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When military might lacks strategy - the most dangerous form of war



No matter how powerful an operation is militarily, if the strategic calculus behind it is lacking, the outcomes can be far more complex than expected.

Many strategists and security experts argue that precisely this happened in the war launched by Trump and Netanyahu against Iran.

Both leaders had military power in their plans, but the realities of the Middle East often exceed military planning. Several critical factors that were overlooked or misjudged emerged quickly.

Chief among them was the expectation that the **Iranian regime** would rapidly collapse. A core assumption of the operation was that strikes on **Iran's senior leadership** would weaken state structures or even topple the regime.

Attacks aimed at Iran's supreme leader and multiple senior officials were seen as part of that strategy. But the opposite occurred: instead of collapsing, the Iranian state quickly formed a new leadership and sustained its warfighting capacity.

This again illustrated how political systems in the Middle East function – regimes in the region often rest less on a single leader than on ideological foundations and robust security networks. Iran proved a typical example.

Underestimating Iran's regional network

Another miscalculation was underestimating **Iran's regional network**. Iran is not a state that operates only within its borders; it has an extensive regional influence apparatus.

Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iran-linked militias in Syria are key parts of this network.

When the war began, the activation of these groups transformed the conflict from a one-

sided war into a multi-front regional confrontation.

This development raised the military and political costs for both Israel and the United States far more rapidly than anticipated.

Iran's potential to mine the strait or otherwise disrupt shipping posed an enormous risk to global energy markets

Energy policy became one of the war's most critical dimensions. Roughly twenty to twenty-five per cent of global oil trade passes through the **Strait of Hormuz**.

Iran's potential to mine the strait or otherwise disrupt shipping posed an enormous risk to global energy markets. The resulting tensions after the outbreak of war drove oil prices sharply higher and shook the world energy system.

That development triggered a ripple effect that affected not only the Middle East but also European and Asian economies.

Many analysts judged that underestimating the Hormuz risk during a period of fragile energy markets was a serious strategic error.

From a limited clash to a broader security crisis

Another significant factor was the risk of Gulf states being drawn into the war. Trump originally assumed Iran would not directly target **US allies in the Gulf**.

But Iranian attacks on US bases in Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE demonstrated that assumption was false. The war therefore ceased to be a limited Iran-Israel clash and evolved into a broader security crisis affecting the entire region.

The economic impacts were also far larger than expected. The Trump administration

believed the war would not cause a major shock in oil markets.

Instead, energy prices surged and global market uncertainty rose. Volatility in oil prices increased global inflation risks and created new vulnerabilities in the world economy.

Iran's military resilience was another badly misjudged factor

In a period when energy markets are so sensitive, a major military escalation in the Middle East inevitably had significant **global economic consequences**.

One of the most criticised strategic failings was the lack of a clear objective. Initially, various aims were voiced – destroy Iran's nuclear programme, weaken the regime, support domestic protests in Iran, and keep the Strait of Hormuz open – but these goals changed repeatedly over time.

The most dangerous form of war is to begin military operations without a clear strategic aim. Many military analysts argued that this uncertainty blurred the war's direction.

Iran's military resilience was another badly misjudged factor. The Trump administration claimed Iran's military capacity had been largely neutralised.

Independent military assessments, however, indicated Iran's nuclear programme was not eradicated – at best it was delayed by a few years. That undermined the asserted rationale that the threat had been completely eliminated.

Military force versus regional realities

The resulting picture was clear. Military force played a prominent role in Trump and Netanyahu's calculations, but Middle Eastern geopolitics cannot be explained by military power alone.



Starting a war in the Middle East is easy, but controlling its consequences is extremely difficult - Emre Alkin

The anticipated rapid collapse of the Iranian regime did not occur; Iran's proxy network was underestimated; the Strait of Hormuz's central role in global energy was not fully accounted for; and criticism mounted over the absence of a coherent strategic goal.

The political history of the Middle East reminds us of an ancient truth: starting a war in this region is easy, but controlling its consequences is extremely difficult.

The regional balance is shaped not only by military capacity but also by energy policy, ideological networks, and the fragile equilibria of the global economy.

Scenarios that might stop this

It seems both the US and Israel – encouraged by precedents and outcomes of earlier events – expected “absolute victory.” But now the image that they are untouchable is eroding.

Frankly, the same methods that built the State of Israel could, in theory, contribute to its undoing. Whether the actors realise the gravity of the unfolding process remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the US appears on the verge of its second major blow after Vietnam. I believe a costly ground campaign with heavy casualties could bring Trump's end.

The scenarios that might stop this are:

1. The US or Israel launch a nuclear strike against Iran; Russia responds, "Then it's my turn," and does the same in Ukraine – potentially leading to World War III or, after a massive shock, a restoration of calm.
2. Trump's presidency ends – by assassination or legal action – Israel cannot find leverage to continue pressure, a ceasefire is negotiated, and Netanyahu may face a similar fate.

I cannot think of other alternatives. Diplomacy by shuttle alone seems unlikely to produce a lasting ceasefire. Unless option 1 is taken, defeat looks more likely for the US and Israel under these conditions.