



## **The War on Iran: Week Two**

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President Trump is well known for his fondness for watching television. It is, by his own admission, one of his primary sources of information. One might assume that he has also seen documentaries about the Second World War, especially those familiar headline images of Germany and Japan surrendering unconditionally after relentless bombing campaigns. It sometimes seems as if this historical memory shapes his thinking today, particularly regarding Iran.

The comparison, however, is misleading. Even after the devastating bombing of German cities, victory required massive allied ground forces advancing all the way to Berlin. In the case of Japan, the war ended only after the United States dropped two atomic bombs and the Soviet Union entered the conflict. Military history suggests that airpower alone rarely produces decisive political outcomes.

It is therefore difficult to imagine that President Trump would follow either of those paths today. Sending large numbers of American troops into Iran would involve enormous costs and risks, and the use of nuclear weapons is inconceivable. Yet in recent weeks we have heard increasing speculation about the possible deployment of ground forces. Trump was once strongly averse to the idea of spilling American blood in distant wars. However, after what he perceives as a successful outcome in Venezuela and the relative lack of international pushback, he appears increasingly willing to take risks.

The goals of President Trump's confrontation with Iran also seem to shift frequently. At present, he appears to favor replicating what he sees as the "Venezuela scenario": even if the regime itself does not collapse, the emergence of a leadership more acceptable to Washington would be considered a victory. His military advisers have almost certainly warned him that the comparison between Venezuela and Iran is deeply flawed. Iran is a far older civilization with strong state institutions and a demonstrated capacity to endure hardship and external pressure.

There is no doubt that the Iranian regime has been ruthless toward its own population and deeply destabilizing for its neighbors. Nevertheless, the current war was initiated by

Israel with the support of the United States. Whatever the eventual outcome, the clearest strategic beneficiary so far is Israel.

The turning point in the region's recent history was Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023. In retrospect, it will likely be judged a colossal strategic mistake. One by one, Iran's regional proxies have been weakened or eliminated. Syria has rid itself of its dictator. Now the Iranian regime itself finds itself fighting what increasingly resembles an existential struggle. The balance of power in the Middle East is shifting once again. Israel currently finds itself in the strongest strategic position it has enjoyed in decades, with the military capacity of many of its adversaries significantly diminished.

Yet Israel has paid a heavy price as well. The destruction of Gaza and the deaths of thousands of Palestinians have deeply damaged Israel's international standing. The escalation toward war with Iran has further polarized global opinion. Prime Minister Netanyahu may achieve some of his long-standing strategic objectives, but Israel has become more isolated internationally, and public opinion in the United States, traditionally its most reliable supporter, has begun to shift in a more critical direction.

History suggests, however, that public attention can be short-lived. As crises emerge elsewhere, outrage often fades. As long as the United States government continues to provide firm support, Israel will likely be able to brush off any criticism.

Meanwhile, there are already hints of what might come next. Some voices in Washington have begun suggesting that Cuba could eventually become another target of American pressure or intervention.

Before considering such scenarios, however, we should ask a more fundamental question: how did the international system arrive at this point? Where did we go wrong? Why did international organizations fail? Why was the so-called rules-based international order, largely designed and championed by the United States, unable to prevent the proliferation of conflicts and wars we are now witnessing?

The answer lies partly in the fact that the major powers themselves have repeatedly bypassed those rules when it suited their interests. In earlier decades, they at least attempted to justify their actions and sought legitimacy through the United Nations. This was the case during the Korean War and even the first Gulf War. Over time, however, the credibility of these mechanisms eroded.

For decades, numerous conflicts remained frozen without resolution. From Kashmir to Palestine, from Cyprus to Nagorno-Karabakh, diplomacy repeatedly failed to produce

lasting solutions. The phrase “frozen conflicts” became a normal part of diplomatic vocabulary. Yet these conflicts were never truly frozen; they merely waited for a moment when power realities would change.

The United Nations was unable to prevent Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008 or its annexation of Crimea in 2014, let alone the full-scale war that erupted between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is another example. Armenia occupied Azerbaijani territories for nearly three decades while negotiations produced little progress. Eventually Azerbaijan chose to resolve the issue militarily and regained control of the region. With Russia distracted by its war in Ukraine, Armenia found itself unable to resist and largely abandoned by potential supporters.

A similar pattern can be observed elsewhere. Venezuela and Iran found themselves confronting outside powers on their own. Neither Russia nor China has shown any counter pressure.

All of this suggests that the world has reached a moment where neither rules nor limits are widely respected. Recent conflicts demonstrate that it is not simply hard power that prevails, but raw power.

This raises another troubling question. As the United States concentrates its attention on Iran and soon possibly towards Cuba, could this create an opportunity for China to move against Taiwan? President Xi Jinping’s recent purge of senior military leaders suggests that Beijing’s armed forces are undergoing internal turmoil, which may delay such ambitions. Yet Chinese strategists may also calculate that opportunities of this kind are rare and fleeting.

The war against Iran is therefore not merely a regional crisis. It has the potential to reshape the Middle Eastern landscape and produce far-reaching global consequences. History repeatedly teaches us that strategic decisions made in one region often trigger chain reactions elsewhere.

In international politics, one should always be careful what one wishes for.