The Gog and Magog Complex: On Iran/Israel Endless War

written by Behrang Pourhosseini | August 22, 2025



The cradle of monotheism, the Middle East, has always been the scene of clashes between deities who, in order to reign undivided, have continually forged enemies for themselves. Not even Trump's attempts to reunite the sons of Abraham could untie the Gordian knot where faith and blood are inextricably bound. In this land haunted by the ancient sacrificial figures of the end of the time, it remains unclear who is Gog and where is Magog, according to the biblical account, or who is Gog and who is Magog, according to the Qur'anic account.

This article examines the specificities of the "Twelve-Day War" between Iran and Israel, uncovering its underlying logic and key characteristics.

The Ambivalence of Partisan Wars

If the Middle East remains mired in endless wars, it is partly because *stasis*—internal discord, at times fratricidal—and external war are so deeply entangled that, even in the absence of active war, the constant threat of it has become a primary tool of governance. From their very inception, both the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran were forged in war—each in its own way, and each continuing to draw legitimacy from it.

Without retracing the warrior origins of the State of Israel in the colonizations and the terrorist actions of Zionist armed group prior to 1948,[1] it is nonetheless essential to recall that the very founding of the Israeli state is inseparable from a war of extermination against the Palestinian people. From the very beginning, as Deleuze pointed out, the goal was to act as if Palestinians had never existed: "Israel never hid its objective from the outset: to empty the Palestinian territory. Even more, to act as if the territory had always been empty, destined from the beginning for the Zionists…. It is a genocide, but one in which physical extermination is subordinated to geographic erasure."[2]

As for the Islamic Republic of Iran, one of its ideological forerunners was the Fedayeen of Islam, an Islamist terrorist group active in the 1940s and 1950s. Closely affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, the group called for the re-Islamization of society and its purification from Western influences. Its founder, Navvab Safavi, orchestrated several assassinations of intellectuals and political figures of the time.[3] The Islamic Republic later institutionalized this logic of terror at the state level, waging an internal sacrificial war against Iranian society to purge it of Western or heterodox influences, and an external war to export its ideological and military model to other Islamic countries wherever possible. In its hostility toward the "absolute enemy,"[4] the Islamic Republic mirrors other Islamist movements in the region—Sunni or Shiite alike.

A War Against People

The Twelve-Day War was a peculiar kind of conflict, one from which all parties emerged claiming victory. The Islamic Republic celebrated the resilience of Iranian society and touted its strikes on some Israeli targets as a triumph, while the Israeli government emphasized its military superiority, the precision of its operations against strategic sites, and the successful elimination of senior IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) commanders.

Beyond the propagandas, this war has an undeniable achievement for both sides: the interstate war between Iran and Israel serves to obscure another, more insidious war. Not merely a war *amid* populations, where the boundary between soldier and civilian collapses. Not even a war *with* populations, where states conscript youth—willing or not—into their struggles. Rather, it is a war *against* populations. This war against people unfolds in two directions. On one hand, it involves the deliberate targeting of civilian and urban infrastructure. During the twelve-day conflict, the Israeli army struck thousands of sites across Iran, including residential areas where IRGC generals resided. According to Iranian authorities, 1,064 people were killed[5] and thousands more wounded. On the Israeli side, 29 people were killed by Iranian missile strikes, including four women from the same family.

On the other hand, this war casts a strategic, if temporary, shadow over the other conflicts that both the Israeli government and the Islamic Republic continue to prosecute. For Iran, it is the internal war against women, migrants, and non-Persian or non-Shiite populations— and by extension, against Iranian society as a whole. For Israel, it is the relentless campaign of ethnic cleansing that grinds on under the machinery of occupation, crushing Palestinian lives and futures.

During the Iran-Iraq War, Ayatollah Khomeini famously declared that “war is a blessing.” As paradoxical as it may sound, there was a strategic truth behind the statement. The twelve-day war represents not a new conflict, but a continuation—and escalation—of a longstanding confrontation. The Islamic Republic seized upon it to impose an atmosphere of heightened securitization: massive deployment of riot police in the streets, a proliferation of checkpoints, and a sharp intensification of repression. This militarized suffocation of public life is nothing new. It resurfaces whenever the regime is confronted by protest, particularly in peripheral regions like Kurdistan and Baluchistan.

In fact, in this war, the Islamic Republic took its revenge on Iranian society itself. A renewed purge of alleged “spies” has begun. The regime’s execution machinery is once again in full motion. In June 2025 alone, at least 98 peoples were executed in Iran,[6] including on charges of espionage for Mossad, following expedited and opaque trials. In a climate of heightened paranoia, any form of dissent risks being labelled as “Zionist” or collaboration with foreign enemies. Meanwhile, under the pretext of national security, the Islamic Republic has expelled over one million Afghan immigrants—both legal and undocumented—on the pretext of espionage and collaboration with Israel.

If there is one red line not to be crossed for the Islamic Republic, it is the one drawn by the hijab—a garment that has become a political frontier, rendering women’s bodies a contested territory of ideological control. The hijab embodies the regime’s obsessive drive to preserve the interior of the community sealed, pure, and protected from the gaze of the outsider.[7] Women who defy this mandate are not merely seen as disobedient citizens, but also as infiltrators, suspected agents of foreign influence or as victims corrupted by external powers.

While another Israeli strike on Iran remains likely, the long history of this conflict has made one thing abundantly clear: after 45 years of saber-rattling and calculated provocations, both regimes have learned that it is far more profitable to brandish the threat of war than to fully engage in one.

The Use of Force

The Iran-Israel war is marked by a particularity: it is being fought between two states that share no common border, separated by over 1,100 kilometres at their closest point. This distance largely renders infantry operations obsolete, instead placing strategic emphasis on air power, long-range missiles, drones, and covert infiltration—technologies and tactics that allow for remote, high-impact operations.

What has positioned Israel in a place of strategic superiority is precisely its technical and military edge. The targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists—carried out with booby-trapped vehicles and motorbikes—date back to the early 2010s. But following October 7, Israeli retaliations and operations against Iran took a more assertive and escalatory turn. The assassination of Ismael Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31, 2024—the day after Masoud Pezeshkian's inauguration—the precision strikes on Iranian military infrastructure, and deep infiltration into Iran's high-ranking intelligence apparatus have only fueled Israel's military hubris.

Having lost—or seen significantly weakened—its traditional allies such as Assad and Hezbollah, who once served as buffer zones, the Islamic Republic has increasingly retreated into ideological rhetoric. In an October 2024 speech, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei addressed Muslims worldwide in Arabic, issuing a tepid and dated call for resistance and Islamic awakening—an uninspired echo of Sayyid Qutb, one of the key ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood. In military terms, Tehran has only one card left to play: the threat of production of nuclear weapons. Indeed, the law of the strongest in the Middle East has a double side-effect. On one hand, Israel—widely acknowledged as the region's only nuclear-armed state—continues to refuse accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), while Iran's uranium enrichment program has been under strict surveillance by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), subject to recurring sanctions and international negotiations since 2006.

On the other hand, as in the case of anti-piracy wars—where maritime insurance firms emerged as the primary beneficiaries—the real winners in the region's climate of perpetual insecurity are arms manufacturers. The Islamic Republic periodically threatens closure of the Strait of Hormuz—a critical maritime chokepoint through which approximately 21% of the world's oil supply transits—in the event of a major escalation with U.S. forces or their regional allies. Between 2020 and 2024, Qatar and Saudi Arabia—after Ukraine and India—ranked among the world's top arms importers,[8] reinjecting a substantial share of their petrodollar revenues into American and European markets.

A Chronic War

Israel's military force in its conflict with Iran is not aimed at territorial conquest, but rather at the mastery of time. In this war, hypersonic missiles traversing extra-atmospheric space and swift aerial strikes illustrate a shift in recent wars: privileging speed over spatial conquest, thereby diminishing the strategic significance of geography. Not only the vast distance between these two non-contiguous countries appears almost nullified, but the disparity in size between them becomes also irrelevant. The acceleration of armaments enacts what Paul Virilio characterises as the very essence of modern warfare: the obliteration of terrain. Through its ability to strike across the entire Iranian territory, the Israeli air force expands the battlefield to such an extent that the very notion of land dissolves. All terrain becomes non-terrain[9]: without obstacle, the air force crosses and penetrates every point. Geography cedes to topology, where war is waged through an infinite array of potential trajectories.

This acceleration paradoxically unfolds within the long durée of the conflict. The war did not begin in April 2024; it stretches back across decades. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, hostility

between Israel and Iran has been marked by proxy wars, sporadic strikes, targeted assassinations, and the persistent threat of retaliation or even annihilation. The ambivalent zone of "neither peace nor war" in which these two countries operate requires a careful calibration of escalation and de-escalation, aiming to pre-empt and outmanoeuvre the opponent's next move. It is a temporality governed simultaneously by speed and duration—a dual regime of time where surprise and rapidity must coincide with strategic foresight and long-term endurance.

In fact, unlike the Iran-Iraq War, one of the longest wars of the 20th century, which had a clear beginning (declaration of war in 1980) and end (peace treaty in 1988), the conflict with Israel is part of a fluid and indeterminate temporality. For Israel, war—not only with Iran and its proxies but also with the Palestinians and certain Arab neighbours—is a structural backdrop, embedded in a fragmented timeline marked by temporary truces, to the point where the boundary between peace and war has become blurred. In this light, whether in Israel's annexation of Palestinian territories or Iran's imperial expansion via the Axis of Resistance, the central issue appears to be the territorial conquest through the mastery of time.

This chronic war—never formally declared, never definitively concluded—functions as a strategy of uncertainty that benefits both regimes. If Israel temporarily opts for de-escalation with Iran, it is to redirect its military aggression toward the Palestinians, while stretching its confrontation with Iran over the long term to gradually erode Iranian strength. The ongoing debates over the extent to which Israeli-American strikes have delayed Iran's nuclear program should thus be understood within this ambiguous temporality—one that the time-stretching logic of this conflict actively sustains.

The terrain is further shaped by a temporal logic in another, more religious sense. The annexation of Palestinian territories is grounded in a messianic vision of the land promised to the State of Israel. The Iranian-Israeli conflict entrenches also over time, since it is animated by an eschatological horizon. This war is a prelude to the final war at the end of time, a war that prepares for the coming of the Messiah in the eyes of some Jewish currents and, in the eyes of the Shiites, the reappearance of the hidden Imam, al-Mahdi. Within this temporality, both defeats and victories are provisional, subordinated to the greater promise of a final triumph—the triumph of the righteous over evil.

The Battle Between Good and Evil

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has described the siege of Gaza as a war against "human animals," while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to frame the fight against Hamas and Iran as that of civilization against barbarism. On the other side, Khomeinist rhetoric refers to Israel as the "Little Satan" and the United States as the "Great Satan," presenting both as inherently hostile to Islam. Within this ideological framework, the struggle against Israel and, by extension, American imperialism, is cast as a cosmic battle between ḥaqq (truth) and bāṭil (falsehood). The Axis of Resistance—an alliance fortified under the Islamic Republic, particularly after the fall of Saddam Hussein—is conceived as the antithesis to the "Axis of Evil," a term coined by George W. Bush in 2002 to designate Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.

This polarization has fueled a global form of campism, in which everyone is expected to take sides. Such a dualistic worldview, deeply rooted in the region, revives ancient myths. The age-old struggle between good and evil, unfolding across time and culminating in eschatological redemption, is a central motif in the cosmology of pre-Islamic Iranian religions, which in turn have significantly influenced Jewish messianic tradition. Whether the Islamic Republic were to collapse or Israel were to embrace a secular future, this messianic conception of war seems fated to persist.

Joel C. Rosenberg interprets the conflict between Iran (backed by Russia) and Israel as the

fulfillment of biblical prophecy, specifically chapters 38 and 39 of the Book of Ezekiel.[10] These passages describe Gog, king of Magog, leading a coalition of nations in an invasion of Israel—an event portrayed as a prelude to an apocalyptic war. In this narrative, Israel is ultimately saved by a dramatic divine intervention, ushering in the final triumph of good over evil, the rebuilding of the Third Temple, and the dawn of a messianic era marked by universal peace.

Interestingly, the Gog and Magog episode also appears twice in the Quran, under the names Yajuj and Majuj,[11] two agents of chaos and terror, corrupted by Satan, and restrained behind a barrier erected by the legendary king Dhul-Qarnayn. While Islamist discourse draws less frequently on this particular apocalyptic image, it has been always casting Israel as a disruptive force within the Muslim ummah. In both Judaic and Islamic eschatologies, Gog and Magog symbolize a final cataclysmic confrontation with foreign invaders—one understood not merely as a future prophecy but as an archetypal struggle endlessly replayed throughout history.

And yet, as Nietzsche once remarked, enemies tend to resemble each other. When each side proclaims the inevitability of its own ultimate truth, it cannot exist without an adversary onto whom it projects absolute evil. A strange mirror effect emerges in this conflict, where the enemy reveals a reflection of oneself.

[1] Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, New York, Henry Holt & Co, 2000.

[2] Gilles Deleuze, “Grandeur de Yasser Arafat,” in *Deux régimes de fous*, Paris, Minuit, 2003, p. 222.

[3] Cf. Farhad Kazemi, “The Fada’iyan-e Islam; Fanaticism, Politics and Terror,” in: Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1984. pp. 158- 176.

[4] Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan; Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, translated by G. L. Ulmen, New York, Telos Press Publishing, 2007, pp. 89-95.

[5] https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/516098/Israel-aimed-to-collapse-Iran-but-united-us-instead.

[6] https://www.iranhr.net/en/articles/7701/.

[7] Behrang Pourhosseini, “Refaire la révolution en Iran,” in *AOC* (Online Magazine of Ideas), https://aoc.media/opinion/2023/01/04/refaire-la-revolution-en-iran/.

[8] Mathew George, et al., “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2024,” SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2025, p. 6, https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2024.

[9] Paul Virilio, *Vitesse et Politique*, Paris, Galilée, 1977, p. 62.

[10] Joel C. Rosenberg, *Epicenter 2.0: Why the Current Rumblings in the Middle East Will Change Your Future,* Illinois, Tyndale House Publishing, 2008.

[11] Surah Al-Kahf (verses 93 to 98) and Surah Al-Anbiya (verse 96).