Revolution vs Integration: Iran's Strategic Turning Points

By Ali Abutalebi

One of the most pointed statements regarding the Israel strikes against Iran – backed by the United States – came from Argentine President Javier Milei. In an **interview with LN+**, the *La Nacion* TV channel, Milei declared that 'Iran is the enemy of Argentina' and framed Israel's actions as a defence of Western capitalist values rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions.

Regardless of his misunderstanding of religious and civilisational values – which stands in stark contrast to the legacy of liberation theology in Latin America – Milei articulates a crucial geopolitical logic: Israel serves as an outpost for Western capitalist interests in the ongoing confrontation with Iran, a sovereign actor in the Global South. While Iran operates within a capitalist framework, it remains one of the most politically independent nations in West Asia, seeking to preserve its autonomy while supporting the Palestinian liberation movement against the US and Israeli interventionism.

Understanding today's escalation requires examining the deeper historical roots of Iran-Israel tensions. These tensions are not merely products of the post-1979 Islamic Revolution. Even during the Pahlavi monarchy, Israel viewed Iran both as a regional partner and a potential rival, recognising the country's strategic importance and independent capabilities. In a **recent article**, Michael Hudson, the author of *Super Imperialism:The Origin and Fundamentals of U.S. World Dominance*, explains how the US strategists were discussing a plan 'to possibly overthrow Iran and break it up into ethnic parts' in the mid-70s.



Political poster by the Organization of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class (Peykar), 1979-1982.

Following the 1979 revolution, Iran severed all ties with Israel and emerged as one of its most vocal opponents, particularly due to its support for Palestinian resistance. This ideological shift was reinforced by practical geopolitical considerations: Iran's new leadership saw Israeli influence as part of a broader Western imperial project in the region.

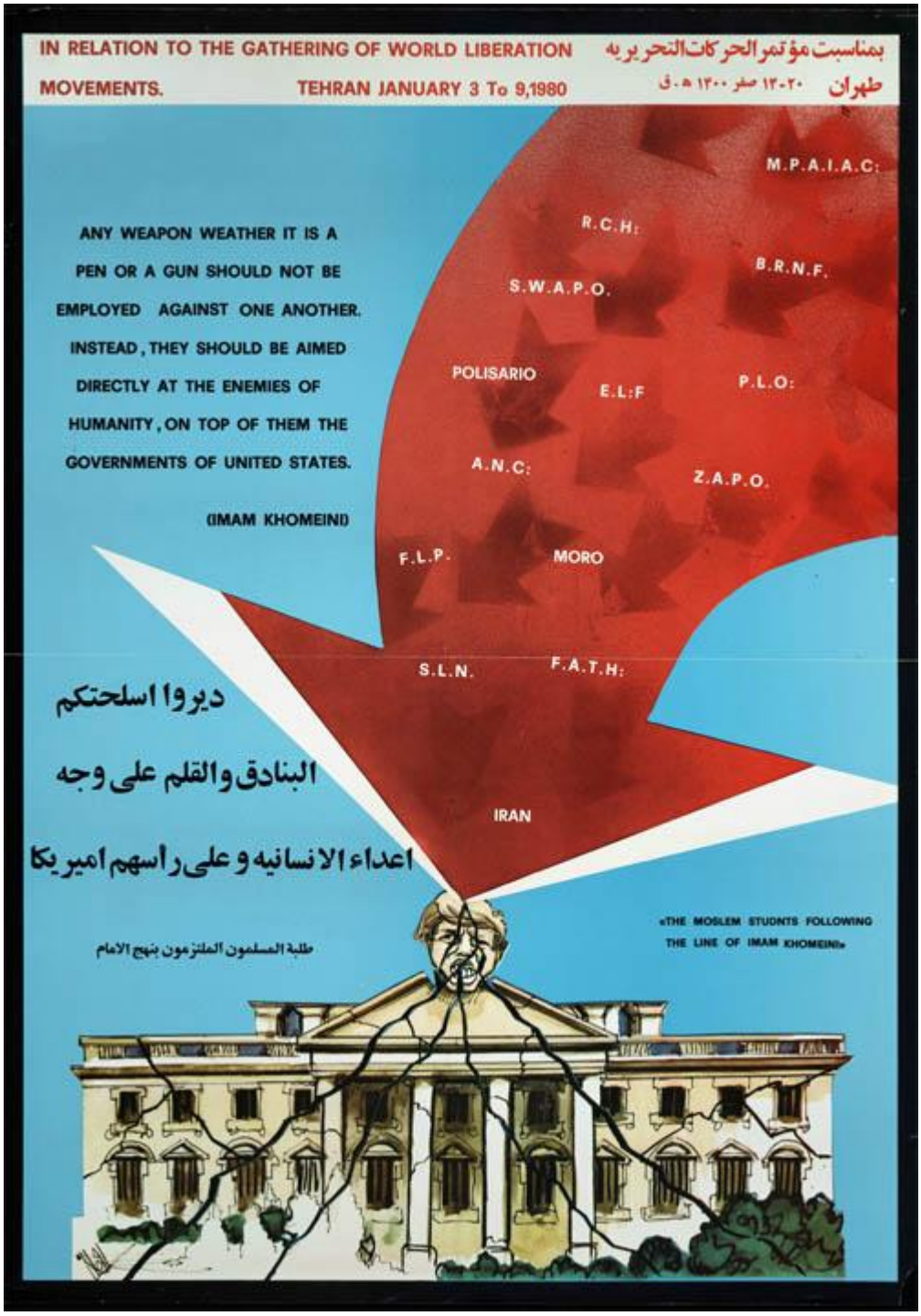
In response, Israel adopted an increasingly aggressive stance, supporting separatist groups inside Iran, and launching cyber-attacks like the infamous Stuxnet operation. In fact, Israel was carrying out part of the operations intended by the United States, while the US itself had not refrained from efforts to effect government collapse through coup attempts, sanctions, and various political pressures since the revolution's victory. The Trump administration's imposition of 'maximum pressure' sanctions emboldening Israeli efforts to further isolate Iran. This long trajectory of antagonism helps explain why the current conflict has intensified to include direct military engagements.

This historical context illuminates why Iran's regional allies – Hezbollah in Lebanon, Islamic Jihad in Palestine, and resistance forces in Iraq – are often mischaracterised in Western discourse as mere 'Iranian proxies.' This framing is not only reductionist but also fundamentally misunderstands the nature of these movements.

These groups represent, first and foremost, indigenous expressions of national liberation struggles, resisting foreign occupation and neocolonial violence. Their relationships with Iran are strategic partnerships born of shared anti-imperialist objectives, not simple client-patron arrangements. To frame them solely through their connection to Iran erases their local legitimacy and independent strategic agency – a perspective that obscures rather than clarifies regional dynamics.

Given Israeli assassinations of key Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon in September 2024 and the collapse of the Ba'ath party's rule in Syria – the 'bridge' of the Axis of Resistance – in December 2024, it became increasingly clear that Iran itself would soon face direct confrontation. What proved genuinely unexpected, however, was the scale and decisiveness of Iran's response.

Defying assumptions rooted in its prior posture of self-restraint, Iran increasingly launched a large-scale missile operation against Israeli targets, utilising both precision-guided ballistic missiles and drone swarms. More significantly, following U.S. airstrikes on its nuclear facilities, Iran struck Al-Udeid, the US military base in Qatar, signalling a fundamental shift in strategic doctrine: from Strategic Patience to Active Deterrence.



Rawhani (Iran), *Gathering of World Liberation Movements*, 1980.

This marked a crucial turning point in regional power dynamics. The Israeli authorities quickly realised it could not sustain such confrontation without direct US military engagement – a level of commitment Washington appeared reluctant to provide. Yet even as open bombing paused, the broader political, economic, and intelligence campaign against Iran persisted, compelling the Iranian state to prepare for prolonged asymmetric warfare.

These external pressures have catalysed significant changes within Iran's domestic political landscape. Iranian

military and security institutions are reportedly shifting into a new phase of operational readiness, targeting internal destabilisation efforts and mercenary networks. Simultaneously, a renewed sense of advocates is emerging – driven by anti-imperialist sentiment and opposition to foreign aggression.

Even segments of Iranian society that previously hesitated to openly criticise Israel now recognise the criminal nature of its actions. Only a narrow neo-fascist faction continues to echo pro-Israeli narratives within the country, finding themselves increasingly isolated from mainstream opinion.

However, this emergent unity remains fragile and contested. Economic hardship stemming from prolonged sanctions and neoliberal directives, combined with political uncertainty about the country's future direction, could undermine the current patriotic consensus. It is therefore vital to understand the competing visions now emerging within Iran's political elite.

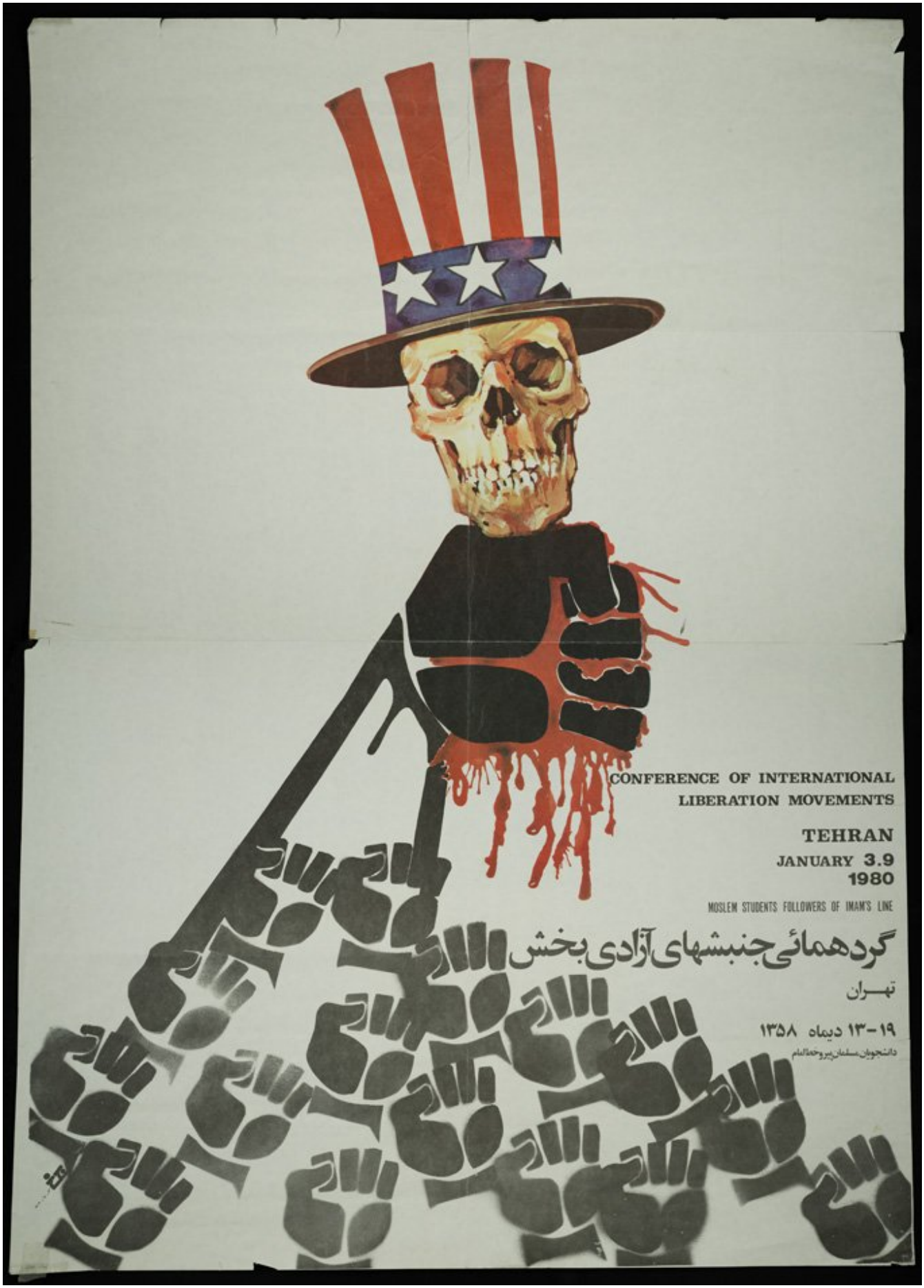
Among Iran's political elite and intellectuals, two fundamentally different strategic approaches have crystallised, replacing the traditional 'reformist vs. principalist', or 'moderates vs. hardliners' in the Western media rhetoric.

The first camp stresses the need to fortify Iran's military capabilities and national sovereignty, firmly rejecting any path toward capitulation. This faction includes elements within the elites from diverse backgrounds, the revolutionary youth networks, and segments of the working class that continue to identify with the original ideals of the 1979 Revolution. For them, Iran's revolution represented not merely a change in political leadership, but a deeper struggle to reclaim popular sovereignty against imperial domination.

The second camp, more technocratic in character, advocates normalisation with the West. This faction argues that the succession of a 'moderate' Supreme Leader could pave the way for détente and reintegration into global capitalist circuits. Their supporters largely make up the social base of neoliberal capitalism, who view the entering of global capitalism as an essential precondition for economic recovery.

This division represents more than tactical disagreement – it reflects fundamentally different conceptions of Iran's national project and its relationship to global power structures.

Iran's strategic choices must be understood within the context of broader shifts in global power dynamics. As the US hegemony faces increasing challenges and multipolarity gains momentum, Iran has the opportunity to forge strategic partnerships beyond its traditional allies in China and Russia.


CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL
LIBERATION MOVEMENTS
TEHRAN
JANUARY 3.9
1980
MOSLEM STUDENTS FOLLOWERS OF IMAM'S LINE
گردهمائی جنبشهای آزادی بخش
تهران
۱۹-۱۳ دیماه ۱۳۵۸
دانشجویان مسلمان پیرو خط امام

Uncle Sam Skull Strangulated by a Collective Fist,1979.
Middle Eastern Posters Collection.

Comparing Iran's situation with countries like Venezuela and Cuba – which have similarly resisted imperial pressures while maintaining their sovereignty – reveals the contours of an emerging anti-imperialist alignment. These nations share common experiences of economic sanctions, political pressure, and external destabilisation attempts.

The central question facing Iran today extends beyond mere survival in the face of external pressure. Instead, it involves redefining the Iranian project for the 21st century in ways that refuse subjugation while promoting social justice and aligning with broader Global South aspirations.

Whether such a project can be realised will depend on the emergence of a political economy that prioritises popular welfare over elite accommodation, and a statecraft grounded in both strategic realism and transformative vision. This requires not only resistance to imperial pressure but also the construction of alternative models of development and governance that can inspire similar movements throughout the Global South.



Victory to the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerillas, 1979.

Palestinian Popular Struggle Front Collection.

The stakes of this struggle extend far beyond Iran's borders. In an era of increasing global instability and imperial overreach, Iran's choices will influence not only regional dynamics but also the broader trajectory of resistance movements worldwide. Success in this endeavour could contribute to the emergence of a more multipolar and just international order, while failure might reinforce existing patterns of domination and exploitation.

For this reason, Iran's current moment represents both profound risk and historic opportunity –one whose resolution will reverberate far beyond West Asia in the decades to come.

Ali Abutalebi has been the executive director of Mazmoon Books since 2005. He founded the Iranian Campaign for Solidarity with Cuba, worked as publication director at the House of Latin America (HOLA), and authored numerous articles for the Iranian press and political websites – primarily focusing on Latin America's progressive movements. Ali also published a book on Cuba titled Rest in Peace, Ernesto.