

US/ISRAEL - IRAN WAR: A GLOBAL CHOKEPOINT AND A CHESSBOARD

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On December 28, 2025, following protests in Iran sparked by a deepening economic crisis, the current regime's violent suppression¹ of street protests drew criticism from the international community, particularly the United States. US President Donald Trump stated that Iran was using excessive force against protesters, emphasizing that the regime led by Ali Khamenei posed a danger to the region. In response, the US threatened Iran with the possibility of war by gradually amassing forces in the Middle East, while simultaneously suggesting negotiation as a solution. Tehran, upon entering the negotiating table, faced demands for restrictions on its ballistic missile program and limitations on enriched uranium used in nuclear energy. While negotiations conducted on these issues, the US, with the support of Israel, launched a bombing campaign against Iran on February 28, 2026, with the aim of achieving "regime change." As a result, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other key figures in Iran's leadership were killed; the country was destabilized, and the protests were intended to escalate into a popular revolution. However, the expected reaction did not occur, and the Iranian people could not be incited against the current regime. Subsequently, Iran's halt of diplomacy and its retaliatory missile attacks on US bases in the region and Israel created a situation from which the US could no longer easily extricate itself from the military operation it had initiated, even if it wanted to.² Needing an honorable way out to end this war – without facing backlash from domestic public opinion – the US has not only become the target of retaliatory missiles but has also caused the disruption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz. These developments have put the Donald Trump administration in a race against time. There are several reasons for this: with the November 2026 congressional elections approaching, public opinion in the US is increasingly questioning the legitimacy of the war; the non-involvement of US global allies in the conflict; and the rising price of oil, creating a daily risk of an energy crisis, isolating the Trump administration by depriving it of the expected military and political support.

In the current situation, for the US to maintain its national and international prestige, it needs to win the war quickly; this requires opening the Strait of Hormuz and militarily restricting Iran. Otherwise, in addition to the loss of equipment and increased logistical costs for the US, unstoppable retaliatory attacks from Iran could prevent the US from further financing the war. Besides the economic dimension, it is also predictable that the Trump administration will fear the

discontent that a low-intensity war spanning years would create in the US public. A resolution to the war through dialogue in the near future is also possible, but this requires the establishment of a healthy negotiation environment. The conflicting statements from both sides regarding whether or not talks are taking place between the US and Iran do not

¹ Bozorgmehr N. (2025, 29 December). Iran's currency 'turns to ash' as economy spirals. *Financial Times*.

² Chatterjee N. (2026, 15 March). Iran's Foreign Minister Denies Seeking Ceasefire, Sees 'No Reason' to Talk to the U.S. *Time*.

currently send a positive signal regarding the possibility of dialogue.^{3 4}

This analysis attempts to understand the US decision to wage war against Iran by examining possible explanations for this decision. The first part will address the influence of Israel, the other instigator of the war, on the US. The second part will examine whether China was behind the motivations for initiating this war. After addressing these two claims, assessments will be made regarding the future of the post-war international system.

Where Does Israel Stand In This War?

Israel, a staunch US ally in the Middle East, has generally been in conflict with both Iran and the forces it supports (Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis), apart from the friendly relations it established with Iran during the Shah's era. This foreign policy approach has become a chronic diplomatic posture for Israel, shaping the Middle East policies of its ally: the US.

At this point, it seems appropriate to make a separate note about Israel's lobbying power in the US. Lobby groups that support pro-Israel policy production, primarily AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee), try to influence US foreign policy in a way that aligns with Israel's interests.⁵ These groups are believed to influence the rhetoric of US politicians

through large-scale "donations." However, even though initiatives like "TrackAIPAC"⁶ draw attention to pro-Israel politicians, it seems highly unlikely that there will be a significant "shake-up" in the US political system in the short term.

Leaving aside lobbying groups, it is also necessary to pay attention to how the Israeli government uses its alliance with the US against the US itself. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who consistently advocates for military action against Iran, has been making headlines for nearly 30 years with the claim that "Iran is only a few months away from developing nuclear weapons".⁷ This effort to shape US foreign policy has sometimes manifested itself in approaches that border on blackmail against the US. Before the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) nuclear agreement signed between the US and Iran in 2015, Israel consistently pursued a policy of urging the US to attack Iran; in meetings, it stated that if the US did not attack, it would attack alone, thus ensuring that US bases would be attacked by Iran even if the US did not want it, and that the US should make the first move in the war.⁸ Ultimately, the US under the Obama administration did not adhere to this agenda, continuing the path of negotiation with Iran and reaching an agreement. In short, the historical context of Israel's policy towards Iran is important

³ Dursun A. (2026, 25 March). İran'ın İslamabad Büyükelçisi: Trump'ın iddiasının aksine iki ülke arasında hiçbir görüşme yapılmadı. *Anatolian News Agency*.

⁴ Çopur H. (2026, 24 March). Trump, İran'ın "asla nükleer silaha sahip olmayacağı" konusunda kendileriyle mutabık kaldığını savundu. *Anatolian News Agency*.

⁵ Mearsheimer J. J., Walt S. M., Friedberg A., Ross D., Ben-Ami S., Brzezinski Z. (2006). The War over Israel's Influence. *Foreign Affairs*, 155, 56-66

⁶ The website, named www.trackaipac.com, exposes members of Congress in the US who are linked to AIPAC. Its aim is to make US citizens question the extent to which policymaking is independent of Israel.

⁷ CNBCTV18. (2025, 15 June). For 3 decades, Israeli PM Netanyahu has claimed Iran months away from nuclear weapons.

⁸ Sobelman D. (2018). Restraining an ally: Israel, the United States, and Iran's nuclear program, 2011–2012. *Texas National Security Review*, 1(4).

in providing insight into the causes of the current conflict.

Given the ongoing conflict, allegations that the US decision-making process is being manipulated by Israel are gaining prominence.⁹ Just as the US became involved in the Twelve-Day War, Israel is now once again putting pressure on Iran with the same agenda (regime and military/nuclear capacity), and has been conducting, and continues to conduct, intense diplomacy with US to benefit from the military power of the US. Furthermore, the frequent mention of Donald Trump and other bureaucrats in the Epstein case, and the censored release of the documents, lend credence to the allegations that Israel is blackmailing the US.

In this war, which was launched jointly with the US, the targeting of civilian and infrastructure targets (oil and gas facilities, water infrastructure) has led to reports in the press that the war has taken a course contrary to the US's intentions.¹⁰ At this point, it is important to note that the US has also occasionally targeted civilians, such as the elementary school attack in Minab on the first day of the war.¹¹ However, while the US has refrained from large-scale attacks that could affect the entire region, it is believed that it is struggling to keep this war under control as its ally Israel escalates tensions in the region. From a broader perspective, Israel's role appears to be greater than that of the US in initiating this war.

⁹ Sputnik Türkiye. (2026, 10 February). Laricani: Amerikalılar Siyonistlerin yıkıcı rolüne karşı teyakkuzda olmalıdırlar.

¹⁰ Mills A., Hunnicutt T. (2026, 19 March). Trump tells Israel not to repeat strikes on Iranian energy as crisis deepens. *Reuters*.

China's Weight

Rising artificial intelligence and rare earth technologies are bringing the US and China face-to-face in increasing competition. China, particularly in the energy sector, is establishing itself as a primary actor threatening the petro-dollar system established by the US, through innovations that aim to reduce its dependence on oil. China is also making moves to exclude the dollar from currency circulation: the switch from the US dollar to the Chinese yuan in oil trade with Saudi Arabia, the BRICS Pay system created for BRICS countries to exchange their currencies under their own sovereignty, and the mBridge system for digital currencies are just some of the initiatives through which China seeks to weaken the dominance of the US dollar as the global reserve currency and strengthen its own currency.¹²

On the other hand, the US has taken several steps to halt China's rise. The CHIPS and Science Act, enacted in 2022, is one example, offering incentives for technology companies to operate in the US while imposing restrictions on their operations in China. Other developments that have been reported in the press, such as the demand for Greenland from Denmark and the planned abduction of Venezuelan President Maduro to the US for trial in the first week of 2026, also present aspects linked to China. In this context, examining the aftermath of the Venezuela operation is crucial for comparison with the case in Iran. Before Maduro's abduction, China, which had close trade relations with

¹¹ Dehghanpisheh B., Scott M. (2026, 24 March). Iranians grieving over school missile strike express rage at U.S., Trump. *NBC News*

¹² Walker I. (2026, 29 January). What is the petrodollar and why is it under pressure? *Green Central Banking*.

Venezuela, imported oil in high volumes and at discounted rates. After the US intervention, imports dropped by approximately 75%, and the price of oil per barrel increased.¹³ Therefore, this US operation also reflects, in a way, an effort to hinder China's rise by striking a blow to its oil needs. The aim is to buy time to approach the level of China, which is a world leader in renewable energy technologies and rare earth element refining. However, China had already diversified its oil purchases to avoid being affected by energy shocks; thus, the negative developments in Venezuela did not turn into an oil crisis for China.¹⁴

Although China is more dependent on Iran than Venezuela, with an estimated 13% oil import level for 2025¹⁵, it has prepared for a potential Iranian oil shock in the short-to-medium term thanks to its record pre-war oil purchases.¹⁶ Iran has also stated that ships not belonging to the US/Israel and its allies will be able to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁷ In this sense, China could benefit from the flow of oil in the Strait of Hormuz as quickly as it would in peacetime. However, it is necessary to emphasize that these statements are difficult to realize in the current war environment. This is because commercial ships are at risk of encountering mines laid by Iran in the Strait of Hormuz and being caught in the crossfire in a potential conflict at any moment.

In general, it appears that while the US attacks on Iran may promise a future where China's oil supply could be sabotaged, prioritizing them as the primary objective does not seem rational. Given its geographical location, which imposes far greater logistical costs on the US than Venezuela, and its high military capacity, viewing Iran solely as a region to hinder China would not be a realistic approach.

However, although not the primary cause of this war, China, having chosen to be a party to it, is attempting to prevent the US from achieving its regional objectives by supporting the Iranian regime both diplomatically and economically. To this end, China's supply of kamikaze drones and missile fuel to Iran can be said to aim at depleting US resources and negating any gains the US might achieve from this war.¹⁸

It is important to shed light not only on this covert war between the US and China, but also on the diplomacy being conducted. Because of the Strait of Hormuz closure, China has been deprived of a large portion of its fertilizer imports, which are even more important than its oil imports, and faces the risk of weakening its power in the agricultural sector. It can be predicted that the US, which suffers from a shortage of rare earth elements, will try to exploit the agricultural deprivation caused to China by the Strait of Hormuz blockade. In light of this, it is among the predictions that the key topics of the US-China talks, postponed

¹³ Hidayat M. (2026, 15 January). China's Venezuelan Oil Imports Face 74% Collapse by 2026. *Discovery Alert*.

¹⁴ Downs E. (2026, 29 January). Where China Gets Its Oil: Crude Imports in 2025 Reveal Stockpiling and Changing Fortunes of Certain Suppliers, Including Those Sanctioned. *Center on Global Energy Policy*.

¹⁵ Reuters. (2026, 13 January). China's heavy reliance on Iranian oil imports.

¹⁶ Alam K. (2026, 25 March). China well-placed to withstand Hormuz closure aftershocks, but for how long? *TRT World*.

¹⁷ Hancock A., Bozorgmehr N. (2026, 24 March). Iran says 'non-hostile' ships can transit Strait of Hormuz. *Financial Times*

¹⁸ Mathews S. (2026, 27 February). China has sent attack drones to Iran, as it discusses ballistic missile sales. *Middle East Eye*.

in the shadow of the war and scheduled for May, will be critical elements and food security.¹⁹ While it's possible the parties might create space for each other on these issues as a geo-economic balancing act, China may not trade the technological advantage promised by rare earth elements for something like food security.

When the US-China rivalry is examined specifically in the context of the war with Iran, it becomes clear that China is not the primary cause of this war. However, as one of the dynamics of the initiated war, it is making moves to weaken the US. How much more resources the US will spend on this war seems to depend on national public opinion reaction and the decisive role of Israel.

The Future Of The International System

The war with Iran has created consequences that will negatively affect the international system. In particular, European countries, which are highly dependent on energy, have been deprived of oil and LNG imports and are faced with the necessity of using their strategic reserves; they have called for the Strait of Hormuz to be opened as soon as possible.²⁰ In a scenario where the war continues for a long time, the importance of Russian oil becomes increasingly significant for Europe, which will be forced to seek alternatives. Europe, which has imposed heavy sanctions on Russia due to the ongoing war, may feel compelled to purchase oil from Russia in a scenario where it remains without alternatives. Therefore, in a scenario where Europe both defends Ukraine and finances Russia's

invasion of Ukraine, it can be predicted that Europe will weaken politically in the medium to long term.

In the context of international law, this war undermines countries' motivation to establish norm-based relationships. This war, in which concepts such as the rule of law and respect for human rights are violated, continues despite calls for restraint from the US/Israel, thus placing the dynamics of the global system solely on a power-driven foundation. In this regard, by abandoning the axis of multilateral diplomacy, the US/Israel is dragging the world into a period where dialogue will be essential.

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