



## "SURVIVAL OR COLLAPSE: THE IRAN ENDGAME WASHINGTON AND JERUSALEM CAN'T AGREE ON"

**Regional Update Greater Middle East | Following Netanyahu's assertion** that the war with Iran continues, a pointed question arises: will Israel comply if Washington and Tehran reach a fragile ceasefire or genuine peace?

On 21 April 2026, President Trump extended the fragile two-week ceasefire as the deadline approached in Islamabad, though White House sources indicated the extension would last merely three to five days. Washington's words prove more fluid than the price of crude oil; Brent crude oil hits \$115, the highest since 2022 on the third week of the ceasefire.

The world watches anxiously as Israeli-American brinkmanship with Iran reaches its crucible in the Strait of Hormuz. The playbook of Washington is to push Iran into surrender, through naval blockade of Iranian maritime export. In reaction, Tehran seems open for comprehensive negotiations outlined recently in a 3-phase framework, but unwilling to surrender to US terms.

The Hezbollah affiliated outlet Al Mayadeen reported that Tehran has outlined a staged negotiation approach covering ceasefire guarantees, maritime coordination in the Strait of Hormuz, and later discussions on its nuclear program. This in the background of warnings from Tehran that the U.S. naval blockade “will soon be met with practical and unprecedented military action,” saying its patience has limits, according to Press TV.

### **Where do we stand with the imposed war on Iran?**

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt confirmed the ceasefire whilst emphasising that "Operation Economic Fury" continues, as "Iran needed it" amidst mounting domestic pressures. Yet it is Trump who appears increasingly out of control, with Fury backfiring on its architect. Levitt's clarification that Trump has set no "definite and specific deadline" for ending the "undefined" ceasefire speaks volumes.

Trump's extension came despite Iranian officials refusing to send delegates to Islamabad's second round, insisting they would not negotiate until the naval blockade was fully lifted and normal traffic restored to the Strait of Hormuz. Iran then escalated by seizing vessels in the Strait, as US Secretary of the Navy John C. Phelan stepped down. Iran holds more cards still, its proxies have yet to enter, but the naval war in the Persian Gulf is already exacting a visible toll on the Trump administration.

### **Beyond the bilateral table, a larger question looms over the Middle East: where does Israel stand in Trump's "ultimate containment" of Iran?**

This matters because, as the New York Times reported exclusively, President Trump's alignment with Netanyahu, and his inner circle's failure to oppose it, has set the United States on a course towards war. Netanyahu has now thrice convinced Trump to act against Iran: the unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal in Trump's first term (May 2018), the 12-day war (June 2025), and the recent Hormuz War is his current second term. The question of who drives this war—Netanyahu or Trump—is therefore valid. Will Tel Aviv accept this half-hearted peace or unilaterally reignite conflict?



Strategically, Washington still calls the shots on Israeli military actions in the region—but a US–Iran deal preserving the current regime of Iran would be Israel's nightmare. Having survived two joint strikes, the Islamic Republic of Iran intact will be more dangerous to Israeli perception than a collapsed one, making regime destabilization Jerusalem's core strategic goal for years to come: an Iran in a state of failed–state or even anarchy would be the objective.

**This is precisely Mossad's message to Trump.** Outgoing chief Barnea declared: "our mission in Iran is not over until regime falls." Predecessor Yossi Cohen warned Washington: "no agreement will change Iran's fundamental ambitions." Tel Aviv clearly fears a Tehran–Washington rapprochement.

Israel's strongest dependence on the United States is military and diplomatic. The economic link matters, but it is less 'existential' than the security bargain. US military assistance remains Israel's largest external defence pillar. The 2019 to 2028 memorandum fixes support at \$3.8 billion a year and, according to INSS, this equals about 15% of Israel's defence budget and roughly 0.5% of GDP. Diplomatically, Israel has long leaned on US cover in international forums, especially at the UN, where American vetoes have shielded it from adverse resolutions.

**The most existential military component** vis-à-vis Iran is the additional layer of missile defence: US-made THAAD interceptors. America has depleted at least half its THAAD inventory—missiles designed to intercept ballistic threats—during recent operations.

The pro-Israel lobby exerts significant influence in US domestic politics, including elections for both Congress and the presidency. In turn, US policy on Iran under both Trump administrations has been strongly shaped by Israeli military–security perspectives and wish lists: withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018, a joint military attack on Iranian nuclear infrastructure in 2025, and the recent aerial strike on Iran. That trajectory sits uneasily with the US National Security Strategy, which seeks a lighter US footprint in the Middle East. In short, the 2025 US National Security Strategy treats the Middle East as secondary to great–power competition with China and Russia. In the military and security domain, Israel ultimately depends on US final decisions.

**Three incidents illustrate the hierarchy.**

First, Netanyahu issued a public apology to Qatar after Israel's strike in Doha. Second, Trump successfully prohibited further Israeli bombing in Lebanon during the ceasefire. In interviews, Trump reiterated: "Israel has to stop. They can't continue to blow buildings up. I am not gonna allow it," signalling irritation with Netanyahu's reluctance to fully halt operations against Hezbollah. Third, the unilateral truce between Tehran and Washington caught Israel off guard amid ongoing operations, and it tied into broader US–Iran peace talks mediated in Islamabad, Pakistan. Washington, not Jerusalem, is in the driver's seat. On that logic, Israel is unlikely to take kinetic action against Iran without Donald Trump's approval.



**There is another scenario: Washington enforces** a naval blockade whilst, through division of labour, allowing Israel to light the fuse, then steps back to limit regional fallout. Tehran would reject such outsourcing and widen the war across the region. Iran seeks a central role in shaping Western Asia's future security architecture, if not beyond.

This is why the exchange between the Saudi Crown Prince, the Arab world's de facto leader, and President Xi Jinping is pivotal. Together they will press distressed Trump looking for an off-ramp to sustain the ceasefire and restore transit through Hormuz.

**Europe, the region's former imperial power, is moving as well.**

The recent French British initiative, which united more than fifty states behind a 'strictly defensive' yet proactive effort to secure free passage through the Strait of Hormuz, marks a strategic inflection point. A return to the pre-war order is illusory.

**Stability now requires recognising Iran as an enduring geopolitical actor.**

This shift compels a reassessment of maritime chokepoints, from Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb to the Strait of Malacca, in a more contested global order. For now, whoever controls Hormuz, meaning Goddess in Persian, exercises a near divine leverage over the years ahead.