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# Strategic Digest

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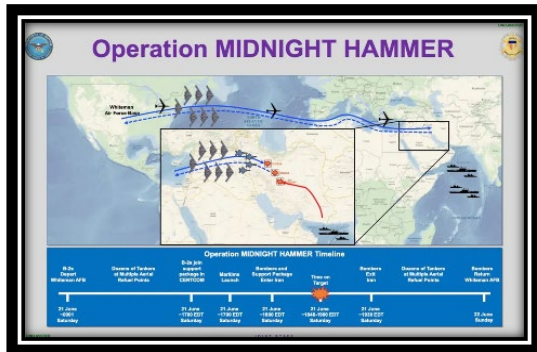
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## Israel's wars with Iran and Hamas- An Update

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched a pre-emptive attack on Iranian territory on June 13 to destroy its nuclear sites, military, and missile facilities. Israel's Operation Rising Lion, conducted between June 13 and 24, resulted in the deaths of several top military figures and nuclear scientists. In Iran, Israeli airstrikes have killed approximately 627 people. In response, Iran launched Operation True Promise 3, firing more than 550 missiles and around 1000 drones, which killed 28 people and displaced about 9000 in Israel due to home destruction. Iranian strikes caused damage to infrastructure, including the Haifa oil refinery, Ben-Gurion International Airport, Military Intelligence headquarters, IDF bases, air defense installations, electricity grids, and research institutions.



The US joined Israel on 22 June, attacking nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, and Esfahan. Iran retaliated the next day, launching 19 missiles at Qatar-based Al Udeid air base, causing minimal damage. On 24 June, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a total ceasefire. The minor escalation following the ceasefire halted after Trump's intervention. There have been contrary reports regarding the extent of damage to Iran's nuclear facilities. After the conflict, the Iranian parliament approved a bill to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Israel has continued its military strikes, and ground operations resumed in June. US Special Envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, presented a proposal in the last week of May that includes a 60-day ceasefire. Key points of the proposal are as follows:

- A cessation of military and surveillance aerial movements.
- Release of 10 living hostages and 18 deceased individuals from a total of 58 on days 1 and 7.
- Release of 125 prisoners serving life sentences, 1,111 detainees, and information regarding 180 deceased Gazans.
- Provision of humanitarian aid.
- Redeployment of forces in northern and southern Gaza, including the Netzarim corridor.
- Access to information regarding the status of hostages and prisoners.
- Negotiations concerning a permanent ceasefire, long-term security arrangements, and the situation following the conflict, as well as the status of remaining hostages.

Israeli cabinet members are deeply divided over the proposal. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, Settlement Minister Oril Strock, Diaspora Minister Amichai Chikli, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir oppose it. In contrast, Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has formally endorsed the proposal, likely anticipating its rejection by Hamas, which would help him avoid potential friction with the Donald Trump administration. Hamas has asserted its demands regarding the proposal, including a permanent ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli forces, and the formation of an independent technocratic governing committee.

IDF lost three soldiers on 3 June, four on 7 June, and seven on 25 June. The total number of Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza since 7 October has risen to 879. In June, IDF forces recovered the bodies of seven Israelis and one Thai national from Gaza. 148 hostages have been released, including eight deceased bodies. Israeli forces have retrieved eight living hostages and 49 bodies of others. Currently, 50 hostages, including 27 deceased bodies, remain in Gaza. Among foreign nationals, two Thai, one Nepali, and one deceased Tanzanian are still in captivity. According to Hamas-controlled health ministry reports, around 56,500 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's war on Hamas.

The US-backed organization Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) has been operational since May 27 to facilitate aid deliveries within the Gaza Strip. However, it has faced criticism for its approach to aid, particularly for requiring individuals to travel to distribution sites to receive food. This policy has resulted in tragic consequences, with over 500 Palestinians reported killed by IDF forces while gathering at these distribution points.

On 4 June, the US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an unconditional and permanent ceasefire, stating that the resolution would undermine diplomatic efforts to reach a ceasefire. The 12 June General Assembly resolution demanding a lasting ceasefire in Gaza passed with 149 states backing it. 19 states, including India, abstained from voting.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 5 June acknowledged that his government had activated some Palestinian clans providing arms to counter Hamas. These groups, amid Hamas's weakening power, regained freedom to act. Palestinian and aid workers have accused these groups of stealing supplies from trucks and conducting criminal activities. Abu Shabab militia, a self-proclaimed nationalist group, has come to light for helping secure shipments to GHF centres. Hamas, according to a statement, killed 50 fighters belonging to clans in recent months. IDF admitted engaging with Hamas fighters to assist Abu Shabab militia, seen as part of a calculated strategy to reduce IDF's military and administrative responsibilities in Gaza by nurturing local surrogate actors.

### **NATO's 2025 Summit: Unity on Display, Challenges beneath the Surface**

The NATO Summit of 2025, convened at a time of mounting geopolitical tensions and evolving global security dynamics, has been widely portrayed as a demonstration of alliance unity and strategic resolve. The summit was notably dominated by President Donald Trump, whose strong-arm tactics shaped both the agenda and



outcomes. One of the most significant outcomes of the summit was the agreement by NATO members to raise defence and security-related spending to 5 % of GDP by 2035, a sharp increase from the previous 2 % target. Trump hailed the defence spending agreement as a “big victory” for NATO, crediting it to his longstanding demands. Secretary General Mark Rutte and other leaders openly lavished praise on Trump, even using the nickname “daddy” in a highly orchestrated show of unity

This new two-tiered formula for enhanced 5% GDP expenditure on defence by NATO members includes 3.5 % GDP for core military needs—covering equipment, personnel, operations, and maintenance. And 1.5 % GDP would be allocated for broader security investments, such as critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, logistics, resilience, and modernisation. Despite a broad consensus on defence expenditure, several views of dissonance persisted.

The 2025 NATO Summit showcased a strong public display of unity. The reaffirmation of Article 5 collective defence was a central theme, and the commitment to stand firm against external threats appeared resolute. However, beneath this surface unity, significant divergences persist among member states. Spain officially refused to join the 5 % pledge, arguing it could meet commitments with just 2.1 % GDP and expressing concerns about welfare trade-offs. Other countries—Belgium, France, Italy—warned of economic strain in meeting the new target. Disagreements regarding the pace and scale of military support to Ukraine, varying national threat perceptions, and differences in strategic priorities between the United States and European allies subtly undermined the summit’s message of cohesion. Some Southern European countries, for example, expressed concerns that NATO’s eastern focus may neglect security challenges in the Mediterranean, such as instability in North Africa and the migration crisis.

Additionally, the growing transatlantic gap in strategic focus—with the U.S. increasingly balancing its commitments between Europe and the Indo-Pacific—casts doubt on the long-term durability of alliance solidarity. The summit’s declaration did not adequately address these underlying tensions or offer a mechanism for harmonising divergent regional priorities. Furthermore, simply achieving numerical spending targets does not guarantee the effective modernisation or interoperability of NATO forces. There is a risk that focusing on input metrics, such as GDP percentages, may overshadow the more critical assessment of capability development, force readiness, and defence innovation.

The formal admission of Sweden as NATO’s 32nd member was rightly hailed as a strategic victory, reinforcing the alliance’s presence in the Baltic region. However, the summit’s handling of Ukraine’s membership aspirations was far more ambivalent. Although NATO leaders reiterated that Ukraine’s future lies within the alliance, they failed to provide a concrete pathway or timeline for membership. The conditional support—tied to further reforms and security stabilisation—was seen by some as a cautious, perhaps overly risk-averse, approach.

The summit’s explicit inclusion of China as a “systemic challenge” marks a conceptual evolution for NATO, moving beyond its traditional Euro-Atlantic focus. However, the practical consensus on China remains shallow. Many European allies are reluctant to frame China as a direct military threat, given their extensive

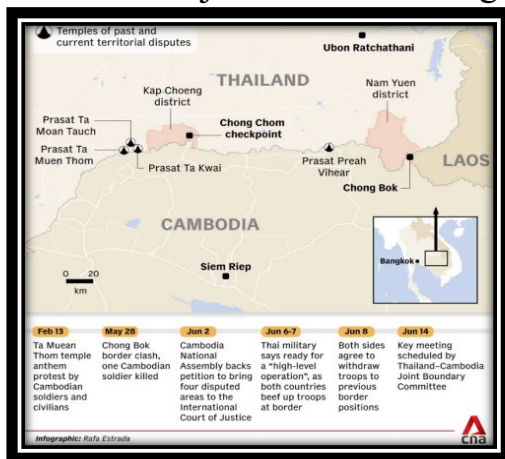
economic ties and limited military engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The divergence in threat perception between the U.S., which views China as its primary strategic competitor, and many European states creates a strategic mismatch that the summit did not adequately resolve. The 2025 summit placed a strong emphasis on technological innovation, cyber defence, and space security. Initiatives like the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund were highlighted as mechanisms to preserve the alliance's technological edge.

However, the pace of implementation and the fragmentation of defence industrial bases across member states remain significant barriers. Many NATO countries still rely heavily on national procurement systems and lack a fully integrated approach to joint capability development. Without deeper defence-industrial cooperation, these innovation initiatives may struggle to deliver strategic impact.

The NATO Summit 2025 was, unarguably, a moment of strategic significance. It reinforced the alliance's relevance, made notable commitments to defence investment, and adapted to a more complex security environment by recognising emerging threats such as China, cyber warfare, and space militarisation. However, several of these advances may be more declarative than transformative. The summit's outcomes are vulnerable to political backsliding, economic pressures, and divergent national interests that could erode cohesion over time.

## Soaring Border Tensions between Cambodia and Thailand

The Cambodia-Thailand border clash in the Emerald Triangle on 28 May 2025 has become a major crisis for the region. This area is a shared border region between Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, covering seven provinces among the three countries – Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey, and Stung Treng in Cambodia; Salavan and Champasak in Laos; and Ubon Ratchathani and Sisaket in Thailand.



The area remains an un-demarcated border zone with overlapping territorial claims, where the countries agreed to maintain the status quo to avoid destabilising the border. This includes prohibiting any actions that alter facts on the ground, such as construction, troop movements, or digging, without prior notification.

The incident took place at the disputed Chong Bok pass, where Thailand's northeastern Ubon Ratchathani province borders Cambodia's Preah Vihear. According to Thailand, in the early hours of 28 May, its forces detected Cambodian troop movements and preparations to establish a position in an area Thailand claims. This prompted Thai forces from Task Force 1 of the Suranaree Command to deploy to investigate, which led to a clash and the death of a Cambodian soldier. At the heart of the ongoing conflict between Cambodia and Thailand is a fundamental disagreement over well-established and clearly defined borders, which has led to



recurrent armed clashes, especially between 2008 and 2011. The 817 km land border, which includes ancient temples, has been contested for decades due to the absence of a mutually agreed-upon demarcation.

Historically, the Thai monarch Rama III claimed territorial control in 1851, which included present-day Thailand as well as various northern provinces of what is now Malaysia, much of western Cambodia, Laos, and areas as far as the banks of the Salween River (north of Chiang Mai). The definition of Thailand's borders was shaped by a series of treaty concessions to the British and French. In the 1867 treaty, Thailand gained French recognition of its sovereignty over the Cambodian provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. However, in 1888, the French successfully persuaded the Thai government to relinquish its claims to northern Laos. Additionally, in 1893, the French compelled Thailand to accept their claim—based on their status as the inheritors of the Vietnamese Empire—to all territory east of the Mekong River. This led to the treaties of 1904 and 1907, in which Thailand ceded the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap, along with Sai Buri.

Cambodia adheres to 1:200,000-scale maps derived from the 1904 and 1907 Franco-Siamese Conventions. In contrast, Thailand uses more detailed 1:50,000-scale national maps, claiming they are more accurate as they reflect the true topography and the watershed principle. This cartographic clash, resulting from differing projection systems and scales, has created vast “grey zones” along their 817-kilometer shared border, becoming a flashpoint for ongoing conflict.

In the days following the recent clash between Thai and Cambodian forces, both sides committed to maintaining dialogue through the Thailand-Cambodia Joint Boundary Commission (JBC). While they agreed to de-escalate the situation, tensions have been complicated by escalating actions taken by both parties. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet emphasized the need for the JBC to continue its work on border demarcation, but he also stated that his government would bring the cases of other disputed areas to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Cambodia's military buildup along the border after the clash prompted Thailand to take reciprocal measures. Both countries, by reinforcing their military presence, have further escalated tensions. To mitigate the situation, Thailand and Cambodia eventually agreed to withdraw their troops to the previously established lines along their disputed border.

However, on June 6, Thailand imposed new restrictions at the border, limiting crossing times and barring Thai casino tourists and workers from entering Cambodia. These unilaterally imposed restrictions are affecting trade and the movement of people. In response, Cambodian leaders reacted strongly, urging their migrant workers to return home. Cambodia has even threatened to cut cross-border internet links, halt electricity supplies, and stop fuel services from the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, in addition to banning Thai movies, TV shows, and imports.

The diplomatic tension escalated when Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen leaked a private phone conversation between himself and Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on June 15. This leak plunged the Thai government into a significant domestic political crisis.