

Red Lines and Airstrikes: The Iran–Israel Standoff



With the direct military confrontation between Iran and Israel now behind them, attention has shifted to the “day after” the war. The central question emerging is what the regional landscape and new rules of engagement will look like—especially as the United States rushes to re-engineer the region in a way that cements Israeli dominance, granting “freedom of movement” for Israeli military operations across a much broader area.

Although the Iranian regime remained intact after the confrontation, the full impact of Israel’s strike is still being assessed—particularly regarding long-range offensive capabilities. Meanwhile, rebuilding Iran’s air defenses has become an urgent priority, viewed as essential to reestablish strategic balance and deterrence.

On the other side, Israel is racing to normalize its “freedom of movement” over Iranian airspace. Its air force has already carried out deep strikes within Iran, crossing previously inviolable red lines. Israel’s objective now is to solidify this advantage by continuing to degrade Tehran’s nuclear and offensive capabilities.

This leaves Iran confronting a crucial test: can it restore its image of deterrence and enforce new rules to prevent a slide into further rounds of unchecked strikes?

No One Is Immune

Shortly after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant (Yisrael Katz in the original) announced military orders to prepare an “executive plan against Iran,” prioritizing air superiority, thwarting Iran’s nuclear and missile advancements, and countering its ongoing hostile activity toward Israel.

He described the recent military operation—dubbed “Ascending Lion,” lasting 12 days—as merely a precursor to a “new Israeli policy”: “no one is immune.” The Israeli military’s success in “neutralizing Iran’s air defenses,” “destroying missile production facilities,” and “eliminating security officials and nuclear-linked scientists” was both highlighted and celebrated.

Yet, further Israeli analysis made it clear that the ceasefire—mediated by the U.S.—did not signify the end of the confrontation, but rather a transition into a more complex and dangerous phase. As reported by Haaretz, Israeli security assessments in Tel Aviv now focus not on if combat will resume, but on when and where .

Despite the relative calm, Israel persists in treating the halt of Iran’s nuclear project as a “national purpose,” while Iran remains determined to proceed with its programs, resisting military coercion. The head of Mossad, David Barnea, affirmed, “we will stay there as we have... we know these programs well,” a statement observers interpreted as indicating the ongoing nature of the confrontation.

Damage over residential homes at the impact site following missile attack from Iran on Israel, in Tel Aviv June 16, 2025. Moshe Mizrahi/Reuters

The ceasefire, it seems, did not arise from a strategic settlement, but from a provisional alignment of interests. Israel seized tactical gains: crippling Iranian nuclear infrastructure and military bases; Iran, in turn, avoided escalation into a broader conflict with the U.S.

There were no explicit provisions to halt Iran’s nuclear or long-range missile developments—nor mechanisms for oversight or permanent communication channels—leaving the ceasefire vulnerable to sudden collapse, whether triggered by a missile from Lebanon, a drone from Yemen, or strikes in Syria .

That’s why Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s planned visit to Washington takes on amplified significance. Israel aims to lock in “freedom of movement” and secure explicit U.S. backing for preemptive actions against Iran, akin to recent operations in Lebanon. Israeli public broadcaster Kan reports that Netanyahu seeks written guarantees from President Trump ensuring Israel’s ability to strike proactively against Tehran .

Kan also indicates that Israel is advocating for a post-Gaza war framework tying its military freedom to broader regional arrangements, reinforcing its role as a dominant security player .

The intention is clear: leverage the postwar pause to cement Israel’s dominance, continue eroding Iran’s specialized capabilities, and bar any Iranian rebound—all under sustained political and military protection by Washington. The emerging regional reality: “No safe haven, no immunity.”

Iran’s Race Against Time

Iran recognizes that the war is far from over. The June 24 ceasefire is seen as a fragile truce in a prolonged engagement. Tehran’s immediate strategy focuses on restoring defensive capabilities and enhancing deterrence in preparation for a likely—and more intense—next round.

Iran has publicly voiced “serious doubts” regarding Israel’s commitment to the ceasefire, and sent a formal letter to the UN Secretary-General attributing responsibility to Israel and the U.S., calling for reparations due to the aggression . Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi described the attacks as a “systematic aggression,” while Chief of Staff Maj Gen Abdolrahim Mousavi insisted that Iran had not initiated the war but “responded with full force” and remains ready to do so again . He stated that although “Israel requested a ceasefire to regroup,” if Iran is compelled, “the next round will be fiercer” .

Revolutionary Guard advisor Ibrahim Jabbari claimed Iran launched “200 missiles on Tel Aviv” in its initial retaliation and noted that Iran retains unexercised capabilities. He warned that any new Israeli aggression would destabilize global energy, potentially expanding the conflict’s economic battleground .

On the Israeli side, Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Iran has already begun recovering—particularly in its air defense capacities—resuming anti-aircraft missile launches and reinstating radar systems. The newspaper cautioned that this could lead to a prolonged war of attrition in the absence of a clear diplomatic path .

U.S. intelligence has also observed Iranian naval preparations in the Gulf, including reportedly loading mines onto vessels—interpreted as possible preparations to blockade the Strait of Hormuz. A symbolic parliamentary vote in Iran even supported blocking the strait following strikes on Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan.

Whether actual mining occurred remains unconfirmed, but the intention sends a clear deterrent message.



Iran’s most immediate challenge lies in reconstructing its air defenses—not only acquiring advanced systems from Russia or China but also integrating them effectively in the face of cyber intrusions, espionage, and constant surveillance by U.S. and Israeli satellites.

Despite its strategic ties with Moscow and Beijing, Iran’s experience with foreign arms suppliers has been inconsistent. Delays and hesitations inhibited delivery or operational support during the recent fighting, and Tehran still lacks a secure and reliable supply chain to effectively rebuild and sustain its defenses.

Iran now faces a complex, time-sensitive equation: to rebuild deterrence while preparing for a possible sudden escalation—yet avoid being lured into a costly war of attrition. How Tehran strikes that balance will play a decisive role in shaping the next phase, not only for its direct confrontation with Israel but for regional security more broadly.

Systematic Attrition or New Rules of Engagement?

The latest developments suggest the region is tilting toward a potential flashpoint. Israel is increasingly committed to institutionalizing a norm of offensive “freedom of movement,” conducting strikes under U.S. cover to preempt any Iranian resurgence—an extension of its campaign against Iran-aligned forces across Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen since October 7, 2023.

This strategy aims at a form of methodical attrition, targeting not just core Iranian assets, but the operational infrastructure of the resistance axis. Ironically, this same pressure could amplify the destabilization of regional resistance networks while attempting to prevent them from coalescing into renewed confrontation.

The head of the IAEA recently suggested that Iran could resume enriched uranium production within months despite the damage to its nuclear installations. That projection, possibly used to justify further Israeli strikes, could help build a “target bank,” as mentioned by Minister Gallant.

Meanwhile, Israel has reportedly assassinated a member of the IRGC-Quds Force near Beirut, illustrating the expansion of its operational footprint across multiple theaters. This approach—reminiscent of Israel’s “war between wars” doctrine—aims for sustained containment without full-scale war, yet keeps the region in a near-perpetual state of tension.

The danger intensifies if Israel steps into sovereign Iranian territory, targeting facilities or individuals within Iran itself. While limited external strikes might be absorbed, any attack inside Iran risks triggering a direct response—especially given Tehran’s stern warnings that it will “break the rules of engagement” if its “red lines” are crossed.

Were Iran to respond openly, revealing readiness for full confrontation, Israel might find itself forced to reconsider its campaign style—especially if deterrence dynamics shift and preemptive strikes provoke uncontrollable escalation.

Alternatively, if Israel is not met with decisive Iranian pushback, it may continue its strategy of successive strikes, broadening its targeting scope. This would sustain a high-tension regional context, all but void of diplomatic mechanisms capable of managing or de-escalating conflict.