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13/07/2026

Part One

From Military Conflict to Geopolitical Transition: Redefining Power, Resistance, and Global Order in the Middle East after the Iran–US–Israel Confrontation

Introduction

Wars throughout human history have never been measured solely by the number of missiles launched, the scale of military operations, or the extent of material destruction. Their deeper consequences are revealed through changes in the balance of power, transformations in how societies perceive security, and the political order that emerges after conflict.

The confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel cannot be analysed merely within the framework of a limited regional conflict. This crisis has unfolded at a time when the international system, following the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a prolonged period of relative American predominance, has entered a phase of power transition. Many scholars view this period as a movement away from a unipolar order towards a more complex and competitive global structure (Nye, 2011; Mearsheimer, 2014).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States entered a period that some scholars described as the “unipolar moment”—an era in which Washington possessed an unprecedented ability to shape international affairs without facing a comparable global rival (Krauthammer, 1990). During this period, American military superiority, economic strength, technological advancement, and extensive alliance networks provided the foundation for a dominant international position

This crisis also raises deeper questions regarding the relationship between power and morality. States and political leaders may possess enormous military and economic capabilities, yet they remain constrained by legitimacy, public opinion, economic realities, and—most importantly—the limitations of human time.

The central question of this article is:

Can military power alone produce sustainable political outcomes, or has the world entered a new phase in which legitimacy, historical identity, economic capacity, and diplomacy have become as important as hard power?

The central argument of this article is that the Iran–US–Israel confrontation is not merely a military conflict; rather, it represents part of a broader transformation in the concepts of power, resistance, and global order in the twenty-first century.

This article major discussion is that while military capability remains a significant component of national power, the ability to achieve lasting strategic outcomes increasingly depends on a combination of military strength, political legitimacy, economic resilience, diplomatic influence, social cohesion, and an accurate understanding of historical and cultural realities.

The Illusion of a Long Life: Time, Power, and the Moral Responsibility of Leaders

One of the fundamental questions in the study of political history is why individuals who possess the greatest levels of power sometimes make decisions that produce enormous human, historical, and civilisational consequences.

This question is not limited to politics alone; it is deeply connected to humanity’s understanding of time, mortality, power, and the desire for permanence.

Human life, contrary to common perception, is far shorter than it appears. A person who lives to the age of eighty does not spend all those years with full

awareness, intellectual independence, and complete freedom of decision-making. A significant portion of human life is consumed by childhood, education, sleep, physical limitations, social responsibilities, and eventually the natural decline associated with old age.

What truly remains within human control is a relatively limited period during which individuals possess the ability to think, choose, and influence their social environment.

Emperors, conquerors, and influential leaders may reshape the course of history for a period of time; however, they themselves inevitably become part of that history. Their power, regardless of its scale, has always been constrained by time, social conditions, economic capacity, and the responses of the societies they sought to influence.

Figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler demonstrate that military and political power, when separated from an understanding of limitations and moral responsibility, can lead to decisions that produce devastating consequences not only for others but also for the very systems of power they attempted to strengthen.

At the same time, figures such as Winston Churchill demonstrate that the significance of political leaders cannot be judged solely by the amount of power they possessed or by military victories alone. Their historical role must also be assessed within the broader context of the circumstances they faced, the difficult decisions they made, and the legacy they left for future generations.

The purpose of such comparisons is not to place these figures on the same moral or historical level; rather, it is to highlight a recurring pattern in the history of power: those who experience extraordinary authority ultimately confront the same limitations of human existence.

The common lesson of history is that power, contrary to the perception of some leaders, is not permanent ownership; it is a temporary opportunity. The manner in which that opportunity is used ultimately determines how individuals are remembered in historical memory.

This reality becomes even more significant when considering political leaders. Heads of state, military commanders, monarchs, and ideological leaders may make decisions affecting the fate of millions of people; however, they too remain subject to the passage of time and the limits of human existence.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that power can create an illusion of permanence. Some leaders, even during the final years of their lives, have continued to pursue greater influence, military expansion, the elimination of opponents, or the consolidation of personal authority rather than focusing on a legacy of peace and stability.

From the perspective of political philosophy, the greatest danger emerges when power becomes detached from moral responsibility. Power without awareness of human limitations can become a dangerous illusion, because decision-makers may impose costs on future generations that they themselves will never experience (Arendt, 1970).

From this perspective, major wars are not merely clashes between military forces; they are also moral tests for those who make decisions about the lives, security, and future of millions of people.

Contemporary Reflections: Political Power and the Limits of Human Time

The lessons of history continue to resonate in contemporary politics. Modern crises once again demonstrate that political decision-makers, regardless of their influence and authority, remain subject to the universal realities of time, vulnerability, and mortality.

During the recent Middle East crisis, U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham—widely known for his hawkish stance toward Iran, his advocacy of a more assertive U.S. foreign policy, and his strong support for Israel’s security interests—passed away unexpectedly after a brief illness. Throughout his political career, Graham was regarded by many observers as a prominent advocate of close U.S.–Israel strategic relations and maintained close ties with influential pro-Israel lobbying organisations in the United States.

From the perspective of some critics of Washington’s Middle East policy, U.S. pressure on Iran during the Trump administration was shaped not only by broader American strategic interests but also by Israel’s security concerns and the influence of pro-Israel lobbying organisations within American politics. Supporters of that policy, however, have argued that Washington’s approach was primarily driven by U.S. national security interests, regional stability, and efforts to counter perceived threats.

Regardless of these differing political interpretations, the circumstances surrounding Graham's death highlight a broader human reality: even individuals occupying the highest levels of political power possess only a limited period in which they can influence the course of history. Political authority, no matter how extensive, remains temporary and subject to the same human conditions of time, mortality, and historical judgment.

The significance of such examples does not lie only in the life or political career of one individual. Rather, they raise a wider question concerning the relationship between power and responsibility:

If political influence is temporary, how should leaders use the authority entrusted to them during the limited period in which they possess it?

Political leaders may make decisions affecting war, peace, economic conditions, and the security of millions of people. Yet they themselves remain vulnerable to ageing, illness, and the inevitable passage of time. This reality does not reduce their responsibility; instead, it increases the moral weight of their decisions.

The central issue, therefore, is not simply the amount of military or political power a leader possesses. The deeper question is whether that leader understands the temporary nature of power and recognises that political decisions may continue to affect societies long after the individual decision-maker has left the political stage.

History ultimately evaluates leaders not only by the strength they demonstrated but also by the consequences of how that strength was used. The measure of leadership is therefore not merely the ability to exercise power, but the wisdom to understand its limits.

From Ethical Responsibility to Strategic Calculation

The relationship between time, power, and responsibility is not only a philosophical or moral question; it also has direct implications for strategic decision-making and international relations.

Leaders who fail to recognise the limitations of time and power may prioritise immediate political objectives over long-term consequences. They may believe that military pressure, economic coercion, or the use of force can resolve complex political problems. However, historical experience demonstrates that

coercive power alone rarely produces the outcomes intended by those who employ it.

In international politics, this issue reflects a fundamental distinction between the ability to destroy and the ability to create. A state may possess the capability to launch military operations, weaken an opponent's infrastructure, or achieve short-term battlefield objectives. However, transforming those actions into lasting political outcomes requires far more complex elements: legitimacy, diplomacy, social acceptance, economic resilience, and an understanding of historical and cultural realities (Mearsheimer, 2001; Nye, 2011).

This distinction between military capability and political effectiveness has been evident in many conflicts of the modern era. The ability to defeat an opponent militarily does not necessarily translate into the ability to establish a stable political order afterward. The experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated that removing a government or achieving military dominance represents only the first stage of conflict; the far more difficult challenge lies in creating sustainable institutions and political legitimacy after the fighting ends (Fukuyama, 2006).

The same principle applies to regional conflicts in the Middle East. Military operations may alter temporary balances of power, but they do not automatically resolve deeper historical, ideological, social, and political disputes. Issues such as national identity, sovereignty, security perceptions, and historical grievances cannot be eliminated through military means alone.

Therefore, the evaluation of conflicts should not be limited to immediate operational outcomes. A comprehensive strategic assessment requires examining several interconnected levels:

- The operational level: whether military objectives were achieved during specific operations;
- The tactical level: whether short-term goals were accomplished;
- The strategic level: whether the actions produced lasting changes in political behaviour, regional stability, or the balance of power.

Many disagreements over the outcome of wars emerge because different actors apply different definitions of victory. A government may declare success based on battlefield achievements, while opponents may argue that the broader

political objectives were not achieved. Conversely, a state may endure military pressure yet claim strategic success if it preserves its political system, national cohesion, or ability to resist external demands.

This distinction is particularly important in analysing the confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel. The central question is not only who possesses greater military capability, but whether military power can achieve sustainable political transformation in a complex regional environment.

The history of modern conflicts suggests that lasting influence requires more than dominance. It requires the ability to combine power with legitimacy, force with diplomacy, and strategic objectives with an understanding of human and political realities.

The Transformation of Global Order and the End of Unilateral Dominance

The confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel cannot be properly understood without considering the broader transformation currently taking place within the international system. This crisis has emerged at a time when the global order, after several decades of relative American dominance, has entered a new phase characterised by strategic competition, power transition, and the redefinition of the roles of various actors.

Following the end of the Second World War, the United States became one of the primary architects of the international order through the establishment of global economic institutions, the creation of extensive political and military alliances, and the accumulation of significant economic and technological capabilities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States entered a period that many scholars described as the “unipolar moment”—an era in which Washington possessed an extraordinary ability to influence international developments without facing a comparable global competitor (Krauthammer, 1990).

However, the experience of the past three decades has demonstrated that military superiority alone does not guarantee a state’s ability to create a stable political order.

Military power can overthrow governments, conduct large-scale operations, and alter short-term balances of power; yet establishing a legitimate political order, social stability, and a sustainable security framework requires additional factors,

including legitimacy, historical understanding, economic capacity, and social acceptance.

The American experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan represent important examples of this reality. The United States was able to defeat existing governments within a relatively short period; however, transforming military victory into lasting political stability proved far more difficult than the initial phase of war. This distinction between battlefield victory and post-war political success remains one of the central issues in contemporary strategic studies (Fukuyama, 2006).

The Rise of New Powers and the Movement Towards Multipolarity

In recent decades, the global distribution of power has undergone significant changes.

The emergence of China as an economic, technological, and geopolitical power, the return of Russia as a major military actor, the growing influence of India, expanding economic cooperation among non-Western countries, and the development of frameworks such as BRICS all represent signs of a more dispersed global power structure.

These developments do not indicate the immediate decline or disappearance of American power. The United States continues to possess one of the world's most extensive alliance networks, as well as significant technological, economic, and military capabilities. However, the central implication of these changes is that the ability of any single power to impose its preferences on the international system without considering other actors has become increasingly limited.

In the contemporary world, power is no longer measured only by the number of fighter aircraft, military vessels, or defence expenditures. Economic strength, technological capability, diplomacy, international legitimacy, social cohesion, and the ability to build alliances have become equally important components of national power (Nye, 2011).

The Middle East: An Arena of Competing Orders

The Middle East represents one of the most important regions for understanding this global transformation. Due to its energy resources, geographical position,

strategic trade routes, and security importance, the region has historically been an arena of competition among major powers.

However, the experiences of recent decades demonstrate that the Middle East is no longer simply a region dominated by a single external power, as was often the case in previous periods. Regional actors such as Iran, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, alongside global powers, are increasingly seeking a greater role in shaping the future security and political arrangements of the region.

Within this context, the confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel can be understood as part of a broader competition over the future regional order.

From the perspective of critics of Washington's policy, US pressure against Iran during the Trump administration was influenced by Israel's strategic concerns and the activities of pro-Israel lobbying networks in American politics. Supporters of Washington's approach, however, have argued that such policies were driven by security concerns, regional stability, and efforts to counter perceived threats.

Regardless of these competing interpretations, the outcome demonstrated an important reality: military pressure alone was unable to produce a decisive political transformation in Iran or eliminate the factors that contribute to its domestic resilience and resistance to external pressure.

On one side, the United States seeks to preserve its strategic position and the security of its regional allies; on the other side, regional actors and emerging powers seek a greater role in determining the security and economic rules of the Middle East.

The Limits of Military Power in Creating a Sustainable Order

One of the most important lessons of modern history is that military capability is not identical to political capability.

Possessing enormous destructive power does not necessarily mean possessing the ability to create a desired political order.

A state may succeed in destroying specific military targets, but if it cannot manage the political environment that follows, the final outcome may differ significantly from its original objectives.

Therefore, analysing crises such as the confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel requires distinguishing between several different levels:

- Operational level: success or failure in military operations;
- Tactical level: achievement of short-term objectives;
- Strategic level: the ability to produce lasting changes in behaviour, political structures, or the balance of power.

Many disagreements regarding the outcome of wars arise because different actors apply different criteria when defining victory.

Conclusion of Part One

The Iran–US–Israel crisis has demonstrated that twenty-first-century wars cannot be assessed solely through the lens of military power. While hard power remains an important element, sustainable success depends on a combination of power, legitimacy, diplomacy, economic capacity, and a deeper understanding of historical and social factors.

This crisis has also brought us back to the central question raised at the beginning of this article: political leaders, despite the immense power they may possess, have only a limited opportunity to influence the course of history. Power detached from moral responsibility and awareness of human limitations can become a source not of stability, but of crisis and destruction.

End of Part One