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Timed for Impunity: Israel's War on Iran

By: Yara Hawari · June, 2025

Introduction

On Thursday, June 19, 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stood in front of the aftermath of an Iranian strike near Bir al-Saba' and told journalists: "It really reminds me of the British people during the Blitz. We are going through a Blitz." The Blitz refers to the sustained bombing campaign carried out by Nazi Germany against the UK, particularly London, between September 1940 and May 1941. With this dramatic comparison, Netanyahu sought to elicit Western sympathy and secure unconditional support for his government's latest act of military escalation and violation of international law: the unprovoked bombing of Iran. This rhetorical move is far from new; it has become an enduring trope in Israeli political discourse—one that casts Israel as the perennial victim and frames its opponents as modern-day Nazis.[1]

Netanyahu has long harbored ambitions of striking Iran with direct US support, but timing has always been central. This moment, then, should not be viewed merely as opportunistic aggression, but as part of a broader, calculated strategy. His actions are shaped by a convergence of unprecedented impunity, shifting regional dynamics, and deepening domestic political fragility. This commentary examines the latest escalation in that context and discusses the broader political forces driving it.

An Unprovoked Act of War

On Friday, June 13, in breach of international law, the Israeli regime launched a large-scale assault on Iran, targeting infrastructure and nuclear facilities. This marked the start of a twelve-day war between Israel and Iran, which claimed hundreds of lives—most of them Iranian civilians. The US escalated the conflict by joining the Israeli air campaign, carrying out coordinated strikes on major Iranian nuclear sites, including Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan. Iran condemned the strikes as grave violations of international law and warned of severe retaliation. On Monday, June 24, Iranian forces launched missiles at the US Al Udeid military base in Qatar—the largest in the region. The following day, US President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire between Israel and Iran—one that was fragile but holding at the time of writing.

Netanyahu justified the offensive by claiming that Iran had developed nuclear weapons—an accusation he has been making for at least three decades. The US echoed this narrative to justify its direct involvement in the strikes, framing the joint assault on Iranian nuclear sites as a necessary preemptive measure to neutralize an existential threat. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has consistently refuted such claims, stating unequivocally that there is no verified evidence that Iran possesses or is currently developing a nuclear weapon.

Ironically, while Iran remains a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subjects its nuclear facilities to IAEA oversight, Israel has neither signed the agreement nor allowed comprehensive international inspections. Indeed, Israel is widely believed to possess a significant nuclear arsenal—an allegation it neither confirms nor denies, maintaining what is commonly referred to as a policy of nuclear opacity. Yet, independent assessments estimate that Israel possesses at least 90 nuclear warheads and the capacity to produce hundreds more. Over the decades, Israel has reportedly

collaborated with other states—including France and apartheid South Africa—to develop and test its nuclear weapons.

Still, the vast majority of Israel's nuclear infrastructure remains outside the purview of international oversight. The IAEA is granted limited access solely to the Soreq Nuclear Research Center, while Israel's primary nuclear facility at Dimona is closed to inspection. Consequently, the full extent of Israel's atomic capabilities remains unknown.

This deliberate opacity—combined with the absence of international inspections—has shielded Israel from accountability under global non-proliferation norms. It has also reinforced the broader structure of impunity that enables its acts of aggression to unfold without consequence. Within this context, the Israeli regime's assault on Iran constitutes an unprovoked act of war, carried out by a state that is simultaneously perpetrating a genocide in Gaza and whose leadership is under investigation by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Echoes of the 2003 War Drum

The US-Israeli rationale for the latest aggression against Iran echoes the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when unfounded allegations of weapons of mass destruction were used to justify a war that devastated an entire country and resulted in the deaths of over half a million Iraqis. Though those claims were later widely discredited, they succeeded in legitimizing a preemptive military campaign that continues to destabilize the region. The same formula was invoked once again to bomb Iran: unsubstantiated nuclear accusations, purported preemptive military strikes, and the complicity of Western discourse in constructing a narrative devoid of credible evidence or accountability.

While Trump unsurprisingly echoed Netanyahu's narrative, European leaders also

played a central role in distorting the legal and political dimensions of the escalation. In a joint statement issued shortly after Israel's strike on Iran, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the UK, along with the EU's High Representative, reaffirmed what they described as Israel's "right to protect its security and people, in adherence with international law." The statement then shifted its focus to Iran, urging Tehran to return to the negotiating table and pursue a diplomatic resolution.

The statement's invocation of "self-defense" rhetoric serves to obscure a fundamental truth: it was Israel that initiated hostilities, in clear violation of international law. By framing Israeli aggression and warmongering as self-defense and by redirecting diplomatic pressure onto Iran, European powers have helped legitimize an unlawful act of war while reinforcing the structural impunity long afforded to the Israeli regime.

Yet a critical distinction between 2003 and the present moment is the marked decline in the US public's appetite for war. A recent poll found that only 16 percent of Americans support US involvement in Israel's war with Iran, reflecting a growing fatigue with foreign military interventions across the political spectrum. This sentiment is particularly pronounced within the Republican Party and among Trump's supporters, where significant divisions over continued engagement in the Middle East have begun to emerge.

Prominent right-wing figures such as political commentator Tucker Carlson and former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon have been vocal in opposing US involvement in the war. They, along with others in Trump's political orbit, argued that military engagement breaks with the president's longstanding campaign promise to avoid entanglement in foreign conflicts. Bannon has further claimed that US participation in Israel's war against Iran would divert funding and resources from domestic priorities, particularly the aggressive efforts underway to deport immigrants. Even within the administration, dissent has emerged: Tulsi

Gabbard, Trump's intelligence director, has categorically stated that there is no credible evidence that Iran has developed nuclear weapons.

For days following Israel's initial strike, Trump hesitated to deepen US involvement—a reflection of the divisions within his administration. He suggested it could take up to two weeks to reach a decision. Ultimately, however, under firm pressure from Israeli officials to target the Fordow nuclear facility, Trump conceded—with the caveat that this would mark the full extent of US participation. In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned the attacks as "outrageous" and warned they would have "everlasting consequences." Thus, Trump's initial pledge to keep the US out of foreign wars proved short-lived and will undoubtedly come to define his presidency.

Netanyahu's Golden Opportunity

Netanyahu has long threatened to strike Iran, yet consistently refrained from taking direct action until now. The timing of Israel's latest military maneuver is far from coincidental and is a result of several converging dynamics.

First, after initially surprising Israel by restarting nuclear negotiations with Iran earlier this year, Trump grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress. Intervention by Netanyahu's allies within his administration played a decisive role in hardening the US position. These dynamics culminated in the issuance of a 60-day ultimatum demanding Iran's compliance with its nuclear obligations, effectively setting the clock for confrontation. According to media reports, once Israeli officials shared their operational plans they encountered no resistance from Trump.

On the very day the US-imposed deadline expired, Netanyahu's long-standing ambition was realized: Israel launched a direct strike on Iran. This escalation unfolded within a permissive international environment shaped by the broader

context of Israel's ongoing genocidal assault on Gaza—an extermination campaign that has been met with near-total impunity. The message to Israel has been unequivocal: it can operate without accountability. Compounding this message is the deeply entrenched anti-Iran sentiment within much of the Western political establishment. In such a climate, Netanyahu likely calculated that an attack on Iran would provoke minimal diplomatic backlash and might even secure tacit approval under the familiar guise of countering a nuclear threat. Indeed, he managed to maneuver the US into a position in which a strike on Iran became politically difficult to resist. The convergence of these dynamics produced a perfect storm—an exceptionally dangerous moment shaped by stalled diplomacy, emboldened militarism, and strategic impunity.

Second, the regional balance of power has undergone a profound recalibration over the past two years, one that has significantly weakened the "Axis of Resistance." The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, Iran's only formal state ally in the region, has delivered a major strategic blow to Tehran's regional posture. At the same time, the Israeli regime has carried out targeted assassinations of key figures and significantly degraded the military capabilities of Iran's principal non-state allies, including Hezbollah and Hamas. While the Houthis in Yemen have recently emerged as a disruptive force, demonstrating the capacity to interfere with regional shipping lanes and launch missiles toward Tel Aviv, their ability to mount a sustained or direct military challenge to Israel remains limited in both scale and reach.

Finally, the ongoing genocide in Gaza—and the Israeli military's failure to achieve its stated goal of eliminating Hamas from the Strip—has placed growing domestic pressure on Netanyahu and his coalition government. Mounting opposition to the conduct of the war, including the inability to secure the release of Israeli hostages, coupled with Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trials, has further weakened his political standing. In this context, shifting the focus toward Iran became a

politically expedient move. Indeed, Netanyahu understands that war with Iran commands overwhelming public support inside Israel. Given the limited internal opposition, he was able to project himself as a strong, decisive leader defending Israel's security interests, even as his government continues to falter over its failure in Gaza. More worryingly, the escalation has provided him with political cover to advance a broader agenda of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, as well as in the West Bank.

On the international stage, Netanyahu has been acutely aware of the shifting tide against Israel in its ongoing genocide in Gaza, which continues to claim the lives of dozens of Palestinians each day. In the lead-up to Israel's assault on Iran, not only had recognition and condemnation of the genocide become increasingly mainstream, but the patience of Israel's allies was also beginning to wear thin, particularly as questions mounted regarding their own complicity in the crime. This moment, therefore, is not merely one of opportunistic belligerence. It reflects a deliberate strategic recalibration by the Israeli regime, one driven by unprecedented levels of impunity, shifting regional dynamics, and the acute political fragility facing Netanyahu's government domestically.

The Monsters are Here

Israel's war on Iran was a bold assertion of its regional dominance. It was and continues to be part of an effort to consolidate domestic support and deflect international attention from the mass killing of Palestinians. It also carries the potential to reshape the Middle East, as well as global dynamics of power and accountability. As the Iranian-Swedish policy analyst Triti Parsi observed, "Two nuclear weapons states have bombed a non-nuclear weapons state, without having been attacked. This will send shockwaves throughout the world, and more countries will conclude that they will need nuclear weapons to deter existing nuclear weapons states."

Indeed, what has become clear is that the so-called rules-based international order, which has dominated global relations since World War II, is now being decisively dismantled. The Israeli regime has played a pivotal role in shattering the illusion of this system, exposing its foundational contradictions and selective enforcement. In this context, Antonio Gramsci's words from his Prison Notebooks (1929–1935) ring eerily true: "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters." What we witnessed was not merely a war between Israel and Iran; it marked the unraveling of international norms, giving way to a more violent, unaccountable world order. The façade has fallen, and in its place, the monsters of militarism, authoritarianism, and impunity are rising.

1. *To read this piece in French please click here. Al-Shabaka is grateful for the efforts by human rights advocates to translate its pieces, but is not responsible for any change in meaning.*

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