

From Shadow War to Open Fire: **The Day Israel Struck Iran**

Israel–Iran Conflict: The Rising Lion

Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, a massive and rare military operation designed to target Iranian nuclear and military assets, on June 13, 2025. Airstrikes, drones, and cyber warfare were all employed in the attack, which began early in the morning and lasted for several hours. Israeli planes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) entered the Iranian airspace from multiple directions and hit more than 100 targets across the nation. Iran's significant nuclear enrichment plants in Natanz and Isfahan, uranium conversion facilities, ballistic missile production and launch facilities, and military bases tied to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were among the primary targets.

Furthermore, the operation also included targeted attacks on residences and convoys of top Iranian generals and senior officials in Iran's nuclear program. According to reports, more than two dozen Iranian nuclear scientists were killed, alongside significant members of Iran's missile command. Although the complete list of casualties was not immediately made public, Iranian state media confirmed the deaths of several senior military officers. Significant explosions occurred in Tehran, Isfahan, and Kermanshah as a result of the Israeli operation; social media footage and satellite photos revealed extensive damage to research facilities, fuel depots, and strategic locations.

The scale and speed of the attack overwhelmed Iran's air defenses, destroying numerous radar installations and anti-aircraft batteries in its initial wave. Iran's command and communication networks were reportedly disrupted by cyberattacks at the same time, which further delayed its response. Reports mentioned panic in major cities, fuel shortages, and power outages in civilian areas. The operation was much bigger than any of Israel's prior covert operations, including the 2020 assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. By the end of the attack, observers identified Operation Rising Lion as Israel's biggest one-day assault on Iranian territory in history, marking a significant advancement in their long-running shadow war.

Reasons behind Israel's Attack

Israel has long viewed Iran's nuclear program as an existential threat, one that directly jeopardizes the country's sovereignty rather than a strategic challenge. Iran's increasing

capacity to enrich uranium at high levels, its repeated threats to "wipe Israel off the map," and its attempts to erect a military presence around Israel's borders through proxies and allies like Hamas in Gaza, the Syrian regime, and Hezbollah in Lebanon are at the heart of Israel's concerns. Israeli security officials call this "encirclement strategy," which made people more worried that Iran was getting ready for a coordinated attack on Israel from many fronts in the future.

Israel responded for years with limited proxy wars, cyberattacks (like the Stuxnet virus), targeted assassinations (like the 2020 murder of leading nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh), and covert sabotage operations. These steps were deliberately designed to steer clear of direct, full-scale confrontation. Several factors, including Iran's strong missile deterrent, the possibility of regional escalation, and strong international pressure—particularly from significant Western allies—made Israel decide against launching an open military attack. Given the concerns about destabilizing the Middle East, direct military strikes on Iran were either discouraged or outright vetoed, even under pro-Israel U.S. administrations like George W. Bush's and Donald Trump's first terms.

However, by 2025, several significant advancements had altered the calculus. First, due to growing internal discontent, economic instability brought on by prolonged sanctions, and waning support for its proxies as a result of financial constraints, Iran's regional influence began to diminish. Second, the geopolitical landscape was drastically altered by Donald Trump's return to the presidency of the United States. In contrast to prior administrations, the Trump administration in its second term saw a more assertive stance toward Iran. It reportedly gave Israel an unofficial green light to act militarily if necessary. The Netanyahu administration, which had long aimed for greater freedom of action against Iran's nuclear infrastructure, was emboldened by this alignment of Israeli and American policy.

With these shifting dynamics—Iran's declining intimidation and renewed U.S. backing—Israel seized what it saw as a narrow strategic window to launch a large-scale military operation. Operation Rising Lion was not an impulsive decision but the result of years of strategic planning, now activated under favorable conditions that had not existed before.

What weakened Iran's Position?

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack was a turning point in the region which set the stage for Israel's eventual full-scale attack on Iran. Israel responded to the heinous attack with a

wider regional campaign that went well beyond Gaza. Israel took decisive action to destroy Hamas' military facilities in the Gaza Strip, but it also opened several fronts at the same time: increasing targeted attacks on Syrian military installations that support the Bashar al-Assad regime, a longtime Iranian ally; crippling Hezbollah's ability to operate in southern Lebanon through sustained airstrikes and special operations.

The crucial turning point was the overthrow of the Assad government in December 2024. For over a decade, Syria had served as Iran's strategic land corridor for more than ten years, linking Tehran with Hezbollah in Lebanon through Iraqi and Syrian territory. This "Shiite Crescent" supported Iran's forward military posture close to Israel's northern border in addition to facilitating training and the transfer of weapons. Internal uprisings, Israeli pressure, and a diminished Iranian ability to assist Damascus all contributed to Assad's downfall, which effectively broke the backbone of the "Axis of Resistance" and severed Iran's logistical link.

Iran's vulnerability was elevated in October 2024 when the Islamic Republic launched a series of ballistic missiles at Israeli territory, presumably in retaliation for earlier Israeli operations or as a means of reaffirming deterrence. However, this move backfired. Israel retaliated with a devastating long-range precision strike that exposed serious flaws in Iran's military response systems and targeted the country's vital air defense infrastructure. The successful Israeli strike not only inflicted material damage but also revealed Iran's inability to prevent or absorb a large-scale aerial assault—making it clear to Israeli defense planners that Iran's defensive umbrella had been seriously compromised.

By late 2024, Tehran was far more vulnerable than it had ever been. With Assad gone, Hezbollah weakened, militia routes disrupted, and Iran's air defense systems partially disabled. These evolving circumstances presented Israel with a unique and brief strategic opportunity. The only remaining barrier to a direct assault was American approval—and that, too, shifted under the second Trump administration. With U.S. resistance diminishing and Iran's regional power structure in ruins, Israel prepared to strike the core of what it saw as the biggest threat to its existence.

Trump's Greenlight

The geopolitical landscape surrounding Iran's nuclear program underwent a significant change in January 2025 with Donald Trump's return to the White House. Despite his longstanding hawkish stance on Iran, Trump initially took a more measured and strategic approach after taking office. As tensions between Iran and Israel increased in May 2025, Trump reportedly called for moderation and halted a full-scale Israeli strike in an attempt

to restore diplomatic relations. In contrast to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which only limited enrichment levels, his objective was clear: to use increasing pressure to compel Iran into negotiating a new, far more restrictive nuclear agreement that would require Iran to completely dismantle its nuclear program.

Iran, on the other hand, strongly disagreed with these conditions, refusing to close its enrichment facilities and claiming the right to civilian nuclear technology. Trump's frustration became increasingly visible in a series of pointed social media posts, where he accused Iran of stalling and warned of "massive consequences." Behind the scenes, Israeli officials were firmly urging the United States to authorize the use of preemptive strikes, pointing to Iran's ongoing nuclear development and the breakdown of regional deterrence. Trump changed course in a matter of weeks. In early June, he gave Israel the unofficial "greenlight" to proceed with Operation Rising Lion—a decision that had been delayed but not rejected.

Following the June 13, 2025 strike, Trump publicly supported Israel's actions arguing that they were a legitimate response to Iran's resistance. He affirmed that "more attacks are already planned" if Iran persisted in defying American demands in a televised speech and several statements posted online. It became evident that the United States was now leveraging Israel's military campaign and using it as a negotiating chip. Trump's strategy is to escalate pressure until Iran is either compelled to negotiate on American terms or faces further military deterioration. For the time being, military coercion has replaced diplomacy, with Trump relying on Israeli force as a means for Iran to completely surrender its nuclear program.

Iran's Dilemma

In the aftermath of Operation Rising Lion, Iran finds itself at a volatile juncture where it must choose between three extremely significant and potentially critical options, none of which provide a clear way forward. In addition to severely impacting Iran's military leadership and nuclear infrastructure, the Israeli attack has put Tehran in a vulnerable spot, weakening its deterrence and scattering its allies. Each potential response carries profound risks, not only for Iran but for the entire West Asian region.

First, Iran could choose to walk away from all diplomatic efforts and launch a military counterattack. This choice would maintain Iranian pride and reaffirm its resistance posture, but it would also encourage more Israeli strikes, perhaps with US backing. Iran runs the risk of losing more of its surviving military and nuclear capabilities in the wake

of Israel's initial attack's successes, which could further damage its reputation in the region and its internal stability.

Second, Iran may choose to accept the U.S.-backed nuclear deal, under pressure to dismantle its nuclear program completely. Such a move would have a severe political cost, though it might halt the escalation and provide economic relief through the lifting of sanctions. This surrender would be perceived as a national humiliation, triggering backlash from hardline sections and the Iranian public, who view nuclear independence as a symbol of sovereignty. Negotiating a new nuclear agreement will surely be more challenging, particularly in light of the current regional unrest and growing mistrust.

Third, Iran might attempt to intensify the conflict drastically and turn it into a full-blown regional war. It may mobilize its proxy networks in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, launch missile barrages at Israeli and potentially the US targets to destabilize the wider region, disrupting global oil supplies, and dragging the United States and its allies into a prolonged conflict. The obvious danger associated with this strategy is the likelihood for direct conflict with the United States, which Iran is ill-equipped to handle given its current military and economic challenges

Each of these choices is a gamble, and none of these options ensures Iran a strategic edge. Rather, the regime must decide between responding too forcefully and inviting destruction or too weakly and losing credibility. Consequently, the power dynamics in West Asia are currently transforming. The upcoming weeks and months will be crucial in reshaping the geopolitical order of the region, with Israel strengthened, Iran cornered, and the United States supporting a policy of coercive diplomacy. All of this leads us to the unsettling but necessary conclusion. Despite its flaws, diplomacy remains the only practical long-term solution to curb instability.

Selected Sources

This article draws on reporting and analysis from the following organizations:

- The Economic Times – coverage of Israeli air operations and the broader implications of Iran's nuclear infrastructure
- BBC News – geopolitical analysis of the Israel–Iran conflict, including conflict origins and escalation risks
- Chatham House – foreign policy commentary on Iran's strategic limitations and regional options

- Institute for the Study of War – insights into the muted response of Iran’s regional proxy networks and strategic behavior
- The Guardian – summary reporting on the week-long conflict's impact on Iran’s political and military resources.

– Janvi Jain
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