

Destabilization of Iran as one of the “12-Day War” goals

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The future of the fragile ceasefire reached by Israel and Iran with the “*participation*” of the United States is difficult to predict. On the one hand, both warring states have an equal need for it, given the noticeable depletion of forces and means for further active military operations, as well as the need to restore critical infrastructure damaged during the two-week exchange of missile and bomb strikes. However, on the other hand, the situation remains extremely tense, and any provocation by the parties themselves or from outside could give rise to a new round of escalation. Thus, the war in the Middle East has not been stopped, but frozen, and the further course of events will depend on a number of objective and subjective factors.

However, even taking into account the continuing high probability of a resumption of hostilities, it can already be concluded that Tel Aviv’s strategy of promoting internal destabilization in Iran has not worked, and is unlikely to justify itself in the future, after the current respite ends.

The present discussion pertains to the Israeli side’s attempts to destabilize the internal political situation in Iran in parallel with military strikes, given the discontent that has accumulated in this country over decades with problems of a socio-political and ethno-social nature. Many experts on recent Middle Eastern events hypothesize that Israel initially aimed to dismantle Tehran’s “*nuclear program*” and high-tech military capabilities. Simultaneously, they sought to foster a widespread uprising among the populace dissatisfied with the political regime by neutralizing Iran’s military and political leadership. In essence, this approach was the cornerstone of the entire anti-Iranian campaign, since Tel Aviv recognized that without a civil war and the dismantling of the state system from within, it would be impossible to neutralize the “*Iranian threat*”. It is technically impossible to prevent Tehran from continuing work on its nuclear program while the ruling theocratic regime remains in the country, and the Jewish State does not have sufficient resources and potential to wage a protracted war of attrition with the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Consequently, the original plan for the attack assumed the detonation of accumulated public discontent with the government and the beginning of an anti-government struggle, up to and including its transfer to the stage of armed confrontation.

A thorough examination of statements made by Israeli politicians and experts, as well as monitoring of the Israeli media publications during the recent military actions, allows us to conclude that Tel Aviv was counting on the possibility of an uprising in major Iranian cities by anti-clerical societal elements, liberal youth, students, supporters of the restoration of the monarchy and the most socially vulnerable strata of the population. However, the main expectation of the Israelis was the revival of ethnic separatist movements in Iran, represented mainly by activists and militants from among the Turkik people of Northern Iran, Kurds and Baluchis. According to Israeli insider sources, Tel Aviv was confident that the national minorities, “*infringed in rights and freedoms*”, would organize protests against the Iranian authorities, and after the brutal methods of suppressing these demonstrations by law enforcement agencies, they would take up arms.

The need for an uprising by the Iranian opposition and the masses dissatisfied with the authorities has been personally stated on several occasions by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, openly signaling that the Jewish State is providing them with a window of opportunity, since *“The ruling Iranian regime has never been so weak”*¹. B. Netanyahu and other politicians tried not to specify the addressees of their appeals. But soon after the first Israeli calls it became clear to which social and political circles Tel Aviv was appealing and with whom it was possibly cooperating in organizing mass riots and armed anti-government demonstrations.

Among the earliest supporters of Israeli calls was Shahzadeh Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian Shah who was deposed in 1979². He, in turn, also declared the need to overthrow *“the criminal clerical regime”*, assuring that he has a *“100-day plan”* of actions. On June 15, 2025 Mahmudali Chohraganli, a former member of the Iranian Majlis, who is now a dissident living in the United States, and who is considered in the West to be the leader of the so-called *“National Awakening Movement of South Azerbaijan”* (GAMOH), came up with a call to prepare an armed uprising in the so-called *“South Azerbaijan”*³. M. Chohraganly directly stated the need to speak out against Iranian statehood, to undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The day before Chohraganly's speech, a similar message was delivered by the leader of the *“Kurdistan Freedom Party”* (RAK) Hussein Yazdanpana. Analogous statements were made by *“Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan”* (PDKI), a Kurdish group *“Komala”*, and as well as by the Iranian branch of the *“Kurdistan Workers' Party”* (PKK), also known as the *“Free Life Party of Kurdistan”* (PJAK)⁴. Although all these Kurdish forces hold diametrically opposed views on the future structure of Iran and, accordingly, on the status of its Kurdish-populated regions, they all spoke in a unanimous tone about the need for an armed uprising. Simultaneously with the above-mentioned forces, the largest Baloch group in Iran, *“Jaish al-Adl”*, also voiced its stance, expressing its readiness to *“extend a fraternal and friendly hand to all Iranian peoples, especially Balochistan, as well as to the resistance forces who want to unite on the path to freedom”*⁵. According to some reports, during the days of the Israeli attacks, *“Jaish al-Adl”* had already managed to distinguish itself with a number of military actions and attempts to seize settlements in Iranian Balochistan.

Consequently, monitoring the statements and stated positions of the Iranian opposition and radical ethnic rebel groups based both in the territory of the IRI and beyond

¹ “Netanyahu calls on Iranians to rise up against the government”. DW (in Rus.), 13.06.2025, <https://www.dw.com/ru/netanahu-prizval-irancev-k-vosstaniyu-protiv-pravitelstva/a-72904029> (download date: 25.06.2025).

² “Former Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi Calls on Iranians to Revolt: ‘Time to Take Back Iran’”. Lechaim (in Rus.), 18.06.2025, <https://lechaim.ru/news/eks-naslednyj-prints-reza-pehlevi-prizval-irantsev-k-vosstaniyu-pora-vernut-iran/> (download date: 25.06.2025).

³ “Maiden Tower”: Former Majlis deputy calls on Iranian Azerbaijanis to start fighting for separation from Iran”. News.am (in Rus.), 15.06.2025, <https://news.am/rus/news/888352.html/> (download date: 25.06.2025).

⁴ “Israel's allies in Iran have become more active: ‘We are ready to launch an offensive...’”. Haqqin.az, 17.06.2025, <https://haqqin.az/news/351527> (download date: 26.06.2025).

⁵ “Internal resistance is growing in Iran: Baloch, Kurds and opposition welcome Israeli strikes”. Lechaim (in Rus.), 16.06.2025, <https://lechaim.ru/news/v-irane-usilivaetsya-vnutrennee-soprotivlenie-beludzhi-kurdy-i-oppozitsiya-privetstvuyut-udary-izrailya/> (download date: 26.06.2025).

its borders may indicate that Tel Aviv had deliberately carried out preparatory work with them. The statements issued by the leaders of these forces were hardly spontaneous, since they were conceived within the framework of a comprehensive impact on the domestic political situation and security of the country. However, as can be seen, the tactic of engaging all opposition forces at once became the reason for Tel Aviv's failure. Israel dispersed its resources in working with the complex Iranian opposition field, without placing its main stake on any one of the factions and without concentrating its main efforts on interaction with such a force, as a result of which the ethnic separatist groups, in fact, limited themselves to loud calls, while the socio-political opposition movements did not accept with optimism the idea of an inclusive uprising in the conditions of Israeli bombings.

The fact is that the separatists, for the most part, advocate the fragmentation of the IRI and its disintegration into national entities, while the political factions opposed to the "*Clerical regime*" do not accept changes to the country's borders or the possibility of its federalization. All Iranian political parties with liberal democratic views, monarchists, communists and, especially, left-wing radical popular forces led by such an anti-government group as "*Mujahideen-e Khalq*" are against such a perspective⁶. Thus, the only thing that unites the motley palette of Iran's opposition and separatists is their rejection of the ruling regime, while they hold opposing views on plans to reorganize the country. In the context of such fundamental contradictions, the bet on a general uprising not only did not work, but also had the opposite effect: Iranian society consolidated against the backdrop of American-Israeli attacks and the *de facto* calls for the collapse of statehood. In turn, various factions of the political opposition immediately distanced themselves from ethnic separatist movements, declaring that otherwise their activism would be perceived not as a struggle against the regime, but as collaborationism and an attack on Iranian sovereignty.

According to Iranian sources, from the first days of the Balochis' activation, the IRI law enforcement bodies conducted local counter-terrorist operations in the south of the country, which helped to avoid large-scale separatist demonstrations and mass riots. Also, in a short time, a number of Kurdish activists from the structures of the RAK paramilitary group, whose headquarters are located in Erbil, Iraq, were arrested on Iranian territory. In turn, supporters of the self-proclaimed Kurdish general H. Yazdanpan were unable to create any tangible problems for the Iranian security forces in the northwest of the country.

Additionally, external factors arose that impeded the organization of ethnic uprisings in northern Iran. Specifically, the increased activity of Kurdish parties in Iran was a source of concern for Ankara. Turkey perceived this as a potential consolidation of the Kurdish influence in the region, which it regarded as a direct threat to its own security. The Kurdish uprising in Iran could also disrupt the process of Ankara's "*reconciliation*" with the PKK, as well as measures to disarm this organization on the territory of Turkey⁷. Perhaps this is partly why, during the days of the Israeli bombing of Iran, the proposal for an alliance that

⁶ Tsukanov P., "With all the wealth of choice: why the Iranian opposition missed the chance for revenge". Forbes (in Rus.), 25.06.2025, <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya/540362-pri-vsem-bogatstve-vybora-pocemu-iranskaa-oppozicia-upustila-sans-na-revans> (download date: 26.06.2025).

⁷ "Now Kurds are preparing for Iranian Kurdistan. What is Turkey doing?" Haqqin.az (in Rus.), 20.06.2025, <https://haqqin.az/news/351764> (download date: 27.06.2025).

the Kurdish group PJAK made to the “*Iranian Azerbaijanis*” remained unanswered⁸. It is possible that Ankara and Baku, which have a certain influence and connections with Turkic separatist groups in Iran, torpedoed the PJAK initiative, fearing that a joint Kurdish-Turkic uprising would, firstly, be suppressed by Tehran, and secondly, would cause unprecedented tension in Tehran’s relations with Baku and Ankara.

To summarize the above, we can conclude that the “*12-Day War*” launched by Israel against Iran convincingly answered questions that have been the subject of debate among analysts for many years: how will opposition factions and society react to external military strikes on the country and how prepared is the “*Iranian theocratic regime*” to save the country from sliding into a civil war? The course of events showed that, contrary to the expectations of external forces, no widespread manifestations of collaborationism were observed in Iran. Furthermore, attempts by individual separatist groups and parties to initiate organized anti-government protests, due to a number of objective and subjective reasons, did not find widespread support among Iranian ethnic minorities.

And it was precisely this circumstance that, in many ways, contributed to the suspension of hostilities on the part of Israel and the United States, which, according to experts, lost the “*strategic vision*” of the further actions against the IRI. It is also widely believed that despite the death of the most authoritative commanders from among the Army Command and the leadership of the Special Services, the loss of a significant part of the military infrastructure and significant damage caused to the “*nuclear program*”, Iran emerged from this stage of the war stronger and more organized in terms of internal consolidation.

Tehran also gained the opportunity to conduct a new inventory, both domestically and abroad, of political forces and movements that had declared their positions and thus became predictable should the “*frozen war*” enter its next and decisive phase.

Certainly, Tehran will take into account all the contours of the domestic political disposition, as well as the behavior of countries and international centers of power that have already manifested themselves, in accordance with which Iran, as Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated, will certainly “*adjust its foreign policy*”⁹.

⁸ “What did the Kurds offer to South Azerbaijan?” Haqqin.az (in Rus.), 23.06.2025, <https://haqqin.az/news/352092> (download date: 27.06.2025).

⁹ “Iran will adjust its foreign policy”. “Vestnik Kavkaza” (in Rus.), 27.06.2025, <https://vestnikavkaza.ru/news/iran-skorrektiruet-svou-vnesnuu-politiku.html> (download date: 27.06.2025).