



[Mec-2] US-Israeli War on Iran

3 messages

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Dear All,

One of the main objectives of the Middle East Center is to offer the public nuanced and informed views of our region. Toward that end, I have answered questions that faculty and students alike have posed to me in the past 9 days. These are *my* views and do not reflect the diversity of opinion that exists in MEC and JSIS more broadly. Since I am on medical leave next quarter, it is important for me to share my perspective with you before the quarter concludes. Ultimately, these answers are about questions that are being ignored - yet again - in the mainstream media.

1. How are Iranians reacting to the conflict? How does the Iranian diaspora react to these moments compared with people inside the country?

The Iranian diaspora is deeply divided. Some in the West have called for war on Iran, while others oppose any military intervention. Voices inside Iran also appear conflicted, though repression and limited access make public opinion difficult to gauge. Meanwhile, U.S. media has too often functioned less as a check on power than as an amplifier for the military-industrial complex. The prominence of pro-war voices reflects that alignment. I immigrated to the United States in 2004 and remember how the media failed to hold the Bush administration accountable before the Iraq War. In some ways the media landscape is worse today, with fewer corporations and billionaires controlling more outlets—though independent platforms such as *The Intercept* and *Zeteo* now provide more nuanced coverage of war.

Focusing on Iranian opinion, however, risks missing a key difference between the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the current Israeli-U.S. war on Iran: the Trump administration never brought this war to the court of public opinion. The White House has offered shifting, largely unsubstantiated justifications—ranging from Iran's nuclear program to its missiles and support for groups like Hezbollah—while working more closely with the Israeli military than with the U.S. Congress. Unlike the Iraq War, which hinged on the fabricated claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, the rationale here has repeatedly moved.

Most troubling is Secretary of State Marco Rubio's admission that the United States abandoned negotiations and bombed Iran because Israel had already attacked and Washington expected Iranian retaliation against U.S. bases. Coupled with the absence of any congressional briefing on credible intelligence of an imminent Iranian attack, this admission undermines the claim that the war was preemptive. What we are witnessing is not self-defense but an assertion of U.S. hegemony on behalf of a foreign state.

2. What misconceptions about Iran tend to appear in Western media during conflicts like this?

To justify perpetual militarism abroad and austerity at home, the military-industrial complex thrives on generating hysteria and fear of racialized others. A familiar example is the hysterical claim that the Iranian regime is an ideological actor hellbent on the total destruction of the West. Yet the same regime entered into a nuclear agreement in 2015 with the United States and other world powers which placed its nuclear program under international scrutiny. Unlike the United States and Israel, both of which possess hundreds of nuclear weapons (while the former remains to be the only country that has used it), Iran is a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and its nuclear facilities were regularly monitored before the United States withdrew from the agreement in 2018.

The regime's willingness to engage in diplomacy abroad does nothing to absolve it of state violence which it directs at any form of dissent. The Iranian regime poses a deadly threat to its own people and to Iran's ecology, as evidenced by the brutal suppression of protesters in recent weeks. But the question remains: what type of threat does it pose to the United States and Israel? Any non-client regime in Tehran—whether it honors or violates human rights—would be treated as a threat to U.S. imperial hegemony by default. The United States maintains thousands of military personnel across the region, tasked with protecting the assets and interests of American power and capital. In general, we must remain profoundly skeptical of any invocation of threat as a basis for acts of war given the expansive reach of the US military. The U.S. has the largest global military footprint in history, the impacts of which will haunt our imperiled planet for decades to come.

Whether one believes the current war is justified or not (and on what grounds), the abuse of power and violation of international laws through which it is conducted should concern everyone. The US has enjoyed an unchecked authority over the use of deadly force for political objectives since the beginning of the War on Terror in 2001. In 2001, the US led an international coalition into a war with nebulous and unattainable objectives. Today, the US leads the War on Terror as a rogue state without bothering to even articulate any objectives or rationales to its own public. A government that is not answerable to its own people cannot claim the moral authority to wage war against the Iranian regime for the same failing. The public opinion in the US appears to be entirely irrelevant to the current administration.

3. What aspects of Iranian culture or life are usually overlooked when the focus is purely on geopolitics?

Every time politicians sell the public a new war, the narrative is predictably the same: baseless claims of an imminent threat paired with promises that military objectives will be easily attainable and the suffering minimal. Yet in just the past ten days we have already seen the goalposts shift considerably—from Iran's nuclear facilities to missile launchers, to members of the regime's leadership (including figures like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who have not held government positions for years), and then to water desalination plants, girls' schools, oil refineries outside Tehran and oil depots at the heart of the Iranian capital. Israel and the United States have a documented history of destroying civilian infrastructure; we have seen this clearly in Gaza and Beirut. That it is happening again breaks my heart.

It pains me that many of my compatriots genuinely believe that Israeli and U.S. forces would limit their attacks strictly to military targets. There are even those in my community who accept the prospect of collateral damage if it means the Islamic Republic might ultimately collapse. This mindset is profoundly dangerous. For decades, the Iranian regime has invoked the men it lost during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–

unlike in 2003, this time the U.S. administration is not even claiming to intervene on humanitarian grounds.

Since its inception in 1980, the Islamic Republic has never seen a day without US intervention. The West supplied weapons to both Iran and Iraq for mutual destruction for eight years and imposed crippling sanctions that –according to the administration itself– have accomplished their stated objective of creating enough economic misery to destabilize the regime. The presidency of the reformist president Mohammad Khatami coincided with a George W. Bush administration whose callous military misadventures gave Iran geopolitical openings while foreclosing diplomatic pathways for change. Obama’s 2015 nuclear deal was a welcome aberration and even then it did not last long as Trump withdrew from it in 2018. In sum, we never gave diplomacy a chance, and yet the US claims this war is the result of exhausted diplomatic efforts.

Iranian society is dynamic and complex, and in no way it is fundamentally different from the United States. Iranian youth, much like their counterparts in places such as Hong Kong, Egypt, and the United States, confront a militarized state that shows little regard for collective dignity and insatiable appetite for money and power. For a population to throw up one’s hands and say “well, we tried, just bomb us already” is therefore not an act of courage but the greatest abdication of collective responsibility—a symptom of an impoverished civic imagination. And to ask the same power that has economically strangled Iran to save us through their bombs is a stuff of Orwellian fiction.

6. Are there any other topics related to these current events that you wish were being discussed more broadly?

I have lived in the United States since I was eighteen, during which time the country has transformed itself into an oligarchic police state at home and a rogue actor abroad. Consider, for example, the carpet bombing of the Ayatollah’s compound, which also killed his granddaughter and daughter-in-law. The casual ease with which this callous act is justified by labeling the Ayatollah an “evil man” is terrifying. Is “evil” a legal loophole we didn’t know about? Who gets to decide who is evil and who is not so evil? This sends a clear message that international norms and laws are only for weak nations—that the United States need not follow them. The truth is that we have never followed the legal apparatus put in place after World War II to prevent the horrors of the Holocaust. Our motto has always been “might is right,” the Trump administration is only more frank about it.

The world has changed in the wake of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran. One thing seems increasingly clear: the cheerleaders of today’s war will later warn about a “caravan of Iranian refugees” supposedly arriving to invade the nation. While I do not begrudge any of my suffering compatriots celebrating the downfall of a brutal dictator at the hands of a far greater bully, history suggests that the only actors ultimately left dancing on the global stage will be weapons manufacturers and oil industry executives. If change begins with a supposition of violence, it will undoubtedly end with more of the same.

The spectacle of imperial violence is also designed to demoralize a generation of youth all over this beautiful planet who dare to dream of a different system. To them I say: do not despair and work toward positive change at any level you can. US and Israeli bombs exhibit the sheer fragility of a morally bankrupt capitalist system that requires a militarized and police apparatus to maintain its operation and

1988) to justify cracking down on dissent years after the war had ended. In effect, the regime has argued that any sacrifice at home is justified if it preserves the state. Yet some of its most ardent opponents now accept the same logic in reverse: that widespread bloodshed and ecological destruction are acceptable if it leads to the regime's downfall.

The greatest victims in such a scenario are civilians and the infrastructure on which their lives depend. The more bombs that fall, the further we move from the day when those responsible for atrocities against the Iranian people might be held accountable. The prospect of justice for Israeli or American war criminals is even more remote. No U.S. president has ever been tried for war crimes, and it is difficult to imagine that changing anytime soon. A generation growing up amid bombed-out cities and shattered institutions will inevitably internalize the lesson that might makes right—and when people reach that conclusion, they often attempt to take justice into their own hands. It is impunity and brute force that radicalize people, not religious scripture in a vacuum.

4. What should people understand about the recent military strikes in Iran?

This war would have been unthinkable just two and a half years ago. Following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel—backed in every way by the United States—launched a genocidal military campaign in Gaza, while simultaneously carrying out routine bombardment and incursions in Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank, and conducting military strikes linked to confrontations with Iran and Yemen. While many international organizations and genocide scholars—including Israeli ones—have credibly accused Israel of genocide, the state has faced no legal, political, or financial consequences for the targeted killing of journalists, the starvation of children, and the widespread destruction of civilian life in Gaza. Amnesty International, for example, concluded in a major report that Israel's actions amount to genocide under international law. The absence of accountability inevitably breeds further violence and extremism.

In effect, Western policy has incentivized Israel to favor perpetual war over diplomacy and conflict management over conflict resolution. Washington has long framed Iran as the central monster directing a network of proxy forces that spread terrorism across the region. Yet this narrative is as simplistic as it is politically convenient for Western elites. Remove Iran from the equation and groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas would still have legitimate and unresolved grievances with Israel and the United States. To place the blame squarely on Iran obscures the material and political conditions that gave rise to these armed movements and misrepresents their political aims. It is then no surprise that US politicians routinely invoke civilizational narratives, instead of clearly outlined and attainable military and political objectives. The rhetoric of civilizational clashes seek to shore up unquestioned obedience along national and cultural divides.

5. How might this conflict affect Iran's ongoing internal tensions and protest movements?

Today, millions of American voters feel deeply disempowered by the ongoing dismantling of democratic institutions here at home. Yet who among them would seriously advocate for their country to be bombarded by a foreign power? We know that the struggle to save our warming planet and our suffering communities from extractive industries and their greed—among them the military-industrial complex—depends on a vibrant and resilient civil society. Bombs cannot deliver that kind of transformation. And

paper over its glaring contradictions. The system has always been on life support. After Gaza, it is no longer possible to ignore that.

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Shape of Extinction: Poems by Bijan Jalali (Winner of 2025 Lios Roth Persian Translation Prize in Modern Poetry)



[Mec-2] More Notes on Iran War

5 messages

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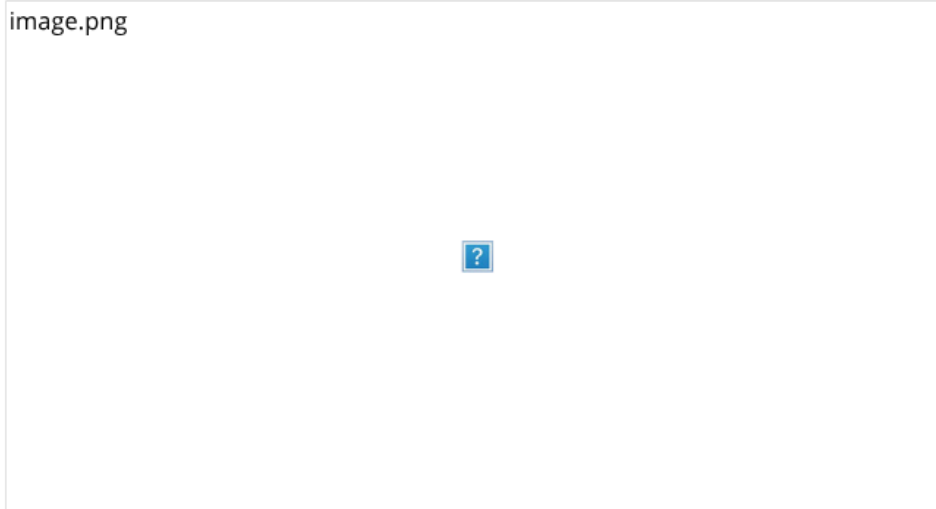
Wed, Mar 18 at 3:39 PM

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Dear All,

Given that this war shows no signs of stopping, you will continue to hear from me. Plus, Twitter has specifically solicited my views:



This Twitter account's fixation with my nationality and political views aside, I agree that understanding Iran for every American is critical right now. But we must first interrogate the dominant discourse that has produced knowledge of Iran. For decades, producing knowledge about Iran has meant the creation of false hysteria and anti-Iranian hatred by an American-Israeli war ecosystem. To arrive at a nuanced understanding of Iran, let us bury the following myths once and for all:

- That the Islamic Republic was either pursuing a nuclear bomb or that they were perpetually two weeks away from a bomb (Iranians do procrastinate after all) was always BS.

Should Iran not emerge as a failed state (and that is a big if right now), the new iteration of the Islamic Republic will look back at Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa against making an atomic bomb, which was annulled by his death, as a grave mistake. Let's not forget that it was Israel that set off a nuclear arms race in the region by acquiring nuclear bombs, having deliberately lied to two US administrations, and for aiding India to acquire theirs. See [Kicking the Hornet's Nest: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East from Truman to Trump](#).
- A cadre of voices ranging from so-called pundits to national security experts to politicians, most of whom had never set foot in Iran, lied to the world about Iran's threat to the US with discipline and conviction for years. They were rarely ever challenged in their views by the American media, which increasingly works as an extension of the US-Israeli empire. Deception of the American public is a connective tissue that binds both Republican and Democratic administrations together (Examples are many, but look at [The Afghanistan Papers](#) which chronicles how every US president from Bush to Trump lied to the public about the objectives and progress of the US invasion of Afghanistan).

- Casualties: 176,000–212,000+ direct deaths, including over 46,000 Afghan civilians. The conflict also claimed the lives of roughly 66,000–69,000 Afghan military/police, over 84,000 Taliban fighters, and 2,448–2,459 U.S. service members.
- That the current war is against the Islamic Republic is not supported by facts on the ground. In fact, Iran -the people, their [cultural heritage](#), their ecology, and their civilian infrastructure-- is currently in an [existential](#) battle. Israel just cannot stop committing acts of terrorism: they've targeted Iran's oil depot (below) and more recently its gas fields. Israeli actions tell us that they seek the destruction of the state, not just its ruling class.
 - Note: the US framed Saddam Hussein's bombardment of Kuwait's oil infrastructure, which led to acid rain on civilians, as a war crime. White House couldn't be reached for comments.

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image.png



- Crimes of ecocide: Over the past two years, Israel's genocide in Gaza has caused environmental damage on the scale of an entire country's annual pollution: tens of millions of tons of greenhouse gases—comparable to putting millions of extra cars on the road for a year—have been emitted, with even more expected from rebuilding. On the ground, the destruction has left behind tens of

millions of tons of toxic rubble, widespread contamination of water and soil, and the collapse of farmland and energy systems. In simple terms, the air has been heavily polluted, the land reduced to hazardous debris, clean water severely compromised, and the ecological damage will last for decades.

- That this war is necessary to prevent future bloodshed by a nuclear bomb seeking theocratic regime in Tehran is an obscene perversion of the reality we see before our eyes: bloodshed by two nuclear armed states which are acting entirely outside legal and international norms.
 - This is the same logic that justifies keeping millions of Palestinians under a brutal regime of apartheid because they claim that one day Palestinians will drive all Jewish Israelis into the sea. #ColonialLogic
- Israeli scholar [Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin](#) has argued that Zionism as a political movement cannot be understood without Orientalism. The idea that Iranians are irrational and deeply ideological (read: suicidal) is a clear example of Hasbara's* reliance on Orientalist tropes. When it comes to religious fundamentalism, the US, Israel, and Iran differ only in degrees to which religion governs domestic and foreign policy.
 - [*Hasbara](#) : Israel's public diplomacy, strategic communication, and public opinion management aimed at influencing foreign perceptions, particularly in Western countries
 - From the outset, the Islamic Republic's approach to Shi'a theology has fundamentally been transactional and political, as opposed to pure and disciplined. A student of Khomeini and a key figure during the revolution of 1978-79, [Ayatollah Montazeri](#) was the architect of Velayat-e faqih or the Guardianship of Islamic Jurists which confers Islamic jurists political authority (given that the twelfth Imam is like some UW students: showed up first day of class and was never seen again). Guardianship of the Jurist is contested among Shi'a clerics and forms the most anti-democratic element of the Islamic Republic. Before his death, Ayatollah Montazeri came out against his own thesis and paid a big price for his opposition to Khomeini's theocratic rule.
 - While religion plays an integral role in Iranian politics, the Islamic Republic has shown itself to be theologically flexible and transactional in their foreign policy. The regime has talked a big talk on organizing Iranian society according to Islamic notions of fairness and equity, but it has created a thoroughly capitalist economy riddled with monopolies, corruption, and mismanagement. Revolutionary in rhetoric, but not in form.
 - US sanctions have only helped the regime consolidate more power and wealth. IRGC has been the biggest beneficiary of US military misadventures and regime of sanctions. Through sanctions, the US has ensured the longevity of the Islamic Republic as an ideal boogeyman.
 - We label Iran's behavior and actions in the region as "Islamic terrorism" without any thought. In the spirit of consistency, how are we to understand and frame the following facts?
 1. Trump was blessed by evangelicals in the Oval Office before the war
 2. US officials cannot stop making religious assertions that frame the war as a crusade
 3. US army is riddled with Christian extremists who invoke messianic messaging
 - [Intercept reports.](#)

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- Do these examples point to "Christian fundamentalism"? Isn't the violence created by this religious vision "Christian/Zionist terrorism" in nature? That is not to say that there is little scholarly value in studying Islamic fundamentalism, but we must also recognize that Islamic fundamentalism often serves as a free-standing category that brings into a single field of equivalence a wide range of theological and social movements each of which is rooted in different material conditions. It suits Zionists to always shift the narrative to Islamic fundamentalism and the terrorism it produces, rather than take a modicum of responsibility for ethnic cleansing, genocide (both incremental and post Oct. 7), ecocide, and displacement. Their wrath, Zionists claim, is rooted in an irrational and deeply-seated hatred for all Jews, and not remotely related to dispossession and displacement.

Those of you who know me know that I've been struggling with severe psoriasis on my hands. The past two and a half weeks have made my condition much worse. I am now taking a strong steroid designed to prevent my body from producing too many skin cells. My/our physical condition is never divorced from our planetary condition. Ultimately, I understand Zionism as cancerous, a potentially fatal outgrowth in our planetary body: multiplying uncontrollably, invading healthy tissues, spreading, disrupting organs, stealing nutrients, and ultimately shutting vital systems down. The steroid will provide momentary relief but it is not sustainable because it is attacking my body in order to suppress the psoriasis. I reflect on my hands *and* the state of our world: how do I attack this disease without targeting my entire body? Is it possible to take away the T-cells' power to do damage instead of killing bad and good blood cells alike? This is the question facing us right now. Iran is teaching us that while we are no match for the spectacular violence that the US/Israel possess and inflict on our warming planet, it is possible to target this system's most vulnerable area: its reliance on fossil fuels. This type of framing is essential to fight the myopic framing that does so much violence to our collective imagination. Let's ask: How will this war be understood in fifty years? The flimsy and obscenely hypocritical foundation upon which the war is being waged does not even survive a week-long scrutiny, let alone fifty years of reflection.

I want you all to understand your privilege as educated people with a platform. Everyday the US/Israel set terrifying precedents, but academia is always very slow and conservative in how it responds and readjusts to new realities. I intend to meet this moment with the urgency it demands. This war is not on Iran alone, it is a war on the Global Majority. It is a war on the rules-based international order, in spite of its rootedness in US primacy. Let's also be clear that being a regime in the Global South doesn't absolve anyone of crimes against humanity, and I hope to God that one day those responsible for the killing of young, innocent Iranians face trials for their crimes in Iranian courts (as opposed to facing the blind wrath of the Israeli killing machine). In fact, the Islamic Republic could only exist in a world where one's place in the hierarchy of nations determines which laws and norms apply to you and which ones do not.

The Islamic Republic operates in very similar fashion to the US/Israel, albeit on a much smaller scale. As such, Iran poses a real danger to its population and ecology while the US/Israel pose a planetary threat. To combat the latter, we

need to understand how two economies --military and linguistic-- work harmoniously: the latter presents certain groups as less than human while the former enacts that vision in material ways. Our ability to rein in the economy of militarism requires building a democracy, but we can get a massive head start on creating a new, anti-colonial economy of language. This is no small challenge, particularly given that our [university](#) increasingly behaves like a marketing firm for AI. And I am supposed to promote the use of AI/ChatGPT in my teaching and forget that Israeli/American bombs were directed by ChatGPT to destroy Tehran. There are fewer and fewer places where these conversations can be had, and I am glad that MEC can play a small role in shaping critical dialogues. "Otherwise, why have MEC at all?," whoever writes these tweets has common sense. Warmly, Aria --
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