



Iran war reality check: Why the US miscalculated Tehran's political resilience?

America tried to break Tehran; instead, it exposed its own miscalculation

Published 12 March 2026 12:11



By **Farhad Ibragimov** – lecturer at the Faculty of Economics at RUDN University, visiting lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration



RT composite. © Getty Images / Bill Pugliano; Majid Saeedi

For almost two weeks now, the US and Israel have been waging war on Iran. What Washington initially presented as a military campaign that would swiftly alter the strategic balance and put Tehran in a vulnerable position has proven to be far more complex. Over the past months, the White House has maintained that Iran could be on the brink of total defeat by the end of the first, or at most, the second day of a conflict. Apparently, the American side expected a rapid dismantling of Iran's capabilities and a serious destabilization of its government. However, recent developments tell a different story.

How Iran is holding up

Despite immense pressure, Iran did not show signs of systemic collapse and managed to maintain the operation of key state institutions, military infrastructure, and governance mechanisms. Moreover, the current situation indicates that Washington's initial

calculations were overly optimistic and failed to account for several fundamental factors that underpin Iran's resilience. This resilience is particularly remarkable considering that on the first day of the war, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was assassinated.

The US thought the Iranian regime was severely weakened and would collapse like a house of cards under a significant blow. According to this logic, eliminating the supreme leader would trigger a chain reaction: Elites would lose coordination, institutions would become dysfunctional, and the state structure would rapidly disintegrate. The scenario was supposed to resemble the events of 2003 in Iraq, where the destruction of central authority led to a swift disintegration of state institutions and a prolonged period of systemic crisis.

Yet, the events in Iran reveal a fundamentally different picture. State institutions continue to operate. Key government bodies remain active, decision-making processes are functioning, and the system has not spiraled out of control. This suggests that the political framework of the Islamic Republic relies not solely on individual leadership but also on a robust institutional architecture capable of ensuring stability even amid conflict.

Furthermore, the Assembly of Experts – a deliberative body responsible for selecting the supreme leader – has appointed Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as the new supreme leader. This indicates the stable operation of the institutional continuity of power.

Today, Iran faces yet another stress test in its modern history. The country's political system has encountered serious challenges before – from the devastating Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s to decades of sanctions, international isolation, and regional crises. Each of these periods tested the durability of the institutional framework established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This model combines religious-political legitimacy with a robust security apparatus and a sufficiently flexible governance structure, allowing it to adapt to external pressures.

The current crisis serves as another test of the structure's resilience. As the events unfold, it's becoming evident that America's expectations for quickly achieving its strategic objectives have been misguided. The US faces many challenges that it appears to have underestimated in its initial plans to pressure Iran. If this crisis is resolved without a major upheaval, it will further demonstrate that the state model created after the Islamic Revolution is very resilient. Moreover, these types of trials often lead to the opposite effect in the long run, strengthening internal unity and enhancing the political system.

Many of these factors were obvious to countries that have an extensive experience of dealing with Iran. For example, Russia and China, which maintain close political and economic ties with Tehran, understand the nuances of the Iranian political system, its capacity for mobilization in the face of external threats, and its high level of institutional stability. That's why experts in these countries have maintained a much more measured and realistic view of the prospects for coercive pressure on Iran.

What is Washington's miscalculation?

The rhetoric of the American leadership also leads us to another important observation. A closer look at Trump's statements – both his social media posts and public speeches – reveals a sense of noticeable political and emotional turbulence within his administration. Firstly, the inconsistency of the statements issued by the White House stands out. Since the start of the conflict, we have seen sharp shifts in US rhetoric. Initially, US officials declared that the strategic objective of the pressure campaign against Iran was regime change. Subsequent statements suggested that the focus was solely on “*demilitarization*” and the limitation of Iran's military capabilities. This was followed by new hints about the need to transform Iran's political system. And then, the rhetoric shifted towards emotional outbursts and insulting remarks directed at both the nation and its political framework, as well as specific members of the Iranian leadership.

This evolving discourse creates a palpable sense of uncertainty. And it's not just about Trump. Similar inconsistencies can be seen in the statements of key officials in his administration. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth have repeatedly issued contradictory messages over the past week: First asserting one position, then adjusting the wording, only to present entirely different interpretations of America's objectives in Iran shortly afterward. These constant shifts in rhetoric inevitably give the impression of a lack of a clear strategy. The more Trump insists that the situation is developing successfully and is fully under control, the starker the contrast between this narrative and reality.

A telling example was Trump's attempt to draw a parallel between Iran and Venezuela. This comparison fails under scrutiny, as these countries have fundamentally different political structures. Clearly, the White House, inspired by what it perceived as a successful strategy in the case of Nicolas Maduro's kidnapping, hoped to apply a similar approach to Tehran. The assumption was that by creating external pressure and supporting internal destabilization, a swift collapse of the regime could be achieved. However, this thinking reveals a significant misunderstanding of Iranian statehood. If these miscalculations formed the basis of America's expectations, the repercussions could be quite severe for US policy in the Middle East.

Even in the face of threats from the US and Israel regarding potential strikes against the country's leadership, the Iranian elites show no signs of panic or political paralysis. Equally important is the broader strategic context. Over decades of pressure on Iran, the US employed virtually every tool of external influence: Extensive sanctions, diplomatic isolation, attempts to exploit ethnic tensions, and efforts to initiate a color revolution. None of these strategies have yielded the results Washington anticipated.

In this context, the current aggression can be seen not as a display of strength and dominance by the US, but rather as an indication of America's weakness. When economic, political, and information tools fail to achieve the desired results, military action becomes the last resort. In other words, the ongoing aggression against Iran increasingly appears less like a show of confidence and more like a sign that the old model of US global dominance is

facing significant limitations. As these constraints become more evident, the rhetoric of the US leadership grows more anxious and contradictory.

Clearly, Washington's initial expectations for a quick weakening of Iran are not being realized. Rather, the current situation suggests that the Islamic Republic is undergoing a serious trial and is poised to demonstrate its resilience in the face of external aggression.

Article printed from RT.com: [**https://www.rt.com**](https://www.rt.com)

URL to article: [**https://www.rt.com/news/634592-iran-war-reality-check/**](https://www.rt.com/news/634592-iran-war-reality-check/)