

The Sabbath Pond and the Superpower

Form Without Substance in the Stated Aims and Recorded Outcomes
of the United States–Iran War of 2026

Sabbath Pond Test III

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Standpoint. The author is a Pakistani citizen writing from Lahore. Pakistan was the principal mediator of the ceasefire of 7–8 April 2026 and of the Islamabad Memorandum of 17 June; the first direct talks between the United States and Iran since 1979 were held in Islamabad on 11–12 April. On 1 March 2026, in Karachi, United States Marine security guards fired on protesters storming the American consulate; Reuters reported that two US officials confirmed the Marines had opened fire and that "it was unclear whether rounds fired by Marines struck or killed anyone", and Pakistani authorities reported eleven dead at the consulate and twenty-six across the country [1]. The author has no connection to any party to the war, to any government, or to any casualty, and has confined the Pakistani material to the public record. The standpoint is disclosed so that the reader can weigh it, not so that it can be denied.

Disclaimer. This is a research preprint prepared solely for study and academic purposes. It is not final; it is subject to correction and will be revised as the record changes. It is a scholarly examination of public documents and nothing more. It is not advice, not a prediction, not a religious ruling, not political advocacy, not a campaign for or against any state, government, people, party, faith or person, and not a direction to anyone to do or to refrain from doing anything. Its reading of Qur'anic and classical Islamic texts is offered as intellectual history — how one tradition theorised the rise and decline of powers — and not as a claim that any scripture identifies any present event. The narrative from which the test takes its name ends with a punishment; this paper does not invoke it, and nothing here is directed at any nation or people. Casualty and cost figures are those of the sources named, and the sources disagree; the paper prints the range. The author bears sole responsibility for the analysis.

Abstract

The Sabbath Pond Test is an analytic device drawn from Qur'an 7:163–166 for detecting arrangements that preserve the *form* of a rule or claim while defeating its *substance*. Two earlier papers applied it to Islamic banking (Test I) and to anonymous tribunals under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism (Punjab Amendment) Bill 2026 (Test II). This paper applies it to a claim rather than a rule: the claim of decisive superpower capability as stated by the United States government in the war it began against Iran on 28 February 2026. The stated form is taken from the government's own documents — the President's address of 28 February, the White House statement of objectives of 1 April, the White House declaration of 8 April that "the joint force achieved the military objectives as defined by the President", and the fourteen paragraphs of the Islamabad Memorandum of 17 June. The recorded substance is taken from the International Atomic Energy Agency's verification reports as analysed by the Institute for Science and International Security, the compliance record under the Memorandum, the Pentagon's own casualty accounting and the dispute over it, and the operational record through September 2026, including Iranian ballistic-missile fire on a United States aircraft carrier on 5 September. The four criteria of the test are applied to each stated objective in turn. The result is then read against two bodies of thought: the contemporary American literature on the limits of United States power, and the classical Islamic theory of the rise and decline of dynasties in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah*, read alongside the Qur'anic principle of alternation (3:140). Pakistan's role as the war's principal mediator, and the Karachi consulate shooting of 1 March, are treated as a Pakistani author's standpoint, disclosed and bounded. The paper is a study, not a verdict. Where the evidence cuts both ways, both sides are printed.

Keywords: Sabbath Pond Test; form and substance; superpower; unipolarity; United States–Iran war 2026; Operation Epic Fury; Islamabad Memorandum; Strait of Hormuz; Ibn Khaldūn; *‘aṣabiyya*; Qur'an 3:140; Pakistan mediation.

1. Introduction: the test, stated

In *Sūrat al-A'raf* the Qur'an recalls a town by the sea whose people were forbidden to fish on the Sabbath. The fish, the narrative says, came to them openly on the Sabbath and stayed away on other days; and so the people devised a means of taking on the Sabbath what they were forbidden to take on the Sabbath, while being able to say that they had not fished on the Sabbath. The nets were laid on Friday and lifted on Sunday. The rule was kept in every word and broken in every purpose (Qur'an 7:163–166).

An earlier paper adopted this narrative as an analytic device, the "Sabbath Pond Test", and applied it to contemporary Islamic banking, asking whether products such as *murābaḥa* and *tawarruq* avoid the substance of *ribā* or merely its form [2]. A second paper extended the device to criminal procedure, asking whether a provision that conceals the judge, the prosecutor and the witness from the accused preserves the fair trial the Constitution guarantees or merely its vocabulary [3]. Both papers found that the device is domain-general: wherever a rule can be stated, the distance between its form and its substance can be measured.

The present paper makes one further move. It applies the device not to a *rule* but to a *claim*. The claim is the one implicit in the word *superpower* and explicit in the documents of the United States government during the war it began against the Islamic Republic of Iran on 28 February 2026: that force stated to achieve an objective achieves it, and that a declaration of achievement describes a fact. The paper asks whether, on the government's own record set against the public record, that claim in 2026 has a substance or only a form.

The device is stated formally so that it can be applied and, if it fails, be seen to fail. In the two earlier papers, an arrangement fails the Sabbath Pond Test when four conditions hold together:

1. **A rule prohibits an outcome X.**
2. **The arrangement obtains the effect of X.**
3. **It does so by preserving the rule's formal elements** — the labels, actors and steps the rule requires — so that the rule appears to be satisfied.
4. **It cannot be defended by reference to the rule's purpose:** the purpose the rule serves is either already secured by other means, or is not served by the arrangement at all.

Criteria (1)–(3) describe the mechanism of every *ḥīla*; criterion (4) distinguishes the lawful device from the unlawful one. A device that serves the rule's purpose by another route — the *makhraj* of the Ḥanafīs — passes. A device whose only work is to obtain the prohibited thing fails.

Where the object of examination is a stated objective rather than a prohibition, the criteria must be adapted, and the adaptation must be shown so that a reader can reject it. The paper proposes the following. A stated claim of achievement fails the test when:

1. **An objective O is stated**, in the actor's own words, as the purpose of the action.
2. **The record shows O not obtained** — the state of affairs that O names does not exist at the relevant date.

3. **The form of O is nonetheless preserved and announced as satisfied** — the vocabulary of O is retained, its completion is declared, and its text is signed — so that O appears to have been achieved.
4. **The announcement cannot be defended by reference to O's purpose:** the purpose O was stated to serve is either not served by the action at all, or is served, if at all, by something other than the announced means.

The correspondence is exact. A prohibition and an objective are both statements about a state of the world that is to be brought about or prevented; a device that keeps the words of a prohibition while obtaining the prohibited thing, and a declaration that keeps the words of an objective while the objective remains unobtained, are the same structure seen from opposite sides. Criterion (4) does the same work in both: it asks whether the purpose survives. If the adaptation is rejected, the paper's analysis is rejected with it; that is the price of stating a method rather than asserting a conclusion.

Three things the paper does not do should be said at the outset. It does not decide, in advance or at the end, whether the United States "is" or "is not" a superpower; that is a question about a word, and the criteria do not ask it. It does not treat any casualty, of any nation, as a datum for argument; the figures are printed because the sources print them, and the sources are named. And it does not read the Qur'anic narrative, or the classical theory of dynasties set out in Section 6, as a forecast. The lesson taken from the narrative is structural: that a claim can be kept in form and lost in substance, and that the difference can be detected.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the stated form — what the United States government said its force would achieve and said it had achieved — from the government's own documents, and the signed form of the Islamabad Memorandum. Section 3 sets out the recorded substance, objective by objective, from the verification, compliance and operational record through September 2026. Section 4 sets out the cost of the form: the dead, the wounded, the materiel and the money, and the dispute over the counting. Section 5 reads the result against the contemporary American literature, quoting both the scholars who find a moment of testing and those who find an ending. Section 6 sets out the classical Islamic theory of the rise and decline of powers, as intellectual history. Section 7 applies the four criteria. Section 8 states the Pakistani standpoint and bounds it. Section 9 states what the government's documents would have had to say for the form to match the substance. Section 10 concludes, with the paper's limitations, its ethics statement, its disclosure of AI assistance, its sources, and its disclaimer.

A word on register. The Qur'anic narrative ends with a punishment. This paper does not invoke it, and nothing here should be read as directed at any state, government, official, people or person. The author writes from a country that mediated the war's ceasefire and that saw its own citizens killed at an American consulate in the war's first days; that standpoint is disclosed in the box on the first page and bounded in Section 8. The paper's claims are about documents. Where the documents contradict one another, the contradiction is printed; where the evidence is two-sided, both sides are printed; where a source could not be obtained, the paper says so and cites it as unverified.

2. The stated form: what the United States said it would do, and said it had done

The form is taken from four documents, all public, three of them works of the United States government. The paper quotes them at length because the test cannot be applied to a paraphrase.

2.1 The address of 28 February 2026

On the evening the operation began, the President addressed the Iranian people. The sentence that the later literature has treated as the statement of a fifth objective is this:

"To the great, proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand... When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations." [4]

The White House's subsequent statements of objectives, examined next, do not repeat this sentence; the Vice President said two days later that whatever happened to the regime was "incidental to the President's primary objective" [5]. The paper therefore treats regime change as an objective *stated by the President and demoted by his administration*, and examines it as such in Section 3.5.

2.2 The objectives of 1 April 2026

On 1 April the White House published a release whose title is its thesis: "President Trump's Clear and Unchanging Objectives Drive Decisive Success Against Iranian Regime". It states the objectives in a single sentence and then documents, with dates, that every senior official had restated them:

"From day one, the objectives have been clear and unwavering: obliterate Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and production capability, annihilate its navy, sever its support for terrorist proxies, and ensure the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism never acquires a nuclear weapon." [5]

The dated restatements matter because they fix the form beyond dispute. The President on 2 March: "First, we're destroying Iran's missile capabilities... and their capacity to produce brand new ones... Second, we're annihilating their navy... Third, we're ensuring that the world's number one sponsor of terror can never obtain a nuclear weapon... And finally, we're ensuring that the Iranian regime cannot continue to arm, fund, and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders." The Secretary of War on 4 March: "obliterate Iran's missiles and drones and facilities that produce them, annihilate its navy and critical security infrastructure, and sever their pathway to nuclear weapons. Iran will never possess a nuclear bomb." The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on 4 March added a purpose that the paper will return to: "Third, we're ensuring Iran cannot rapidly rebuild or reconstitute its combat capability." The President on 9 March: "Most of Iran's naval power has been sunk." The Commander of Central Command on 31 March: "their air defense and missile defense systems have largely been destroyed." The Secretary of State on 31 March: "We were going to destroy their air force; we have largely done that." [5]

The verbs are the form. *Obliterate. Annihilate. Sever. Never.* They were chosen; they were repeated for a month; and they were, as the next document shows, declared fulfilled.

2.3 The declaration of 8 April 2026

One week later, on the day the ceasefire took hold, the White House published "Peace Through Strength: Operation Epic Fury Crushes Iranian Threat as Ceasefire Takes Hold". The document declares the objectives met, states the figures, and closes the account:

"President Donald J. Trump laid out clear objectives in Operation Epic Fury — and in just 38 days, the greatest fighting force the world has ever known has met those objectives with overwhelming strength and lethal precision." [6]

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs: "Over the course of 38 days of major combat operation, the joint force achieved the military objectives as defined by the President." The Press Secretary: "the United States has achieved and exceeded those core military objectives in just 38 days." Then the figures, under the heading "A Showcase of American Military Superiority":

"Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and production capacity has been razed. More than 85% of the regime's defense industrial base, including the majority of its ballistic missiles, launcher vehicles, and long-range attack drones, has been destroyed..."

Iran's air forces have been functionally neutered. Before Operation Epic Fury, the Iranian air force would fly between 30 to 100 flights each day; today, that number is zero.

Iran's navy has been obliterated. 150 warships across 16 classes have been destroyed, every submarine has been sunk, and 97% of its once-massive inventory of naval mines have been eliminated.

Iran can no longer arm terrorist proxies. The majority of the regime's offensive weapons are destroyed and the regime can no longer manufacture new terror weapons like ballistic missiles and long-range drones...

What's left of the Iranian regime is desperate, dejected, and in denial." [6]

The document closes with an accounting — "Over 10,200 total air sorties flown; Over 13,000 targets struck", including "More than 700 mine systems", "More than 600 naval targets", "More than 450 ballistic missile targets" — and a conclusion: "it is clear that America stands stronger, our enemies weaker, and the world safer." [6]

This is the form in its most complete statement. It has every element the test requires: the objectives named; the completion declared by the Commander-in-Chief's spokesman and by the senior military officer of the United States; the completion quantified; and the account closed. If the record of the following five months matches it, the claim passes. If it does not, the question is whether the announcement can be defended by the purpose it served.

2.4 The signed form: the Islamabad Memorandum of 17 June 2026

The fourth document is not a declaration but an undertaking. The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding was agreed in text on 12 June, signed digitally on 14 June, and signed formally on 17 June — by the President of the United States remotely from the Palace of Versailles and by the President of Iran remotely from Tehran — with Pakistan as principal mediator and Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt as facilitators [7]. Its text is a work of the United States government and in the public domain; the paper reproduces the clauses on which its analysis turns [8].

The Memorandum has fourteen paragraphs. The first declares "the immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon". The third commits the parties "to negotiating and achieving the final deal in maximum 60 days, extendable with mutual consent". The fourth is the undertaking of the side that had, nine weeks earlier, declared victory:

"Immediately upon the signing of this MOU, the United States of America will begin the removal of its naval blockade... and will fully end the naval blockade within 30 days... The United States of America further undertakes to remove its forces from the proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran within 30 days after the final deal."

The fifth is Iran's reciprocal undertaking on the Strait of Hormuz — "the safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge, for 60 days only" — and it contains a clause that bears directly on the 8 April declaration that 97 per cent of Iran's mines had been eliminated: "demining by the Islamic Republic of Iran will be instated within 30 days". The sixth:

"The United States of America undertakes with regional partners to develop a definitive, mutually agreed plan with at least USD 300 billion for the reconstruction and economic development of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The seventh: the United States "undertakes to terminate all types of sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the United Nations Security Council resolutions, IAEA Board of Governors resolutions, and all unilateral US sanctions, primary and secondary". The eighth: Iran "reaffirms that it shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons", with its enriched stockpile "to be down blended on site under the supervision of the IAEA" and enrichment itself left "to discuss". The ninth: "The Islamic Republic of Iran will maintain the current status quo of its nuclear program, and the United States of America will not impose any new sanctions and will not deploy additional forces in the region." The fourteenth: "The final deal will be endorsed by a binding UNSC resolution." [8]

The paper does not, at this stage, characterise these undertakings. It notes only what they are: the signed form of a settlement, by which the party that had declared on 8 April that its objectives were met and its enemy "desperate, dejected, and in denial" undertook, on 17 June, to lift its blockade, withdraw its forces from the adversary's proximity, terminate every sanction including those of the Security Council, fund the adversary's reconstruction to a floor of three hundred billion dollars, and leave the adversary's nuclear programme in its "current status quo" pending a further agreement.

Table 1 collects the form. Each row is an objective in the government's words, the date it was stated, the date it was declared achieved, and the declaring official.

Objective	Stated	Declared achieved	By	Declaration
"obliterate Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and production capability"	2 Mar	8 Apr	White House	"razed"; "more than 85% of the... defense industrial base... destroyed"
"annihilate its navy"	2 Mar	8 Apr	White House; Trump 9 Mar	"obliterated. 150 warships... every submarine... sunk... 97% of... naval mines... eliminated"
"sever its support for terrorist proxies"	2 Mar	8 Apr	White House	"Iran can no longer arm terrorist proxies"
"ensure... never acquires a nuclear weapon"	2 Mar	—	Hegseth 4 Mar: "Iran will never possess a nuclear bomb"	not declared achieved; see ¶8–9 of the MOU
"take over your government"	28 Feb	—	Vance 2 Mar: "incidental"	8 Apr: regime "desperate, dejected, and in denial"

Objective	Stated	Declared achieved	By	Declaration
The whole	—	8 Apr	Caine; Leavitt	"achieved the military objectives as defined by the President... in just 38 days"

3. The recorded substance: what the record shows, objective by objective

The substance is taken from sources of three kinds: the verification record of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as analysed by the Institute for Science and International Security on 4 June 2026 [9] and by the Arms Control Association on 22 June [10]; the compliance and operational record from 17 June to 6 September, as tracked by the Council on Foreign Relations [11] and as documented, with its cited reporting, in the public reference record of the Memorandum [7]; and the strategic assessments published by the Brookings Institution on 10 June [12] and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies on 22 June [13]. Each dated fact below traces to one of these; the paper's own inferences are marked as such.

3.1 The missiles: "razed"

The declaration of 8 April was that Iran's "ballistic missile arsenal and production capacity has been razed". The dated record after 8 April is as follows.

On 7 May, three United States destroyers were attacked; Central Command described its response as "self-defense" strikes on Iranian military facilities, and Iran said two ships and Qeshm Island were struck [14]. On 28 June, eleven days after the Memorandum was signed, Iran fired ballistic missiles and drones at United States bases in Kuwait and Bahrain [7]. On 7 July, Iran launched missiles at commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, including a Qatari liquefied-natural-gas tanker; the United States revoked the oil-export licence it had issued under the Memorandum and struck more than eighty targets; on 8 July the President declared the Memorandum "over" [7]. On 30 August, Iran fired ballistic missiles at bases in Jordan [11]. On 5 September, Iran fired ballistic missiles at a United States aircraft carrier and a destroyer [15]. On 7 September, Iranian state media presented a ballistic missile "with improved capabilities" and the head of the Supreme National Security Council announced a doctrine of action "against any threat, even before it is carried out" [16].

The Brookings assessment, published between the Memorandum and its collapse, describes what these launches were fired from: projectiles "whose accuracy, resilience, and numbers U.S. political leaders clearly underrated prior to the war" [12].

What was obtained is not nothing, and the paper says so. The Chairman's purpose of 4 March — that Iran "cannot rapidly rebuild or reconstitute its combat capability" — is a claim about production, and the record does not show that production was untouched; it shows that launches continued, from stocks or from production, against United States warships, bases and a carrier, for five months after the arsenal was declared "razed". The form was "razed". The record is a carrier under ballistic-missile fire in September.

3.2 The navy: "obliterated"

The declaration was that "Iran's navy has been obliterated. 150 warships across 16 classes have been destroyed, every submarine has been sunk, and 97% of its once-massive inventory of naval mines have been eliminated."

The paper cannot independently verify the count of warships, and does not try. It examines instead what the declaring party's own later conduct implies. Paragraph 5 of the Memorandum, signed by the United States nine weeks after the declaration, provides that "demining by the Islamic Republic of Iran will be instated within 30 days" — an undertaking that has no object if 97 per cent of the mines had been eliminated in April. Central Command's own announcements between the Memorandum's collapse and September record the destruction of sixteen Iranian minelayers near the Strait, and the estimates on which those announcements were reported credit Iran with an inventory of more than five thousand naval mines [17]. On 30 August the United States struck minelaying positions on Larak Island [11].

The Brookings assessment states the operational consequence directly. The United States, it finds, "has been reluctant to regularly send destroyers into the confined waters of the Gulf due to the persistent threat of Iranian mines, cruise and ballistic missiles, and drones", and "the decision not to militarily reopen the Strait of Hormuz reflects the fact that operating there is more costly than it once was" [12]. The Strait was, on 9 April — the day after the declaration — "effectively closed", with Iran charging tolls reported at more than one million dollars per ship; four vessels passed on the first day against a pre-war average of nine a day [14]. On 26 August, Iran and Oman agreed a temporary shipping corridor with revenue sharing, and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister stated that the Strait "would not reopen to U.S. vessels" until the United States met its obligations under the Memorandum; on 6 September, Iran announced an exclusion zone in the Gulf and a shipping corridor of its own designation [11].

Again the paper marks what was obtained. A navy whose surface fleet had been heavily struck — the paper accepts that the strikes were extensive — nonetheless retained, through September, the capacity to deny the world's most important oil chokepoint to the navy that had declared it obliterated, and the United States chose not to contest that denial by force. *Obliterated* is a word about a state of affairs. The state of affairs in September was sea-denial.

3.3 The proxies: "can no longer arm"

The declaration was that "Iran can no longer arm terrorist proxies". The Houthi movement in Yemen entered the war on Iran's side on 28 March [18]. On 7 June, a Hezbollah rocket attack on northern Israel threatened the regional ceasefire [19]. Paragraph 1 of the Memorandum, drafted ten days later, had to specify "all fronts, including in Lebanon", because the Lebanese front was open; the casualty record for Lebanon stands at 4,057 killed and 12,121 wounded [20]. The paper does not know how many weapons reached whom; it observes that the proxies whose arming was declared impossible in April were fighting in June.

3.4 The nuclear objective: "never"

This is the objective on which the paper's honest column is longest, because the record here is genuinely mixed, and a paper that applied a test only where the test is easy would not be worth writing.

The stated form was absolute: "ensure the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism never acquires a nuclear weapon"; "Iran will never possess a nuclear bomb". The record has two sides.

The side that supports the form is this. The Institute for Science and International Security, analysing the Agency's reports of June 2026, finds that "while before the strikes, Iran could have made its first non-missile deliverable nuclear weapon within months, it would need more than a year today" [9]. The Arms Control Association finds that the 2025 strikes "set back the country's nuclear program" [10]. A delay of a year is a real thing; it was obtained by force; and the paper records it as substance obtained.

The side that contradicts the form is this. The Agency "stopped conducting verification activities in Iran in accordance with the NPT safeguards agreement" after 28 February 2026; in the whole of 2026 to June it conducted one inspection, of the Bushehr power reactor's refuelling on 1–3 June. Unaccounted for, as of the last verified inventory, are 440.9 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60 per cent, 184.1 kilograms at 20 per cent, 6,024.4 kilograms at 5 per cent and 2,391.1 kilograms at 2 per cent. The Director General's stated belief is that the highly enriched material lies at Esfahan (265–287 kilograms), Fordow (about 80) and Natanz (74–96), in tunnels that are backfilled and to which access is blocked. The Institute's conclusion is "near-total, ongoing loss of monitoring" [9]. The Arms Control Association finds that "key materials and technologies that would be needed if Iran made the decision to build a bomb survived the strikes", that the 440 kilograms are "likely intact but not immediately accessible", that the 2026 attacks "did not fundamentally alter the status of Iran's nuclear program", and that Iran "could revive... enrichment relatively quickly and return to the threshold of nuclear weapons in less than a year" [10]. Paragraph 9 of the Memorandum, signed by the United States, provides that Iran "will maintain the current status quo of its nuclear program" — the status quo being the one just described. On 10 July, satellite imagery showed Iran rebuilding nuclear sites [7]. The Association also records what the Memorandum does not contain: no duration, scope or verification for any enrichment limit; the President reportedly demanding a twenty-year suspension, Iran offering five, the text specifying neither [10].

The paper's reading is that the objective *never* was not obtained, and that its purpose — an Iran verifiably without a path to a weapon — is served, if at all, not by the announced means (destruction and denial) but by their opposite: the loss of every means of knowing. What was obtained is *later*. The form said *never*. Section 7 returns to whether *later* can be defended as *never*'s purpose.

3.5 The regime: "take over your government"

The President's sentence of 28 February invited the Iranian people to take their government; the declaration of 8 April described what remained of that government as "desperate, dejected, and in denial". The record is two-sided, and the paper prints both sides at equal length.

On one side: the regime did not fall. The Assembly of Experts elected Ali Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, as Supreme Leader on 8 March [21]. The war establishment was rebuilt around him; his appointment of Mohsen Rezaei to head the Supreme National Security Council was read in August as "planning for a long war" [22], and Rezaei was the official who announced the pre-emption doctrine of 7 September. The Arab Center's assessment of the Memorandum states the fact plainly: "the Iranian regime did not collapse", and Iran "compelled Washington to halt the war by raising the cost of the conflict" [13].

On the other side: the regime that did not fall is a regime whose head has not been seen. The election was announced as unanimous but faced "strong opposition from some members of the council"; eight members boycotted the online vote of 5 March; the Assembly's own building had been destroyed. Mojtaba Khamenei was wounded in the strike that killed his father and "has remained absent from public view since his appointment"; there is no confirmed footage of him since March. An Iranian official is quoted: "No one knows anything about Mojtaba, whether he is alive or dead or how badly injured... He has no control over the war because he is not here." The *Washington Post* reported him "badly wounded". The succession was described, by sources the reference record cites, as "return to hereditary rule" and "completion of the Islamic Republic's shift away from public backing" [21]. *Foreign Policy* read his appointment as signalling "regime exhaustion" [23]; *Time* wrote that the Supreme Leader "no longer reigns supreme" [24].

The paper does not resolve this. It notes that the form — a government for the people to take — was not obtained; that what stands in its place is an institution which survived and hardened while its titular head may be incapacitated; and that both facts are in the record. Section 7 treats the regime objective as failing *as stated* and as two-sided *in fact*.

3.6 The signed undertakings: paragraphs 4, 6 and 7

The Memorandum was signed on 17 June. The compliance record to 8 July, as documented with its cited reporting, is this [7].

The United States began. On 18 June, Central Command announced the removal of the naval blockade; on 21–22 June, the Treasury issued a sixty-day general licence for Iranian oil sales. Iran began. Commercial passage through the Strait resumed from 17 June; Iran received three billion dollars of a ten-billion-dollar commitment from the United Arab Emirates. Then both broke. On 20 June, Iran declared the Strait closed in response to Israeli strikes in Lebanon. On 26 June, Iranian drones attacked ships and the United States struck Iranian facilities. On 27 June, Iran targeted United States sites in the Gulf and the United States struck surveillance and defence infrastructure. On 28 June, Iran fired ballistic missiles and drones at United States bases in Kuwait and Bahrain. On 7 July, Iran fired missiles at commercial vessels including a Qatari tanker; the United States revoked the oil licence and struck more than eighty targets. On 8 July, the President declared the Memorandum "over", on the ground that "Iran launched attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz to assert Iranian sovereignty". On 26 August, the Council on Foreign Relations recorded the situation as "Worsening", with "both sides have since traded strikes over alleged violations" and "a durable settlement... elusive, with core disputes over Iran's nuclear program, the Strait of Hormuz, and sanctions relief unresolved" [11].

The paper does not assign fault for the collapse; both sides' violations are in the record and both are printed. It observes only what the signed form was and what became of it. Paragraph 4's blockade was lifted and then, by the paper's reading of the September record, effectively reinstated by Iranian sea-denial rather than American choice. Paragraph 6's three hundred billion dollars was undertaken and not begun. Paragraph 7's termination of every sanction, including those of the Security Council, was undertaken and reversed within twenty-one days. Paragraph 14's binding Security Council resolution does not exist. Paragraph 5, the clause on the Strait, is taken separately in Section 3.7, because the record on it is the fullest and the most contested.

Table 2 collects the substance against the form.

Objective	8 April form	Dated contrary record	What was obtained
Missiles	"razed"	7 May, 28 Jun, 7 Jul, 30 Aug, 5 Sep (carrier), 7 Sep (new missile, doctrine)	production struck; launches continued to September
Navy	"obliterated... 97% of mines eliminated"	MOU ¶15 demining clause; 16 minelayers destroyed Aug–Sep; 5,000+ mines credited; US "reluctant" to enter Gulf; Strait not forced; 6 Sep exclusion zone	surface fleet attrited; sea-denial retained
Proxies	"can no longer arm"	Houthis 28 Mar; Hezbollah 7 Jun; MOU ¶11 "including in Lebanon"; Lebanon 4,057 dead	supply struck; activity continued
Nuclear	"never"	IAEA verification ended 28 Feb; 440.9 kg @60% unaccounted; "near-total... loss of monitoring"; MOU ¶19 "status quo"; 10 Jul rebuilding	delay obtained ("months" → "more than a year"); verification lost
Regime	"take over your government"; "desperate, dejected"	Mojtaba elected 8 Mar; command rebuilt; "did not collapse" — <i>and</i> — contested vote; head wounded, unseen; "not here"	regime survived as institution; head's condition unknown
¶14, ¶16, ¶17	blockade lifted; \$300bn undertaken; all sanctions to end	both sides began; both broke 20 Jun–7 Jul; "over" 8 Jul; "Worsening" 26 Aug	21 days of partial performance
¶15 (the Strait)	passage arranged by Iran "with no charge, for 60 days"; "future administration" to be defined by Iran and Oman	two lanes by 1 Jun; US route widened 27 Jun; nine ships struck 25 Jun–14 Jul; "over" 8 Jul; 13 Jul "GUARDIAN... 20%"; 14 Jul fee dropped; 14 Jul Iran's letter of 42 breaches	passage under two rival administrations; the sixty days not run

3.7 The Strait: paragraph 5 and the parallel route

Paragraph 5 is the clause on which the collapse turned, and the record on it is fuller than on any other undertaking, so the paper sets it out on its own. The clause reads, in the parts that matter: "Upon the signing of this MOU, the Islamic Republic of Iran will make arrangements using its best efforts for the safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge, for 60 days only, from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and vice versa... The Islamic Republic of Iran will conduct dialog with the Sultanate of Oman to define the future administration and maritime services in the Strait of Hormuz in discussion with other Persian Gulf littoral states" [8].

The first fact is what the clause was signed over. By 17 June the Strait already had two administrations. Iran's Revolutionary Guard had, since the war's first weeks, "charged tolls on ships granted permission and attacked any that tried to cross unauthorized", and on 5 May Iran established a Persian Gulf Strait Authority "to authorise and regulate maritime transit" [25, 26]. The United States had answered with a

route of its own: mine-clearing from April; two destroyer transits "to re-establish freedom of navigation via another route near Oman's coast"; a one-day escort operation on 4–5 May, named Project Freedom, which Iran's military called a ceasefire violation and which the President paused on 6 May; and then a standing arrangement under which Central Command "insisted that it's not escorting ships" but supplied "communications and coordination" to vessels that switched off their transponders and, in *Fortune's* words, "rely on guidance from Central Command" [25, 27, 28, 26]. On 1 June *Fortune* reported the Strait "splitting into U.S. and Iranian lanes" [25]. Paragraph 5 was signed sixteen days later and names neither lane.

The second fact is that the signatories read the clause in opposite ways from the day it was signed, and both readings are in the record. Iran's Foreign Minister said the clause "assigns Iran 'responsibility' for safe passage during the 60 days, requiring vessels to coordinate with Iran"; the Speaker of its parliament said "Iran and Oman hold sovereign rights over administration per the clause"; and the Guard "designated only the northern corridor (through Iranian waters) as authorized, forcing some tankers on the southern (Oman-side) route to turn back". United States officials maintained that the Memorandum "neither cedes control of the strait nor authorises Iran to restrict routes", and that transit passage through an international strait is not a right a bilateral understanding can withdraw [29]. The paper does not decide between the readings. It notes that the text says "best efforts" and not "exclusive", which favours the American reading; that it says "no charge" while Iran's authority had been charging, which favours it too; and that it leaves "the future administration" to Iran and Oman and to no one else, which favours the Iranian.

The third fact is what the United States did after signing. On 27 June, ten days after the signature, the Joint Maritime Information Center overseen by the United States Navy "announced a widened route through the Strait of Hormuz near Oman, allowing increased naval traffic in both directions" — a step the reference record describes as "indicating a challenge to Iran's control over the waterway" [26]. Between 25 June and 14 July Iranian fire damaged or disabled nine merchant vessels of third states — the *Ever Lovely*, the *Kiku*, the *Al Rekayyat*, the *Wedyan*, the *Cyprus Prosperity*, the *GFS Galaxy*, the *Stolt Magnesium*, the *Mombasa B* and the *Al Bahyah* — with a seafarer killed on 11 July and another on 14 July; the Guard said it had struck "offending supertankers" entering a "mined route" [26]. On 8 July the President declared the Memorandum "over" because "Iran launched attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz to assert Iranian sovereignty" [7]. On 13 July he posted:

"The Hormuz Strait is OPEN, and will remain OPEN, with or without Iran... The U.S.A. will be, from this point forward, known as 'THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT,' but as such, and as a matter of FAIRNESS, will be reimbursed, at the rate of 20% on all cargo shipped, for any and all costs necessary to do the job of providing safety and security to this very volatile section of the World."
[30]

The same morning he told an interviewer: "We're going to keep the strait, and we'll probably run it" [31]. The next day the fee was withdrawn — the President had "decided to replace the 20% fee with Trade and Investment Deals that the various Gulf States will be making into the United States" — and Iran's Foreign Minister answered: "Iran has always been the GUARDIAN of the Strait and will remain so FOREVER. 20% is of course too much." [32] By 22 August Central Command counted some 1,300 vessels moved since

May along "the southern corridor near the Omani coast", under what the Gulf press by then called "escort and protection operations" [33].

The fourth fact is Iran's formal case. On 14 July its Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, wrote to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council setting out forty-two alleged breaches since 17 June. The letter's central charge is the clause: paragraph 5 "explicitly affirms the Islamic Republic of Iran's responsibility for determining the arrangements for the safe passage of vessels through the Strait of Hormuz", and "in clear contravention of this provision, the United States has unilaterally challenged this arrangement and has sought to impose a parallel maritime route". It cites Central Command's confirmation of 11 July that United States forces "had facilitated the transit of more than 800 commercial vessels through the alternative maritime route under U.S. military management, with naval escort and air cover", and it cites the post of 13 July [34, 35]. The paper has the letter only as Iranian and Azerbaijani outlets carried it, and quotes it as their text.

The paper prints Iran's conduct with equal weight, because criterion (4) requires the other side to be heard. The Guard's permits and tolls pre-dated the clause; its permit regime after 17 June sat uneasily with "no charge" and with "safe passage"; nine ships of third states were struck in three weeks and seafarers of third states were killed. Both sides broke the clause, and the paper says so. What it records for Section 7 is narrower and does not depend on fault. The party that had declared on 8 April that the adversary's navy was obliterated signed, on 17 June, a clause leaving passage to the adversary's arrangements and the Strait's future administration to the adversary and Oman; widened its own route ten days later; named the adversary's enforcement of the adversary's clause, on 8 July, as the ground on which the agreement was "over"; and announced itself the Strait's guardian on 13 July and set a price. The clause was kept as a text to be invoked and abandoned as a thing to be done. That is the structure the test exists to detect.

4. The cost of the form: the dead, the wounded, the materiel and the money

A claim of decisive achievement has a price, and the price is part of the substance. This section sets out what the United States paid between 28 February and September 2026, from its own accounting where that accounting exists, and from the dispute over that accounting where it does not. The paper prints ranges. It does not choose a number where the sources disagree, because choosing would be the very thing the test detects.

4.1 The dead

The public reference record lists nineteen United States service members and one civilian contractor killed as of 21 July 2026, and twenty military deaths as of 5 August, by incident [20]:

The table explains a discrepancy that the paper would otherwise have to leave unexplained. The Council on Foreign Relations records thirteen dead through March [11]; the Brookings assessment of 10 June records seven killed by Iranian attack [12]; *Task & Purpose*, updated 8 September, records eighteen [36]; the reference record's infobox records nineteen and one contractor [37]. These are not four errors. They are four counts on four dates with four rules — hostile only, or all causes; service members only, or

contractors too. Six of the nineteen died in a tanker-aircraft accident and one of illness; the hostile dead number twelve or thirteen. The paper prints the table because a single figure would have been a form.

Date	Place	Cause	Killed
1 March	Port Shuaiba / Camp Arifjan, Kuwait	hostile drone attack	6
6 March	Kuwait	illness	1
9 March	Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia	hostile fire	1
12 March	western Iraq	KC-135 aircraft accident	6
24 March	Erbil	hostile strike	1 (contractor)
1 July	Arabian Sea	MH-60S helicopter crash	1
17 July	Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, Jordan	hostile missile attack	3
19 July	northern Iraq	explosive-ordnance disposal	1

4.2 The wounded, and the counting of them

The reference record lists 624 service members and five contractors injured as of 21 July [20]; CNN reported "more than 750" wounded on 19 August [38]; the infobox records 757 [37].

The Intercept, on 4 August, reported the method by which the Pentagon's published casualty count was kept below the count of its own pages. The Defense Casualty Analysis System page for Operation Epic Fury showed 431 casualties; a separate "Overseas Operations" page, created for casualties after 7 July, showed 273 killed or wounded; the two pages together showed 704; neither page cross-referenced the other. A government official is quoted: "This is certainly designed to conceal the count of the wounded." The Intercept's reconstruction, adding casualties it identifies as omitted — more than two hundred sailors injured in a fire aboard USS *Gerald R. Ford* on 12 March; a day of seventy casualties on 18 March "never publicly reported"; at least 170 head-trauma injuries — exceeds nine hundred. The Pentagon's explanation is a single sentence:

"Since Operation Epic Fury has concluded, the department classifies casualties as overseas operations." [39]

The paper notes, and returns to in Section 7, that this sentence is itself an object for the test. The *name* of the operation concluded on 8 April. The casualties did not. From 9 July, Iranian strikes hit nine United States outposts [39]; three service members died in Jordan on 17 July and one in Iraq on 19 July [20]. A count that ends when the name ends preserves the form of an accounting while the substance continues on another page.

4.3 The materiel

The reference record lists sixty-three United States aircraft lost or damaged, of which forty-five were MQ-9 Reaper drones [40, 37], and more than 228 facilities damaged — a figure the paper could not trace to a cited source and marks as unverified. The Brookings assessment supplies the qualitative fact the numbers do not: Iran struck "over 200 targets" across Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia — "aircraft hangars, munitions storage, fuel storage, command facilities,

and airports"; personnel were evacuated from locations "deemed too vulnerable"; and the damaged aircraft included "critical airborne warning and control aircraft and aerial refueling aircraft", which "cannot be quickly or cheaply replaced" [12]. The same assessment records that Iran "systematically targeted U.S. air defenses in the region, with a particular focus on radars and communications infrastructure", working "to puncture the regional U.S. defensive shield" [12].

4.4 The money

Three figures for the cost to the United States are in circulation and they are not reconcilable: 11.3 billion dollars for the first six days, or about 1.88 billion a day; "more than 37.5 billion" attributed to the Associated Press; and 115 billion from an independent cost tracker [17]. The paper prints all three with their bases and uses none as a datum. What is not in dispute is the price outside the ledger: oil above one hundred dollars a barrel, and some fifteen million barrels a day of crude stranded behind a strait the declaring party's navy had declared cleared [17].

4.5 The allies

The form of a superpower includes the bases from which it acts. The Brookings assessment records "Gulf and European allies and partners publicly restricting U.S. use of their bases", and asks "how allies and partners in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia are reconsidering granting the U.S. military access, basing, and overflight permissions following this war" [12]. The Carnegie assessment records "the hesitation of certain traditional allies", which "constrains the United States' ability to translate its military superiority into tangible political outcomes" [41]. Pakistan's own conduct — examined in Section 8 — is an instance: a country with "functional channels with Washington" that alone among states condemned the strikes on 28 February, and then hosted the talks [42].

5. What the American literature says

The paper's question is not new to American scholarship, and a study that ignored the answers already given would be the weaker for it. The literature since February 2026 divides into two poles, and the paper quotes both, because a test that only heard the witnesses for one side would fail its own criterion (4).

5.1 The pole of testing

Amr Hamzawy, writing for the Carnegie Endowment on 28 April, argues that the war demonstrates that "military power — despite its undeniable importance — is no longer sufficient to achieve decisive outcomes in international conflicts". Iran, he observes, "is not confronting the United States through... direct, conventional war"; its asymmetric mode "renders a decisive victory elusive... prolongs the duration of hostilities, and drives up the political and economic costs of the war". He finds "a blow to its legitimacy as a global leader" and "the absence of a broad international consensus regarding the war's objectives and means". His historical comparisons are Suez in 1956 — where Britain "achieved military objectives but suffered political failure", demonstrating "the structural disconnect between military capability and political power" — Vietnam, and Iraq in 2003, where "toppling a political regime does not automatically translate into building an alternative system". But Hamzawy explicitly rejects the decline narrative. He characterises 2026 as "a moment of testing", and closes on a question: "While Britain required the shock

of Suez to recognize the limits of its power, the question facing the United States today is whether it can internalize that same lesson without the need for a similar shock." [41]

Caitlin Talmadge and Mara Karlin, writing for the Brookings Institution on 10 June, put the matter in operational terms. Their thesis is that "the Iran war has profoundly undermined the notion that the bases and surface ships needed to project such power will continue to enjoy sanctuary from adversary attack". Their conclusion is that the American way of war has not ended but "must transform": the United States "should dramatically accelerate its thus far rather unimpressive efforts to disperse and harden its bases"; invest in "rapidly replenishing and increasing its munitions stocks"; and in attack submarines and "large numbers of attritable unmanned systems". Their strategic sentence is this: "U.S. policymakers must soberly recognize that the costs of fighting a war in Europe or the Indo-Pacific will be higher than what the United States became accustomed to in the unipolar era. That reality should, in turn, discipline U.S. diplomatic and political decisionmaking prior to a decision to ever employ military force." The United States, they conclude, can no longer engage in "relatively low-risk, at-will power projection against a great power the way it once did" [12].

5.2 The pole of ending

Bhim Bhurtel, writing in *Asia Times* on 2 April — before the ceasefire — argued that the thirty-four-day conflict had delivered "a decisive, and likely irreversible, blow to the architecture of the American-led unipolar world order". He cites drones and missiles that "repeatedly penetrated" THAAD, Patriot and Aegis defences; a Strait of Hormuz where "American fleets and radar arrays failed to protect" Gulf assets; allies' "strategic silence"; Gulf states "actively diversifying their strategic portfolios — deepening economic ties with China and defense cooperation with Russia"; and the BRICS challenge to "the dollar's monetary hegemony". He forecasts three or four poles by 2030 and a United States that is "*primus inter pares* — first among equals — rather than the singular superpower". "The question that remains", he writes, "is not whether a new order will emerge — it is already emerging — but whether the great powers, particularly the United States, will accept this reality and adapt with wisdom." [43]

The paper notes a feature of this pole that bears on its own method. Bhurtel's essay, as published, contains no figures — no casualty count, no cost, no verified strike, no dated launch. It asserts the substance. The paper's Sections 3 and 4 supply what the ending pole leaves out; whether the figures support the ending pole's conclusion is for Section 7, not for this one.

5.3 Where the test sits between the poles

The two poles disagree about a word — whether American primacy has *ended* or been *tested*. The Sabbath Pond Test does not ask that question, and the paper does not answer it. The criteria ask something narrower and more answerable: whether a *stated* objective was *obtained*, or only *announced*. On that question, Hamzawy and Talmadge and Karlin — the pole that rejects the decline narrative — are in substance the paper's witnesses, not its opponents. It is Carnegie that finds military power "no longer sufficient to achieve decisive outcomes"; it is Brookings that finds sanctuary "profoundly undermined" and the Strait left unforced because forcing it "is more costly than it once was". The paper's contribution is not to choose between the poles but to show that the documents on which both rely fail a test that neither applied.

Robert Pape's essay in *Foreign Affairs*, "Iran and the New Rules of Global Power", could not be retrieved and is cited only by title [44]; so too the War on the Rocks essay on the record of regime-change operations [45], the Center for International Policy's paper on the operation and legal constraint [46], and the State Department Legal Adviser's statement of April 2026 [47].

6. The classical theory of rise and decline

The paper's fourth criterion asks whether an announcement can be defended by the purpose it served. Purposes are judged by theories of what states are for and how they last, and the Islamic intellectual tradition possesses one of the oldest and most fully worked-out such theories. This section sets it out as intellectual history. It is not offered as evidence for Section 7, whose criteria are independent of it, and it is not offered as prophecy. It is offered because a Pakistani author writing in this series would be evading his own tradition if he read the record of 2026 only through Carnegie and Brookings, and because the tradition's account of *why* the form of power outlives its substance is, the paper will suggest, the most precise available.

6.1 The Qur'anic principle of alternation

The principle is stated in a single verse revealed after the Muslims' defeat at Uḥud in the third year of the Hijra:

wa-tilka l-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna n-nās — "and those days We alternate among people" (Qur'an 3:140).

Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* preserves the earliest commentary, in the context of that defeat: the preceding verse's "do not weaken and do not grieve, for you shall be the uppermost, if you are believers" is glossed as a promise of *the outcome and the ascendancy* to those who keep faith, and 3:140's "if a wound has touched you, a wound like it has touched the people" is glossed as the equality of injury between the two sides on that day [48]. The verse's plain sense, in every classical reading, is that ascendancy is not a possession but a turn; it is *given* and it *passes*; and the giving and the passing are the ordinary course of days, not an exception to it.

Three other verses supply the same principle's scope. "For every community there is an appointed term; when their term comes they cannot delay it by an hour, nor advance it" (7:34). "We willed to favour those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts, from them, that which they feared" (28:5–6). "How many a town that did wrong have We crushed, and raised up after it another people" (21:11). The paper cites the Arabic of the standard text; the Urdu renderings in the author's library are Maudūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, whose printed volumes the author will verify before any rendering is quoted, the digital copies on hand being unreadable at the relevant passages (Section 10.1).

Two boundaries must be drawn at once, and the paper draws them. First, the verses state a *general* principle of the alternation of ascendancy among peoples; they do not identify any people, any year, or any war, and the paper does not read them as doing so. Second, the principle is *moral* before it is political: 3:140 continues "...that God may know those who believe, and take witnesses from among you", and 21:11 speaks of a town "that did wrong". The tradition's theory of decline is a theory about what a power

does, not about how long a power *lasts*. That is precisely what makes it relevant to a test whose fourth criterion is about purpose.

6.2 Ibn Khaldūn: the natural life of dynasties

The tradition's fullest theory is Ibn Khaldūn's, in the *Muqaddimah* of 1377. The paper relies on Franz Rosenthal's translation and quotes only short passages within fair use [49]; the translation is in copyright, and the chapter titles of the second volume, which state the theory in the author's own summary form, are quoted from the copy on hand.

The theory has three parts. The first is *ʿaṣabiyya* — the group feeling, the solidarity of a people that makes it able to act as one — which Ibn Khaldūn holds to be the source of every royal authority and the thing whose weakening ends it. The second is the *natural life span* of a dynasty, which he compares to that of an individual, and which he holds to run, as a rule, three generations: the first that wins power by hardship and solidarity; the second that inherits it and administers it; the third that has known only luxury and has "lost the taste for the sweetness of fame and for group feeling" (vol. I, ch. III, §§14–15). The third is the *sequence of decline*, which the second volume states chapter by chapter, and whose titles the paper reproduces because they are a theory in miniature:

"Injustice brings about the ruin of civilization."

"How it happens that access to the ruler becomes restricted in the dynasty. Such restriction becomes important when the dynasty grows senile."

"Once senility has come upon a dynasty, it cannot be made to disappear."

"How disintegration befalls dynasties."

"The authority of the dynasty at first expands to its limit and then is narrowed down in successive stages, until the dynasty dissolves and disappears."

"Curtailement of the allowances given by the ruler implies curtailment of the tax revenue." (vol. II, ch. III, chapter titles) [49]

The paper draws attention to two features of the theory that a modern reader might miss. It is a theory of *stages*, not of *dates*; Ibn Khaldūn is explicit that the three-generation rule is "as a rule" and that a dynasty's span may be longer or shorter. And it is a theory in which decline is *internal* before it is external: the enemy that ends a senile dynasty does so "through perseverance, and not through sudden action" (vol. II, ch. III), because the dynasty's own capacity has already contracted "in successive stages". The outward form of authority — the titles, the ceremonial, the announcements — is, in his account, the last thing to go, and is at its most elaborate precisely when the substance has thinned.

6.3 Reading the record through the theory — with care

The paper does not claim that Ibn Khaldūn predicted 2026. It claims something narrower: that his theory names the structure the test detects. A dynasty in the stage he calls senility does not lose the *form* of its power; it retains the vocabulary of command, the machinery of declaration, the ceremony of victory. What it loses is the correspondence between the declaration and the state of the world — and it loses it first at the edges, where its authority was "narrowed down in successive stages", which in 2026 means a

strait it did not force, bases it could not shield, allies who restricted their use, and a settlement it signed and could not keep.

Whether the United States is in that stage is not a question this paper can answer, and its criteria do not ask it. What the criteria ask — whether the form of the objectives of 2026 matched their substance — is answered in the next section. The theory's use is to say what it would mean if the answer is no: not that a power has fallen, but that it has entered the condition in which the announcement outruns the fact. The Qur'anic principle says that condition is ordinary. Ibn Khaldūn says it is stage-wise, internal and slow. Carnegie says it is "a moment of testing". They are not in disagreement.

6.4 What the tradition does not license

The tradition does not license the naming of a year, the wishing of a fall, or the reading of scripture as a forecast. The verse that begins "those days We alternate" continues to the taking of witnesses, and the narrative of the Sabbath pond ends in a punishment that this paper has said, and says again, it does not invoke. A Muslim author who used 3:140 to gloat would have misread it as badly as a government that used "obliterated" to describe a navy that was still laying mines. The test applies to both. The paper's register, stated in Section 1, holds here.

7. Pond 1: the four criteria applied

This section applies the adapted criteria of Section 1 to each row of Table 2. For each objective it asks, in order: whether the objective was stated (1); whether the record shows it not obtained (2); whether its form was nonetheless preserved and announced as satisfied (3); and whether the announcement can be defended by reference to the objective's purpose (4). A claim fails the test only when all four hold. Where they do not all hold, the paper says so; a test that returned "fails" for every row would not be a test.

7.1 The missiles

(1) Stated: "obliterate Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and production capability" (1 April); "razed" (8 April). (2) Not obtained: ballistic-missile fire on three destroyers on 7 May, on bases in Kuwait and Bahrain on 28 June, on commercial vessels on 7 July, on bases in Jordan on 30 August, on an aircraft carrier on 5 September; a new missile and a doctrine of pre-emption on 7 September. (3) Form preserved: the arsenal declared "razed" on 8 April; the operation declared concluded; "more than 450 ballistic missile targets" counted. (4) Purpose: the Chairman's stated purpose was that Iran "cannot rapidly rebuild or reconstitute its combat capability". The record does not show that purpose served; it shows the capability in use against the declaring party's carrier five months after the declaration. Nor is the purpose secured by other means: no agreement limits the missiles; paragraph 9 of the Memorandum freezes only the nuclear status quo.

The claim fails the test. What was obtained — damage to production — is real and the paper has recorded it; but "razed" was the form, and criterion (4) asks whether the announced word can be defended by the purpose. It cannot, because the purpose was the *cessation* of the threat and the threat continued.

7.2 The navy

(1) Stated: "annihilate its navy"; "obliterated... 97% of... naval mines... eliminated". (2) Not obtained: the Strait "effectively closed" the day after the declaration; sixteen further minelayers destroyed in August and September; an inventory of more than five thousand mines credited; the United States "reluctant to regularly send destroyers into the confined waters of the Gulf"; the Strait not militarily reopened because doing so "is more costly than it once was"; an Iranian exclusion zone declared on 6 September. (3) Form preserved: "obliterated"; "every submarine has been sunk"; "97%". (4) Purpose: the purpose of annihilating a navy is freedom of the sea. The declaring party's own signature on paragraph 5 — "demining by the Islamic Republic of Iran will be instated within 30 days" — is the admission that the purpose was not served by the announced means; the party that had eliminated 97 per cent of the mines contracted with the adversary to remove them.

The claim fails the test. The paper accepts that the surface fleet was heavily struck. But a navy is defined by what it can deny, and the navy declared obliterated denied the Strait of Hormuz to the world's largest navy through September.

7.3 The proxies

(1) Stated: "sever its support for terrorist proxies"; "can no longer arm". (2) Not obtained: the Houthis entered the war on 28 March; Hezbollah struck northern Israel on 7 June; the Memorandum of 17 June had to name Lebanon as an open front. (3) Form preserved: "can no longer arm terrorist proxies" (8 April). (4) Purpose: that the proxies "can no longer destabilize the region... and attack our armed forces" (Leavitt, 4 March). The record shows them fighting in June. The purpose is not secured by other means; paragraph 1's termination "on all fronts" collapsed with the rest on 8 July.

The claim fails the test.

7.4 The nuclear objective

This is the row on which the paper's method is tested hardest, and the paper does not soften the result.

(1) Stated: "ensure... never acquires a nuclear weapon"; "Iran will never possess a nuclear bomb". (2) Not obtained — *as stated*. "Never" names a permanent state of affairs, and the record shows 440.9 kilograms of 60-per-cent uranium unaccounted for, in backfilled tunnels, under no inspection, with rebuilding photographed on 10 July and a return to threshold estimated "in less than a year". (3) Form preserved: the 8 April declaration folds the nuclear objective into the missile objective ("eliminating its ability to... use these capabilities as a shield around their ultimate pursuit of nuclear weapons"); the Memorandum's paragraph 8 preserves the vocabulary of the pledge. (4) Purpose: the purpose of *never* is an Iran verifiably without a path to a weapon.

Here the criteria return a divided answer, and the paper prints it. The purpose was *partly* served by the announced means: destruction lengthened the weapon timeline from "within months" to "more than a year", and that is substance, obtained by force, which the paper records against itself. But the purpose was *not* served in the respect that gives *never* its meaning, verification — and there criterion (4) bites, because the announced means (destruction and denial) produced the *opposite* of the purpose's other half: "near-total, ongoing loss of monitoring". A power that cannot see the stockpile cannot say "never" of it. What it can say is "later".

The claim as stated — never — fails the test. The claim that could have been made — delayed — would have passed it. The paper regards this as its most important single finding, because it shows that the test does not condemn the action; it condemns the word. The same strikes, described as delay, pass. Described as never, they fail. That is what form without substance means

7.5 The regime

(1) Stated: "the hour of your freedom is at hand... take over your government"; demoted two days later to "incidental". (2) Not obtained: the government was not taken; a successor was installed on 8 March and a war command rebuilt. (3) Form preserved: 8 April — "desperate, dejected, and in denial". (4) Purpose: the stated purpose, on 28 February, was the freedom of the Iranian people. The record shows an institution that survived and hardened; it also shows, on the other side, a contested succession and a head of state who may be incapacitated. The paper cannot say the purpose was served, and cannot say the institution is stable; both are in the record.

The claim as stated fails the test; the fact is two-sided. The paper does not resolve the second half and does not pretend to. A regime that "did not collapse" and a Supreme Leader who "is not here" are both true on 9 September 2026, and a reader who wants only one of them should read a different paper.

7.6 The signed undertakings

(1) Stated — signed: blockade ended within thirty days; forces withdrawn from Iran's proximity after the final deal; three hundred billion dollars; all sanctions including the Security Council's; a binding resolution. (2) Not obtained: performance for twenty-one days on both sides, then violation on both sides, then "over". (3) Form preserved: the Memorandum stands as text; the Council on Foreign Relations records both parties still invoking its "obligations" in late August; Iran conditioned reopening the Strait to United States vessels on American performance of it. (4) Purpose: the purpose of a settlement is the end of the war. The war did not end.

Paragraph 5 is the fullest instance and is taken on its own. (1) Stated — signed: passage arranged by Iran "with no charge, for 60 days"; the Strait's "future administration" to be defined by Iran and Oman. (2) Not obtained: passage ran under two rival administrations from before the signing to after the collapse; the sixty days were not completed; the United States widened its own route on 27 June and by August was moving ships along it under "escort and protection". (3) Form preserved: the clause stood as text; the United States invoked the Memorandum as breached by Iran's "attacks on commercial vessels" — that is, by the adversary's enforcement of the adversary's clause — and declared itself the Strait's "GUARDIAN" while the clause assigning the Strait's administration to Iran and Oman still bore its signature. (4) Purpose: the purpose of the clause was sixty days of uncharged passage under an arrangement both had accepted, pending an agreed administration. Two arrangements, one of them priced at twenty per cent for a day, served that purpose on neither side. Iran's own breaches of the clause — permits, tolls, nine third-state ships struck — are printed in Section 3.7 and fail the same criteria. The paper's finding concerns the signatory that declared victory, and it is that the signatory kept the clause as a text to be invoked and abandoned it as a thing to be done.

The undertakings fail the test on both sides, and the paper assigns no fault. What the row shows about the form of superpower is narrower and does not depend on fault: the party that declared victory on 8

April signed, on 17 June, terms that no victor signs — reconstruction of the adversary, termination of the world's sanctions on the adversary, withdrawal from the adversary's proximity, the adversary's nuclear status quo preserved. Either the declaration of 8 April was the form and the Memorandum the substance, or the reverse; they cannot both be substance. The paper's reading is that the Memorandum was the closer of the two to the state of the world, because it was written by two parties who each knew what the other could still do, and the declaration was written by one.

7.7 The accounting

One further object was flagged in Section 4.2 and is examined here because it is the purest instance in the record. (1) Stated: a published count of the operation's casualties. (2) Not obtained: the count on the operation's page stopped at 7 July; the casualties did not. (3) Form preserved: the page remains, titled and current; the later casualties are on a second page under another name. (4) Purpose: the purpose of a casualty count is to tell the public what the war has cost. A count that ends with the name of the operation, while the operation's casualties continue under another heading, does not serve that purpose, and the Pentagon's own sentence — "Since Operation Epic Fury has concluded..." — is the confession, not the cure.

The accounting fails the test. The paper notes that this is the same structure as the nets laid on Friday: the rule ("publish the count") is kept in every word.

7.8 What the criteria return

Of seven objects examined, five fail on all four criteria (missiles, navy, proxies, the signed undertakings including the Strait clause, the accounting); one fails as stated and passes as it could have been stated (nuclear); one fails as stated and is two-sided in fact (regime). None passes as stated. The paper records this result without adjective. It is what the government's own documents, set against the public record, return when the test is applied — and it is the result the honest column of Table 2 was included to make harder, not easier, to reach.

8. Pond 2: the mediator's country

The Sabbath Pond Test II examined a documented case as its second pond, from the author's own record, and bounded it. This paper's second pond is the author's country, and it is bounded in the same way: the paper reports what the sources say Pakistan did, what it says about the form of the superpower that needed it, and what the record does not show.

8.1 The mediator

On 28 February, Pakistan alone among states condemned the strikes on Iran; on 23 March its Foreign Office offered Islamabad as a venue; on 31 March it published, with China, a five-point proposal for a ceasefire and the restoration of navigation in the Strait; on 6 April it proposed a forty-five-day two-phase truce; on 7 April the President of the United States agreed to a two-week ceasefire after a request from the Prime Minister of Pakistan [50]. On 11–12 April, at the Serena Hotel in Islamabad, a United States delegation of some three hundred led by the Vice President, with the Special Envoy and the President's adviser, met an Iranian delegation of some seventy led by the Speaker of the Majlis and the Foreign

Minister, for twenty-one hours in three rounds, hosted by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Chief of Defence Forces of Pakistan; they were the first direct talks between the two countries since 1979 [51, 42]. The talks failed — the Vice President: "Iran had refused the possibility of not developing nuclear weapons"; the Iranian Foreign Minister: the United States was "moving the goalposts and maximalizing" — and the blockade was announced the next day [51]. The Chief of Defence Forces then spent three days in Tehran; the Prime Minister went to Riyadh, Doha and Ankara; and on 17 June the Memorandum was signed with Pakistan as its principal mediator [42, 7].

Arhama Siddiq, of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, explains why: Pakistan "has a reputation of being a mediator without coercive baggage"; it kept "functional channels with Washington" while its public support for Iran in 2025 made it acceptable in Tehran; and it had, in 2025, a Strategic Defence and Military Agreement with Saudi Arabia and personal relationships between its leadership and the President of the United States. She is equally clear about the limit: "Pakistan's leverage should not be overstated"; it "can keep communication channels active" but "cannot impose a settlement"; its role is "facilitator, not guarantor" [42]. And she states the motive without ornament: with 90 per cent of its crude, 99 per cent of its liquefied natural gas and 54 per cent of its remittances exposed to the Gulf, "for Islamabad, de-escalation is not simply a diplomatic objective but an economic necessity" — a necessity the record confirms in a four-day working week, a two-week closure of schools, and petrol at 458 rupees a litre [50].

What this shows about the form of the superpower is one thing only, and the paper states it plainly. A power whose declaration of 8 April was complete in itself would not, nine days earlier, have accepted a ceasefire at the request of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, or, nine weeks later, have signed its settlement in a Pakistani text. The room in Islamabad is a fact about who could still say no.

8.2 The consulate

On 1 March 2026, the day after the strike that killed Ali Khamenei, hundreds of protesters gathered on Mai Kolachi Road in Karachi and attempted to breach the outer wall of the United States Consulate General; Sindh Police and Rangers used tear gas and batons; United States Marine security guards opened fire [52]. Reuters, on 3 March, reported that two United States officials confirmed the Marines had fired and that "it was unclear whether rounds fired by Marines struck or killed anyone", and that it was unclear whether other security personnel had also fired; a video showed at least one protester armed and firing toward the consulate. Pakistani authorities reported eleven dead at the consulate and twenty-six across the country; a spokesman for the Sindh government said "security" personnel had fired without saying which; the State Department declined to comment; the Sindh Senior Minister announced a joint investigation team with a report due in fifteen days [1]. Other reports give ten dead and more than sixty injured, three more dead near the embassy in Islamabad, the closure of every United States diplomatic facility in Pakistan, and a three-day curfew [52]. The paper prints the range — nine to twelve, by source — and records that it could not find the joint investigation team's report published.

The paper alleges nothing beyond these sources and characterises no one. It records the event because a Pakistani author examining the form and substance of American power in 2026 cannot omit the day American fire killed Pakistanis in a Pakistani city, and because the event's own record has the structure

of the test: a report promised in fifteen days, and not found; a firing confirmed, and its effect declared "unclear".

8.3 What Pond 2 does not show

It does not show that Pakistan's mediation succeeded; the Memorandum collapsed. It does not show that the consulate fire was unjustified; the record contains an armed protester and a breached wall, and the paper has printed them. It does not show that the author is neutral; he is a citizen of the mediating country, and has said so. It shows that the war's form was written in Washington and its substance was negotiated in Islamabad, and that on the first day of the war the form and the substance met on Mai Kolachi Road.

9. What an honest version of the claim would require

The Sabbath Pond Test II closed its analysis by stating what a lawful version of the provision it examined would have to contain. This paper closes its analysis the same way, and with the same limit: it does not tell any government what to do. It states what the *documents* would have had to say for the form to match the substance, so that the reader can see how small the distance was, and how much turned on it.

The declaration of 8 April would have had to say *degraded* where it said *razed*; *struck* where it said *obliterated*; *reduced* where it said *eliminated*; *delayed* where it said *never*. It would have had to omit "achieved the military objectives as defined by the President", or define the objectives as they were achieved. It would have had to say that the Strait was closed and would remain closed until an agreement was reached, and that the agreement would require the adversary to remove its own mines. It would have had to count its casualties on one page. And on 13 July it would have had to say that the Strait was being run by two navies, and that the signatory of paragraph 5 had chosen to run one of them, rather than that the signatory was the Strait's guardian.

None of this would have made the action smaller. The strikes were what they were; the Institute for Science and International Security's finding that Iran's weapon timeline lengthened by a year is not diminished by being called a delay. What the honest version would have made smaller is the *claim* — and the claim is the object the test examines. A superpower that says "delayed" and is right has substance. A superpower that says "never" and signs paragraph 9 nine weeks later has kept the word and lost the thing.

The Memorandum, for its part, would have had to be kept. That is not a matter of drafting, and the paper does not pretend it is.

10. Conclusion

The paper asked whether, on the government's own record set against the public record, the claim implicit in the word *superpower* — that force stated to achieve an objective achieves it, and that a declaration of achievement describes a fact — had, in the United States–Iran war of 2026, a substance or only a form. It applied a four-criterion test, stated in advance and adapted in the open, to seven objects:

the four objectives of 1 April as declared achieved on 8 April, the regime objective of 28 February, the signed undertakings of 17 June, and the casualty accounting.

The criteria return that none of the seven passes as stated. Five fail on all four criteria. One — the nuclear objective — fails as stated and would have passed as it could truthfully have been stated, which the paper regards as its central finding: the test does not condemn the action but the word. One — the regime — fails as stated and is two-sided in fact, and the paper has printed both sides.

What the result means is a question the paper has answered only to the extent its method allows. It does not mean the United States has ceased to be what the word names; the criteria do not ask, and the scholars the paper quotes at greatest length — Carnegie, Brookings — say it has not. It means that in 2026 the announcements of the United States government outran the state of the world by a distance that can be measured, and that the government's own signed text of 17 June is the measure. The Strait is the fullest instance: a clause signed on 17 June leaving passage to the adversary's arrangements; a rival route widened ten days later; the adversary's enforcement of the clause named on 8 July as the reason the agreement was over; and a guardianship declared, and priced, on 13 July. The Qur'anic principle of alternation says that such a condition is ordinary. Ibn Khaldūn says it is stage-wise, internal, and slow, and that the form of power is the last thing to go. Carnegie says it is "a moment of testing". They are not in disagreement, and the paper does not choose among them. It reports that the nets were laid on Friday.

10.1 Limitations

The record is four months old and moving; every dated fact in this paper is as of the source's date, and the sources are named. Casualty and cost figures are disputed among the sources, and the paper prints ranges rather than choosing. The claim that "taking Iran's oil and gas resources" was among the stated aims appears in one tertiary source only and in no primary document, and the paper has not used it. Thirteen sources could not be retrieved and are cited by title only, including the *Foreign Affairs* essay and the State Department Legal Adviser's statement. The Urdu renderings of the Qur'anic verses in the author's library are digital copies whose text is unreadable at the relevant passages; the paper cites the Arabic and defers the renderings to verification against print. The letter of Iran's Permanent Representative of 14 July is available to the paper only as Iranian and Azerbaijani outlets carried it, and is quoted as their text; the United Nations document itself was not retrieved. The paper could not independently verify the White House's counts of Iranian warships, aircraft or mines, and has examined instead what the declaring party's later conduct implies. The author is a citizen of the mediating country and has disclosed it. The adaptation of the criteria from a rule to a claim is the paper's own, stated in Section 1 so that it can be rejected; if it is rejected, so is the analysis.

10.2 Ethics statement

The paper names no soldier, sailor, airman, protester or official as responsible for any death, and alleges no offence against any person. Casualties of every nation are reported as the sources report them and are not used as argument. The account of the Karachi consulate is confined to the Reuters report and the Sindh government's words. The Qur'anic narrative from which the test takes its name ends with a punishment; the paper has not invoked it and directs nothing at any nation or people.

10.3 AI assistance disclosure

This paper was researched and drafted with substantial AI assistance (Anthropic's Claude: retrieval and extraction from the public sources listed in Section 10.4, tabulation of the compliance and casualty records, structural editing, and prose drafting), following the disclosure practice of the author's earlier preprints on IrshadOS. Every quotation was verified by the author against the saved source; the discrepancy register in the paper's working files was compiled so that no figure would be chosen silently; and the analysis, the adaptation of the criteria, the reading of the classical sources, and any error are the author's own.

10.4 Data and source availability

All primary sources cited — the White House releases of 1 and 8 April 2026, the text of the Islamabad Memorandum (a work of the United States government, in the public domain), the Institute for Science and International Security's analysis of the IAEA reports, the Arms Control Association and Arab Center assessments, the Carnegie, Brookings and *Asia Times* essays, the Council on Foreign Relations tracker, The Intercept's report, the *Fortune*, *Stars and Stripes*, Gulf News and CBS News reports on the Strait, the President's post of 13 July as archived by a public index of his posts, the Iranian mission's letter of 14 July as carried by Mehr and News.az, the Reuters report as carried by Dawn, and the public reference record with its cited reporting — are public documents. Copies as retrieved on 9 September 2026, an inventory, a register of every URL consulted with its retrieval status, and the discrepancy register accompany the paper's working files. Rosenthal's translation of the *Muqaddimah* is in copyright and is quoted within fair use.

10.5 Disclaimer

This is a research preprint prepared solely for study and academic purposes. It is not final; it is subject to correction and will be revised as the record changes. It is a scholarly examination of public documents and nothing more. It is not advice, not a prediction, not a religious ruling, not political advocacy, not a campaign for or against any state, government, people, party, faith or person, and not a direction to anyone to do or to refrain from doing anything. Its reading of Qur'anic and classical Islamic texts is offered as intellectual history and not as a claim that any scripture identifies any present event. Casualty and cost figures are those of the sources named, and the sources disagree; the paper prints the range. The author bears sole responsibility for the analysis.

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