

09/03/2026

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Europe faces war in Iran



The fog of war blinds the belligerents, said Clausewitz. But unfortunately, it also clouds the judgement of those outside the conflict. Since the launch of the Israeli-American offensive on Iran, confusion has reigned in European debates, in contrast to what is happening in the United States, where the debate is much more frank, direct and genuine.

The war against Iran is unsettling Europeans in three ways:

- It is dividing them: Spain condemns this war as illegal under international law, while Germany has chosen to support its American and Israeli allies.
- It distracts them from Ukraine, which should be their priority now that the Americans are more preoccupied elsewhere.
- Finally, it causes them double concern: the fear of being drawn into a conflict against Iran coexists with the dread of seeing international law trampled on by the United States for a long time to come.

Of course, all Europeans are delighted to see one less dictator on the planet and all hope that the Iranian people will find the path to a less cruel rebirth. Nevertheless, for Europe, this war is one war too many.

Let us first recall a few undeniable and inescapable facts, unless one has a clear ideological bias:

- The American-Israeli intervention in Iran is illegal. International law recognises the right of any state to carry out pre-emptive strikes in the event of an immediate and imminent threat to its security. However, both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and CIA reports¹ indicated that there was no immediate nuclear threat from Iran. The atrocities of a dictatorship, its use of terrorism, and its ballistic and nuclear proliferation policies are legitimate causes for concern, but they are not valid arguments to justify an attack. Under international law, the United States and Israel deserve the status of aggressors.
- Iran, under attack, has the right to defend itself: this is the very basis of international law and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. And even if one can legitimately question the relevance of Iran's military strategy since the beginning of the conflict, it is difficult to deny them the right to retaliate.
- Regimes cannot be changed by force. All the attempts at 'regime change' by Western powers since the end of the Cold War have ended in major failures: in 2003, the death of Saddam Hussein did not lead to the 'democratic domino effect' hoped for by American neoconservatives, but rather to chaos and a civil war that has barely subsided 20 years later. In Libya, the death of Colonel Gaddafi in 2011 left the country destroyed by civil war and facing a serious risk of partition, which has yet to be overcome. And the same thing happened in Somalia with the failure of the UN intervention "Restore Hope", led by the United States in 1992-93.
- International law is not dead because the United States or Israel decide that it should be. We condemned the war in Ukraine in the name of international law violated by Russia, which we want to defend; we condemn in advance any attempt by China to annex Taiwan; we condemned the United States' desire to annex or conquer Greenland by force or coercion; we condemned Rwanda's aggression against the Central African Republic, etc... How could we, on the contrary, put international law on hold amidst these conflicts in the Middle East, on the pretext that the United States and Israel are involved?

Let us then try to analyse a few points that may be worth discussing, if possible in a calm and informed manner.

- Donald Trump is inventing war without a goal. His hesitations about his war aims are even more worrying than the war itself. First, there was the argument of regime change, then that of the threat Iran posed to the United States, then that of the fight against nuclear, ballistic and terrorist proliferation. In other words, nothing and everything at the same time: a dramatic improvisation, when the stakes are nothing less than the direct or indirect security of a large part of the planet. History will tell us how this American president allowed himself to be influenced by his Israeli allies to enter into a conflict that all his predecessors had managed to avoid.

- Donald Trump has reached the limits of his power. Domestically, this military intervention is a disaster: barely 20% of the population supports the American involvement. The MAGA camp is disoriented by a decision that goes against all of Donald Trump's election promises and the highly isolationist culture of a large part of his supporters. The blind support for Israel is not going down well with the most traditional conservatives, to such an extent that there are fears of a rise in anti-Semitism in the United States. On the international stage, American power appears colossal, but it is entangled in a militaristic fury against the 'mullahs' similar to Putin's against the 'Nazis' in Ukraine. That is, incapable of achieving a quick victory without collateral damage, but very useful as an example to all the other revisionist powers on the planet.
- What is good for Israel is not necessarily good for America, and even less so for Europe. There is no doubt that the mullahs' Iran made the destruction of Israel one of its strategic objectives. It is also worth pointing out the desire for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons dates back well before the mullahs, to the Shah himself, who nevertheless maintained more than cordial relations with the Americans. But Israel's right to self-defence is not a right to blind destruction. It ends where reprisals begin : against civilians in Gaza, the brutal colonisation of the West Bank, the destruction of the southern suburbs of Beirut, and the illegal attack on Iran. Defending Israel's existence is certainly imperative for Europe. But reminding it of its duties as a democratic state is equally vital.
- This spiral into violence is not inevitable. It is clear that European states must defend and protect their citizens in the area, just as they have a responsibility to defend their military bases and local allies. On the other hand, going on the offensive against Iran, alongside the Israeli-American coalition, is neither a given nor necessary, at least as long as Iran does not directly attack any European country. The alliance with the United States does not in any way imply following them in their foreign endeavours. The NATO treaty is limited to the North Atlantic area.

One major question remains, which goes far beyond the scope of this blogpost: why are our principles, convictions, rules and values as European democracies completely disrupted, upset, confused, distorted, turned upside down and shaken up when it comes to the United States and Israel?

FOOTNOTES:

- ¹ See Grossi, Rafael Mariano. "Speech by IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi of 19 June 2025", *CIA report*, (March 2025).