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THE WORLD PERSPECTIVE



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Israel, the United States and Iran: The Gordian Knot of the Middle East

The Iran war began on 28 February, in the middle of the Oman-mediated indirect talks held in Geneva, and there were also positive signs from Iran. Given the asymmetry in the military capability of the two sides (the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the opposite side), it was expected that the war would end soon. But it was not to be, as Iran seemed more confident in its resolve to fight back. Despite being armed with all the tools, it has emerged that the US and Israel have not succeeded in winning the contest of wills with the Iranians. They probably presumed that physical destruction would subjugate Iran. Will cannot be quantified. It is historical, cultural, faith-based, and anthropological. The power of resilience, which is unique to the more than 90 per cent Shia population of Iran, to endure pain and spring back immediately, probably was not factored into their strategy for Operation Epic Fury.

History Rhymes

The Iran war is part of the complex Middle East situation, a tangled web, with the Palestinian issue as a major sticking point. The General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, which called for the partition of Palestine into a large Jewish state and a smaller Arab one, was followed by the UNSC Resolution 242 of 1967, which drove the last nail into the coffin of Palestinian aspirations and changed the balance of power in the Middle East forever. One day before the British withdrew from Palestine on 15 May 1948, Israel declared independence, and the persecution of the Palestinians continued, giving way to the mushrooming of different armed outfits.

The Palestinian question is not a regional issue but a central node in contemporary great-power politics. While the world anxiously awaits the end of the Iran war, it is useful to look back to 1956, when the Third World War almost broke out over the Suez Canal, for similar reasons, if not the same. In early 1956, in response to Palestinian militants in Egypt who launched an attack against Israel, Israel decided to invade Egypt in cooperation with France and the UK. The opportune moment to initiate the secret plan – the Protocol of Sèvres came when, on 26 July 1956, Egypt's President Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal to collect revenue

for the construction of the Aswan Dam after the US halted World Bank funding of its construction. Operation Musketeers was activated, and Israel invaded Egypt on 29 October, followed by France and the UK on 31 October 1956. The UN Security Council was deadlocked because of an Anglo-French veto. Both the US and the Soviets sought to resolve the crisis. Besides, the Soviets threatened to use nuclear weapons. President Eisenhower, the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, Canadian Foreign Minister Lester Pearson, and Ralph Bunche, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, worked relentlessly to help avoid another major conflict after World War II. It resulted in the withdrawal of Israel, France and the UK and the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF).

The phrase "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes" is commonly attributed to Mark Twain. Because the outcome of the repeated history is subject to change. Close to seven decades later, history has repeated itself with greater ferocity, with Hamas attacking Israel on 7 October 2023. Israel retaliated, destroyed Gaza, killing around 75000 innocent Palestinians and bombarded dozens of military and nuclear facilities in Iran because it supported proxies (Hezbollah and Houthis) and Hamas. Even before the ashes of Gaza could be picked up, the combined military forces of the US and Israel attacked Iran again in February this year. The chequered history – the stage, has not changed, but the plot has taken a new turn. Israel remains the primary protagonist. However, neither the UK Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, nor the French Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, who led their countries' invasions of Egypt in 1956, is there anymore to take the side of Israel. Trapped by the paradox of choosing between ethics and looking up to the US, the European nations, including France and the UK, even though they did not condemn the US and Israel,

criticised Iran during the emergency session of the UNSC. But on the positive side, Germany and many others have refused to be drawn into the conflict by supporting the US Navy in clearing the strait. Even though in a joint statement of 19 March 2026, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands expressed their willingness to contribute to ensuring safe passage through the strait, what this 'willingness' means is difficult to state. At best, the European nations are watching the development carefully and keeping their options open.

During the Suez Crisis, President Eisenhower coerced Israel, France, and the UK into withdrawing from Egypt (Office of Historian, 1955–1957). On the contrary, reversing its role, the US, along with Israel, is at the forefront of the attack on Iran, as part of Israel's war. Diplomacy, as part of the central role of primacy of politics in conflict resolution, was intended to buy time, with the hope that if Iran did not agree to the terms of the talks, it would provide a legitimate excuse to attack Iran. However, despite signs of reconciliation from Iran's side in the Oman-led diplomatic negotiations, Iran was nonetheless attacked under the pretext of collective self-defence before the talks could conclude. Therefore, if the main Palestinian question remains, irrespective of the likelihood of success of the Gaza Peace Plan (Magid, 2026), any conflict in the Middle East risks spilling over into wider conflict.

Iran used the geography of the Strait of Hormuz as a strategic instrument to securitise global trade, plunging the world into a major economic crisis and putting it on the verge of another World War. In the absence of strategic sense, empathy for human beings, and "restraining power", it is difficult to say whether war will end soon or take a different direction. Eisenhower is not the President of the US to strong-arm Israel. The UN's helplessness is also obvious, as it is under full US control (Bardalai, 2026). As reported by Gowan, "Trump May Not Need a 'Board of Peace.' He Has the U.N. Under His Thumb" (Gowan, 2026). As I mentioned in my earlier post, Iran seems to be committed to facing the worst in the coming days (Bardalai, 2026). In Lebanon, Hezbollah is back again as Israel ramps up the destruction of Lebanon with impunity (Christou, 2026 & Bardalai, 2026).

Will there be peace?

The power to make or break peace is in the hands of a very few. As of this writing, a two-week de-escalation window has opened. Is it because of President Trump's threat of a 48-hour deadline, or had both sides reached an agreement? The US and Iran have been in talks to find a face-saving exit with the notion of victory. There are international and domestic pressures of varying degrees that ought to have been working on the President of the US and the Supreme Leader of Iran. Among other reasons, one likely explanation for the US and Iran agreeing to a conditional ceasefire for two weeks on 7–8 April 2026 is that the ongoing negotiations had led them to reach an initial agreement. Therefore, choosing the right moment to emerge victorious was

important. President Trump created such a diplomatic moment by threatening to obliterate Iran just 48 hours before the official announcement of the deal. President Trump wanted the deal more than Iran did. Because the consequences of using brutal force, as announced, would be far worse if there were no deal. No matter the compelling reasons, it is a big relief, and the world hopes that the agreement will hold. But again, promises are meant to be broken. Ralph Bunche, Lester Pearson and Dag Hammarskjöld were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for averting war in 1950, 1957 and 1961, respectively. Is there anyone eligible for such an award now?

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