance have stagnated the nuclear deal negotiations. Iran demanded the revocation of all penalties imposed during the Trump administration and assurances that the United States will never again withdraw from the agreement. The United States sought to address more topics than those included in the initial JCPOA [47].

The Biden administration's plan for Iran was called a "depressurization strategy" [48]. Although it employed sanctions and collaborated with partners on regional security, its goal was to reduce tensions. Those who desired harder measures or more diplomacy were not entirely satisfied with this strategy. The lack of practical solutions to Iran's nuclear program irritated both parties. Iran's nuclear program proceeded unchecked due to the inability to renew the JCPOA, increasing the likelihood of a military confrontation [49].

US-Iran relations have been increasingly challenging under the Biden administration due to regional developments. When, in October 2023, war erupted in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, Iran opposed Israel's military operations in Gaza because it had backed Hamas and other Palestinian organizations. In the meantime, Israel's military activities have received substantial support from the United States. Concerns about a potential direct conflict between the United States and Iran have increased due to this circumstance [50].

Military operations, cyberattacks, and covert operations between Iran and Israel increased significantly. Israel targeted Iranian military installations and nuclear facilities. Iran responded by conducting its own covert operations and supporting organizations that attacked Israeli military installations and cyberattacked Israeli infrastructure. Although it did not reach the level of a full-scale war, this prolonged struggle raised the possibility of a bigger conflict [51].

The failure of diplomatic efforts and the ongoing escalation of tensions led to the crisis in February 2026. Iran kept up its nuclear program in 2025; It enhanced uranium stockpiling and enriched it to higher levels suitable for use in weapons. Israel and the United States were concerned about this because they thought military action might be required to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons [52]. In fact, the likelihood of military alternatives increased as diplomacy failed, and that is exactly what happened when Israel pressured the United States to attack Iran militarily at the beginning of 2026. Iran's nuclear development, according to Israeli leaders, poses a significant threat that calls for an immediate response. They cautioned that since Iran was expanding and defending its nuclear facilities, it might be too late to launch an attack. Israel changed America's perspective on initiating another significant conflict in the Middle East through both public declarations and

private discussions. Israel and the United States collaborated more on military planning during this period, suggesting potential combined operations [53].

Fourthly: The February 28, 2026, military attacks

After negotiations with Iran broke down and tensions over Iran's nuclear program increased, Israel and the United States launched a military assault on Iran on February 28, 2026. Although the precise cause of the strikes on February 28, 2026, is not clear, it appears to be connected to claims that Iran was either nearing the production of nuclear weapons or had advanced to a significant stage in its nuclear program. The choice to launch an assault signaled a dramatic shift from merely attempting to restrain Iran to actively using force to destroy its nuclear facilities. This objective is aligned with the long-term US-Israel strategy to preserve a nuclear edge in the region and prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power capable of posing a threat to the United States and Israel [54] who made this decision because taking military action would be less dangerous than letting Iran obtain nuclear weapons.

Iran's military installations, nuclear facilities, and other significant assets were the targets of the attacks. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps command centers, nuclear research facilities, missile manufacturing and storage facilities, and uranium enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow were among the main objectives. To interfere with Iran's air defenses and communication systems, the operations employed stealth aircraft, air-launched missiles, and potentially cyberattacks [55].

Initial attacks were followed by additional strikes on targets that were either missed or discovered later. Compared to previous Israeli attacks on Iranian sites, this operation was bigger and more intense. Additionally, it was the first significant US military operation against Iran since the 1980s. The intricate actions required extensive planning and intelligence work, demonstrating that military plans were prepared before the decision to take action. Iran has reacted to both short-term military operations and long-term adjustments. It demonstrated its capacity to attack American forces and allies by launching missile attacks on US bases in the Persian Gulf and Iraq. The conflict grew as Iranian-backed organizations in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon intensified their attacks on Israeli and American interests. Additionally, Iran said that it will openly pursue nuclear weapons and withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, altering the strategic landscape.

The operations were intended to undermine Iran's military power and regional influence in addition to their nuclear objective. They went for Iran's missile program, which had produced sophisticated missiles capable of striking targets all over the Middle East. By lessening threats to their territories, damaging Iran's missiles aided in defending the interests of the United States and Israel [56].

Both Israeli and American authorities had political objectives when they planned and carried out the strikes. The United States showed its seriousness about dealing with Iran by employing military action against it. Additionally, it demonstrated to regional allies that the United States was prepared to take action against Iran and relieved domestic political constraints. The strikes were the outcome of years of

military action advocacy on Israel's part. They demonstrated Israel's ability to influence American policy regarding Iran. In addition to warning other nations about the dangers of defying the United States and Israeli objectives, the coordinated operations enhanced the US-Israel alliance [57].

The strikes were intended to uphold American-Israeli dominance in the Middle East and stop rising regional countries from opposing Western dominance. They contend that the nuclear problem served just as a pretext for military action intended to destabilize a nation that defied American pressure and backed organizations opposed to Israeli policy. In addition to being motivated by nuclear concerns, the strikes demonstrated strength and a readiness to use force to uphold a regional order that serves US-Israeli objectives [58].

Fifthly: Regional and International reactions to the strike and its ramifications

The strikes in February 2026 illustrated how complicated the Middle East politics are.

1. **Regional and International reactions**

- While they remained silent in public, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates covertly backed operations against Iran. They see Iran as a danger to their security and dominance in the region. Although they were worried about increased fighting and chaos, the strikes met their objectives. They kept silent in public because they were aware that the population disapproved of US-Israeli military operations and did not want to appear to be supporting an attack on a Muslim nation [59].

- Turkey and Qatar were more critical. Even if they always had a complex relationship that included both collaboration and rivalry with Iran, they claimed that the strikes violated both Iran's rights and international law. They preferred diplomatic discussions over armed action as a way of resolving issues. Their responses demonstrated the opposition to using military force and the desire to maintain good relations with Iran while preventing further unrest in the region. There was no one Arab or Muslim perspective on the issue, as evidenced by the various reactions from these countries [60].

- Depending on their political affiliations, China and Russia were also critical, denouncing the strikes as unlawful and a danger to international peace. They see the strikes as part of America's ambition to use military force to govern the world since they have close relations with Iran. China and Russia hinted at potential military and economic backing for Iran in addition to offering diplomatic support [61].

- Reactions have been diverse in the European Union. They struggled to balance their concerns about regional stability and International Law with their support for the United States. They were worried about the deteriorating situation and called for more negotiations to resolve the nuclear issue, even if they did not publicly condemn the strikes. Maintaining a divergent foreign policy from that of the United States and its rivals proved challenging for the European Union, particularly when it comes to

striking a balance between sanctions and preserving economic and energy relations [62].

There are significant economic ramifications to the US-Israeli-Iranian confrontation. International trade, regional economy, and the world's energy markets have all been impacted.

2. **The ramifications of the strike**

Immediately following the strikes, oil prices increased due to worries about disruptions to Persian Gulf oil exports and energy facilities. About one-fifth of the world's oil supplies, which corresponds to about 20 percent of the world's crude oil and a lot of liquefied natural gas, pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which became a major source of concern when Iran threatened to stop or interfere with shipping in reaction to the assaults. [63].

The Middle East's financial markets are now unstable, and investors have relocated their funds to safer locations. Stock markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council have declined, and currency pressure has affected nations with close economic connections to the region. South Asia has also been affected economically. These countries, which depend on remittances from Gulf states and are vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices, experienced "energy-remittance double shock" [64]; This threatens their development progress and economic stability.

The strikes had created a serious humanitarian crisis; In fact, they killed civilians and damaged Iranian society by destroying vital institutions like hospitals and schools. The attacks affected neighboring residential areas in addition to military and nuclear targets. In a region already dealing with numerous issues, including the conflict in Gaza and instability in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, this has made life more difficult there.

Iran was subject to additional restrictions by the United States, which also cautioned other countries against doing business with it. The goal of these measures was to impede Iran's recovery by applying more economic pressure. But they also created issues for countries like Russia and Europe that wanted to keep commercial relations with Iran and thought the sanctions might destabilize the region and obstruct peace initiatives. All Iranians were punished by the sanctions, which may have aided the government's argument that it was fending off foreign threats [65].

3. **The Ceasefire and Its Fragile Promise**

Throughout the chaos that was unfolding in the region, Pakistan succeeded in bringing the United States and Iran to the negotiating table and helped them agree to a temporary ceasefire for two weeks after weeks of rising hostilities and pressure from other countries. Iran would stop blocking the Strait of Hormuz, and the United States would stop attacking. In fact, the ceasefire started immediately and led to peace talks in Islamabad [66]. The United States supported the "double-sided ceasefire," and Iran said it would follow the agreement "if attacks against Iran stop".

The ceasefire allowed officials from the United States and Iran to meet in Islamabad on April 11 and 12. This was their first meeting in person since 2015 [67]. The talks lasted 21 hours, but they did not reach an agreement. Iran has not accepted American terms and requested $6 billion in frozen assets released, guarantees about its nuclear program, the authority to tax vessels that transit through the Strait of Hormuz, and an end to Israeli attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon [68]. The United States was being stubborn and refused [69]. Even though peace is still uncertain, Pakistan asked both sides to keep the ceasefire to continue talks.

As a result of this, the economic effects were quick and serious. Oil prices went over $103 per barrel on April 13, one of the biggest jumps since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 [70]; Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and Trump's counter-blockade caused a major disruption to global energy markets [71].

The blockade starts on April 13, and the States are worried. They wonder if peace talks can work or if the Middle East will face more serious strikes. The next few days or weeks are crucial; they will show whether the war will spread to more areas or if there is a chance for peace.

Sixthly: The after February 2026 Iran's strategic options

Iran has some strategic options to take into consideration after the US – Israeli military attacks.

1. **Military reaction and prevention strategies**

Following the assaults on February 28, 2026, and continued US-Israeli operations, Iran faces tough decisions. It can choose to launch intense attacks that could spark a larger confrontation, or it can reply with smaller military measures to demonstrate power without initiating a major fight. Iran demonstrated its ability to target American locations after these strikes. In fact, it used missiles and drones to attack American bases in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iraq. However, it limited its response to prevent a significant military reaction from the United States [72].

Iran's priority currently is developing nuclear weapons, and the assaults in February 2026 may have increased the probability of doing so. Iran declared it will openly pursue nuclear weapons and withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This indicates a marked transition in Iran's approach. Iran feels that only nuclear weapons can defend it against future attacks and that conventional military power is insufficient to thwart American-Israeli strikes. In my opinion, this way of thinking is reasonable, but it could result in additional States in the region obtaining nuclear weapons that could lead to a potential nuclear war.

Iran's tactics include halting ships in the Strait of Hormuz. It may confront its adversaries using this tactic without engaging a confrontation with the US military. Iran increased pressure on the United States and Israel after the attacks by demonstrating its ability to escalate conflict in countries including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. This strategy is dangerous, though, as Iran may lose control over these groups, resulting in more serious issues that it cannot manage. For me, I

guess, this could generate violence, instability in the region, and retaliation from both domestic and foreign actors [73].

Iran's military power in the future depends on fixing damaged capacities, developing new technology, and persevering in the face of defeats from the February assaults or any other assaults. Iran's defense sector can manufacture missiles, drones, and other military equipment despite the sanctions. Any future plan will depend on Iran's ability to reconstruct its nuclear program.

2. **Diplomatic routes and global involvement**

The tensions between the United States, Israel, and Iran should be controlled, notwithstanding the severity of the situation. For example, they can resume nuclear negotiations with assistance from other nations. This could help resolve current issues and pave the way for further conversations. However, previous negotiations were unsuccessful, and the recent surge in military operations has created a great mistrust, making negotiations more difficult [74].

Iran is attempting to strengthen its partnerships with Russia and China to maintain its strategic position in the region and protect itself against Western influence. It also helps Iran deal with pressure from the United States and Israel.

Due to their rivalry with the United States and desire for a multipolar world, China and Russia always backed Iran. In fact, Iran's economy has benefited from China's energy investments despite US sanctions, and Iran's defense has been strengthened thanks to Russia, which sells Iran weapons and provides intelligence [75].

Divisions and the difference in the points of view make any regional diplomacy difficult, yet it may be an approach to ease tensions in the Middle East. I agree that many disputes may be resolved by broader security accords incorporating Iran, but these agreements are difficult to establish due to concerns regarding regional order and external powers [76].

Iran's sovereignty must be safeguarded, and American and Israeli acts must be constrained by international organizations and International Law. In fact, to mobilize worldwide backing and legal action against its adversaries, Iran has turned to the United Nations and International Law to denounce the February strikes as unlawful. However, the willingness to uphold International Law determines its success. As a permanent member with veto power, the United States restricts the UN's capacity to act against American interests [77].

3. **Regional Collaborations and Economic Resilience**

Iran plans to fortify its economy in order to counter any pressure coming from Israel and the United States. It can accomplish this by creating regional alliances, diversifying its economy, and figuring out how to free itself from sanctions. Iran is indeed less dependent on Western financial systems and markets because of these actions. Iranian leaders embrace the idea of a "resistance economy" [78], which emphasizes increasing national production, creating indigenous technologies, and

becoming self-sufficient. Sanctions have been expensive, but they have also forced Iran to develop new economic networks and adapt [79].

An important component of Iran's economic strategy is fostering relations with China. Despite US sanctions, China is Iran's largest commercial partner and purchases a significant amount of Iranian oil. A 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement was concluded in 2021 [80]. This deal for significant Chinese investments in Iran's industrial, energy, and infrastructure sectors makes Iran gain political support and economic resources from this cooperation, which lessens its isolation and makes it more difficult for the United States to apply pressure [81].

By collaborating with neighboring nations and organizations, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran might fix its economic issues. Iran can sell its exports and get imports without having to cope with Western sanctions thanks to trade with Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Central Asian nations. To trade with these countries, Iran is using local currencies and alternative payment methods rather than US currency. Even if these alternatives are not that effective due to the extensive American sanctions and the fact that most trade is done in US dollars, these strategies are still working [82]. In order to sustain its position against the United States and Israel, the Iranian government must continue to enjoy public support while addressing its economic difficulties.

Seventhly: Scenarios for regional stability or regional instability

Geopolitics in the Middle East and relations between the United States, Israel, and Iran may take multiple paths in the future. Indeed, every route has an impact on both international security and regional peace.

A significant regional conflict is a **worst-case scenario**. This might involve a military confrontation between the United States and Iran, Israeli attacks on Iran, Iran's retaliation against US soldiers and Israeli cities, and proxy conflicts in many regional countries. The window for a diplomatic deal is **closing fast**. Once the crisis turns into a long war or leads to regime collapse, recovery becomes much harder and more costly.

Such a scenario could be the reason for catastrophic humanitarian consequences, severe economic issues, and perhaps the use of weapons of mass destruction could result from this [83]. In this scenario, Iran speeds up efforts to rebuild nuclear capabilities in hidden sites, seeing nuclear weapons as key to regime survival. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty system could collapse in the Middle East.

Because of the worldwide influence of Middle East instability, this scenario affects the countries involved at the same level as the entire region and the entire world.

The scenario of Regime Collapse is the most extreme outcome and the one with the longest effects. It starts not with a military strike, but with people in the streets of Tehran. Opposition groups enter Tehran and declare the Islamic Republic ended. But no single government takes over. Iran breaks into competing zones of control. Azeri, Kurdish, Arab, and Baloch groups each push for autonomy or

independence, backed by different regional powers. Iran's collapse creates a major nuclear security crisis.

Returning to a hostile but managed war, like the one that existed before February 2026 but more fierce, is **another scenario**. In this one, cyberattacks, military strikes, proxy conflicts, and covert activities persist without escalating into a full-scale conflict. Diplomatic negotiations would not advance. This "cold war" scenario would keep the region tense and unstable, but it would still result in catastrophic humanitarian consequences, financial expenses, and the possibility of escalating into a conflict.

A more **optimistic scenario**, if countries come to a diplomatic agreement. This would establish security plans that satisfy everyone and reduce tensions. The United States would have to acknowledge Iran's dominance in the region for this to succeed. Security initiatives, including Iran, would require Israel's consent. Iran would have to restrict its regional activities and nuclear program, the Strait of Hormuz reopens for good, the US agrees to lift sanctions in phases, and Israel agrees to stop Lebanon operations once Hezbollah clearly disarms.

History demonstrates that even difficult disputes can be settled via continuous diplomatic negotiations and adaptive approaches, even though, in my own opinion and in light of current international relations, this solution seems achievable [84].

The question is, which of these scenarios will come to pass? I can say that the materialization will be influenced by geopolitical transformations, such as the growth of US-China competition, Russian policies in the Middle East, and the shifting global energy picture.

New regional strategies may arise without American power if it is contested. However, if the United States keeps control of the region, the war with Iran may go on, which could raise tensions and cause instability in the region as regional nations respond to US actions. The decisions made by regional actors like Iran and Arab nations will also have a big impact on the outcomes. The few days or the few months will shape the geopolitics in the region.

Conclusion

This essay examines the hostile actions taken by Israel and the United States against Iran. It displays a combination of ideological disputes, economic interests, security concerns, and strategic competition. The biggest conflict in the Middle East began in February 2026 as a result of these circumstances. From the 1953 coup to the Islamic Revolution, the post-Cold War nuclear standoff, and current tensions, history demonstrates a pattern of Western attempts to keep Iran from growing into a powerful regional force capable of challenging Israeli and American domination. All these seek to use pressure rather than communication to compel Iran to alter its policies, and Iranians have suffered as a result of these acts. They haven't, however, altered Iran's policy as planned. Rather, they have encouraged Iran to build nuclear weapons for defense.

This article shows that the February 2026 crisis was not an isolated incident; rather, it was the outcome of years of escalating hostilities and unsuccessful diplomatic efforts. Although the long-term consequences are unknown, the United States and Israel agreed to strike because they thought it was preferable to letting Iran develop nuclear weapons. Both the global order and regional stability are impacted by this crisis. The strikes disrupted oil markets, sparked proxy wars in other regional countries, prompted Iranian retribution, and exacerbated humanitarian problems in the region.

A more extensive regional conflict is very probable, especially if Iran keeps developing nuclear weapons or if there are more military attacks. The issue also highlights the limitations of international organizations and International Law in stopping aggression and defending regional States from assaults.

Iran must make important decisions after the attack by the United States and Israel. It must focus on its economy, employ military power, and engage in negotiations. In fact, without Iran's help, diplomatic attempts to resolve disputes in the region may not be successful. While trying to acquire nuclear weapons could help Iran prevent attacks, it could also result in more attacks and nuclear proliferation in the region and spark more serious confrontations.

In my opinion, the only way to establish long-term regional stability is through diplomatic negotiations based on respect for each other's security interests and sovereignty, as opposed to coercing surrender. However, doing so will take political courage to confront interests that have stoked animosity for years.

Actually, the February 2026 crisis and the US-Israeli hostility toward Iran constitute a crucial test for regional stability and global order. The decisions made by the leaders of the three nations -the United States, Israel, and Iran- will determine whether there is additional war in the region or if a peaceful resolution is reached.

Likewise, the future of the Middle East, the global economy, the nuclear non-proliferation system, and even peace between major powers are all at risk. The choices made in the coming weeks will shape the region and the world for decades.

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