

## *Iran Was Counting on the West's Cravenness*

The confluence of brave and aligned leaders in Washington and Jerusalem was far from a sure thing.

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By Eugene Kontorovich

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### *Jerusalem*

The current campaign against Iran represents the convergence of two wars—the long, slow war the Islamic Republic has waged since its inception in 1979 against the U.S., and the more intense and gruesome war Tehran's proxies launched against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

President Trump campaigned on ending “forever wars.” The current operation fulfills that promise by finally responding decisively to decades of aggression against America and its allies. Every president since Ronald Reagan for mysterious reasons tolerated rather than confronted this persistent adversary.

The U.S. attacks have a clear legal and practical justification. Iran has sponsored numerous lethal attacks on U.S. troops throughout the Middle East. Its proxies have attacked international shipping and funneled drugs to America. In recent years, Tehran tried to assassinate former President Trump and former senior officials from his first administration. The Biden administration's response was limited to criminal prosecutions of the would-be hit men.

Iran managed to game the system by working through proxy militias and terror groups. The deniability wasn't designed to fool anyone, but rather to give Western politicians an excuse for their own fecklessness.

In his speech announcing the war, Mr. Trump explained the extensive casus belli to the American people. He didn't bother seeking approval from the United Nations Security

Council, which would have handed veto power to Vladimir Putin's Russia. The Constitution doesn't forbid launching a surprise attack on a rare meeting of the enemy high command, but a requirement of notifying all lawmakers in advance would be as good as a ban. Nonetheless, the administration briefed congressional leaders of both parties.

Mr. Trump's approach finds the sweet spot within the Republican Party between so-called neocons, who believe America can build democracy anywhere, and isolationists, who would withdraw from the world altogether. America is a global power with global interests; Iran threatens those interests. As Mr. Trump made clear, this war isn't being fought for the people of Iran. But given the alacrity with which the mullahs massacred their own people, their cries of "Death to America!" have to be taken seriously.

In his speech, Mr. Trump mentioned Israel once, in passing. This isn't a war to protect Israel, which has done an excellent job of protecting itself. For the first time, the U.S. and Israel are fighting side by side. While America's other major allies decided to sit this one out—and even deny the use of air bases on their soil—Israel has proved itself a peer partner that makes it possible for America to achieve its strategic goals at far less risk to its own forces. This may represent another stage in the decline of America's nominal Western European allies, who were so feckless with Iran that they designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terror group barely a month ago.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that his country took no part in the attacks. This should have been an occasion for shame, since he said in the same statement that "the Iranian regime poses a direct threat to dissidents and the Jewish community" in Britain and that "over the last year alone, they have backed more than 20 potentially lethal attacks on UK soil." Mr. Starmer's passivity in the face of aggression is what most on the left, and a vocal faction on the right, want for America.

Israel can hope this is the last battle in an existential conflict. [Writing in these pages](#) immediately after the Oct. 7 massacre, I called it the opening battle in "the Iran-Gaza war" and argued: "Any serious response must go through Iran." It took a while to get there, and the path was uncertain. Had Israel buckled to the massive pressure from much of global public opinion, international courts, media and the Biden

administration, it wouldn't now see its nemesis on its heels. From university campuses to U.N. agencies, Israel was told to stop its war with Iran's "axis of resistance" while Hamas still threatened from Gaza, Hezbollah was a fearsome force, and Bashar al-Assad ruled in Syria.

The Trump administration should draw lessons from Israel's experience. A quick end to a conflict can be tempting but self-defeating. This war cannot end like a Marvel movie, with the bad guy exiled to an ice planet in another universe, from which it is only a matter of time before he escapes to threaten the world again. A wounded Islamic Republic won't be humbled. It will rebuild its terror capabilities with a vengeance. The amazing confluence of brave and aligned leaders in Washington and Jerusalem won't last forever, and they must treat this as the last opportunity to remove this threat.

*Mr. Kontorovich is a professor at George Mason University Scalia Law School and a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation.*

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