

How to Win the Iran War

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For the first time in six months, President Donald Trump this week [raised](#) the objective with which he started the Iran war: creating conditions for eventual regime collapse by the Iranian people. Good. It is the only way this conflict with Iran can properly end.

In his powerful speech on the first night of the war on February 28, Trump [said](#) to the Iranian people, “When we are finished, take over your government.” But ever since he has focused mostly on other critical wartime objectives, such as addressing the nuclear and missile threats but reopening the Strait of Hormuz most of all.

Declaring a ceasefire, Trump smartly initiated a blockade of Iranian oil exports in April to compel Iranian concessions, but it was overhyped and wasn’t successful. There was no Iranian oil industry implosion, as some [analysts and media](#) predicted, nor Iranian concessions on the nuclear program or Strait of Hormuz.

The MOU of June 17 didn’t get Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz either. It was overly generous to Tehran, including enabling the regime to [reap](#) \$6.5 billion in oil revenue within a few weeks and promising it billions more. After that windfall only emboldened Iran to restart attacks and ratchet up demands, Trump had the good sense to declare the MOU dead July 8.

The administration recently [touted](#) new financial sanctions against Iran (Operation Economic Outcast) to pressure Iran. It undoubtedly will help, but the extent of the pressure will depend upon the administration’s willingness to enforce against Iran’s trading partners like China.

Even if the sanctions bite, to what end? Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent’s comment in announcing the sanctions [suggested](#) the administration still seeks a deal with Iran: “Iran now faces a very clear choice...complete global isolation...or a path back to normalcy.” Normalcy with this fanatical regime?

Ever since he pivoted away from regime collapse, and from weakening the regime’s military, Trump has been stuck in a frustrating cycle—reluctant to use force but looking for a way to compel Iran to compromise for a deal, most recently turning to economic pressure, while Iran pushes back forcefully, sparking new cycles of tit-for-tat strikes.

Until now. A return to regime collapse as a strategic objective, paired with U.S. and Israeli military prowess, offers him a way out—if he’ll take it.

All the leverage the United States now has—and it is in a much stronger position than administration critics who proclaim an Iranian victory admit—has come from the application of military force, not for reprisals, but toward the specific goal of degrading the regime's ability to project power internally and externally.

For 13 straight nights in July, the U.S. military hit Iran's coastal radars and missile and drone capabilities. This did more to reopen the Strait of Hormuz than diplomacy.

Having degraded Iran's ability to detect and hit tankers, the U.S. military was able to get non-Iranian oil out while also effectively blockading Iranian energy exports. More oil is reaching the market, while Iran is suffering serious economic hardship with motorists enduring long gasoline lines.

A similar approach is needed now.

Iran, as again evident in its attacks of recent days, won't stand pat as its economic situation worsens, but will try to inflict pain back.

U.S. reprisals, including this week, seem focused on enforcing the naval blockade and enabling non-Iranian tankers to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Those are important objectives, but tit-for-tat strikes are not deterring Iranian attacks, even on U.S. bases in Arab countries.

In contrast, Iran has not attacked Israel or U.S. forces stationed in Israel for a few months, out of the correct fear Israel will respond very forcefully.

Going forward, Trump should make unequivocally clear he doesn't seek a deal with the Iranian regime but its collapse.

The United States and Israel should deliver devastating military strikes against Iran's domestic energy facilities, such as refineries and natural gas infrastructure that generates electricity, and remaining missile and drone infrastructure. This will cripple the regime and severely degrade its ability to project power internally and externally. They should also neutralize Pickaxe Mountain, and other nuclear sites, as Trump committed to do.

The United States and Israel will have to respond to Iran's inevitable reprisals, and will have to endure a temporary spike in oil prices. Then, the United States and Israel should stop, maintain the economic pressure, and make clear they will go back in if Tehran tries to rebuild its nuclear sites or missile factories.

Finally, the United States and Israel should covertly help the Iranian people with communications, weapons, and planning.

It will be increasingly hard for the regime to withstand the internal pressure of such a situation that will intensify over time.

It's time to end this war and this regime.