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# Geopolitical Rivalry of Great Powers with Special Reference to Iran and Israel

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**Assistant Professor Vladan MIRKOVIĆ, PhD\***

\*Faculty of Law in Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad  
e-mail: [vmirkovic@pf.uns.ac.rs](mailto:vmirkovic@pf.uns.ac.rs)

## Abstract

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After World War II, the United States established a geographical ring, extending from Scandinavia to the Far East, aiming to prevent any land power from reaching the high seas and challenging its global dominance. In 1979, Iran terminated its strategic partnership with the United States, creating an opening for the land powers to reach the high seas. This shift prompted the United States to influence regime change in Iran. However, this interest stands in conflict with the strategic objectives of Russia and the People's Republic of China. Their shared interest lies in maintaining stability in Iran and preserving the current regime, which warrants them access to the high seas and ensures energy security. In order to pursue its geopolitical objectives within the existing balance of power among the three major powers, the United States is unwilling to engage in a full-scale war with Iran but employs Israel for proxy wars instead, justifying those conflicts on the grounds of the perceived threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. This thesis was tested in the research, with the most recent conflict between Iran and Israel serving as evidence in favor of the thesis.

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## Keywords:

Geopolitics; Great Powers; Hartland; Rimland; the Middle East; Iran; Israel.

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## Introduction

Iran and Israel are located in the Middle East (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel), a geopolitical region that “had become the second most important strategic zone in the struggle for world domination” (Spykman 1942, 184). After World War II, it became a site of geopolitical competition between the United States (the US) and the Soviet Union (the USSR). Through military alliances and political agreements, the US established a geographical ring, extending from Scandinavia to the Korean Peninsula, which prevented the USSR from reaching the high seas and challenging the naval dominance of the US.

An essential component of this geographical barrier in the Middle East was Iran, since it represented the closest and most favorable route to the high seas for the USSR. Also, both Iran and Israel were at some point major allies of the US, as they helped maintain the balance of power with the Arab states. The Arab states were largely dependent on military and political assistance from the USSR, while the US provided Iran and Israel with political, military, and economic assistance. Furthermore, to strengthen the position of its allies, the Eisenhower administration initiated the “Atoms for Peace” program in 1953, under which the first nuclear reactors were constructed in the Middle East. The program officially aimed at sharing the benefits of atomic energy for peaceful purposes (Eisenhower 1953).

The US closely monitored developments in Iran during 1978–1979. In the months leading up to the Revolution, US diplomacy sought to facilitate a transition of power from the Shah to a responsible civilian government that would not only meet the needs of the Iranian people but also fulfill the requirements of US policy (Ball 1978). This effort ultimately failed, and in 1979, the Iranian Revolution occurred, resulting in a fundamental shift in Iran’s socio-political system. The most significant consequence was that Iran severed its alliance with the US. This development created a gap in the US’s geographical ring and tilted the balance of power in the region. At the same time, Iran’s nuclear program raised concerns about the potential for nuclear weapons development. For this reason, since 1979, the US has been in favor of regime change in Tehran and/or dismantling of Iran’s nuclear program (Ball 1978); (Guardian 2003); (Chivvis 2025).

The regime in Tehran is aware of its security situation and is thus determined to maintain the nuclear program and potentially obtain nuclear weapons as a deterrent against any aggression. Additionally, Iran seeks to capitalize on this geopolitical struggle and the interests that Russia and the People’s Republic of China (China) have in Iran to achieve its objectives through a strategic partnership with these two powers. These facts reduced the possibility of a full-scale war against Iran, thereby leaving the US with limited options regarding the change of political regime in Tehran, ranging from sanctions to supporting proxy wars.

## Methodology

Building upon the points outlined in the introduction, the following research subject was determined: the geopolitical interests of the Great Powers, particularly in the Middle East, where these interests intersect and create a framework that determines the strategic approaches and opportunities for regional states like Iran and Israel to achieve their national objectives. Within the research subject, the following research questions were determined:

1. Can classical geopolitical theories serve as a methodological framework for understanding conflicts in the Middle East?
2. What is the place and role of Iran and Israel within the geopolitical strategies of the Great Powers in the Middle East?
3. Is the conflict between Iran and Israel primarily driven by the geopolitical objectives of the Great Powers, or by Israel's existential fear of Iran's nuclear program?

In order to answer the first research question, fundamental geopolitical principles found in the classical geopolitical theories of Mahan, Lee, Mackinder, Spykman, Kjellén, and Brzezinski were described, and their applicability to contemporary relations in the Middle East was explained. To address the second research question, the geopolitical strategies of the US, Russia, and China were examined, placing particular focus on the position and role of Iran and Israel within those strategies. Finally, in addressing the third research question, it was essential to analyze the underlying causes of the hostility between Iran and Israel and to contextualize them within the broader geopolitical interests of the major powers in the Middle East.

To achieve the research objectives, we formulated and tested the following hypothesis: the hostility between Iran and Israel is an element of the protracted geopolitical conflict between the sea and land powers, while the short-term military conflict in June 2025 ("the Twelve-Day War") represents an armed escalation of that geopolitical conflict. This conflict began in 1979 when Iran severed its strategic partnership with the United States, thus creating an opening for the land powers to access the high seas and challenge the US's status as a sea power. Given the current balance of power among the Great Powers, the US is unwilling to engage in a full-scale war with Iran but instead employs Israel to wage a proxy war, using the perceived threat posed by Iran's nuclear program to justify the conflict.

To test the hypothesis, the following scientific methods were employed: content analysis, the deductive method, the historical-comparative method, and the inductive method.

By applying the content analysis method to the classical geopolitical theories of Mahan, Lee, Mackinder, Spykman, Kjellén, and Brzezinski, key geopolitical terms such as "Hartland", "Rimland", "the sea power", and "the land power" were conceptualized. Furthermore, by applying this method, key geopolitical principles that explain the political actions of land and sea powers were identified.

The deductive method was used to conclude the specific geopolitical objectives of the Great Powers, as well as those of Iran and Israel, in the Rimland and the Middle East, and about the nature of *the Twelve-Day War* between Iran and Israel.

The historical-comparative method was applied to determine the mutual and different geopolitical perspectives of classical geopolitical authors. Moreover, it was used to determine the historical and current dynamics of relations between the states that were encompassed by the analysis.

Finally, using the inductive method, we concluded the future development in the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East and the place of Iran's nuclear program in the regional security discourse.

### **Classical Geopolitical Theory as an Analytical Framework**

Geopolitics finds the drivers of political actions of states in geography. Based on geographical position, Kjellén classified states as island states, states on a continent with access to seas, and landlocked states (Kjellén 1917, 65). This position determines their motives and the directions of their political actions. Mahan argued that in order to acquire the status of a sea power, a sea state must meet seven conditions (Mahan 1898, 25-35). The basic condition is the control of the islands, naval ports located along the most important maritime trade routes and straits through which these routes pass. Additionally, a sea power must obtain a foothold on the continent in order to contain other land powers' access to the high seas, control areas rich in energy, and influence the internal affairs of (coastal) continental states (Mahan 1898, 62; Kjellén 1917, 65; Lea 1912, 156). Mahan's principles were summarized in Lea's rule that sea power is measured "by its capacity to prevent the maritime superiority of any state placed on the external shores of the sea in which it is located (Lea 1912, 156)."

Land states are focused on advancing towards the areas rich in energy and towards geographical barriers that serve as secure frontiers. Furthermore, due to the lack of trade and security comfort offered by an insular position, the interests of the land powers related to the sea can "be condensed into access to the sea as extensive and as free as possible" (Mahan 1900, 56) which is why this is a "political motive of the first order (Kjellén 1917, 34)." This advance causes fear among the sea powers because "whenever a continental state abuts upon the sea in which is situated an insular kingdom, and acquires a relative equality in maritime power, the probabilities of eventual victory rest entirely with the continental nation (Lea 1912, 156)."

This statement by Lea holds the reason why generally the sea powers do not look favorably upon the presence of a land power on the coasts. Nevertheless, alliances and hostilities are shaped by specific positions and interests at a given moment. This means that alliances between the sea and land powers are not inherently impossible. A notable example of this is the alliance between the Russian Empire and the United Kingdom during World War I, which is particularly interesting given that Mackinder's geopolitical theory was founded on the rivalry between these two empires

(Mackinder 1904, 421-437). In a multi-actor geopolitical situation, the central question is not whether a power is a sea or a land power, but with whom the given power can align in order to achieve its geopolitical interests. This dynamic is evident in the case of the US and the USSR, which were allies during World War II against Germany and Japan, but immediately after the war became geopolitical rivals.

Sea and land powers, alone or in alliance, are in a global struggle for dominance that takes place on and around Eurasia as the World (Large) Continent (Mackinder 1919, 82-83). Brzezinski vividly compared Eurasia to “*the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played*” (Brzezinski 1999). The central position on the chessboard occupies the vast landmass known as the Heartland. The Heartland is encircled by the Rimland (buffer zone), which resembles a crescent and consists of Scandinavia, Western and Central Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, Afghanistan, India, China, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Siberia (Mahan 1900; Mackinder 1904; Spykman 1942). Around the Rimland runs the “*great circumferential maritime highway*” (Spykman 1942, 181) which starts in the Baltic and the North Sea in Europe, passes through the European Mediterranean and the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, and further stretches through the Asiatic Mediterranean and ends in the marginal seas of the Far East. The rest of the world is the outer insular crescent.

The importance of controlling Eurasia for global dominance is undisputed in geopolitical theories. However, there are different views on what factors most decisively influence the control of Eurasia. Mackinder considered that whoever controls the Heartland controls the World, while Spykman modified this formula and argued that whoever controls the Rimland controls the World (Mackinder 1904; Spykman 1942). Spykman’s theory seems to be more adequate since if the land power does not control the Rimland, it will be contained by the geographical circle dominated by sea powers. To be more precise, if a land power seeks to achieve global dominance, it must secure the strategic routes through the Rimland to the high seas. On the other hand, a sea state that is unable to control these routes through the Rimland cannot be considered a sea power, nor can it ensure global dominance.

This further implies that the Great Powers win and lose geopolitical battles in the Rimland, where their interests touch, intertwine, and oppose, making this zone both geographically and politically important. According to Mahan, no state located within the Rimland can confidently “repose securely upon its own strength, or even upon the certainty of non-interference by ambitious neighbors (Mahan 1900, 22).” In this way, these states, including Iran and Israel, become “weights in a balance used by others” (Spykman 1942, 20) because their fate is a part of the geopolitical strategies of the Great Powers, achieving their interests only to the extent to which they align with the interests of the Great Powers.

Nevertheless, China is located in the Rimland and represents an exception to Mahan’s conclusion. In 2013, China began shaping a significant part of the Rimland through

the “*Belt and Road Initiative*. The Initiative was launched with the idea of enabling China to break free from the geographical encirclement both by land in the west, across Central Asia and the Middle East, and by sea in the south, through Pakistan and Myanmar (Rahman 2024; (Blanchard and Flint 2017). China uses infrastructure projects to *reshape geography*, thus making new routes to the high seas and adapting them to its needs and interests.

From a technical point of view, China can overcome geographical obstacles. The US confirms that it is the “only competitor with both the intent to reshape international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it (White House 2022, 23).” From a political point of view, the reshaping process has an uncertain outcome because China does not support its interests using military force. Nevertheless, China has already been positioned as a crucial geopolitical actor. Thus, if the US seeks to preserve its global dominance, it must prevent an alliance between Russia and China, bearing in mind the same arguments Mackinder raised against an alliance between Germany and Russia (Mackinder 1919, 112). Therefore, we can use his modified formula: *Whoever is China’s strategic partner rules Eurasia! Whoever controls Eurasia controls the World!*

## **Geopolitical Interests and Position of the US, Russia, and China**

### ***Geopolitical interests and the position of the US***

The US symbolically acquired the status of a sea power during World War II, when the United Kingdom granted it the right to use its possessions in the Atlantic Ocean for a period of 99 years, in exchange for 50 destroyers needed at the time to defend the United Kingdom from Germany (Con and Fairchild 1989, 51-62). After the war, the US began establishing positions across the Rimland and creating a geographical ring around the USSR, in accordance with the geopolitical principles advocated in classical geopolitical theories. This geopolitical approach became known as the Truman Doctrine and persisted as a strategic approach to relations with Russia and China after the Cold War (Department of State n.d.).

In Europe, the United States provided financial assistance through the Marshall Plan (1948-1953), thereby laying the groundwork for the military and political integration of the European states under the US patronage (National Archives 1948). NATO was established in 1949 as a defensive alliance based on the principle of collective defense (NATO 1949, Art. 4). Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, and in 1953, they formed the Balkan Pact with Yugoslavia (Office of the Historian 1953). Through these alliances, the US secured a foothold in Europe, enabling it to influence the internal affairs of Western European states and to contain the USSR’s access to the high seas. Nevertheless, Türkiye was an undisputed American partner until 2003, when the Turkish parliament refused to allow the US troops’ passage to Iraq (Wikileaks 2003). The culmination of this breach in relations occurred after the

failed military coup in 2016, when Turkiye became a closer partner of Russia. In the Middle East and South Asia, the geographical ring consisted of Turkiye, Iran, Pakistan, and India. To deter Soviet aggression, the US stationed nuclear weapons in Turkiye and assisted India (1954), Pakistan (1956), and Iran (1957) in launching their nuclear programs ([Rammana 2007](#)); ([Mian 2013](#)); ([United Nations Treaty Collection 1957](#)). Pakistan was a reliable partner, supporting the efforts of the US in organizing the resistance movement against the USSR in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Pakistan also supported the US during its military presence in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. However, in 2015, Pakistan shifted its strategic alignment and turned to cooperation with China ([CPEC Secretariat n.d.](#)). The US exerted decisive influence in Iran until 1979, particularly after 1953, when it orchestrated a coup to overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh and strengthened the position of Shah Reza Pahlavi, with whom the US reached an agreement concerning the civil use of atomic energy in 1957.

In Southeast Asia and the Far East, the US gradually established a barrier against the land powers. It first purchased Alaska in 1867, and then it conquered Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines in 1898 as strategically important islands. After World War II, it occupied Japan with which it signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in 1960 ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1960](#)). From 1950 to 1953, the US was involved in the Korean War, after which it signed the Mutual Defense Treaty with South Korea ([United States Forces Korea 1953](#)), thereby securing a foothold in the Far East. The victory of the Communist Party in the Chinese civil war raised concerns about the spread of communism through Southeast Asia, prompting the US involvement in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1955 to 1975 ([Kissinger 1994](#)) and political support to Taiwan. For the same reason, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand founded ASEAN in 1967, later joined by Myanmar, Laos, the Philippines, Brunei, and Vietnam ([ASEAN n.d.](#)).

To protect the pillars of sea power, the US established a network of military bases throughout the Rimland. A continuous geographical belt of states with the US (NATO) bases stretches from Norway, the United Kingdom and Denmark in Europe, to Oman in the Middle East, with Ramstein in Germany being the largest base in Europe and the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar being the largest and the most important base in the Middle East ([Allen, Flynn and Martinez Machain 2021](#)). The United States, however, no longer has bases in Central Asia following its withdrawal from Afghanistan, ceding this country to Iranian and Pakistani influence. The likelihood of establishing a new military presence in Central Asia is considered low, given the strong Russian and Chinese influences in the region ([Umarov 2021](#)). In the Far East, the US has most bases and most troops stationed in Japan and South Korea.

What was previously stated shows that Central Asia, as a region which Iseri described as the new Heartland of Eurasia ([Iseri 2009, 34](#)), represents a “soft spot” for the geopolitical strategy of the US. In this energy-rich region, the US does not have

political partners, nor does it have military bases that could support its interests. Furthermore, it does not control Iran and Pakistan as coastal states that connect Central Asia to the high seas. Therefore, it was concluded that in order to restore the principles of sea power, the US first needs to induce a change in the strategic alignments of Iran and/or of Pakistan.

### ***Geopolitical interests and the position of Russia***

From the geopolitical principles that determine the interests of the land powers, we derived Russia's three geopolitical objectives. First, Russia seeks a secure land border. Second, it aims to control resource-rich areas so that it can influence global trade. Finally, Russia's political motive is access to the high seas. According to classical theories, Russia has three routes to the high seas: across Europe, through the Caspian region and Iran to the Indian Ocean, and through Manchuria.

To the west of Russia lies the vast European Plain, which does not provide enough security. Consequently, Russia has three potential courses of action. First, Russia's interest lies in the existence of small, weak states at the western border that are under its influence, to serve as a buffer zone in case of invasion from the west (Kjellen 1917). Finland, the Baltic states, Belarus, and Ukraine, if neutral or pro-Russian, would constitute an ideal buffer zone. However, the Baltic States joined NATO in 2004 and Finland in 2023. The second option for Russia is to go westward to the line Szczecin – Berlin – Dresden, where the European Plain is the narrowest. Third, Russia could extend its reach further to the Atlantic Ocean, thereby securing its western border and simultaneously achieving its goal of accessing the high seas. However, the Baltic states, Western and Central European states are NATO members, making any Russian actions in Europe, other than Ukraine, highly unlikely.

The second route to the high seas is across the vast plains of Central Asia and Iran, which is why the partnership with Iran holds critical importance for Russia. Russia signed a military-technical agreement with Iran in 2001 and 2023 (Wallshaein 2025), the Treaty on Strategic Partnership in 2025 (Maini and Kumar 2025) and supported Iran's membership in BRICS (2024). Furthermore, Russia is also interested in forming a partnership with Central Asian states and Iran because of their natural resources. Furthermore, the partnership with Iran allows Russia's direct access to resource-rich states in the Gulf region, where Russia plays an important role, both through its cooperation with OPEC to set oil prices and through investments in exploration and production in the region. With its economy and federal budget dependent on energy exports and with global downward pressure on oil prices since 2014, Russia has sought to stabilize energy markets. Russia's cooperation with Saudi Arabia on oil production is a notable example" (Wasser, et al. 2022, 58-59). Russian direction to the south is intersected by the Chinese *Belt and Road Initiative*, which stretches from east to west. Currently, the two powers' interests in this region are compatible, making the cooperation between Russia and China both feasible and beneficial. This strategic partnership holds potential for the integration of Eurasia

under the leadership of these two Great Powers. Classical geopolitical theories also suggest that Russia could access the high seas in the Far East through Manchuria. However, this direction leads to the marginal seas of Asia, which are not controlled by China.

### ***Geopolitical interests and the position of China***

As a land power, China is encircled by a geographical ring that consists of high mountains and deserts to the east, north, and south, with weak states on its borders forming a buffer zone (Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, former Soviet republics, and states in Southeast Asia), along with marginal seas to the east. It has two geopolitical objectives (Stajić, Mirković and Radivojević 2025). Firstly, it seeks to achieve access to the high seas. To the east, China is encircled by a geographical ring controlled by the United States. According to Spykman (Spykman 1942, 184), the easiest route from China to the Indian Ocean is through Pakistan and Myanmar (Burma). In 1999, China initiated economic corridors with India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, and in 2015 with Pakistan (Karim and Islam 2018). Through its economic corridor with Pakistan, China established a robust infrastructural network in Pakistan linked to ports Gwadar and Karachi. This Sino-Pakistani partnership forced India to pause projects in its economic corridors with China. However, China concluded individual agreements with Myanmar (Dutta 2018).

Secondly, according to “the World Bank data for 2023, China’s GDP, adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), is the highest in the world, at approximately \$ 35 trillion, followed by the US at about \$ 27 trillion. According to these data, China is the first economy in the world, and for its normal functioning and growth requires a large amount of energy (Stajić, Mirković and Radivojević 2025).” That is why China is deeply interested in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Sino-Pakistani economic corridor provides direct access to Iran’s resources, which account for 15% of China’s overall imports. China demonstrated its interest in a strategic partnership with Iran by signing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in March 2021 (Tiezzi 2021) and supporting Iran’s membership in BRICS.

The achievement of these geopolitical priorities is hampered by the conflicts or political instability in Myanmar, Pakistan, and Iran. Firstly, in 2021, a military coup took place in Myanmar and caused a civil war. While Western states and their allies in Southeast Asia condemned the military coup (Reuters 2021), both China and Russia supported the military junta (Walker 2025; Abuza and Aung 2025). The ongoing civil war, with belligerents controlling various parts of the state, has severely hindered political and economic stability, which is essential for the implementation of infrastructural projects. Secondly, on 7 May 2025, India initiated a short-term conflict with Pakistan, a part of the broader conflict between the two states. Indian officials accused China of providing military support to Pakistan (Reuters 2025). Thirdly, on 12 June 2025, Israel launched attacks on Iran, intending to change the political regime in Tehran. These attacks “exposed the limits of China’s ambitions in

the Middle East, revealing that despite its rhetoric and economic presence, Beijing remains unwilling and unable to replace the United States as a true regional power” (Evron 2025, 39) even though the Chinese Communist Party “ has articulated a vision of a world order in which China supplants the United States as the leading global power and the United States must accommodate Chinese interests” (Wasser, et al. 2022, 58-59).

## **Iran and Israel in the Geopolitical Strategies of the Great Powers**

### ***Iran in the geopolitical strategies of the Great Powers***

Based on the previous analysis, it can be concluded that Iran is the subject of geopolitical interest for all three Great Powers, which makes its position extremely unfavorable. Russia seeks to break free from the geographical ring through Central Asia and Iran, while China is primarily interested in Iran’s natural resources and in utilizing it as a corridor linking Central Asia with the high seas. “For many years, Iran has held a distinctive place in China’s Middle East strategy, serving both economic and geopolitical aims. Economically, Iran supplies 5-15 percent of China’s imports. After the imposition of international sanctions, China became Iran’s primary investor and trading partner. These ties were formalized in March 2021 with a 25-year \$400 billion strategic cooperation agreement, including discounted Iranian oil and reciprocal investment. Strategically, Iran acts as a counterweight to US influence in the region” (Evron 2025, 37). Iran is also a subject of interest for the US for at least four reasons. Firstly, Iran represents a crucial point where the US needs to block Russian access to the high seas. Secondly, Iran has the third-largest oil reserves (OPEC 2022) in the world and is in a strategic partnership with China, which has been identified as the US’ principal global adversary. Third, Iran’s nuclear program serves as a deterrent to potential aggressors, thereby reducing the available options for the US to change the regime in Tehran.

Finally, Iran’s influence over Shiite communities in neighboring states provides it with the capacity to further destabilize the US’s geopolitical position in the Middle East. In 2006, Iran established a geographical crescent, disrupting the territorial link between the US allies in the region, specifically between Israel and Turkey, and between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This crescent began in Palestine, where Hamas has held power since 2006, and Lebanon, where Hezbollah operates as a pro-Iranian militia, and extended to Syria, a state with which Iran had maintained close cooperation until the regime change in late 2024. When US troops entered Iraq in 2003, Iran encouraged “all Shiite factions in Iraq to cooperate in the US – led political process, given that the size of Iraq’s Shiite population (about 60% of the population) would likely guarantee Shiite dominance in government (Blanchard 2008).” This strategy was successful and, after the 2005 elections, Nouri al-Maliki was appointed Prime Minister. Furthermore, Iran enjoys favorable relations with Qatar, partly due to the presence of an influential Shiite minority and shared economic interests, particularly

in natural gas. The CIA has identified a Hamas office in Doha, indicating Iranian influence, which is problematic given Qatar's hosting of the Al Udeid Air Base.

On the other hand, the US has tried to change the regime in Tehran and dismantle Iran's nuclear program since 1979. Following the Revolution, the US used Iraq to wage a proxy war against Iran. "Between 1984 and 1988, Iraq conducted at least seven air strikes against Iran's Bushehr reactors ([Castelli and Samuel 2023](#))." In 1984, the United States imposed sanctions on Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism (U.S. Department of State n.d.). Furthermore, since 2006, Iran's nuclear program has been the subject of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council ([The Security Council 2006](#)). This situation coincides with a period during which Iran established its geographical crescent in the Middle East, at the expense of the US's influence. Most recently, the US provided direct military support to Israel during the Twelve-Day War by conducting airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. It is significant to observe that these attacks coincide with a period in which Iran is reaching unprecedented levels of oil exports to China ([Liu, Yap, and Tunagur 2025](#)). At the same time, even though Russia and China agreed on strategic cooperation with Iran, these powers provided indirect military and limited political support to Iran ([Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2025](#); [Calabrese 2025](#)) showing they perceived "both Iran and Israel as assets, regardless of how Teheran and Jerusalem view the situation" ([Shpunt and Khanin 2025](#), 41). Another reason why Russia has refrained from providing open military support to Iran stems from the broader pattern of mutual restraint in US – Russian relations, reflected in observation that "the United States and Russia have generally been cautious concerning each other's presence" and that "neither side has viewed the conflict as primarily a way to impose costs on its competitor" ([Rhoades, et al. 2023](#), 11).

### ***Israel in the geopolitical strategies of the Great Powers***

Israel has significant importance for the US's geopolitical interests. It serves as a critical foothold in the west of the Asian continent. Geographically, Israel is situated between the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, in close proximity to the Suez Canal, a vital maritime point connecting Asia and Europe. Additionally, Israel extends southward through a narrow corridor to the port of Eilat on the Red Sea, thereby disrupting the territorial continuity of Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa, while providing the US with access to the Red Sea. This position is of particular significance to the US, especially as Saudi Arabia and Egypt became members of the BRICS (2024).

Israel is established with inherent deficiencies, which left all interested parties dissatisfied. Originally a British protectorate, Palestine was divided into an Israeli and a Palestinian state by the General Assembly Resolution No. 181 ([The United Nations 1947](#)). According to the Resolution, the Palestinian state consists of three physically separate areas: the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean coast, the West Bank on the coast of the Dead Sea, and an area bordering Lebanon. Despite the Resolution and international

recognition, the US has consistently blocked Palestine's admission to the UN since 1948. In contrast, Israel was granted full membership in the UN on May 11, 1949.

The establishment of Israel in a region where Arabs constitute the majority has been viewed as provocative, triggering multiple wars by Arab states against it. Throughout the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel was also an unofficial pillar of U.S. policy in the region and served as an effective partner in combating the Soviet Union's regional partners. During that period, the United States backed its ally Israel, while the Soviet Union supported Egypt and its Arab allies, including Iraq and Syria" (Rhoades, et al. 2023, 8). Nevertheless, the USSR, and subsequently Russia, never regarded Israel as an adversary. In fact, the USSR, together with the US, extended formal recognition to Israel immediately following its declaration of independence. Even today, Israel is „the only country of the Golden Billion not to introduce sanctions against Russia“ (Shpunt and Khanin 2025, 41).

Israel considered the entire former British protectorate to be historically Jews' land, which led to the integration of territories that were meant to constitute the Palestinian state. This triggered armed resistance from the Palestinians, initially led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and later by Hamas. Iran, as a non-Arab and non-Sunni state, was a natural ally of Israel in the fight against the Arab states. However, since 1979, Iran has denied Israel's right to exist (Iran International 2023) and has started to support militant groups such as Hezbollah (stationed in Syria and Lebanon), and later Hamas in Palestine. Consequently, the suppression of Iran's hostile influence in the region, alongside efforts to change the regime in Tehran, became the first point at which the interests of Israel and the US overlap.

In Israeli public discourse, Iran's nuclear program is perceived as an existential threat. At the same time, the US views Iran's nuclear program as a deterrent, reducing the means available to influence regime change in Tehran. Thus, the annihilation of Iran's nuclear program emerges as the second point where the interests of Israel and the US overlap. Since 2006— the year in which international sanctions were imposed on Iran's nuclear program—a series of subversive activities, acts of sabotage, cyberattacks, and airstrikes have been conducted against Iran's nuclear program. Between 2007 and 2010, the “Stuxnet” malware destroyed a significant number of uranium enrichment centrifuges at the Natanz facility (Corera 2021). From 2010 to 2025, leading Iranian nuclear scientists were assassinated in targeted operations, most of which have been attributed to Israel (Tobey 2020). In 2018, Mossad came into possession of a large number of documents from a warehouse in Tehran, containing information about the alleged “Amad Project”, which was active between 1989 and 2003 and aimed at developing nuclear weapons (BBC 2018).

Efforts against Iran's nuclear program culminated in the Twelve-Day War, during which numerous nuclear scientists were killed, and nuclear facilities were destroyed. Furthermore, on June 24, 2025, the US airstrike targeted and destroyed fortified

bunkers at all three of Iran's nuclear sites. Nevertheless, Iran's nuclear program was not destroyed, so in an ongoing geopolitical struggle, Iran's nuclear program will continue to serve as a justification for sanctions, limited military strikes, and subversive actions within Iran. The confirmation of this conclusion is the initiative launched on 28 August 2025 by the United Kingdom, Germany, and France ([Berg 2025](#)) to reimpose sanctions on Iran due to renewed concerns over its nuclear program, even though the US President stated that Iran's nuclear facilities had been completely obliterated in the US airstrikes ([Guardian 2025](#)).

## Conclusions

The hostility between Iran and Israel cannot be viewed as an isolated regional conflict. Instead, it must be understood within a broader geopolitical context, where the underlying causes of the conflict are determined by the interests of the Great Powers. Until 1979, Iran played a crucial role in the geographical barrier that kept the USSR away from the high seas. However, after the 1979 revolution, Iran left the US sphere of influence and created a crack in the geographical ring around the USSR. This development brought into question the basic principles of the US's maritime dominance. In response to this situation, the US has undertaken military and non-military actions against Iran since 1979. These actions aimed to change the political regime in Tehran and to eliminate Iran's nuclear program.

Iran did not experience a new revolution. On the contrary, in 2006, Iranian influence in the Middle East reached its summit thanks to the influence on Shiite communities in the neighboring states. In the same year, the international community imposed sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear program, thus formalizing Iran's status as a state that poses a threat to international security. Under these circumstances, Iran's nuclear program became a justification for unilateral actions by the US, and potentially by the international community upon a decision by the Security Council. However, due to the interest of Russia and China as permanent members of the Security Council, an international intervention against Iran is highly unlikely. As a result, the US is forced to use Israel to wage proxy wars.

The most recent Twelve-Day War failed to achieve its primary objective to change the regime in Tehran, meaning that Israel and the US did not achieve their objectives. Iran's nuclear program was not destroyed in this conflict, which means that the reasons for a new escalation remain intact. On the other hand, Russia and China provided both military and political support to Iran, thereby preventing regime change and winning this geopolitical battle. However, the geopolitical interests of the US have not disappeared, nor have the reasons that could lead to further conflicts. This is the reason why we can anticipate new conflicts between Iran and Israel with the support of the Great Powers. Considering all the facts established in this research and the conclusions drawn, we may confirm that the general hypothesis has been fully proven.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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