

Why the US Failed To Achieve Its Objectives in Iran

Mohsin Raza Khan 09/Apr/2026

The war's outcomes may reshape alliances, perceptions, and expectations across West Asia.



George Kennan, the father of US' containment strategy against the Soviet Union, might have been surprised to see a country whose infrastructure, and naval and air forces lie devastated managing to contain the United States. Especially when this war was fought against the world's leading superpower, combined with the only nuclear power in West Asia. Yet, that is what Iran has achieved, at least for now.

Kennan lived to see something similar in the Vietnam and Korean Wars, but in both cases the smaller country was directly assisted by global powers: China and the Soviet Union. An old-school realist, he **advised against** involvement in these wars, as he wanted the US power preserved for greater challenges to its direct interests.

The Ceasefire and Its Terms

The terms of the two-week ceasefire between Iran and the US, and the manner in which it was achieved, lead to the conclusion that the US has been checked. Just an hour before his self imposed deadline, and before the Iranians agreed, the US President hastily announced **a two-week extension**, incorporating a ceasefire.

Later, the Iranian Foreign Minister **confirmed that Iran would open the Strait of Hormuz** for a fortnight while retaining control over it. The fact remains that the US was unable to take

military control of the strait, leaving Iran effectively in charge, with the option to close it again, if it so chooses.

Iran will also charge a toll. President Trump stated on April 6 that the **US wants a share in the toll collection**, keeping in with his penchant for monetisation. The toll indicated by Iran amounts to approximately **1% of the price** of a barrel of oil, insignificant compared to the 60% increase in price since the war began, and, according to Iranian statements, it would be shared with Oman.

US and Israel's Objectives Unmet

As per the **Pakistani Prime Minister's statement**, the two-week ceasefire will include a halt to fighting in Lebanon. The Israeli Prime minister has reportedly **denied this claim**, but even if it does not materialise, the statement makes no mention of stopping Iran's nuclear enrichment, removing nuclear material, or ending its medium and long range missile programmes.

This means that none of the principal objectives over which the war was initiated by the US and Israel have been achieved. The Strait of Hormuz was open before the war, and thus its reopening that too with a toll, cannot be considered a success for the US. Any deal now secured is likely to be far worse than what might have been achieved through negotiations before the war, which were suspended by the US.

Negotiations will now proceed on the remaining points of **the 10-point Iranian proposal**. There may not be agreement on all of them, but the mere fact that issues such as war reparations, sanction relief, unfreezing of Iranian assets, and the removal of US bases in the Gulf are going to be discussed, alongside the nuclear programme and support for Iran's proxies, would have been unthinkable before the war. Control over, or a toll on, the Strait of Hormuz would similarly have been difficult to imagine a month ago.

Iran's Unexpected Containment of US Power

The question, then, is how Iran achieved this against such overwhelming firepower. The answer is summarized in two points: first, its ability to maintain control over shipping through Hormuz while retaining offensive missile capability; and second, the unpopularity of the war in the US, where midterm elections for both houses of Congress are due in seven months.

The New York Times **reports** that Netanyahu and the Mossad chief had convinced Trump by early February that Iran was weak and on the brink of collapse. Trump, seeking quick victories and emboldened by Maduro's capture in Venezuela, along with Iran's mild response to earlier US and Israeli attacks, appears to have anticipated a short war.

However, Iran proved far more resilient. It quickly shut down Hormuz and began targeting surrounding Gulf states, driving up the prices of oil, natural gas, fertilisers, helium, and more. It **survived the decapitation** of its government and military officials without triggering public revolt, and absorbed significant punishment. Even towards the end, when the US threatened to destroy its remaining infrastructure, Iran credibly **signalled retaliation** against infrastructure in neighbouring Gulf states, likely skyrocketing oil prices.

Why Ground War is Not a Viable Option

Reopening the strait would have required sustained control over Iran's long coastline, and the alternative — regime collapse — would have demanded large-scale ground operations. Considering Iran's size, roughly three times the population and five times the area of Iraq, this would have required between **500,000 and a million troops**.

Given the **war's unpopularity in the US**, and especially the strong opposition to deploying ground forces, shaped by experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, this was never a viable option. Meanwhile, oil prices were rising in the US. As oil is a fungible commodity priced on global supply and demand, domestic production levels offered little relief to the voters.

Oil Shock and the War's Impact on US' Domestic Politics

Moreover, a large oil shock was imminent. Oil tankers moved slowly, and the **last shipments to leave Hormuz** were only then arriving in Europe and the Americas; they had reached East Asia earlier, and before that South Asia and Africa. Behind them lay a supply gap. The only option was a further drawdown of strategic reserves by the few countries that hold them, but this too would only provide temporary reprieve.

Even now, prices are **likely to remain elevated** due to damage to production and refining infrastructure in the Persian Gulf, as well as the six-week delay in shipments. On top of that, many countries will be attempting to replenish their reserves.

Although President Trump is now unlikely to resume attacks, given Iran's resilience, its control over Hormuz, and domestic pressure, Iran will be racing to replenish its strength with support from China and Russia. It will need to strengthen deterrence against Israel and provide some relief to its own population. Whether this includes a move towards nuclear weapons remains uncertain.

The impact on US alliances and bases in the Gulf, as well as in Europe and East Asia, remains unclear, though the outcome is unlikely to be better than before the war. Similarly, the domestic political consequences for Trump, particularly among his MAGA base, whom he had long assured of avoiding wars, is also uncertain, but could signal a shift from imperial presidency to greater moderation.

What Happens Next

How Iran manages the aftermath, both domestically and internationally, will determine not only the emerging security architecture of West Asia but also the very survival of the regime itself. A limited 'rally around the flag' effect is likely for a while. Anti-regime protestors, though still dissatisfied, may also abandon expectations of American and Israeli support for their rights and freedoms, if recent indiscriminate bombardment has not already done so. Nevertheless, broader public dissatisfaction will return unless reforms follow, requiring political sagacity and substantial reconstruction funding, whether through sanctions relief, transit revenues from Hormuz, or both.

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