Twelve Days of War: How Iran's Master Plan Was Thwarted

By David Bensoussan
Professor of Science, University of Quebec

A Regional Firestorm Narrowly Averted

The Middle East has just weathered a military storm of historic proportions. Over the course of twelve tense days, a long-dreaded escalation nearly plunged the region into uncontrollable chaos. Yet, against the odds and prevailing expectations, a catastrophic scenario was narrowly avoided.

Iran's Grand Strategy Undone

For years, Iran has pursued an aggressive agenda, both rhetorically and strategically. The slogan "Death to Israel," chanted in its streets and echoed through its institutions, evolved into a detailed offensive plan. This vision called for a multi-front assault: 150,000 missiles from Hezbollah in Lebanon, 20,000 more from Gaza, coordinated actions from the Houthis in Yemen, and support from militias in Syria, Iraq, and the West Bank.

However, the Hamas-led assault on October 7, 2023, proved premature and set off a chain of failures. Hezbollah faced stiff losses, Hamas was severely weakened in Gaza, U.S.-UK airstrikes battered Houthi positions, and instability gripped Syria's regime. The unraveling of Iran's alliances and its growing isolation dealt a severe blow to the Islamic Republic's strategy.

A Devastating Blow to Iran

The military cost for Iran has been staggering. Israeli strikes reportedly destroyed 80% of Iran's air defense systems. Several senior generals and a dozen nuclear scientists were assassinated in targeted operations, a testament to Israel's formidable intelligence capabilities. Key nuclear facilities—Natanz, Fordow, Isfahan, and Arak—suffered damage, with the underground site at Fordow hit by American bunker-buster bombs.

Of the 300 missiles launched by Iran toward Israel, 90% were intercepted. The remaining ones caused destruction and left 15,000 Israelis homeless. Yet the feared collapse of the global economy never materialized. China, heavily

dependent on Iranian oil and invested in Gulf stability, likely pressured Tehran not to block the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Hezbollah: The Shifting Landscape in Lebanon

Once dominant in Lebanon, Hezbollah is facing an unprecedented crisis. Previously muffled dissent is now emerging across Christian and Muslim communities alike. Even among Lebanese Shiites, there is growing resentment toward Iran for not intervening directly during Hezbollah's confrontation with Israel.

Despite retaining around 10% of its missile stockpile, Hezbollah has refused to transfer its weapons to the national army. Southern Lebanon, now littered with destroyed arms depots and debris, risks becoming a de facto buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon.

Sunni States: Outward Condemnation, Inward Relief

Several Sunni-majority countries have officially condemned Israel's strikes on Iran. But behind closed doors, the mood is different. Media and political cartoons in those same countries express quiet satisfaction. Saudi Arabia, eager to stabilize the region and advance normalization with Israel, has made two demands: Syria's return to the Arab diplomatic fold, and the creation of a Palestinian state.

Syria: A Strategic Front

Observers question whether Syria's rebranded leadership—once at the helm of jihadist factions—truly seeks peace or even has control over the militias it once commanded. These militias bear responsibility for brutal acts against the Druze population. Israel, unwilling to take chances, now considers the Hermon Heights a strategic advantage for regional airspace control.

Heavy Syrian weaponry has been systematically targeted in southern Syria, considered a critical corridor to block jihadist or even Turkish military buildup. Meanwhile, Syrian Druze, long persecuted, now find a protective ally in Israel. Recent Israeli strikes on Damascus were framed as a response to atrocities committed against this community—a clear message to Syria's leadership.

Yemen: The Irrational Front

The Houthi insurgency, despite devastating losses to its military and economic infrastructure, continues to fire missiles at Israel. In a recent development, Yemeni Republican forces intercepted two Iranian vessels carrying weapons and missiles, along with Farsi-language documents—undeniable proof of Tehran's direct involvement.

Gaza: The Unfinished Battle

In Gaza, Israel remains focused on dismantling Hamas's underground infrastructure while seeking to protect the lives of remaining hostages. True to form, Hamas refuses any ceasefire. It continues indoctrinating its population with martyrdom rhetoric, stores weapons in civilian sites, bars access to tunnels, diverts humanitarian aid, and fires at Israeli civilians, vowing to persist.

Delivering aid without Hamas interference remains a complex challenge. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority—having twice rejected peace agreements and still promoting incitement—is silent and discredited, particularly among Palestinians weary of corruption.

Israel also struggles with flare-ups in the West Bank, where settlements have created volatile tensions.

A Lopsided Media Narrative

Western media overwhelmingly spotlight Palestinian suffering in Gaza, often ignoring the trauma inflicted on Israelis. A case in point: Iran's missile strike on Beer-Sheva's Soroka hospital barely drew headlines. Hamas's "Ministry of Health" figures are echoed uncritically, while the UN—often seen as biased by virtue of automatic anti-Israel voting blocs—suffers increasing loss of credibility, particularly in contrast with its muted response to dozens of global conflicts.

Historical Context: A Broader Lens on Civilian Casualties

Modern conflicts, tragically, are never without civilian losses. But public memory often proves selective. Few recall the 100,000 lives lost in a single night during Allied bombings of Dresden or Tokyo in World War II. Civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan far exceed those currently reported in Gaza.

A Harsh Awakening

The Gaza war narrative has reignited antisemitic tropes across the West. Simplistic, moralizing media portrayals of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict fuel resentment and hatred. The Iranian regime's continued incitement—still shouting for Israel's destruction—defies reason. Israel, for its part, treats the threat with utmost seriousness and vigilance.

Between Vigilance and Hope

Israel remains alert, aware that Iran's leadership is anything but peaceful, and that biased international forums are quick to condemn it unilaterally. The country's priority remains ensuring that the horrors of October 7 are never repeated.

One fragile hope endures: that the peace of hearts will one day precede the peace of arms.