

U.S. and Israeli Military Attacks Against Iran

Regional and Global Consequences



TÜRKİYE BİLİMLER AKADEMİSİ
TURKISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



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Foreword

Guided by its commitment to scientific thinking, the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) believes that international crises and wars should be examined from a variety of perspectives, including military, political, historical, legal, economic, social and humanitarian. Without peace, the advancement of science, the free pursuit of academic work and the preservation of hope for a shared future become impossible. Scientists have a responsibility not only to explain events, but also to contribute to a foundation that unites humanity around reason, common sense, and dialogue.

TÜBA's International Relations Working Group has closely monitored transformations related to global and regional crises in recent years, carrying out significant studies on these issues (Yurdusev & Doğrul, 2024; Aktürk & Balci, 2026). Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, TÜBA published a report assessing the effects of the war on the international system (TÜBA, 2022a), while another report examined the Palestine–Israel war from scientific perspectives such as international law, human rights, and the protection of civilians (TÜBA, 2023). More recently, a study of the India–Pakistan crisis analysed nuclear deterrence, regional security and crisis management from multiple perspectives (TÜBA, 2025). The present study builds upon these reports and seeks to evaluate recent developments centred on Iran within their historical context, regional dynamics, and global implications.

Tensions between Iran and the United States, as well as between Iran and Israel, have persisted in various forms since the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. These tensions escalated into direct military confrontation in 2026, marking a critical turning point that affected not only the Middle East, but also the future of the global system. During this period, nuclear facilities, energy infrastructure, cities, civilian living areas and educational institutions became targets. This demonstrated that modern wars are fought across multiple dimensions, including economics, energy security, the digital sphere and social psychology, not just on battlefields. Conflicts in which civilians, particularly women and children, bear a heavy burden leave deep scars on humanity's collective conscience.

Today, the power struggles occurring in various regions of the world, particularly in the Middle East, systematically threaten global peace. Conflicts are becoming increasingly complex and unpredictable due to factors such as energy security, great-power competition, the erosion of international norms, artificial intelligence-assisted warfare technologies (Okur, 2025) and global economic vulnerabilities. Tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, in particular, have consequences that affect all states directly due to their impact on global energy supplies and the world economy. At the same time, the growing toll of modern warfare on civilian populations calls into question the effectiveness and capacity of international institutions to act as a deterrent.

Thanks to its historical experience, geopolitical position and multidimensional diplomatic capacity, Türkiye has sought to play a balanced and constructive role during times of crisis. From the outset of the conflict, it has advocated keeping diplomatic channels open, making intensive efforts to preserve regional peace, secure a ceasefire and prevent humanitarian losses. Alongside careful diplomacy, important roles have also been played by public diplomacy initiatives, academic solidarity and humanitarian assistance mechanisms. Lasting peace can only be achieved through agreements between states and the restoration of trust between societies.

This work, prepared through the initiative of the TÜBA International Relations Working Group and composed of distinguished scholars in the field, examines conflicts involving Iran, the United States and Israel within their historical context, while assessing the regional and global effects of war from a scientific perspective. The study's objective is not to take sides based on ideology, but rather to analyse the complex nature of international relations, security concerns, power struggles and the resulting humanitarian consequences in a multidimensional manner. However, beyond all such analyses, one fundamental truth must not be forgotten: there are no winners in war. While wars may be easy to start, ending them is exceedingly difficult.

At TÜBA, we consistently emphasise the importance of world peace through scientific consultation mechanisms on international platforms, such as the World Science Forum (WSF) and the Science 20 (S20) meetings (TÜBA, 2022b). We also engage with the International Science Council (ISC), the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), the Association of Academies and Societies of Sciences in Asia (AASSA), the Union of Academies of Sciences of the Turkic World (UNASTW) and the Euro-Mediterranean Academic Network (EMAN) (Şeker & Doğrul, 2025). By actively contributing to these forums, we affirm that solutions to the global challenges confronting humanity depend on peace, and that scientific production, academic freedom, international cooperation and efforts concerning our shared future can only flourish in a peaceful environment.

In a world dominated by war and deepening conflicts, and where international law is being weakened, it is not only economies and societies that suffer. Scientific thought, academic solidarity, and our collective body of knowledge are also being severely damaged. Scientific academies and their members are not merely institutions that generate knowledge; they also represent humanity's collective conscience and have a responsibility to contribute to world peace on a scientific basis. As TÜBA, we are committed to upholding this understanding and supporting the strengthening of science diplomacy and academic cooperation. We will also resolutely advocate this approach on international platforms.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to TÜBA's International Relations Working Group, our esteemed scientists and experts, and all those who contributed to the preparation of this work.

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Abstract

On 28 February 2026, the United States (US) and Israel launched coordinated air and missile strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, military command structure, and political leadership. Called "Epic Fury" by the US and "Roaring Lion" by Israel, both parties presented these operations as a legitimate response to decades of Iranian threats and attacks, rather than as the start of a new war. The roots of the conflict lie in the deep-seated hostility that dates back to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Following the revolution, the Islamic Republic regime made anti-Americanism and anti-Israeli policies central to its identity and foreign policy. Proxy wars and disputes over Iran's missile and nuclear programme have been the main drivers of this hostility. Tensions between the parties were further heightened when the Trump administration withdrew from the nuclear agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1 countries in 2018, followed by Iran accelerating its nuclear programme. Iran's rise as a regional power and the development of its military capabilities, alongside its nuclear activities, increased the level of threat perceived by the US and Israel. Direct military confrontations eventually took place between Iran and Israel in April and October 2024 and June 2025 (the 12-Day War). Israel's failure to eliminate the threats it perceived from Iran during the 12-Day War (i.e. Iran's continued nuclear and missile programmes, its relations with regional allies, and the survival of the Islamic Republic regime) combined with inconclusive negotiations between Iran and the US made a new conflict between the parties almost inevitable. In result of the large-scale attacks carried out by the US and Israel, besides dozens of senior military and political officials, including Iran's highest-ranking leader, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, nearly 1700 civilians, 168 of whom were schoolgirls attending a primary school that was hit in the first day of the attacks were killed. In addition to nuclear facilities and military infrastructure, Iran's energy and industrial centers sustained severe damage. In response to the joint US-Israeli attacks, Iran launched military operations codenamed "True Promise IV" and expanded the conflict into the Persian Gulf region. The most critical development during this period was Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly one-fifth of global oil shipments pass. Consequently, oil prices almost doubled, causing severe disruption to the global economy. From the outset, Türkiye opposed the war, maintaining intensive diplomatic contact with both the American and Iranian sides. Alongside Egypt and Pakistan, it played a significant mediating role in securing a ceasefire. The ceasefire, announced on 8 April 2026, was the result of these efforts. However, issues such as the status of the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's nuclear programme and broader regional matters remain unresolved. Following the conflict, the political influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) within Iran is expected to grow. Nevertheless, ongoing foreign policy, security and economic challenges, as well as the structural legitimacy issues of the Islamic Republic system, continue to create uncertainty regarding Iran's future.

Keywords: *US, Israel, Islamic Republic of Iran, Epic Fury, Roaring Lion, Persian Gulf*

1. Introduction

On February 28, 2026, U.S. military elements and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched coordinated and joint missile and air strikes targeting Iranian political leaders, nuclear facilities, military command structures, and military installations. In retaliation, the Iranian armed forces responded with unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and missile attacks against Israel and the Persian Gulf countries hosting U.S. military bases, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. The scope of these mutual strikes expanded over time to target economic infrastructure, energy-related facilities, and commercial facilities. Finally, Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which around twenty per cent of the world's daily oil shipments pass, to maritime traffic. Consequently, the conflict evolved into a multi-dimensional and multi-front confrontation. The mutual attacks lasted for 40 days, continuing until the ceasefire declared on April 8, 2026.

Iranian officials described the joint U.S. and Israeli strikes as an “unjust, illegal, and illegitimate” attack and a “imposed war” against the Islamic Republic of Iran, in violation of the United Nations (UN) Charter. These operations, dubbed “Operation Epic Fury” by the Americans and “Operation Roaring Lion” by the Israelis, were defined by U.S. and Israeli officials not as the start of a new war, but as a military operation conducted in response to various direct and indirect attacks of the Islamic Republic of Iran had been carried out against the U.S. and Israel for years, and as part of an ongoing armed conflict (IDF, 2026a). According to Iran, the U.S. and Israeli attacks constituted a “flagrant violation” of Article 2/4 of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force, and represented it an unlawful, illegitimate, and unjust war. The Iranians launched “Operation True Promise IV” in response to the American-Israeli strikes. The Iranian side asserted that the military actions within this operation were “necessary and proportionate defensive operations against the bases and facilities of the aggressors in the region” as part of “its inherent part of self-defense in accordance with Article 51” of the UN Charter (Iravani, 2026).

The clashes that emerged between the U.S./Israel and Iran have influenced regional and global dynamics due to the nature of the parties involved, the scope of the clashes, and their expansion across a vast area. The conflict involving the world's greatest military power, the U.S., and two regional powers, Iran and Israel, has shaken the security dynamics of the Middle East. The involvement of non-state actors-who are Iran's regional allies-and the attacks by Iran on Persian Gulf countries known as U.S. allies have impacted the entire region from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. The concentration of conflict around the Persian Gulf, home to the world's largest oil and gas reserves, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have profoundly affected the global economy and politics, particularly in terms of energy security.

The purpose of this study is to provide an academic analysis of the conflict initiated by the U.S./Israeli attacks against Iran and its subsequent effects. In this regard, firstly, the background of the hostility between the parties and the causes of the U.S./Israel–Iran conflict are discussed. The second part addresses the objectives of the parties and the course of the conflict. Subsequently, the impacts of the conflict on Iran, the U.S., and Israel, as well as its regional repercussions, are examined. The final part of the study discusses the implications of these developments for Türkiye and evaluates the situation of Iran and the Middle East in the post-conflict period.

2. A Brief History of the Hostility Between Iran, the United States, and Israel

As clearly evidenced by how the parties characterize the clashes, the current war must be evaluated as part of a long-standing hostility with roots extending deep into the past. The special strategic relationship between the U.S. and Israel is widely recognized. Sustained by political and cultural alignments, this special relationship positions Israel as the most critical ally of the U.S. in the Middle East, where the interests of both nations converge on numerous fronts. Their shared opposition to Iran is particularly evident at this intersection.

In his first public press statement following the onset of the joint strikes, U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth remarked, “We did not start this war,” recalling pivotal milestones in U.S.-Iran relations-which was deteriorated following the taking of diplomats and staff hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979-and the “Death to America, Death to Israel” slogans consistently chanted by the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran for decades (Roth & Gedeon, 2026). Similarly, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that the Iranian regime “has been attacking Americans worldwide for 47 years and has remained a threat for 47 years” (Rubio, 2026). Likewise, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu articulated the primary objective of the war as the eradication of the existential threat posed to Israel by the Islamic Republic regime for the past 47 years. Indeed, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian leadership assumed the mantle of the leading advocate of Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation and kept its animosity toward Israel perpetually active (Akgül, 2024). In this context, the Iranian regime declared the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as “Quds Day” (Jerusalem Day) in 1979. On every Quds Day, masses take to the streets to hold anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations, chanting “Death to America, Death to Israel.” Iran’s hostile stance toward Israel is frequently reflected in the rhetoric of Iranian leaders. For instance, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust-denying remarks and his assertion that “Israel must be wiped off the map,” alongside Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s 2015 statement that “Israel will not live to see the next 25 years!” are frequently recalled (Dolatabadi, 2025). Moreover, a countdown clock ticking down to the destruction of Israel was installed in Palestine Square, Tehran, in 2017.

According to claims by U.S. and Israeli officials, Iran’s hostility eventually went beyond verbal threats. For years, the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran conducted a direct and indirect campaign of terrorism against Israel and the U.S. by directing terrorist acts through its regional proxies and providing financial support to terrorist groups. Consequently, Iran has been held responsible for numerous terrorist attacks that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Americans and Israelis. According to Israel, Iran has acted as the architect and sponsor of terrorist organizations and criminal networks not only within the region but globally, from Argentina to India. Likewise, the U.S. administration has designated Iran as a “state sponsor of terrorism” since 1984. In November 2020, Nathan Sales, then-Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State, noted that

they held the Iranian regime “accountable for the blood they have spilled in various parts of the world, including South America, Europe, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen” (Lane, 2023). The American stance has seen no significant shift since that time. During the 2018 Herzliya Conference, Israeli politician Naftali Bennett likened Iran to an octopus attacking Israel from various directions with its multiple tentacles, arguing that operations should target the head of the octopus rather than its tentacles (Keinon, 2020).

Conversely, the Iranian side traces the origin of its hostility with the U.S. further back to August 19, 1953, when Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, who pioneered the nationalization of oil, was overthrown in a coup d’état orchestrated by the U.S. and the United Kingdom. According to official Iranian rhetoric, U.S. imperialism opposes Iran becoming a genuinely independent and powerful nation. Because the 1979 Islamic Revolution dealt a severe blow to the regional ambitions of U.S. imperialism, successive American administrations manufactured various conspiracies against the Islamic Republic order. They imposed embargoes on Islamic Iran, supported its adversaries, and encouraged Saddam Hussein to attack Iran. Since the Revolution, the hostage crisis, the freezing of Iranian assets, and sanctions levied under the pretext of supporting terrorism or disputes over the nuclear program have perpetuated the enmity between Iran and the U.S. In Khamenei’s words, the slogan “Down with America” is a natural manifestation of the Iranian people’s reaction against American conspiracies. To him, the U.S. issue with the Islamic Republic is not merely a historical dispute but an “inherent incompatibility and conflict of interest” (Khamenei, 2025). One of the foundational principles of the Islamic Revolution is anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism. According to this view, an eternal conflict persists between the *mustakbirin* (the imperialists/arrogant) and the *mustad’afin* (the oppressed), and between truth (*haqq*) and falsehood (*batil*). In this struggle, while the Islamic Republic represents truth and the oppressed, the U.S. and Zionism embody falsehood and imperialism. Precisely, for this reason, the hostility of the U.S. and Zionism toward the Islamic Republic has endured continuously (Sinkaya, 2015, pp. 63-68).

On April 1, 2026, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian shared an open letter addressed to the American public via his account on the social media platform “X.” In the letter, he pointed out that relations between the peoples of Iran and the U.S. were not originally hostile. However, because the U.S. sought to prevent Iran from utilizing its own natural resources through the 1953 coup and disrupted the democratization process by reinstating a dictatorial regime, a deep-seated distrust toward American policies emerged among Iranians. Pezeshkian stated that this Iranian distrust was further compounded by U.S. support for the Shah’s regime, its backing of Saddam Hussein during the imposed war of the 1980s, the enforcement of the longest and most brutal sanctions in modern history, and ultimately, unprovoked military attacks launched against Iran twice—on June 13, 2025, and February 28, 2026—while negotiations over the nuclear issue were ongoing (Pezeshkian, 2026).

In conclusion, a struggle and rivalry whose history dates back to the Islamic Revolution exists between the U.S./Israeli duo and Iran (Şen, 2016). Although this struggle occasionally transformed into political and intelligence operations directed at one another, it largely remained at a rhetorical level. However, over the past decade, the elevation of Iran's military capabilities and the expansion of its regional power have amplified the potential for direct conflict between Iran, the U.S., and Israel. Following its eight-year war with Iraq between 1980 and 1988, Iran initiated an intensive rearmament program in the early 1990s. From 2006 onward, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) applied various and progressively severe sanctions targeting Iran's rearmament program (SIPRI, 2025). Nevertheless, through its cooperation with North Korea and China, Iran successfully strengthened its domestic defense industry and military capabilities. The most conspicuous element within Iran's rearmament program is its missile development initiatives (Elleman, 2024). As early as the beginning of the 2000s, Iran succeeded in developing missiles with a range of 1,500–2,000 km. Over the past decade, domestically developed and manufactured missiles such as the Kheibar Shekan, Sejil, and Fattah, along with inexpensive kamikaze drones and UAVs like the Shahed-136, have been integrated into Iran's military inventory. The Russian military's highly effective deployment of Shahed-136 drones during the Russia-Ukraine war attracted global attention. Iran has also become one of the few nations capable of designing, manufacturing, and launching satellites into orbit using domestic resources. Starting in the mid-2000s, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) initiated a space program for military purposes. The IRGC's space program has been interpreted as part of its long-range missile development endeavors (Kryzaniak, 2022). Iran's expanding conventional and novel military capabilities-characterized by a continuous rise in the lethality, precision, and stockpiles of its domestically produced missile and unmanned aerial vehicle systems-have been designated by the U.S. as a direct threat to American forces and partners in the region (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2025). Reports indicating that Iran has advanced its medium-range (1,000–3,000 km) missiles to a level capable of carrying nuclear warheads have escalated the perceived threat level emanating from Iran (Gettinger & Clayton Thomas, 2025). Indeed, after waging a proxy war against Israel since 1979, the Iranian regime's direct military targeting of Israel for the first time in April 2024 with cruise and ballistic missile strikes demonstrated the shifting magnitude of the Iranian threat (IDF, 2025a).

In addition to its growing military capabilities, Iran has emerged as a regional power following the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Rubin, 2006). The emergence and rise of resistance groups linked to Iran in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine have enhanced Iran's regional influence. Although Iran's regional power was tested following the Arab Spring, the Assad regime's gradual alignment with Iran in Syria, the transformation of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF/*Hashd al-Shaabi*) organization-formed to combat ISIS in Iraq-into a proxy force for Iran, and the Houthis' (*Ansar Allah*) seizure of power in Yemen, linked to Iran, have strengthened Iran's image as a regional power (Sinkaya, 2022).

The development of Iran's military capabilities, coupled with its status as a regional power and the rise of resistance movements, has led to growing security concerns in Israel. One of the key developments intensifying the security concerns of both Israel and the U.S. is Iran's nuclear program. Despite countervailing assertions by Iranian officials, the U.S. and Israel have maintained from the outset that Iran's nuclear program is geared toward weapons manufacturing, viewing it as a regional and international security crisis. Following Iran's successful uranium enrichment using domestically manufactured centrifuges in the 2010s, the U.S. and Israel mobilized the international community to escalate pressure on Tehran, successfully steering consecutive, heavy sanction resolutions through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Ultimately, the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) established an agreement to lift UN, U.S., and EU sanctions in exchange for placing specific, time-bound restrictions on Iran's nuclear program. The JCPOA was formally endorsed via UNSC Resolution 2231 (Resolution 2231, 2015). Nonetheless, certain regional states, including Israel, alongside American neoconservatives (neo-cons) and a segment of the Republicans, opposed this agreement on the grounds that it failed to halt Iran's regional activities, allowed its missile program to persist, and permitted the continuation of the nuclear program despite the restrictions. Consequently, the administration of Donald J. Trump, which assumed power in the U.S. in 2017, unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 and initiated a "maximum pressure" policy to compel Iran into a "better" new agreement (Azizi et al., 2020). In response, Iran incrementally breached the nuclear restrictions mandated by the JCPOA, elevating its uranium enrichment levels up to 60 percent. As efforts to revive the JCPOA proved futile and the U.S. failed to force Iran into a new agreement, or in other words, as Tehran resisted entering a deal on the American administration's terms, non-diplomatic alternatives increasingly came to the forefront.

Ever since the nuclear program escalated into an international standoff, the scenario of Israel launching a potential air strike against Iran's nuclear installations has remained a constant fixture on the agenda. Indeed, Israel had previously executed targeted strikes against nuclear facilities in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007. It is alleged that between 2009 and 2012, the Israeli government placed a potential strike on Iran on its agenda at least three times, but the operational plans were suspended due to internal policy divergences, the relatively limited capabilities of the military at the time, and Iran's capacity for deterrence. Instead, the Israeli government sought to influence American administrations to ensure that a potential strike targeting Iranian nuclear facilities would be led by the U.S. (Maher, 2020, p. 235). Accordingly, during periods of heightened friction over the nuclear program, various U.S. administrations kept the prospect of a military strike viable by declaring that "no option is off the table" against Iran.

The intermittent American military threats voiced since the early 2000s prompted the Iranian leadership to intensify domestic security measures on one hand, and to formulate diverse military strategies to prepare for an inevitable final showdown with the U.S. on the other (Wehrey et al., 2009). Within this framework, the Iran adopted an asymmetric warfare doctrine designed to counterbalance the conventional military superiority of the U.S. and

establish deterrence against its adversaries. The primary component of this doctrine is the “forward defense” (forward outpost) strategy. This strategy relies on training, arming, and cultivating tighter military and political cooperation with groups operating alongside Iran within the region. Through this mechanism, the objective was to forge a deterrent capability against U.S. military bases in the region and against Israel. As the second component of its asymmetric warfare doctrine, emphasis was placed on advancing the precision, range, and destructive capacity of its missiles, while investing in inexpensive, rapid unmanned aerial and naval vehicles rather than heavy weaponry. As the third component of the asymmetric warfare doctrine, a “mosaic defense” strategy—which decentralizes authority to local commanders in the event that deterrent measures fail, the country faces invasion, or command-and-control mechanisms are disrupted—was adopted.

2.1. Escalation of the Crisis

Although a potential Israeli/U.S. attack targeting Iranian nuclear facilities has surfaced on the agenda intermittently, tensions between the parties did not transition into direct military conflict for a considerable period. Instead of the military option, cyberattacks—such as the Stuxnet virus targeting nuclear facilities—and assassination campaigns against nuclear scientists were conducted to decelerate Iran’s nuclear program. On the other hand, Iran, which expanded its influence in Syria during the civil war, utilized Syrian territory as a theater of conflict against Israel. Specifically after 2018, Iran-aligned Shiite militias and the Quds Force—the external operations arm of the IRGC—conducted rocket and drone attacks against Israel from Syrian soil at various times. Consequently, Iran employed Syria as a space to wage war against Israel. In response, Israel frequently carried out strikes against Iranian targets in Syria (IDF, 2019). In 2020, two significant assassinations targeted Iran’s regional and nuclear activities. On January 3, 2020, Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad. Despite fierce rhetoric of “severe revenge,” Iran’s response was limited to a constrained strike on the Al-Asad airbase in Iraq, where American troops were stationed. On November 27, 2020, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, alleged to be the head of Iran’s nuclear program, was killed near Tehran in an operation conducted by the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad.

Hamas’s “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation on October 7, 2023—which breached Israel’s security perimeter, resulted in the massacre of more than 1,200 people, and the taking of 250 hostages—marked a turning point in the conflict between Israel and Iran. Iranian officials claimed the operation took place without their prior knowledge but nonetheless expressed support. Conversely, Israeli sources held Iran responsible for the operation (Caner, 2024). Yoav Gallant, the Minister of Defense at the time, stated in a speech to the Knesset that his country was under attack from seven fronts in a multi-front war—Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran—and that they were already responding on six of these fronts (Fabian, 2023). Although Iran and Israel did not face each other directly at that time, as Israel fought Iran’s allies in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, it simultaneously dealt a blow to Iran’s regional power assets and, by extension, its deterrence.

Indeed, following October 7, the Iran–Israel hostility transformed into direct military clashes where the parties targeted each other. The first military encounter between the parties occurred in April 2024. In an Israeli strike on April 1, 2024, on a building adjacent to the Iranian consulate in Damascus, eight people were killed, including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the Quds Force commander for Syria and Lebanon, and his deputy, Brigadier General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, who were allegedly meeting to discuss the Gaza war. This was not Israel’s first strike against Iranian generals in the Syrian theater; however, the fact that the consulate building was targeted this time compelled Iran to deliver a forceful response. On April 13–14, 2024, as part of an operation titled “True Promise,” the IRGC launched more than 300 missiles and UAVs with the aim of bypassing Israeli defenses and inflicting serious damage on military targets (Rubin, 2024). In this attack, which targeted the Nevatim and Ramon airbases from which the aircraft that struck the Damascus consulate allegedly took off, the missiles and UAVs were largely neutralized by air defense systems. In retaliation, the Israeli armed forces carried out relatively small-scale strikes targeting Iranian air defense systems, and tensions subsequently de-escalated.

However, in July 2024, Israel assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh at an IRGC guesthouse in Tehran, where he was staying to attend the inauguration of the newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian. Subsequently, on September 27, 2024, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and senior IRGC commander Abbas Nilforoushan were killed in Beirut as a result of an intensive air strike by the Israeli Air Force. In response to these successive assassinations, the IRGC launched new attacks against the Nevatim, Hatzetim, and Tel Nof bases in Israel on October 1, 2025, within the framework of “Operation True Promise II.” As a result of the attack, in which more than 300 UAVs and ballistic missiles were fired, approximately 30 missiles reached their targets and caused damage. In return, Israel also conducted limited strikes targeting Iran’s air defense systems (Dolatabadi, 2025).

2.2. The Twelve-Day War

The ongoing tension and conflict between Iran and Israel escalated on June 13, 2025, into a war that lasted twelve days, initiated by Israel’s “Operation Rising Lion” and characterized by mutual strikes. On June 13, the Israeli armed forces launched a “preventive, precise, and combined operation based on high-quality intelligence, in response to the Iranian regime’s continuous attacks against Israel and to strike a blow against Iran’s nuclear program” (IDF, 2025b). Upon announcing Operation Rising Lion, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) pointed to three primary justifications for the attack. First, the Iranian regime has declared its goal of destroying the State of Israel and operates alongside its proxies in the Middle East to achieve this objective. Second, the Iranian regime is the head of the axis responsible for all terrorist attacks targeting Israel since the start of the Gaza war (Operation Iron Swords, October 2023). During the Gaza operations, Iran also attacked Israel twice with hundreds of missiles. Third, it was claimed that Iran was closer than ever to manufacturing nuclear weapons, and the weapons of mass destruction in the hands of the Iranian regime were defined as an existential threat to the State of Israel (IDF, 2025b). Consequently, the objective of Operation Rising Lion

was expressed as the elimination of the existential and immediate threat posed by the Iranian regime's nuclear weapons program, as well as the threats stemming from its ballistic missile program and other military activities. According to Israel, the trigger for the operation was Iran's acceleration of manufacturing ballistic missiles and its work in all related fields to develop nuclear weapon capabilities. Thus, in Israel's view, Iran had transformed into an imminent and existential threat. To eliminate this threat, "all reasonable non-forceful means" were attempted but yielded no results. Consequently, Israel claims that this operation was carried out as a last resort, not merely as a preventive measure of self-defence or in response to the nuclear capabilities of a hostile regime, but to stop the Iranian regime, which has consistently demonstrated its intention to destroy Israel. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

In the framework of Operation Rising Lion launched on June 13, more than ten high-ranking commanders and nuclear scientists, including Chief of General Staff Mohammad Bagheri and IRGC Commander Hossein Salami, were killed in Iran. Israel's primary military objective was to weaken Iran's air force and air defense systems. Within this frame, the radar at the Hamadan Subashi base, surface-to-air missile defense systems, and defense systems surrounding nuclear and missile facilities were struck. Consequently, Israel succeeded in opening Iranian skies to its fighter jets and, as a demonstration of its aerial dominance, struck the Mashhad airport, located 2,400 km from Tel Aviv. Israeli warplanes flew more than 1,500 sorties in 12 days, hitting approximately 900 targets, including missile production facilities and launch pads. However, because a significant portion of the missile production facilities and depots were constructed in underground cities, Israel was unable to achieve its goal of completely destroying Iran's missile program (Dolatabadi 2025, pp. 23-26).

One of Israel's expectations in the Twelve-Day War was the political objective of triggering regime change in Iran. The day after the attacks began, Netanyahu and Israeli officials called on the Iranian people to take to the streets and overthrow the regime. Thinking that the Iranian people hesitated to act out of fear of regime oppression, Israeli forces attacked the headquarters of the Basij (the People's Mobilization Force; a militia linked to the IRGC prominent in internal security), the police, intelligence, and the IRGC. Even the famous Evin Prison in Tehran, which holds political prisoners, was struck as a symbolic target. Despite this, the Iranian people rallied around the flag, and no anti-regime uprisings occurred.

In response to the Israeli attacks, Iran launched "Operation True Promise III." Throughout the Twelve-Day War, approximately 550 ballistic missiles and more than 1,000 UAV strikes were carried out from Iran against Israel. In these attacks, nearly 10 percent of the missiles reached their targets and succeeded in damaging Israel. Iranian strikes hit the Weizmann Institute of Science, military bases, Mossad facilities, and the Haifa oil refinery. Nevertheless, according to some observers, the Tehran administration-aware of the asymmetric relationship in terms of technology and fire capacity between itself and the U.S./Israeli forces-avoided moves during the Twelve-Day War that would

escalate the crisis to a degree that would force Israel and the U.S. to increase the intensity of the war (Dolatabadi, 2025, p. 30). At the end of the 12 days, the parties mutually ceased their attacks.

Until the final day of the Twelve-Day War, the U.S. remained outside the direct clashes between Iran and Israel. However, certain statements by U.S. President Trump indicated that the U.S. and Israel were acting in coordination. Indeed, Türkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated in a briefing that they received a phone call from the U.S. on the night of the attack, and the Israeli strike began a few hours later (NTV, 2025). Trump's statement as soon as the Israeli strikes began-"We gave Iran 60 days to make a deal; today is the 61st day"-and his subsequent demand for the unconditional surrender of the Iranian leadership demonstrated the coordination and solidarity between Washington and Tel Aviv. Finally, following Netanyahu's "Finish the job, Mr. President!" campaign, American B-52 heavy bombers joined the attacks on June 21 (Operation Midnight Hammer) and struck Iran's underground nuclear facilities at Fordow. Following this strike, U.S. President Trump claimed that Iran's nuclear program was completely destroyed, though contradictory statements emerged from Iran on this matter. Because Iran had ceased cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the true extent of the destruction could not be determined or disclosed to the public.

3. Reasons for the Escalation of Tensions Between the Adversaries

Approximately eight months after the 12-Day War, the joint US-Israeli military attacks against Iran began on February 28, 2026. In terms of both parties and causes, the clashes that began with the February 28 attacks can be seen as a continuation of the 12-Day War. This section discusses why the longstanding hostility between the parties turned into direct military conflict in June 2025 and February 2026. Four issues stand out in this matter: first, the failure of negotiations on the nuclear issue that constituted the main dispute between the parties; second, the rise of hawkish leaders in all three states; third, the assessment by US and Israeli officials that the Iranian regime was in a difficult and weak position; and fourth, the persistence of the threat perceived by Israel and the US from Iran. These issues are discussed in detail below.

3.1. The Failure of the Nuclear Negotiations

The US's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and its initiation of the maximum pressure policy destroyed the belief on the Iranian side that the nuclear issue could be resolved through negotiation, weakening the hand of politicians supporting a negotiated settlement. As the US failed to fulfill its obligations under the nuclear agreement-endorsed by UNSC Resolution 2231-and instead reimposed sanctions on Iran, and as the EU's efforts to revive the agreement failed, Iran gradually moved away from its own JCPOA commitments. Iran accelerated its missile programs and exceeded JCPOA-mandated limits on uranium enrichment levels and stockpiles. Discussions also began in Iran about the prospect of withdrawing from the NPT.

Having returned to the office, Trump increased economic and political pressure on Iran while simultaneously expressing his desire to initiate nuclear negotiations in his letter to Khamenei on March 7, 2025. Meanwhile, he threatened military strikes if Iran did not agree to a new deal. Despite its distrust of the US due to sanctions-driven domestic economic problems, Iran's government came to the negotiating table. Indirect talks took place in Muscat on April 12, 2025, between Trump's Special Envoy for Middle East, Steve Witkoff, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, mediated by Oman's foreign minister. Suspicious with Iranian tactics for deliberately extending negotiations, Trump announced a two-month window for productive results. At the meeting in Muscat, the Iranian delegation proposed keeping uranium enrichment at the 3.5% level as it was set out in the JCPOA, resuming IAEA inspections, implementing the Additional Protocol and securing full sanctions relief, as well as US Congressional ratification of the prospective agreement (Iran International, 2025). Five more rounds mediated by Oman were held, but the talks stalled over American insistence on a complete end to Iranian uranium enrichment and the removal of enriched uranium stockpiles from the country, which were rejected by Iran. While Araghchi and Witkoff prepared for a new round of talks set for June 17, Israel launched its "Rising Lion" operation against Iran on June 13. Iran viewed the operation as an attack on the negotiating table itself, and in response fully suspended cooperation with the IAEA, neither allowing inspectors to return to the bombed facilities nor disclosing the location or condition of its enriched uranium stockpile (Crellin, 2026).

Meanwhile, in a resolution adopted on June 12, 2025, the IAEA Board of Governors noted that Iran had failed to cooperate fully with the Agency that prevented Agency officials from carrying out their duties in designated areas, and stated that unreported nuclear materials had been used in various locations and that activities with nuclear proliferation potential had taken place. The resolution concluded that, since 2019, Iran has failed to fulfill its obligations on numerous occasions and has therefore failed to comply with the Safeguards Agreement concluded with the Agency. Additionally, the Agency declared that it was not in a position to verify whether nuclear material required to be safeguarded under the Safeguards Agreement were converted for non-peaceful purposes into nuclear weapons or explosives (IAEA, 2025).

Pursuant to the IAEA's Resolution dated June 12, the EU and the U.S. took action to refer the Iran nuclear file back to the UN Security Council and to reinstate all UN sanctions that had been lifted under the JSPOA. In response, Iran, Russia, and China argued that the JCPOA would expire completely on October 1, 2025 in opposition to reimposition of the UN sanctions. Nevertheless, with the EU joining the U.S. in implementing the sanctions, UN sanctions have effectively been reimposed. Meanwhile, the U.S. begun to threaten Iran militarily by increasing its military buildup in the Middle East. The mounting pressure led Iran to return to the negotiating table with the U.S. once again in February 2026, under the Omani mediation. Although Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei opposed negotiations with the U.S. administration, he approved indirect negotiations due to the insistence of pragmatists within the Iranian government, led by President Pzshkian (Dolatabadi, 2025, p. 18).

Before the February 28 US/Israeli attacks, three more rounds of indirect talks were held via Oman-on February 6, 11, and 26. The talks stalled again stalled due to the Iranian insistence on “right to enrich” against the US demand for “zero enrichment,” as well as the US push to include Iran’s missile program in the deal, which was refused by Iran. Despite Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi’s statement that the parties were close to a deal, Trump was dissatisfied with the progress of the talks (Albusaidi, 2026). The negotiating team of Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner eventually reported that they might achieve a better deal than the Obama’s, but it could take months (Rozen, 2026). This led the US and Israeli governments to conclude that Iran was exploiting the talks as a stalling tactic to continue enrichment.¹

3.2. The Rise of the Hawks

One cause of the escalation of conflict is the dominance of “hawkish” leaders in all three states. Since the rise of US military threats against Iran following the invasion of Iraq, Iranian politics has been securitized, with security-oriented policies and security elites coming to the fore. Although this trend was weakened somewhat under President Hassan Rouhani, the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018 and the January 20, 2020 assassination of Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani brought hawks back to prominence in Iran. President Ebrahim Raisi, elected after Rouhani’s term, had close ties to the IRGC (Golkar & Aarabi, 2021). After Raisi’s death in a helicopter crash in April 2024, “reformist” Masoud Pezeshkian was elected president, but key power centers remained held by Khamenei and the IRGC. As tensions and mutual strikes with Israel escalated, hawks within the IRGC became more prominent in decision-making. Previously, Iran had long avoided direct military confrontation with the US and Israel, conducting only limited covert operations and avoiding escalation-even its retaliation after the 2020 Soleimani assassination was notably restrained. But Iran’s shift toward the utilization of direct military force against Israel from April 2024 onward has been seen as reflecting the rising influence of ideologically more radical and confrontation-ready hawks in Tehran, a faction deeply committed to the founding principles of the Islamic Revolution, rejecting pragmatist compromise toward the West, and willing to use military and proxy force to end American influence in the Middle East and destroy Israel (Golkar & Aarabi, 2024; Ostovar, 2024). Iran’s advances in its defense industry, growing regional power, and demonstrated capacity to inflict serious damage on Israel during the 12-Day War strengthened the hand and confidence of Iranian radicals.

In the U.S., Donald Trump, who returned to the White House in January 2025 promising to end wars and pursue peace, quickly adopted aggressive rhetoric and militarist policies. Among his early actions was renaming the Department of Defense the “Department

¹ The US negotiating team’s lack of experts on Iran and nuclear issues was also noted by critics. Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi later remarked that his counterparts treated the matter like a property deal – implying Witkoff’s background in real estate - with unrealistic goals. Additionally, according to the Iranian side, both Witkoff and Kushner reflected Israeli demands, particularly those of Prime Minister Netanyahu, throughout the talks due to their long-standing ties with the Israeli government (Tehran Times, 2026a).

of War” in September 2025, appointing Pete Hegseth—with a conservative evangelical background—to lead it. Trump sees himself as a courageous leader taking steps no previous president dared to take in defense of American interests, frequently making unilateral decisions while disregarding international law and allies, and showing no hesitation in using or threatening military force. Examples of his willingness to use force include the limited strike against the Assad regime in October 2017, the 2020 Soleimani assassination, the “Rough Rider” operation against the Houthis in Yemen (March 15–May 6, 2025), the “Midnight Hammer” operation against Iran on June 21, strikes against jihadist groups in Nigeria in December 2025, the blockade of Venezuela, and the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro on January 3, 2026.

Meanwhile, since the early 2010s, as perceived threats from Iran rose and the far right gained influence in Israeli politics, Israeli politicians grew more eager to escalate tension with Iran. Naftali Bennett, who invented the “Octopus Doctrine,” later became defense minister and prime minister (2021–2022), seeking during his tenure to shift the conflict directly to Iran’s home territory. During this period, Israeli operatives conducted cyberattacks, sabotage, and assassinations targeting Iran’s nuclear facilities. Writing an opinion for *Wall Street Journal* on December 28, 2023, Bennett argued the US and Israel should intervene directly to the Ayatollahs to make them pay for the chaos sown via Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthi proxies (Bennett, 2023). Benjamin Netanyahu, who returned to the post of prime minister in December 2022 by forming an alliance with the rising far right—creating one of the most hawkish governments in Israeli history—built his political career around blocking the establishment of a Palestinian state, contrary to the two-state solution backed by the international community (Sales, 2019). Netanyahu, one of those responsible for the collapse of the Oslo peace process in the 1990s, oversaw an acceleration of illegal settlements in the West Bank during his term as prime minister, the occupation of Gaza in response to Hamas after the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation, more than two years of intense destruction in the territory, and military strikes on targets in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Hawkish leaders did not hesitate to invoke religious rhetoric and ritual to justify their actions. Netanyahu linked the “Operation Rising Lion” to Purim, commemorating the Jews’ historical deliverance from the villainous Persian vizier Haman; reports also emerged that American troops were told President Trump had been tasked by Jesus Christ with lighting a beacon in Iran to herald Armageddon and the Second Coming, framing the war as part of “God’s divine plan.” At a Pentagon ceremony, Secretary of War Hegseth presented the conflict with Iran in near-sacred terms (Matthiesen, 2026). Similar religious and messianic framing also underlies the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the struggle against Israel and the US has been portrayed not merely as political or national but as paving the way for the return of Imam Mahdi near the end of times.

The Netanyahu-Trump Alliance

From October 2023 onward, the ties between the US and Israel grew even closer. To begin with, The October 7 attack increased sympathy and support for Israel among the American public and policymakers. Secretary of State at the time Antony Blinken and President Joe Biden made successive visits to Tel Aviv, with the US administration giving full military and political backing to Israel's campaign against Hamas.

Donald Trump—who during his earlier term had controversial steps to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, to withdraw from the nuclear deal, and pursue a maximum-pressure policy toward Iran—returned to the White House in January 2025, reinforcing the US-Israel alliance against Iran. The Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, met with Trump on several occasions. During his visit to Washington on 13 October 2025, he described Trump as the greatest friend Israel has ever had in the White House, stating that no other American president had done more for the state of Israel (Yılmaz, 2025).

Trump-Netanyahu coordination on Iran remained strong. Since returning to the office, Trump has taken a very hard line on Iran, either demanding that the Iranian government negotiate under his own terms or threatening it with war. Despite claims of disagreement between Israel and the U.S. due to Trump's preference for diplomacy over military strikes, the two appear to have carefully coordinated their approach to Iran. Trump reportedly assured Netanyahu that there would never be a deal resembling the JCPOA once US-Iran talks began (Dolatabadi, 2025, p. 21). During Netanyahu's visit to Washington on February 11, 2026, he allegedly shared war plans with the US administration, including a sequence of first killing Iranian leaders including Khamenei, then crippling Iran's capacity to threaten its neighbors militarily, stirring up a people's uprising, and ultimately achieving regime change (Swan & Haberman, 2026). Former Secretaries of State John Kerry and Antony Blinken stated that Israel had similarly pressured prior US presidents to launch strikes on Iran, but those presidents had rejected Netanyahu's requests; Trump, however, agreed to join the strike despite warnings from his own security team (Swan & Haberman, 2026). After the clashes began on February 28, Netanyahu thanked Trump for his "historic leadership," declaring that their close cooperation had elevated the US-Israel alliance to its highest level, forming "an alliance in war and an alliance for peace" (Prime Minister's Office, 2026). In a statement on April 4, Netanyahu said the war against Iran was being conducted in full coordination between himself and President Trump (JNS, 2026).

3.3. The Perceived Weakness of Iran

For some time, a part of Israeli and American officials had assessed that Iran had become severely weakened and isolated due to the US maximum pressure policy, sanctions, and internal political problems, thereby creating favorable conditions for military intervention (Kaye, 2020). This assessment of Iranian weakness intensified further with developments in recent years. The serious losses and weakening of Iran's regional allies since the Gaza war, particularly the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, disrupted Iran's

regional power assets. In addition, the severe difficulties facing Iran's economy under sanctions, high inflation, and the continuous depreciation of the Iranian rial weakened the Iranian government. Furthermore, the legitimacy problems facing Iran's leadership and the repeated, widespread anti-regime protests in recent years led the US and Israel to assess that the Islamic Republic was at its weakest point. Indeed, protests that began in the bazaar on December 28, 2025 in response to economic policies quickly spread across the entire country, turning into something resembling an uprising. The Iranian government used disproportionate force to bring the protests under control, and approximately seven thousand people, including security personnel, lost their lives during the clashes.²

The assessment that Iran had weakened was explicitly stated in the 2026 US National Defense Strategy: "The Iranian regime is now weaker and more vulnerable than it has been in decades." Israel's military operations have severely set back Hezbollah and Hamas, the U.S.'s "Rough Rider" operation has crippled the Houthis' offensive capabilities, and the Houthis have been forced to agree not to attack American ships (Department of War, 2026, p. 11).

It appears that the Netanyahu and Trump administrations reached an understanding to eliminate the Iranian threat entirely while it was at its weakest. According to Omani Foreign Minister Albusaidi, who mediated the nuclear talks between the US and Iran, the Netanyahu government persuaded the Trump administration that the Iranian leadership was severely weakened by sanctions, economic problems, factional infighting, and finally the June Israeli strikes and they would quickly capitulate a dramatic victory following a swift and shocking attack and the killing of Supreme Leader Khamenei (Albusaidi, 2026). Indeed, it was later reported that Netanyahu presented his war plans to Trump on February 21 and persuaded him (Swan & Haberman, 2026).

3.4. The Persistence of the Iranian Threat

Ironically, even as Tel Aviv and Washington viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran at its weakest point in its history, Iran continued to be assessed as a serious threat to American and Israeli interests given its remaining capabilities. The 2026 US National Defense Strategy asserted that, despite being severely weakened in recent months, Iran and its allies were seeking to rebuild their conventional military strength (Department of War, 2026, p. 12). Similarly, the document noted that Iran's proxy forces, despite suffering heavy blows, could also rebuild their capabilities. The document claimed that Iranian leaders sought to keep the nuclear weapons option open by avoiding meaningful negotiations. On the other hand, it was assessed as an opportunity that Israel and America's Gulf partners, with limited US support, were willing and able to defend themselves against threats originating from Iran and its proxies.

² The Iranian government reported that a total of 3,117 people died in the January 2026 protests, of whom 2,427 were civilians and security personnel. Iran International, an outlet known for its opposition coverage on the Islamic Republic, claimed the death toll exceeded 36,500 (Iran International, 2026a). The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), which prepared a comprehensive report on the matter, stated that the confirmed death toll was around 7,000 (HRANA, 2026).

In terms of how Iran was perceived as a threat, the current US/Israel-Iran conflict can be seen as a continuation of the 12-Day War, since the causes for both sides were nearly identical. In other words, the recent conflict was launched to achieve goals that went unmet or were left incomplete in the 12-Day War. Neither Iran's missile program nor its nuclear program was fully destroyed. Although US President Trump claimed after the June strikes that all of Iran's nuclear facilities had been destroyed (The White House, 2025), assessments that Iran could still manufacture centrifuges domestically and still possessed more than 400 kg of uranium enriched to 60% kept the perception of a nuclear threat from Iran alive. In a March intelligence assessment, American officials stated they had no evidence that Iran's uranium enrichment program had resumed, but that Iran remained persistent in advancing its nuclear capabilities (Blake, 2026). Nevertheless, despite the IAEA's finding that there was no reliable evidence of an active nuclear weapons program, US and Israeli officials claimed Iran had come very close to a nuclear bomb (Crellin, 2026). In response, President Trump repeatedly and explicitly stated that he would not allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons, and "Operation Midnight Hammer" demonstrated his resolve on this issue (Department of War, 2026, p. 5).

Alongside Iran's insistence on uranium enrichment, seen as the most critical milestone on the path to nuclear weapons capability, a parallel development reinforcing the perceived threat from Iran was the country's years-long effort to improve the precision and range of its missile program. Briefing the Senate on March 18, CIA Director John Ratcliffe stated that Iranian missile systems had reached a range of 3,000 kilometers and that, if left unchecked, Tehran could attain the capability to target the US mainland (Blake, 2026). The possibility that Iranian missiles could reach intercontinental range and carry nuclear warheads was viewed as a potential threat in Washington.

In sum, just as Iran's nuclear and missile programs were not fully destroyed during the 12-Day War, the Iranian regime also managed to survive. Moreover, the fact that Iranian missiles were able to penetrate air defense systems and strike sensitive targets in Israel during the 12-Day War clearly demonstrated to the US-Israel pairing that the Iranian threat was real, imminent, and serious. Under these conditions, once diplomatic negotiations failed to produce results, a new conflict became inevitable.

On February 6, US President Trump extended the "national emergency declaration" regarding Iran, citing the continued extraordinary threat posed by the actions and policies of the Iranian government to US national security. The 2026 US National Defense Strategy alleged that the Iranian regime was responsible for attacks against Americans, intended to destroy America's close ally Israel, and continually fomented regional crises through its proxies that endangered American soldiers' lives and obstructed the region's progress toward a peaceful and prosperous future (Department of War, 2026, p. 12). Iran was accused of pursuing nuclear weapons in a manner endangering American security, allies, and interests, supporting terrorism, developing ballistic missiles, and destabilizing the region.

In his “State of the Union” address on February 24, Trump claimed that Iran had been warned not to attempt to rebuild its nuclear weapons program after “Operation Midnight Hammer,” but that it had resumed doing so. He said he preferred to resolve the matter through diplomacy but would never allow the world’s number one sponsor of terrorism to acquire nuclear weapons (Associated Press, 2026). In another similar address, he stated that peace could not be achieved in the Middle East if Iran possessed nuclear weapons, and that this was why they had repeatedly been told Iran could not be allowed to have nuclear weapons (The White House, 2026).

Israeli Chief of the General Staff Eyal Zamir, speaking a week after the joint attacks began on February 28, asserted that Iran posed a threat to Israel, regional countries, and the entire free world, stating that the longer action was delayed, the more Iran would exploit the situation and the greater the threat would grow (IDF, 2026b). Netanyahu stated that the joint operation had been launched to eliminate “the existential threat posed by the Ayatollahs’ regime to Israel,” that it would require patience, and that it would continue for as long as necessary (Prime Minister’s Office, 2026).

4. From Hostility to Military Confrontation: U.S.–Israeli Attacks on Iran

To eliminate the Iranian threat, the Trump administration simultaneously continued negotiations with Iran while increasing military preparations. In this respect, the U.S. deployed two large aircraft carriers and their strike groups to the region. The USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group was positioned in the Sea of Oman in late January 2026, while the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier was deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean in mid-February 2026. More than 300 additional combat aircraft were sent to the region. Some personnel were evacuated from American bases in Qatar and Bahrain as a precaution against possible Iranian retaliation (Anadolu Agency, 2026b). Immediately before the joint attacks began, Israel intensified its strikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, alleging that the IRGC was reorganizing and taking command of Hezbollah. The US and Israel established “joint coordination cells” for intelligence sharing, target identification, and coordinating strikes (Fabian, 2026a).

As the nuclear negotiating delegations prepared for a new round of talks in Geneva, Trump approved “Operation Epic Fury” on the afternoon of February 27. US Cyber Command and Space Command first moved to take down Iran’s communications infrastructure, after which “Operation Epic Fury” was launched at 9:45 a.m. Tehran time on Saturday, February 28. According to the White House statement, this operation was described as a precise and overwhelming military operation to eliminate the imminent nuclear threat posed by the Iranian regime, destroy its ballistic missile arsenal, degrade its proxy terror networks, and cripple its naval forces. The same statement asserted that this operation, conducted jointly with regional allies alongside comprehensive diplomatic efforts, came after 47 years of Iranian aggression, including attacks on US citizens, support for global terrorism, and brutal repression of its own people (The White House, 2026).

4.1. Objectives and Targets of the U.S.–Israeli Offensive

The IDF characterized “Operation Roaring Lion” as a response to the Iranian regime’s years-long effort to destroy Israel by organizing, financing, training, and arming proxy “terrorist” groups along Israel’s borders and conducting airstrikes against Israel, framing it as an operation directed at military targets and regime officials. The operation’s stated aim was to dismantle the Iranian regime’s military capabilities, including its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and to create conditions favorable for the Iranian people to overthrow the regime (Fabian, 2026b). During the operation, Israeli officials claimed to distinguish between the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic regime, asserting they were not fighting against the Iranian nation but against the “terrorist” regime of the Islamic Republic, Khamenei, or the IRGC. Israeli Defense Minister Katz stated in the following weeks of the strikes that attacks aimed at eliminating commanders and collapsing the strategic capabilities of Iran’s “terror regime” would continue until all threats to US and Israeli interests in the region were eliminated (Iran International, 2026c).

US Department of War Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson stated that the goal of Operation Epic Fury was not nation-building but securing “absolute American supremacy” and establishing “peace through strength” (Vergun, 2026). According to statements from the Pentagon and the White House, the mission of Operation Epic Fury was to guarantee that Iran would not possess nuclear weapons and to eliminate Iran’s ability to project power beyond its borders and threaten Americans and allies (U.S. Department of War, 2026). Within this framework, the military objectives of “Operation Epic Fury” were summarized in five points:

- 1) Taking definitive action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.
- 2) Destroying Iran’s missile stockpiles and missile production capacity.
- 3) Destroying air defense systems, air forces, and unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) systems.
- 4) Destroying the Iranian navy.
- 5) Preventing the Iranian government from further destabilizing the region and attacking Americans through its proxies.

Regime Change

Secretary of War Hegseth, in a statement following the start of the joint attacks, asserted that the objectives of Operation Epic Fury were realistic and clearly defined, stating that, unlike the 2003 Iraq war, this operation did not include goals such as regime change, nation-building, or establishing democracy (Lopez, 2026). Accordingly, regime change was not explicitly listed among the stated objectives of the American operations, but it consistently lingered in the background as a separate and wished possibility (Sherman, 2026). President Trump had tried to encourage protesters during the anti-regime demonstrations in January 2026, saying “the help you are waiting for is on its way.” Asked on February 14 whether he wanted regime change in Iran, Trump said it would be “the best

thing that could happen” (Sekulich, 2026). Hegseth stated that the US-Israeli operations provided an opportunity for those seeking Iran’s liberation, and that “the right moment” would come for them to seize it. Similarly, CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper stated that they had struck individuals and headquarters targeting protesters, and that the public should, for now, stand aside and remain at home (U.S. Department of War, 2026). A similar emphasis on “the right moment” for the Iranian people to rise up against the regime was also found in Netanyahu’s statements. In his speech announcing “Operation Roaring Lion,” Netanyahu addressed the Iranian people, describing the developments as an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and said that a call would soon be made, when the right time came, for people to take to the streets en masse to finish the job and topple the regime of fear (Prime Minister’s Office, 2026).

The goal of regime change is more clearly visible in statements coming from Israel. Netanyahu listed “creating the conditions for the Iranian people to seize their freedom and determine their own fate” among the operation’s objectives (The Times of Israel, 2026). In a later statement, Netanyahu said they would continue working toward this end, claiming that even if the regime survived, it would be greatly weakened. The Israeli government believed the strikes could mobilize the Iranian opposition and trigger uprisings that could lead to the collapse of the Iranian government. For this reason, during the strikes, the coercive and repressive forces of the Iranian regime-police, intelligence, and Basij headquarters-were targeted in many different cities.

Oil

Although American officials did not initially state this openly, it has frequently been claimed that one of the core motivations of the US administration was to seize control of Iranian oil (Colgan, 2026). It has been argued that the US administration sought both economic gain and to exert pressure on global rivals, particularly China, by controlling energy supply lines. Following Israel’s strike on Iranian oil facilities on 9 March, Senator Lindsey Graham, one of the most fervent supporters of the attack on Iran, stated that the Iranian people would soon take their fate into their own hands, and that Iran would need an oil economy to begin a new and better life once the regime had fallen. Graham, speaking on Fox television, said that once the regime collapsed there would be a new Middle East and “we’re going to make a ton of money.” Noting that the combined oil reserves of Iran and Venezuela amounted to 31 percent of the world’s reserves, Graham described the possibility of the US gaining a stake in these reserves as a nightmare for China and “a good investment” for his own country (Middle East Eye, 2026a). Trump, too, said in an interview with the Financial Times on March 30 that, “To be honest with you, my favorite thing is to take the oil in Iran” (Luce, 2026). However, during negotiations with the US, the Iranian side raised possible agreements on energy, mining, aircraft purchases, and similar matters. In an op-ed written for the Washington Post, Araghchi stated that Iran was not a closed economy and was open to investment and economic cooperation from around the world, writing that it was not Iran but obstruction by US administrations and Congress that kept American entrepreneurs away from trillion-dollar opportunities (Araghchi, 2025).

Thus, the Iranian side put forward economic resources and opportunities as a bargaining chip. Despite this, the US-Iran negotiations produced no results. It demonstrates that the core of the US-Iran conflict continued to be shaped not by issues of resource access or control, but by ideological considerations and security concerns.

Although there is no direct evidence beyond ‘Trump’s instincts’ to suggest that seizing Iranian oil was one of the primary aims of these attacks, oil nevertheless shaped the causes and course of the war in various ways (Colgan, 2026). Most importantly, oil revenues allowed a regime hostile to the US to sustain itself in power, invest in military activities, and finance its proxies. The current conflict is therefore not a conflict over oil, but one shaped by oil revenues (Hertog, 2026). Indeed, in the period between the start of the attacks and the declaration of the ceasefire, no operation was carried out for seizing Iran’s oil resources, nor did this issue arise during the ceasefire talks or the negotiations that followed.

4.2. Course of the US-Israeli Operations

The joint US-Israeli attacks against Iran were planned and carried out in three phases. The first phase aimed to shock and stun the Iranian government through a surprise attack. According to Pentagon Press Secretary Wilson, the American and Israeli attack began on February 28 with “twice the airpower and seven times the intensity” of what Israel had used in the 12-Day War (Vergun, 2026). More than 100 aircraft-including fighter jets, refueling tankers, airborne early warning systems, electronic warfare assets, and bombers-launched attacks from land and sea. According to a statement by US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Caine, naval forces also struck targets inside Iran with Tomahawk missiles and attacked the Iranian navy. From land, precision missile strikes were carried out against hundreds of predetermined targets. More than 1,000 targets were struck within the first 24 hours. In this initial phase, command-and-control structures, military infrastructure, naval forces, ballistic missile sites, and intelligence infrastructure were targeted in order to stun and disorient Iranian forces. Following the initial strikes, American and Israeli officials claimed that eighty percent of Iran’s air defense systems had been destroyed and that US-Israeli forces had achieved near-total air superiority (U.S. Department of War, 2026).

In the following days, B-2 bombers struck underground ballistic missile launch sites, nuclear facilities, and IRGC Aerospace Force headquarters around Tehran and deep within Iran. One of the first targets was the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, built under a mountain near Qom. GBU-57 bombs, each weighing 30,000 pounds (13.6 tonnes) and capable of striking deeply buried targets, were used. Throughout the war, the Natanz uranium enrichment facility, the Arak heavy water reactor, and the Yazd-Ardakan uranium enrichment facility were targeted in the strikes. According to claims by Iranian officials, the Bushehr nuclear power plant in the south of the country was also struck four times. While the Israeli Air Force concentrated its strikes on ballistic missile launch sites and other military facilities in western and central Iran, American forces targeted missile facilities in southern Iran and the Iranian navy (Fabian, 2026a). During the strikes, the US

targeted Iran's nuclear facilities while Israel carried out attacks targeting the leadership and security units of the Iranian regime.

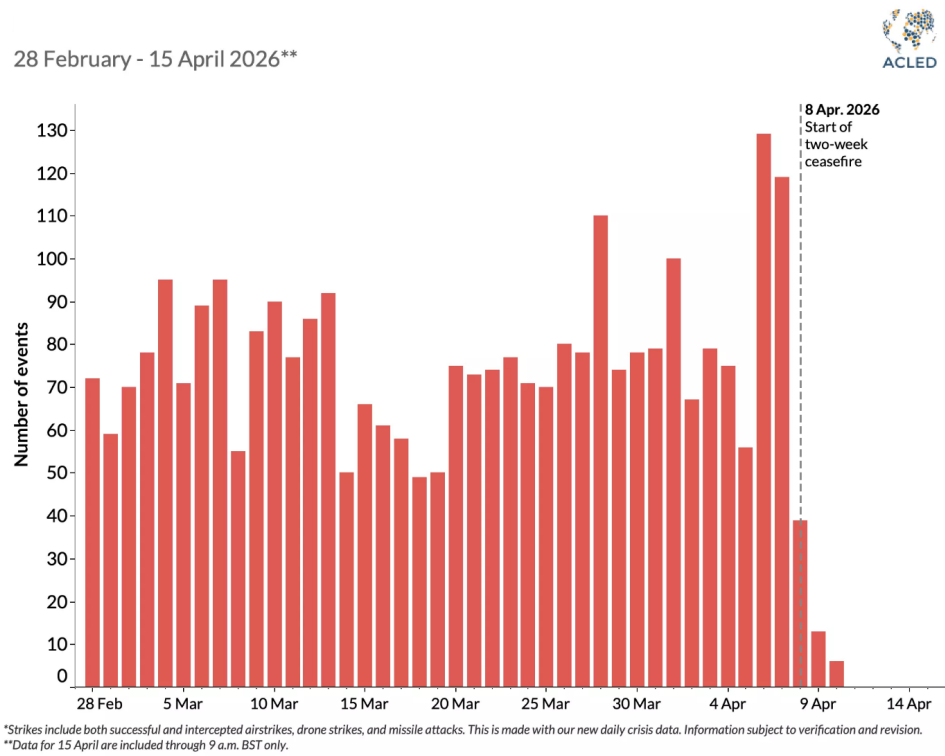
In the first phase of the joint attacks, the political and military leadership of the Islamic Republic and government buildings were targeted. The first targets were Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Pezeshkian. Pezeshkian survived the attacks, while Khamenei was killed on the morning of February 28 in the residence that was struck. Along with Khamenei, around forty senior officials were killed in the early hours of the attack, including IRGC Commander Mohammad Pakpour, Khamenei's military affairs deputy Mohammad Shirazi, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh, and Chief of the General Staff Abdolrahim Mousavi.

By the end of the first week, American and Israeli officials appeared confident and triumphant, and the operation moved into its second phase. This phase aimed to destroy the regime's military capabilities, particularly its ballistic missile production capacity, strategically isolate it, and weaken the regime more than ever before. As the battlefield expanded, the range of targets struck inside Iran also diversified. Military depots, bases, police and internal security centers, intelligence centers, and Basij centers were targeted.

In the third phase, energy and economic infrastructure facilities were targeted. In addition to Iran's defense industry, strikes were carried out against economic facilities allegedly linked to the IRGC, as well as energy facilities and petrochemical plants. On March 7, Israel struck around thirty oil depots in Tehran that it claimed belonged to the IRGC. On March 15, US forces struck Kharg Island, Iran's largest oil terminal, while the Israeli military struck the South Pars gas field on March 18. Steel production facilities were struck in late March. Netanyahu claimed that seventy percent of Iran's steel production capacity had been destroyed, stating that this "impressive achievement" would deprive the IRGC of a major financial resource and weapons production capacity. In early April, petrochemical facilities in Mahshahr and Asaluyeh were targeted, along with logistics routes, and some bridges and railways were struck (Fabian, 2026b). Finally, Trump threatened Iran with an apocalyptic war that would target its electrical grid, bridges, and economic facilities, and with destroying an entire civilization, should it fail to keep the Strait of Hormuz open to traffic.

Although American and Israeli officials claimed that precision strikes were directed at regime-linked targets, military targets, and facilities supporting Iran's military capacity, civilians, civilian buildings, and residential areas were at times either directly targeted or severely affected. On the very first day of the strikes, 168 students were killed when a girls' school in the city of Minab was struck by two Tomahawk missiles. Scientific research centers such as Sharif University and the Pasteur Institute, hospitals, gymnasiums, and historical monuments such as the Golestan Palace were also damaged in the strikes. Finally, on April 7, the Rafi Niya synagogue in Tehran was destroyed as a result of Israeli strikes. By April 7, more than 3,500 Iranians had been killed, of whom 1,665 were civilians (ACLED, 2026a; England & Bozorgmehr, 2026).

Figure 1
US and Israeli Attacks on Iran (ACLED, 2026c)



4.3. Iran’s Defense Strategy

Because tensions between the parties had risen and fallen periodically, Iranian political and military officials had long been preparing for such a military confrontation with the US and Israel. However, as noted above, aware that they could not match their adversaries in terms of conventional military capability, technology, and firepower, Iranian officials adopted a doctrine of asymmetric warfare (Wehrey et al., 2009). The primary purpose of this doctrine is safeguarding the Islamic Republic regime. Aware that they could not bring the conflict to the US mainland or inflict truly severe damage on Israel with the means at their disposal, Iran’s defense policy focused on keeping the “Islamic Republic project” intact through the ongoing attacks and pressure. In other words, since Iran could not fundamentally eliminate its adversaries or the threats to its existence, success and victory for Iran became equivalent to the survival of the Islamic Republic regime. Accordingly, in response to the joint US-Israeli attacks, Iran took four steps as part of its defense strategy. The first of these steps was sustaining resistance domestically. Iran’s second step was launching “Operation True Promise IV” against Israel. In the third step, Iran worked to expand the war, and in the final step it decided to close the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Resistance

Despite the shock-and-awe attacks by the US and Israel, Iran's political leadership did not collapse as expected. While Iran responded militarily to the attacks, constitutional processes continued in parallel. Shortly after the killing of Supreme Leader Khamenei, an Interim Leadership Council was formed, including President Masoud Pezeshkian, Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, and a clerical member of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Ali-Reza Araf. New commanders were immediately appointed in place of those killed, while Ahmad Vahidi was named as new IRGC commander. The Assembly of Experts convened on March 8 to select a new Supreme Leader and declared Khamenei's son Mojtaba Khamenei—who had been seriously wounded in the same strike and had lost some family members—as the new Supreme Leader. However, because he was severely injured and still undergoing treatment, Mojtaba Khamenei had not yet appeared publicly. During this period, a form of collective leadership effectively took hold in Iran, with Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani emerging as the *de facto* leader. Large public demonstrations were also held to condemn the attacks by the US and Israel and to commemorate Khamenei, who was killed. Political leaders such as Larijani and Pezeshkian joined the public and took to the streets during the Quds Day ceremonies held on March 13 under the shadow of the US-Israeli attacks, demonstrating that the Islamic Republic regime remained firmly in place. Larijani himself was killed in an assassination attack on March 17, and former IRGC deputy commander Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr was appointed in his place. Following Larijani's death, Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Ghalibaf assumed the visible spokesperson role for the collective leadership.

While displaying that the order was intact and that public support stood behind the regime, restrictions were simultaneously placed on internet access internally to prevent anti-regime protests and uprisings, security checkpoints were increased, and messages were sent to mobile phones warning the public against street demonstrations and intimidating potential protesters. At the same time, political leaders and security officials called on the public to take to the squares against attempts to destabilize the streets, and these gatherings turned into ongoing “night vigils” (Habibiazad, 2026).

On the other hand, despite claims by American and Israeli officials that Iran's command structure had been neutralized and its military capacity destroyed, Iran's armed forces continued retaliatory strikes against the Gulf states hosting US military bases, against Jordan, and Israel. Moreover, although the number of Iranian missile strikes reportedly declined, their accuracy was said to have improved (Bezhan, 2026). Similarly, while Iran's missiles were estimated to have a range of roughly 1,500–2,000 km, the IRGC fired two missiles on March 21 at the joint US-UK base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, roughly 3,800 kilometers away. Although the missiles did not reach the base, this development was seen as evidence that Iran's missile range had increased. Ultimately, Iran was able to use its military capacity to close the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic.

Operation True Promise IV

In response to the joint US-Israeli attacks, the IRGC carried out retaliatory strikes under the name “Operation True Promise IV,” simultaneously firing numerous missiles and UAVs at targets both inside Israel and at American bases in the Gulf. As part of this, the AN/FPS-132 (upgraded early warning radar) at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and the satellite communications center and radars at Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, were targeted. One of the most frequently visited ports by US Navy vessels, Jebel Ali Port in Dubai, the headquarters of the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, and Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait were struck by Iranian missiles and kamikaze drones. A missile strike was also carried out against Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. Iranian strikes caused serious damage to military depots and communications systems. Following the Iranian strikes on American bases, hundreds of soldiers, their relatives, and technical personnel were evacuated from the region (Walsh, 2026). By the second week of the war, while American and Israeli officials claimed to have established total military superiority over Iran, Iranian officials argued that, after dozens of waves of missile and drone strikes, American military dominance in the region had been broken and that the US had been unable to protect its military bases and warships from Iranian missiles (Press TV, 2026a). By the time of the ceasefire on April 8, Iran had carried out a total of 100 waves of attacks.

As part of “Operation True Promise IV,” repeated waves of strikes targeted Israeli military facilities. The Israeli government imposed widespread censorship on information about the military impact of the strikes, while highlighting civilian areas damaged by Iranian attacks. In contrast, Iranian sources claimed that Israel’s General Staff headquarters had been struck at least six times (Tasnim, 2026a). In response to the strikes on the Bushehr nuclear plant, the IRGC carried out effective strikes on March 21 against the towns of Dimona and Arad, where Israeli nuclear facilities are located. Visiting the area the following day, Netanyahu said that they had endured “a very difficult night” (Tondo, 2026).

Iranian President Pezeshkian, in an open letter addressed to the American people, argued that what Iran had done and continued to do was not an act of war or aggression, but “a measured response based on legitimate self-defense” (Pezeshkian, 2026). Although Iranian officials had for a long time presented their own military actions as legitimate self-defense and retaliation against US and Israeli attacks, Iran’s objectives gradually expanded over time. Indeed, Brigadier General Ali Abdollahi, commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters that coordinates the Iranian armed forces’ war operations, announced on March 22 that Iran’s military doctrine had shifted from defense to offense (Press TV, 2026d). Airports, ports, oil facilities, and factories became targets in the reciprocal strikes.

The Spread of the War

In addition to Israeli territory, the countries hosting American bases in the Persian Gulf-Bahrain (Fifth Fleet maintenance hub), the UAE (Al Dhafra Air Base), Qatar (Al

Udeid), Saudi Arabia, and Jordan-became targets of Iranian retaliatory strikes. Despite denials from the Gulf states, Iran claimed that these bases, along with the facilities and airspace of the Gulf countries, were being used for attacks against Iran, and that these countries had violated the principle of “non-aggression” (Press TV, 2026b). Tehran argued that the integrated radar systems of the Gulf states and Jordan made them silent partners in the US-Israeli operation and that they were sharing intelligence with Israel about Iranian individuals and entities. Iran thus claimed that the named Gulf countries and Jordan had become complicit in the act of aggression. It was argued that Iran’s “defensive operations” targeted American military bases and facilities in the region, not the sovereignty or territorial integrity of regional states (Iravani, 2026).

At the same time, Iranian strikes did not target only military facilities; ports, airports, and hotels were also struck by Iranian missiles and drones. Iranian officials claimed that some US soldiers had left their bases to stay in hotels, and that this was why hotels were targeted. In response to US/Israeli strikes on economic infrastructure and energy facilities, Iran attempted to strike similar targets in Israel or the Gulf states. For example, in response to the March 18 strike on the South Pars gas field, Iran struck an energy complex (an LNG facility) in Qatar.

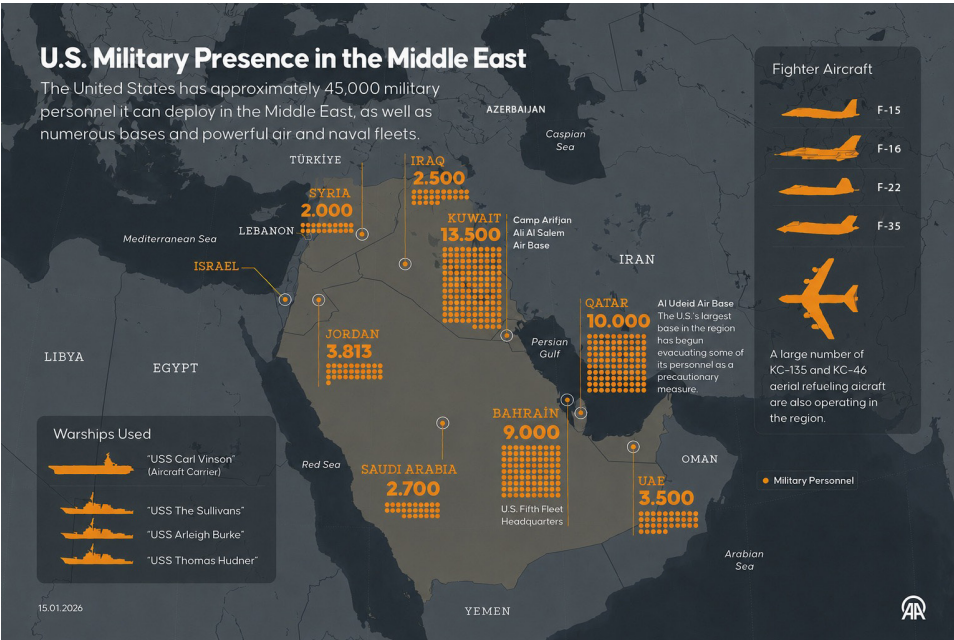
Beyond retaliation or damaging the adversary’s operational capabilities, it is assessed that Iran sought to spread the war to American allies in the Gulf and raise the cost of the war in order to exert indirect pressure on the US administration to end it. At the same time, Iran sought both to punish these countries allied with the US and to intimidate them. Through these strikes, Iran tried to send the Gulf states the message that their alliance with the US and Israel could not adequately guarantee their security, and that they should end their cooperation with the “enemies of Islam” (Tehran Times, 2026c).³

In the later stages of the war, components of Iran’s “axis of resistance”, namely Hezbollah, the Iraqi Islamic Resistance and the Houthis, actively involved in the fighting. Hezbollah launched missile and drone strikes from Lebanese territory against military facilities in Israel. With Hezbollah’s entry into the war, Israel carried out intense strikes on Beirut and areas where Hezbollah was active, and began occupying southern Lebanese territory up to the Litani River.

The Iraqi Islamic Resistance is composed of pro-Iranian Shia militia groups such as *Kata’ib Hezbollah*, *Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq*, *Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba*, and *Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada*. Some of these groups are also members of the Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Sha’bi), which is now formally part of Iraq’s security forces. Iraqi resistance groups launched drone and rocket attacks against Israel and carried out strikes targeting American assets in Erbil and Baghdad, as well as American facilities and troops in Jordan and the Gulf states.

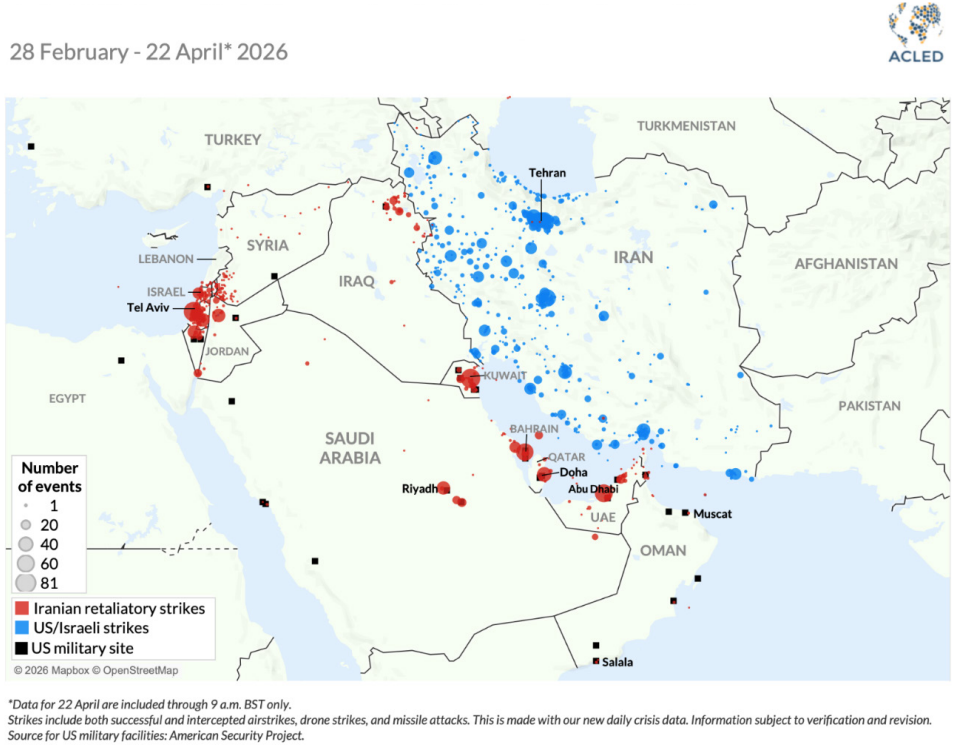
³ Missile strikes were also launched from Iranian territory toward Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Omani territory, but the Iranian government did not claim responsibility for these strikes.

Figure 2
U.S. Military Bases in the Persian Gulf



Immediately after the start of the joint US-Israeli attacks on February 28, Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi described the strikes as a brutal, murderous, and barbaric act targeting the Muslim Iranian people, and declared full solidarity with Iran against the US/Israel. The following day, a large demonstration was held to protest the killing of Khamenei, during which al-Houthi declared that the Houthis were ready to provide military support to Iran. Although the Houthis—who had suffered serious blows from US and Israeli strikes in recent years—declared that they stood “with fingers on the trigger,” they did not take action for four weeks (Raghavan, 2026). The Houthis entered the conflict for the first time on March 28, launching a ballistic missile strike against military targets in southern Israel in support of the resistance movements and Iran.

Figure 3
Joint US-Israeli Attacks and Iranian Retaliatory Strikes (ACLED, 2026)



The Hormuz Knot

One of the most critical flashpoints of the conflict was Iran’s armed forces’ closing the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic shortly after the start of the US-Israeli attacks on February 28. Although the Iranian government initially stated it had no intention of closing Hormuz, traffic through the strait effectively halted after the IRGC struck the oil tanker *Skylight* on grounds that it had “ignored warnings.” IRGC commander Ebrahim Jabbari announced on March 2 that, in response to the US and Israeli attacks, they would not allow passage through the Strait of Hormuz and that any ships attempting to pass would be set ablaze (Mathews, 2026). With Iranian forces striking at least 17 ships between February 28 and March 18, the number of vessels transiting the strait fell by ninety-five percent (Anadolu Agency, 2026f).

The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world’s daily oil shipments pass, was a significant challenge for the Trump administration. First, the closure deprived America’s Gulf allies of one of their most important sources of revenue. Second, the near doubling of oil and related product prices caused by the closure placed major pressure on the American economy and the global economy more broadly, and this pressure in turn became political pressure on Trump. Yet launching a military

operation to reopen Hormuz was seen as highly risky since the indented coastline and high mountainous terrain of Iran coastline limits the maneuverability of large vessels while giving Iranian forces a major defensive advantage. American warships approaching the strait would be vulnerable and easy targets for Iranian UAV, USV, and missiles (Ullman, 2026).

To resolve the Hormuz knot, President Trump first suggested that the US Navy could escort tankers, but it quickly became clear it was not a realistic solution. Trump later stated that the countries benefiting most from this waterway should help ensure Hormuz was reopened and secured, and asked for support from his allies. He requested that China, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom send warships, minesweepers, and counter-drone and counter-mine systems to the region, and said NATO members should also provide support (Reuters, 2026b). However, he received no positive response from either the Asian countries or NATO members.

As the economic and political cost of the war mounted because of the Hormuz knot, reopening the strait became Trump's top priority. He threatened Iranian leaders that, if the strait was not reopened, the US would occupy Kharg Island, strike Iran's energy infrastructure (its electrical grid), and ultimately strike its bridges (TRT Haber, 2026c). To increase pressure on Iran, new infantry and airborne units were deployed to the region, along with dozens of additional fighter jets, attack helicopters, and amphibious assault ships.

While not providing direct military support to the US, 22 countries from different parts of the world led by the UK and including Bahrain and the UAE, issued a joint statement on March 19 announcing their wish to contribute to efforts ensuring safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. The statement condemned Iran's attacks on unarmed commercial vessels in the Gulf, its strikes on civilian infrastructure including oil and gas facilities, and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iranian forces, stating that the disruption of global energy supply networks caused by the closure threatened global peace and stability. It called on Iran to immediately halt its attacks on Gulf states and vessels transiting the strait and to comply with UNSC Resolution 2817 (2026), which emphasized freedom of navigation through the strait. The signatory states also pledged to support appropriate steps to ensure safe passage through Hormuz (Gov.UK, 2026).

Despite Trump's threat to strike Iran's energy and infrastructure facilities if no deal was reached and Hormuz remained closed, Iran did not back down. On the contrary, Iran asserted full sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz and sought to establish a new regime to regulate passage through it. Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi stated on April 2 that Iran was in a state of war, that it was unrealistic to apply peacetime rules under such conditions, and that imposing restrictions and limitations due to the conflict was entirely natural (Tasnim, 2026b).

To regulate and direct maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, the Iranian government announced the establishment of the Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA), which would

charge transiting vessels a fee to ensure the safety and order of maritime traffic. However, the Arab littoral states of the Persian Gulf viewed this arrangement as a violation of their sovereignty, and the overwhelming majority of the international community argued that passage through the strait should not be restricted in any way.

As the dispute over the Strait of Hormuz continued, the US Navy imposed a blockade on Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman starting on April 13, 2026. CENTCOM announced that any vessel entering or leaving the blockaded areas without American authorization would be intercepted, forced to change course, or seized, but that the freedom of navigation of vessels not entering or leaving Iranian ports would not be obstructed. Despite claims that some vessels managed to transit Hormuz despite the blockade, CENTCOM stated that, as of May 13, 67 commercial vessels attempting to breach the blockade had been forced to change course, 4 vessels had been damaged, and 15 vessels carrying humanitarian aid had been allowed passage (CENTCOM, 2026).

4.4. The Ceasefire Puzzle

In statements made after the third week of March, President Trump claimed that “the war had been won,” asserting that the Iranians had reached out to him and wanted to negotiate. Around the same time, Türkiye, Egypt, and Pakistan began mediation efforts. It was reported on March 24 that the US had presented Iran with a 15-point plan via Pakistan (BBC News, 2026). According to press reports, these points included an Iranian commitment not to build nuclear weapons, the decommissioning of existing controversial nuclear facilities, the termination of uranium enrichment activities on Iranian soil and the removal of enriched uranium stockpiles from the country, an end to Iran’s financing and arming of regional proxy groups, limits on missile range and numbers, and keeping the Strait of Hormuz open. In return, the US would pursue civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran and lift sanctions. According to Trump’s statements, diplomatic contacts this time were being conducted by Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. While the Iranian side denied claims of negotiations, Trump stated that talks were going well. It was subsequently reported that the US had offered a 45-day ceasefire in exchange for reopening the Strait of Hormuz and the start of negotiations. Iran viewed the ceasefire as a time-buying maneuver, stating that the ceasefire-threat-attack cycle needed to end, and that it wanted ceasefire and peace negotiations to take place simultaneously alongside a non-aggression guarantee. Iran also began raising demands for war reparations from the US and Israel. In response, the Trump administration threatened either negotiations and the reopening of Hormuz, or the destruction of the entirety of Iranian civilization, including strikes on Iran’s power plants, bridges, and economic facilities, giving time to the Iranian government until April 6. At Pakistan’s request, acting as mediator between the parties, this deadline was extended to April 8.

Hours before the deadline by which Trump had threatened Iran with massive destruction, Pakistan announced that the parties had agreed to a two-week conditional ceasefire in exchange for reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic and halting

the strikes. It was announced that Iran had submitted a 10-point proposal package that the American administration considered these points a suitable basis for negotiations, and that talks would continue during the ceasefire (NTV, 2026d). According to Iranian press reports, the 10-point package presented to the US included a halt to fighting on all fronts, reparations payments to Iran, the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to traffic under Iranian control, the complete lifting of sanctions and the release of frozen Iranian assets, recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium, and an Iranian commitment not to build nuclear weapons. Israel stated that it accepted the ceasefire but claimed it did not cover Lebanon, continuing intense strikes on Lebanon (southern Lebanon, Beirut, the Beqaa Valley, etc.). Israeli strikes paused for a time after Iran insisted that fighting stop on all fronts, including Lebanon, before negotiations could proceed.

The American delegation, led by JD Vance, and the Iranian delegation, led by Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Ghalibaf, met for peace negotiations in Islamabad on April 11. Unlike previous talks, this time the parties arrived with large delegations of political, diplomatic, military, and technical experts-the American delegation numbering 300 and the Iranian delegation 70. However, after 21 hours of talks mediated by Pakistan, no result was achieved. Because Israeli strikes on Lebanon continued, Iran also continued to keep the Strait of Hormuz closed, and the US maintained its blockade of Iranian ports. Under these conditions, Pakistan continued its mediation efforts, but attempts to resume talks in Islamabad before the ceasefire's expiration on April 21 proved unsuccessful. Citing both the American blockade and Trump's threats, as well as the continuation of Israeli strikes on Lebanon, the Iranian delegation did not return to Islamabad for a second time. Nonetheless, thanks to Pakistan's efforts, Trump announced the extension of the ceasefire.

After the April 11 Islamabad talks, the US and Iranian negotiating delegations did not meet directly again, though Pakistan continued its mediation activities by carrying messages between the parties. While President Trump repeatedly stated that negotiations with Iran were progressing well, no positive outcome had been reached as of the time this study was prepared. Disagreements over the continuation of Israeli strikes in Lebanon, the fate of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile, and the status of the Strait of Hormuz prevented progress in the talks. Nonetheless, aside from a few limited clashes between Iranian and American forces along the Persian Gulf coast, the ceasefire has held.

5. Impacts of the Attacks on Iran

The 40-day US/Israeli attacks, lasting from February 28 to April 8, 2026, profoundly affected daily economic, social, and political life in Iran and became a major turning point in Iranian political history. It is still too early to fully assess the social, economic, and political effects of the attacks. However, in light of the limited data currently available, this section assesses the effects of the US/Israeli attacks and the war on Iran from political, military, economic, and diplomatic perspectives.

Political

Without doubt, the most significant consequence of the American/Israeli attacks that began on February 28 was the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had governed Iran as Supreme Leader for thirty-seven years. Although Khamenei began as a relatively weak leader, he gradually managed to consolidate power in his own hands, becoming the sole figure with final say across military affairs, economic policy, political matters, and cultural policy. Under his leadership, nearly every institution from the presidency to parliament lost much of its real function, becoming largely symbolic (Golkar, 2023). Khamenei's death therefore marked the beginning of a new period in Iranian politics whose ultimate direction remains uncertain. With Khamenei's death, the institutional mechanism of the Islamic Republic came into play, and through a process shaped by both historical structural factors and wartime conditions-with the IRGC playing an influential role-Mojtaba Khamenei was designated as Iran's new leader. Within a short time, all military and political institutions and officeholders declared their loyalty to the younger Khamenei. In this way, Iran succeeded in keeping the Islamic Republic system intact.

Two factors stand out in explaining how the regime survived. The first is the institutionalization of the regime (Parsi, 2026). As noted above, although Khamenei had effectively concentrated power in his own office, the constitutional institutions continued to exist and to carry out their missions, even if only nominally. The continued functioning of these institutions also brought about elite circulation, incorporating new generations into the power structure and preventing the system from becoming a gerontocracy ruled solely by the elderly. Thus, although Khamenei sat at the apex of power, beneath him existed a relatively large and varied elite class raised after the Islamic Revolution, with different tendencies, who rallied around the regime. It must therefore be emphasized that the idea of the Islamic Republic, contrary to common assumption, was not the imagination of a handful of individuals but the product of a collective effort directed toward that goal. This vision was transmitted to subsequent generations through an intensive process of religious and political indoctrination. Indeed, the belief in *velayat-e faqih*, which forms the foundation of the Islamic Republic, has become an essential component of religious faith itself. The institutionalization of the regime ensured that the idea of the Islamic Republic was passed on to new generations, enabling the regime to reproduce itself along an even more radical and security-oriented line. Both the institutionalization of the regime and the fact that the vision of the Islamic Republic constituted a shared imagination sustained through solidarity among elites allowed the regime to survive despite the elimination of a significant portion of its leadership cadre.

The second factor is repression and fear. According to this view, the regime built a relentless mechanism of control, intimidation, and repression that prevented dissidents from raising their voices, organizing among themselves, or taking to the streets. Indeed, as the Nowruz holiday-one of Iran's most important national and cultural occasions-approached under US-Israeli attacks, Reza Pahlavi, who has positioned himself as an opposition leader, called on March 14 upon the "Valiant Heroes of the Immortals," who

had displayed great “valor” inside Iran in recent months, to further wear down and weaken the Islamic Republic’s repressive apparatus by every possible means and pave the way for its final collapse (Reza Pahlavi, 2026). Pahlavi’s call triggered Iran’s internal security reflexes. Internet access, already troubled since January, was almost completely cut off starting on March 15, with only limited access granted to certain government officials and members of the press. Even Iran-based news websites and the official websites of many public institutions became inaccessible. The mobilization of Basij forces, with regime supporters gathering in public squares every night throughout the war, along with strict security measures, reduced the likelihood of internal unrest. In addition to these strict security measures, the prolongation of the US-Israeli attacks, the growing damage to civilian targets, economic facilities, and cultural heritage sites during the strikes, and the Iranian government’s corresponding move to raise the banner of nationalism, all undermined expectations that the public would take to the streets to overthrow the regime. The fact that a significant portion of Iranians rallied around the flag reflects not support for the Islamic Republic as an ideological project, but a determination to defend the nation and the country (Parsi, 2026).

Despite the Islamic Republic regime’s survival and continuity, citing the change in the country’s political leadership, Trump claimed in statements made at the end of March 2026 that regime change had been achieved. According to him, after weeks of strikes, the troublesome first- and second-generation leadership cadre had been neutralized and replaced by a more pragmatic and intelligent third generation of leaders. Contrary to Trump’s claims, it is not realistic at this point to argue that regime change has occurred in Iran. The new ruling bloc’s relations with the opposition and its social and economic policies will determine the future of state-society relations and of the regime itself in Iran in the future.

One of the most closely watched issues throughout the war concerned the stance of Iranian dissidents and minorities. One of the defining features of the Iranian opposition is its considerable fragmentation. The group that first comes to mind when discussing the Iranian opposition consists of reformists who once supported the Islamic Revolution and the new regime but were later sidelined or pushed out of power for various reasons. Yet even among reformists there are significant factional divisions and differences. At the same time, reformist politics has been seriously weakened over the past decade due to the rise of ideological and security-driven policies and growing authoritarianism. During and after the 12-Day War, reformists opposed the Israeli and American attacks, but, echoing former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, advocated adopting a new paradigm in foreign policy and negotiating with the US. During the widespread anti-government protests of January 2026, they also criticized the regime’s excessive use of force against protesters and its security policies. In response, the Iranian government launched a new crackdown campaign against reformist politicians.

The second group commonly cited when discussing the Iranian opposition is the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK), led by Maryam Rajavi, which has opposed the Islamic Republic almost since its inception and now operates primarily from Paris. The MEK has for years led an umbrella organization called the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), which claims to offer an alternative to the Islamic Republic regime. The MEK is known to have close ties with certain American neoconservative politicians. It also maintains roughly 3,000-armed militant currently housed at a camp in Albania. However, because of the violent attacks it carried out in the early years of the revolution, the MEK has been designated a terrorist organization in Iran, and its domestic networks have been kept under intense suppression. As a result, the extent of its actual support inside Iran remains unclear. Nonetheless, it has been alleged that MEK elements provided intelligence and engaged in sabotage activities during the US-Israeli attacks.

A third element of the Iranian opposition commonly cited consists of the monarchist movement, generally active in the diaspora. Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, son of the deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, has positioned himself as an opposition leader against the Islamic Republic regime over the past decade. During this period he developed ties with Israel but failed to obtain the recognition and support he sought from the Trump administration. When the US/Israeli attacks began, Pahlavi expressed support for the strikes and declared his readiness to lead a transitional government in Iran. However, he failed to unify the Iranian opposition under his own leadership and did not find the level of support he expected from the Iranian public.

Finally, an important component of the Iranian opposition consists of ethnic-nationalist movements among Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Baluchis, and Arabs. Among these, some Baluchi and Kurdish groups have long been engaged in armed struggle against the Islamic Republic. It has long been alleged that the US and Israeli governments have invested in ethnic groups as a means of pressuring Iran (Hersh, 2008). With the start of the US-Israeli attacks, the prospect of playing an "ethnic card" against Iran came to the fore. In particular, the formation of a joint front by leading Kurdish parties opposing the Iranian government shortly before the attacks began revived speculation about a "Kurdish card." After the fighting began, Israeli strikes targeted IRGC headquarters, the Iranian army, security units, government buildings, and border guards in the Kurdish-populated provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, and Ilam. A statement by Israeli military spokesperson Nadav Shoshani on March 4 that "we are destroying capacity in the west to open the road to Tehran" was interpreted as an attempt to open a "corridor" for the advance of insurgent Kurdish forces. However, some Kurdish parties, along with the Iraqi Kurds (the PUK and KDP), did not support this plan. It was ultimately alleged that President Trump, taking into account Türkiye's objections on regional security grounds, did not want the Kurds to be used as a proxy force and vetoed the plan on March 7 (Mazzetti et al., 2026). Iran, for its part, increased security measures in the region against a possible Kurdish uprising and intensified pressure on Kurdish groups by striking their bases inside Iraq. Alongside Iran's security measures, amid the uncertainty brought on by the war, neither the Kurds nor other ethnic-nationalist movements attempted uprising.

Military

Shortly after the war began, U.S. and Israeli forces succeeded in establishing dominance over Iranian airspace. The Israeli military dropped 18,000 bombs and missiles on Iran through more than 1,000 airstrike waves. Israeli fighter jets flew 8,500 sorties, carrying out 10,800 strikes against more than 4,000 targets, including air defense systems, ballistic missile launch sites, weapons production facilities, nuclear facilities, command centers, commanders, and political leaders. US forces, meanwhile, struck more than 13,000 targets inside Iran by April 8. According to Israeli military claims, of the roughly 470 ballistic missile launchers Iran was estimated to possess before the attacks, sixty percent were destroyed or damaged, and eighty-five percent of its air detection and defense systems were destroyed. IDF spokesperson Brigadier General Effie Defrin claimed that all designated objectives had been achieved and even exceeded (Fabian, 2026b). In early April, Trump announced that nearly all military targets in Iran had been struck. In statements made at the end of March, Israeli officials argued that even if the war were ended at that point, the operation could be considered a success, as Iran's military capabilities had been degraded to a level where they could no longer threaten Israel, the US, or their allies (Ynet, 2026).

Additionally, the US-Israeli attacks eliminated a significant part of Iran's command structure. Beyond the heavy losses suffered in the opening hours of the strikes, IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Majid Khademi, IRGC Navy Commander Alireza Tangsiri, Basij Commander Gholamreza Soleimani, numerous other commanders, and Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani were killed. Iran's nuclear facilities were struck dozens of times. According to CENTCOM Commander Cooper, by March 30 Iran had lost 150 warships at sea, including 11 submarines. Underground bases and shelters along the Iranian coast housing anti-ship missiles and radar systems were also heavily bombed. It is estimated that around 3,500 people were killed on the Iranian side following the American-Israeli attacks, roughly 1,700 of them civilians (Reuters, 2026a).

Despite its weak air defenses, within the first month of the war Iranian armed forces shot down more than 160 drones, including MQ-9 Reaper, Hermes, and LUCAS-type models, around five fighter jets including one F-35, and seven refueling aircraft.⁴ In counterstrikes, Iranian forces damaged radar and air defense systems in Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Over the course of the conflict, 13 American service members were killed and 365 wounded across various locations. By the end of March, it was reported that 9 Israeli soldiers and 22 civilians had been killed and around 7,000 people wounded on the Israeli side as a result of Iranian strikes (Fabian, 2026b).

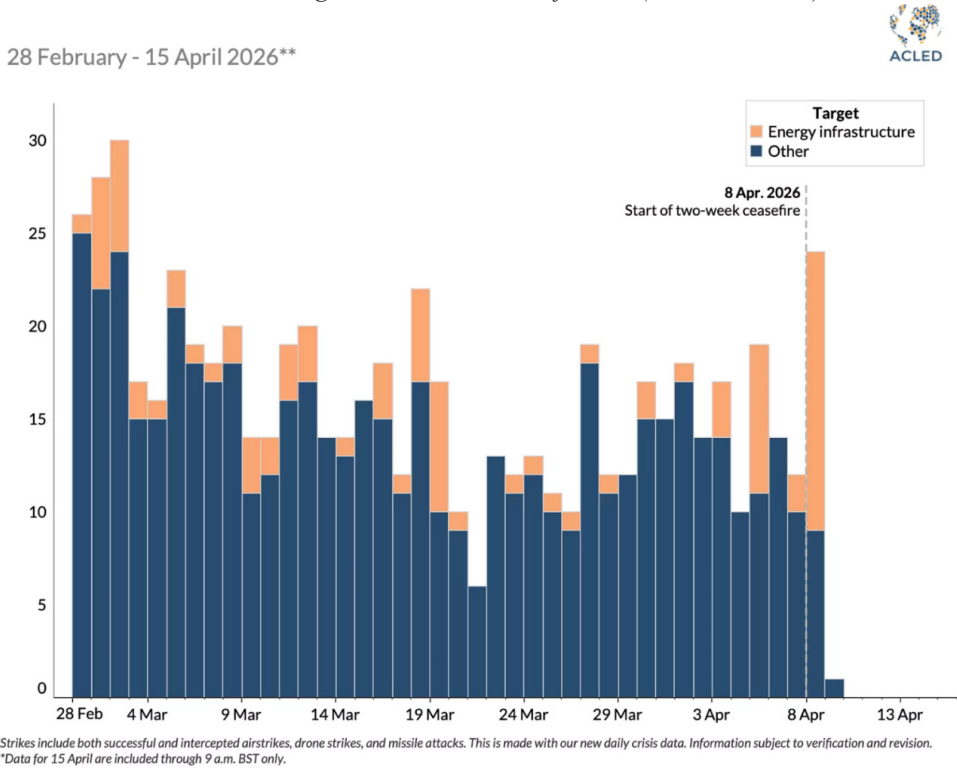
It is estimated that, from February 28 through the end of March, Iran launched approximately 6,770 missile and drone strikes against the Gulf states, Jordan, and Israel. Of these missiles and drones, 2,400 struck the UAE, 1,365 struck Israel, and 950 struck Kuwait (Efesoy & Altun, 2026). In the later stages of the war, the number of missiles and

⁴ Iranian sources claim that more than 200 drones and cruise missiles, along with around 16 fighter jets, were shot down in total (Press TV, 2026c).

drones fired from Iran toward Israel declined, but their accuracy increased. According to Israeli military estimates, Iran still retains around 1,000 ballistic missiles capable of reaching Israel (Fabian, 2026b).

Although American officials claimed that the Iranian navy had been destroyed, it cannot be said that the US Navy has established dominance over the waters of the Persian Gulf. On the contrary, Iran continues to control the Strait of Hormuz. While Iran’s nuclear facilities suffered heavy damage in the strikes, it is assessed that Iran still retains roughly 450 kg of uranium enriched to sixty percent-one of the stated justifications for the war.

Figure 4
Iranian Attacks against the Persian Gulf States (ACLED, 2026b)



Economic

The US-Israeli attacks caused enormous damage to Iran’s economy. Above all, the war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz deprived Iran of one of its most important sources of revenue. Although the embargo on Iranian oil already loaded onto tankers at sea was eased once the war began, Iran’s oil exports fell from 1.5 million barrels per day to almost a complete halt. After the start of the fighting, the Iranian rial lost nearly half its value, and food inflation reached triple digits. In addition, strikes on Iran’s infrastructure, energy, and industrial facilities raised the overall cost of the war. Both the war itself and

the internet blackouts severely damaged Iran's foreign trade and digital economy. Iran's economy is expected to shrink by ten percent as a result of the war. President Pezeshkian reportedly warned, in a cabinet meeting, that if a ceasefire was not reached within three weeks to a month, Iran's economy could collapse entirely. During the Islamabad talks, Iran put the cost of reconstruction at around 270 billion dollars and demanded compensation for this amount. In addition, due to sanctions, banking restrictions, and legal disputes, the Iranian government has roughly 100 billion dollars in frozen financial assets held in various countries abroad. During the talks with the US, the Iranian side demanded the release of approximately 12 billion dollars of these assets as a condition.

Foreign Policy

One of the most notable developments during the war was Iran's isolation. Despite the killing of Iranian leader Khamenei, there was little reaction to the attacks apart from Pakistan, Iraqi Shia groups, and the Houthis, with only Pakistan and Iraq officially declared mourning. When the US-Israeli attacks began, UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the military escalation that began with the US-Israeli strikes and continued with Iranian retaliation, calling on the parties to immediately return to the negotiating table. Although Iran became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2023 and joined BRICS in 2024, no joint statement was issued on behalf of either organization or bloc after the attacks began, aside from individual statements by member states.⁵ The "Maritime Security Belt" joint military exercise that Iran conducted with China and Russia in the Sea of Oman in mid-February had no deterrent effect whatsoever on the US and Israel (Baev, 2026). While states such as Russia, China, and Brazil condemned the attacks, Australia, Canada, and some European countries expressed support for them. Germany, the UK, and France issued a joint statement saying they were not party to the US-Israeli attack and calling for a return to nuclear negotiations, while also condemning Iran's attacks on regional countries (Ciobanu & McNeil, 2026).

Iran's heavy strikes on Gulf states further deepened its isolation. Regional countries that have good relations both with the Gulf states and with Iran condemned the US-Israeli attacks, while also stating that Iran's strikes targeting Gulf states were equally unacceptable. On March 11, Russia and China abstained on UNSC Resolution 2817, drafted by Bahrain on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and supported by 135 countries, which condemned Iran's attacks on the Gulf states and Jordan. The resolution made no reference whatsoever to the US-Israeli attacks, instead emphasizing the right of Gulf states to individual or collective self-defense against Iran's strikes. It also emphasized the freedom of navigation and rights of commercial vessels under international law, reaffirming member states' right to protect their ships from attacks and provocations. The resolution condemned Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, its interference with shipping, its threats, and its endangerment of maritime security in the Bab-el-Mandeb, stating that restrictions

⁵ At the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting held in New Delhi on May 15, 2026, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi asked member states to condemn the US and Israeli attacks, but the talks ended without a joint statement due to differences of opinion among member states (Reuters, 2026c).

on freedom of navigation in these international waterways constituted a serious threat to international peace and security (Resolution 2817, 2026).

In an open letter addressed to Islamic countries on March 16, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Larijani noted that, apart from a few rare political statements, no Islamic country had come to the aid of the Iranian nation, asking which side they stood on in a war pitting the US and Israel against Muslim Iran and the forces of resistance (Middle East Eye, 2026b). Interestingly, two days after Larijani's letter, on March 18, The Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Arab and Islamic countries was held in Riyadh. The joint statement issued at the end of the meeting condemned Iran's deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, including residential areas, oil facilities and diplomatic buildings in the Gulf states and Jordan, while emphasizing these countries' right to legitimate self-defense. The ministers demanded Iran an immediate end to its provocative actions, threats, and attacks against neighboring states and cease its support for militia groups acting against their interests. They also called on Iran to implement UNSC Resolution 2817 (2026) and to refrain from actions and threats endangering international navigation and maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb (Turkish MFA, 2026).

6. Global and Regional Implications of the Conflict

The Trump administration launched the attacks, under the name of a military operation, without seeking authorization from the US Congress, claiming it was acting to eliminate an imminent threat allegedly originating from Iran. However, the US attacks did not find support among the American public. According to a poll conducted on March 13–15, fifty-eight percent of the American public disapproved of the attacks on Iran (Ipsos, 2026a). In another poll conducted on April 12, when weighing benefits against costs, only twenty-four percent of Americans believed the war against Iran was necessary (Ipsos, 2026b). Indeed, the Trump administration never produced concrete evidence to substantiate its claim of an imminent threat from Iran (Politico, 2026). When asked in the Senate whether Iran genuinely posed an imminent threat, US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard responded that the authority to define it rested with the President (Blake, 2026). However, Joe Kent, Director of National Counterterrorism Center resigned from his post on March 18 after posting on X that there was “*no imminent threat*” from Iran to the US, and claiming that the war had been launched under pressure from Israel and powerful pro-Israel lobbies (BBC, 2026).

The debate over whether Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had persuaded Trump to attack Iran raised the question among the American public of “whose war” this really was. Some figures who had once been among Trump's strongest MAGA supporters openly opposed the war. The central argument of those opposed to the war was that Iran, given its existing capabilities, did not pose an urgent or serious threat to the US. According to this view, the US had been dragged into the war by Israel, and American money and blood were being spent on Israel's behalf (Proctor & Wendling, 2026). For that reason,

Democratic members of Congress repeatedly brought “war powers” resolutions to a vote that would have required congressional approval for strikes on Iran, but these measures were rejected by narrow margins each time.

As debate continued over who had dragged the US into the war, it became clear that the course of the conflict was not unfolding as the US and Israel had hoped. Despite the elimination of much of Iran’s leadership and command structure, Iran continued to resist and even retaliate. It also became clear that the US had not seriously anticipated the possibility that the conflict would spread to regional states or that the Strait of Hormuz would be closed. This shook confidence in the American administration’s military strategy. Moreover, the Strait of Hormuz issue was added to the already long list of unresolved matters concerning Iran.

The Iran War demonstrated that the United States, under the Trump administration, had lost much of its global leadership capacity. For one, the US could not secure the support of even its traditional allies for its attacks on Iran. The United Kingdom, for a long period, did not permit its bases to be used for offensive purposes. Spain opposed the attack from the outset and refused to allow the use of NATO bases on its territory. Even German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, known as a friend of Israel, called the US and Israeli attack on Iran “unlawful” and “unnecessary” (Eichner, 2026). Having failed to secure the support he sought from allies for the attack on Iran, Trump also failed to obtain the support he wanted from NATO and European allies for securing the Strait of Hormuz.

EU officials initially provided indirect support to the US/Israeli attacks and viewed Iran’s escalation of the war to the Gulf states with concern. Despite having played a central role in the past during the conclusion of the nuclear agreement, the EU was unable to exert meaningful influence either during the fighting or during the ceasefire talks and subsequent negotiations. EU member states adopted differing positions according to their own political approaches and strategic and economic interests. Similarly, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte expressed support for the US and Israeli strikes insofar as they degraded Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, but stated that NATO had no institutional plan to become involved in the war. A significant number of NATO members argued that the US/Israeli attacks on Iran lacked legal basis and called for an end to the fighting and a return to diplomacy. When the Trump administration called on NATO members to help secure the Strait of Hormuz, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer responded, “This is not our war!”

China and Russia opposed the US-Israeli attacks from the outset but did not adopt a joint, coordinated position. Russia was seen as one of the states that benefited most from the war. Because of the Iran war, Russia benefited both from reduced American pressure to end the fighting on the Ukrainian front and from the easing of the oil embargo and the resulting rise in oil prices. China, for its part, hoped above all for a swift end to the fighting and a normalization of the investment and trade environment. Iran’s strikes on the Gulf states disrupted China’s trade relations with those countries and jeopardized China’s

years-long efforts to maintain balanced relations between the Gulf states and Iran. Indeed, while China's total trade volume with the GCC states exceeds 250 billion dollars, its total trade with Iran stands at around 13 billion dollars (Yang, 2026).

Thus, despite having established "strategic partnerships" with Iran in recent years, neither Russia nor China provided active support that would have strengthened Iran's capacity to fight. Claims that these countries provided intelligence support to Iran circulated but were never confirmed. In fact, both countries remained silent in the face of Resolution 2817, abstaining in the March 11 UN Security Council vote held at Kuwait's request. Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi criticized this outcome, stating that he had expected UNSC members, particularly Russia and China, alongside countries that valued the UN Charter and international law, to stand against moves by the US in the Security Council that would further complicate the situation on the ground (Mehr News Agency, 2026a). Indeed, on April 7, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution submitted by Bahrain to the Security Council calling for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to traffic, on the grounds that it overlooked the role of the US-Israeli attacks in raising tensions in the region while holding only Iran responsible for the tension (UN News, 2026). After the ceasefire was declared, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi visited Moscow on April 27 and met with Russian President Putin. Putin praised the "heroic" struggle of the Iranian people against the joint US and Israeli attacks and said he would do everything necessary to help secure peace. Araghchi also visited Beijing on May 6, meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. During and after these visits, Russia and China took no steps to bolster Iran's capacity to continue fighting, instead emphasized their bilateral cooperation and offered support for peace efforts.

The Arab states of the Persian Gulf-Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia-were the countries most affected by the conflict. Indeed, Iran's missile and drone strikes were directed more heavily at the UAE than at Israel. Iran viewed the UAE as an "aggressor" state because of its role as a base for Israeli operations and its supporting role in the US/Israeli attacks, and placed no limits on its actions against the country (Tehran Times, 2026b). Similarly, Bahrain, home to the US Fifth Fleet, was also seen as part of the attack mechanism against Iran, both because of its political actions and because it opened its bases and airspace to the strikes (Mehr News Agency, 2026b). However, even Qatar, which has traditionally maintained closer relations with Iran, and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which adopted a more cautious approach toward both Iran and Israel, could not escape Iranian strikes.

The war caused major damage to the energy exports and economic infrastructure of the Gulf states, and the Gulf states lost their status as a safe and attractive hub for international investment and trade. The Gulf states did not respond to Iranian attacks with armed force, finding themselves caught between their neighbor Iran and their ally, the United States. As Iran's strikes on civilian targets, energy infrastructure, and economic targets in the Gulf continued, the Gulf states began adopting a more determined and firmer stance. Iranian activities in these countries were halted, individuals suspected of links

to the IRGC were arrested, and some Iranian diplomats and businessmen were expelled (Haghirian, 2026). Initially warning the US against attacking Iran, Gulf politicians grew concerned that the US might withdraw from the war without imposing serious limits on Iran's nuclear, missile and drone programmes following Iran's strikes on airports, ports, hotels and energy facilities.

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan stated that his country's patience in the face of Iranian attacks was not unlimited, warning, "do not assume the Gulf states lack the capacity to respond" (i24news, 2026). Although the UAE and Saudi Arabia did not become directly and actively involved in the fighting, they took steps supporting US operational capabilities. Saudi Arabia stepped back from its earlier position of refusing to allow its territory to be used for strikes on Iran, permitting American forces to use King Fahd Air Base. There were even reports suggesting that the UAE and Saudi Arabia were considering becoming directly involved in the war against Iran (Said & Malsin, 2026).

Among the Gulf states, Qatar suffered the most damage from the conflict. Due to the damage to its economic and energy infrastructure, Qatar's economy is expected to diminish by 8.6 percent. At the start of the year, the GCC's projected 2026 growth rate of 4.3 percent had already fallen to 2 percent (BloombergHT, 2026).

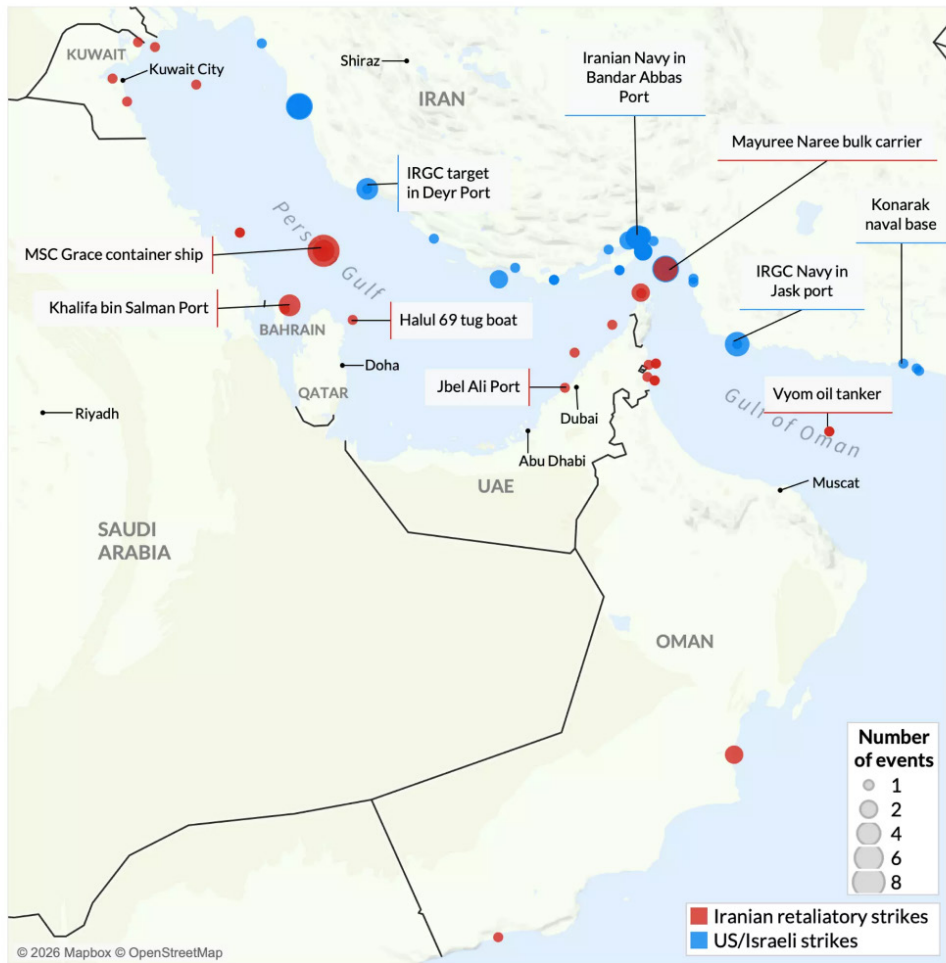
Adverse effects of the war and the prolonged closure of the Strait of Hormuz have not been limited with the Gulf economies. Because the Persian Gulf is one of the key intersection points of global trade and transport networks, the effects and costs of the conflict are felt at a global level. Above all, the region's central role in global oil and natural gas production caused a sharp rise in global energy security risk. Shipments of oil and other commercial products passing through Hormuz fell by 95 percent, and oil prices nearly doubled. Likewise, the Gulf's leading position in petrochemicals, nitrogen, and aluminum production began affecting numerous sectors of the global economy, from agriculture to industry.

Figure 5

U.S.-Israeli and Iranian Attacks in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (ACLED, 2026c)



1 March - 7 April 2026



Strikes occurring at sea are coded to a generic location.

7. Impacts of the Conflict on Türkiye

From the beginning, Türkiye maintained that issues with Iran should be resolved through diplomatic negotiation and repeatedly undertook mediation efforts. In this context, Türkiye conducted close contacts with both the American administration and Iranian officials. Turkish officials repeatedly warned that a war against Iran would benefit no one and would instead plunge the entire region into chaos. Foreign Minister Hakan

Fidan and Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi met in Istanbul on January 30, discussing possible paths to resolving the Iran-US dispute and the possibility of Turkish mediation (Hürriyet, 2026).

In his assessment at the start of February, President Erdoğan once again reiterated his opposition to military intervention against Iran, stating that Türkiye was ready to mediate between the US and Iran (Anadolu Agency, 2026a). Erdoğan proposed holding a trilateral meeting with President Trump and Iranian President Pezeshkian, but the Iranian side rejected this proposal. Although Istanbul was expected to host talks between Witkoff and Araghchi on February 6, the venue was moved to Muscat at the last minute.

Although the venue for negotiations shifted to Oman, Türkiye continued its mediation efforts alongside Egypt and Qatar. The mediators, including Türkiye, prepared a proposal package intended to serve as a basis for negotiations. These proposals included signing a non-aggression pact between Tehran and Washington, a three-year suspension of uranium enrichment by Iran, removal of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile from the country, limits on the use of ballistic missiles, and a halt to arms supplies to groups Iran supports in the Middle East (NTV, 2026a).

Shortly before the attacks, claims circulated on some social media accounts alleging that, in the event of a US attack on Iran, Türkiye was also planning to invade Iranian territory on security grounds. Türkiye stated that these claims were disinformation and affirmed its respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbors (Anadolu Agency, 2026c).

When the fighting began, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again emphasized that the issues should be resolved peacefully, stating that Türkiye was ready to provide the necessary support for mediation (NTV, 2026b). Erdoğan said, "We feel deep sorrow and concern over the US-Israeli attacks on Iran, instigated by Netanyahu's provocations," and argued that Israel's "poisoning" efforts had prevented mediation efforts from succeeding. At the same time, he said, "Iran's missile and drone attacks against our brotherly countries in the Gulf, for whatever reason, are also unacceptable" (TRT Haber, 2026a). In a statement on March 2, Erdoğan described the attacks on Iran as "unlawful" and said diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting were continuing (Anadolu Agency, 2026d).

Türkiye approached the conflict both in terms of regional security risks and economic effects. One of Türkiye's most significant concerns was the collapse of the Iranian government, the country's descent into chaos, and the conflict turning into a regional security problem. In particular, the possibility that ethnic Kurdish nationalist movements linked to the PKK might come to the fore and attempt to establish dominance in border areas with Türkiye, along with the possibility of clashes between Kurds and ethnic Azerbaijani Turks in Iran, which heightened Türkiye's security concerns. Accordingly, security measures were increased in border regions, with the movements of Iranian Kurdish militia groups in particular closely monitored. It has been reported that the US

and Israel provided weapons to Kurdish militia groups early in the conflict and planned to draw them into the fighting, but the Trump administration backed away from this plan due to Turkish warnings. In addition, given the large number of Iranian students in Türkiye, Iranian property ownership in the country, and shared cultural values between Türkiye and Iran, concerns also arose over a possible refugee wave toward Türkiye should instability persist in Iran. Türkiye was also troubled by the spread of the war, openly condemning Iran's strikes on civilian targets in the Gulf states as unjust actions that widened the conflict. Foreign Minister Fidan argued that Iran's indiscriminate bombing of Gulf states was "an incredibly mistaken strategy" (Anadolu Agency, 2026e).

Türkiye watched the spread of the war with concern, both because of its negative effects on the Turkish economy and its possible impact on regional balances of power. The possibility that Iran might emerge from the war strengthened, without any meaningful change to its regional policies, was seen as risky, since it could deepen regional security problems. On the other hand, Israel's achievement of absolute military superiority over Iran, together with the US, was also seen as risky for Türkiye's security calculations. As a matter of fact Turkish-Israeli relations had deteriorated due to Israel's unlawful practices in Palestine, the Gaza war, and Türkiye's support for Palestinian resistance. Türkiye also viewed Israel's attacks on Lebanon, Syria, and finally Iran as steps, in line with the Netanyahu government's expansionist tendencies, aimed at weakening regional states and destabilizing the region, and regarded Israel's expansionist and military activities as a threat to regional security. For that reason, Turkish diplomacy maintained constant contact with officials of regional countries as well as with American and Iranian counterparts, supporting diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting as quickly as possible.

Throughout the conflict, missiles fired from Iran occasionally also veered toward Türkiye. Ballistic missiles fired from Iran entered Turkish airspace on four occasions—the first on March 4 and the last on March 30—and were intercepted by NATO air and missile defense assets deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean. After the first Iranian missile heading toward Turkish airspace was shot down, President Erdoğan stated that the necessary warnings had been issued to Iran to prevent a repeat of such an incident (Milliyet, 2026). Iran's General Staff stated that it had not fired missiles into Turkish territory and that it respected Turkish sovereignty. After another Iranian missile heading toward Turkish airspace was shot down on March 9, President Erdoğan said that the necessary warnings had been given and that the mistake should not be repeated (TRT Haber, 2026b). Speaking by phone with Foreign Minister Fidan, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi claimed that the missiles heading toward Turkish airspace were not of Iranian origin. Another ballistic missile fired from Iran was again destroyed over Türkiye on March 13. In a message issued for Ramadan and Nowruz, new Iranian leader Mojtaba Khamenei claimed that the missile attacks on Türkiye and Oman had not been carried out by Iran or its allies (NTV, 2026c).

Foreign Minister Fidan, who held frequent phone calls with his Iranian counterpart, attended the aforementioned Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Arab and

Islamic countries in Riyadh on March 18. Following the meeting, he held a series of talks with Gulf states' officials. These talks gave rise to the Egypt-Pakistan-Türkiye mediation initiative. This initiative led to the ceasefire reached on April 8 and the Islamabad talks held on April 11. In an interview with Al Jazeera on May 12, 2026, Fidan said Türkiye's greatest concern was sustaining the ceasefire, and described Türkiye's role in the ongoing Pakistan-mediated US-Iran talks as helping the negotiations (Anadolu Agency, 2026g).

8. Iran and the Middle East After the Conflict

Following the conflict that began with the joint US-Israeli attacks on February 28, 2026 and lasted forty days, some Iranian officials have adopted a near-triumphant tone, given that the Islamic Republic regime preserved its existence and integrity, retained the ability to strike Israel, US bases in the region, and the Gulf states, and gained control over the Strait of Hormuz. Indeed, despite continuing his threatening rhetoric toward Iran, it was US President Trump who was seemed most willing to ensure and sustain the ceasefire. Trump has even been pressuring the Netanyahu government to halt Israel's strikes on Hezbollah in Lebanon, which was set by Iran a condition of the ceasefire. Besides the ceasefire indirect negotiations continued between the parties for determining conditions of the cease fire and diplomatic solution of the conflict. Various reports since the declaration of the ceasefire, up to the time this study was completed, indicate that Iran has been repairing its damaged military facilities, replacing destroyed missile launchers with new ones, replenishing its missile stockpiles, and strengthening its air defense systems.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Islamic Republic regime survived this wave of attacks does not mean it stands firmly intact or that it will endure indefinitely. Above else, politics in the Islamic Republic has always been marked by intense factional competition. All observers agree that the IRGC came to the fore during the war. The elimination of several senior leaders during the war, combined with President Pezeshkian's relative weakness, allowed the IRGC to dominate both the conduct of the war and the defense of the revolution and the regime. Although a significant part of its senior commanders were killed, the IRGC has preserved its institutional cohesion and ideological orientation. This enabled it to withstand American/Israeli pressure and even mount effective responses. This success has bolstered the self-confidence of IRGC cadres. The selection of Mojtaba Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader, the rise of former IRGC member Mohammad-Baqer Ghalibaf, and the appointment of Mohammad-Baqer Zolghadr as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council are all seen as signs of the IRGC's growing political power. Following the end of the fighting, it is highly likely that internal debates and factional rivalry over the war and the recent past will come to the fore in Iranian politics. Indeed, even during the clashes, President Pezeshkian faced harsh domestic criticism over his March 7 speech apologizing to neighboring countries for the strikes (Iran International, 2026b). Similarly, shortly after Foreign Minister Araghchi posted on X on April 17 that the Strait of Hormuz had been reopened to commercial shipping, accounts close to the IRGC claimed his statement was incomplete and inaccurate, setting out a series of conditions for the strait's

reopening (Iran International, 2026d). After the start of Pakistan-mediated Iran-US talks, sharp disagreements also emerged between factions favoring continued confrontation with the US and those advocating negotiation. Under those conditions, it will take time for Mojtaba Khamenei to consolidate his leadership. Both the process of consolidating the new leader's authority and the emerging new factional rivalries will likely end up with the purge of some of former comrades. In due course, the new ruling bloc's relations with the opposition and its social and economic policies will determine the future of state-society relations and of the regime in Iran.

Indeed, the Islamic Republic regime's structural legitimacy problem persists. In a country where voting is nearly equated with support for the regime, turnout in the first round of the most recent presidential election stood at only around forty percent. Despite growth in the number of population and the electorate, the 16.3 million votes won by Pezeshkian in the second round of the 2024 election were considerably lower than those won by previous presidents: Hassan Rouhani received 23.6 million votes in the 2017 presidential election, and Ebrahim Raisi received 17.9 million votes in 2021. Meanwhile, the number, frequency, and intensity of anti-regime protests have continued to rise. It was alarming that the anti-regime protests that erupted just two months before the war spread rapidly across the country, with nearly seven thousand people losing their lives in the clashes. Unlike previous waves, the January 2026 protests saw some protesters arm themselves with hunting rifles, knives, stones, and attacked on and chased armed police and security personnel even with bare hands, demonstrating the protesters' anger and readiness for confrontation.

Another source of public discontent and the regime's legitimacy problems is economic hardships (Rahimi & Rezaei, 2025). Iran's economy has long been in a state of near-collapse, with inflation exceeding forty percent, unemployment around thirty-five percent, international sanctions, restricted access to financial markets, and the continuous depreciation of the rial. Before the US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, one dollar was worth 45,000 Iranian rials; today it trades at around 1,375,000. It is alleged that more than half of Iran's population faces malnutrition, and that more than thirty percent of the population lives below the poverty line (Khoshnood, 2019). Iran's GDP, which stood at 400 billion dollars in 2008, remained at roughly the same level in 2023; over the same period, per capita income fell from 5,300 dollars in 2008 to around 4,400 dollars in 2023. In 2025, Iran's GDP fell from 400 billion dollars to 341 billion dollars, and the current conflict is expected to shrink Iran's economy by a further ten percent.

As an economy heavily dependent on oil revenue, Iran has been deprived of a significant source of income due to Western sanctions, causing its economy to shrink and run persistent budget deficits. Iran exported 2.5 million barrels of oil per day in 2012, a figure that fell to 1.5 million by 2024. The Iranian government's resort to raising taxes to cover budget deficits has further increased economic pressure on the public and intensified public discontent.

Despite the economic, social, and political problems facing the Islamic Republic order, power has increasingly become concentrated in the hands of a narrow, security-oriented faction (Parsi, 2026). Because moderate and pragmatist elites active in the political sphere have gradually been purged, the regime has largely lost its capacity for flexibility. Should the new power holders continue repressive policies and disproportionate use of force against protesters, Iran could be drawn into a new wave of violence and terrorism originating from both the opposition and the regime itself. The voluntary arming of some segments of the opposition, the militant capacity of the MEK, and the existence of armed ethnic-nationalist groups all strengthen the likelihood of terrorism and violence.

The future course of Iranian foreign policy after the conflict will be shaped largely by how the conflict ultimately ends. Given the economic difficulties Iran currently faces, the wounds inflicted by the war, and the challenges confronting its allies in their own countries (efforts to disarm the Hashd al-Sha'bi in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza), Iran's influence in the Middle East is expected to continue declining.

Depending on the conditions under which the conflict ultimately ends, Iran is also expected to continue asserting sovereignty and control over the Strait of Hormuz in order to sustain influence in the Persian Gulf.⁶ According to Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Gharibabadi, under normal circumstances all vessels transiting the strait are required to notify Iranian and Omani authorities and obtain the necessary permits to ensure security and safety. Gharibabadi announced that Iran and Oman would henceforth assume greater responsibility for guaranteeing safe passage and that they were working on a protocol to regulate transit through the strait during peacetime (Tasnim, 2026b). In this context, Iran's attempt to charge fees on vessels transiting Hormuz has become a significant challenge for the littoral states and the international community. Failure among the relevant parties to reach an agreement on a transit regime for the Strait of Hormuz acceptable to the littoral states will lead to continuation of the conflict. In such a scenario, a military coalition composed of the US, Gulf states, and willing partners could plausibly undertake a joint operation to secure the strait.

The conditions under which the conflict ultimately ends, along with the disputes surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, will shape the future of Iran's relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. There are no significant problems in relations between Iran and Oman, but Iran's strikes on the other Gulf states throughout the war will leave a lasting mark on those countries' strategic culture. Indeed, throughout the conflict, Iran directed even more missiles and drones at the Gulf states than it did at Israel. As a result of these attacks, the Iranian threat became an immediate and serious one not only for

⁶ The narrowest point of the Strait of Hormuz is roughly 33 km wide and is divided equally between Iran and Oman, both of which have declared 12-nautical-mile territorial waters. Apart from a 1974 continental shelf agreement between the two countries, there is no international treaty specifically governing passage through the strait. Iran claims full sovereign authority over its territorial waters in the strait, while other littoral states and Western countries argue that the Strait of Hormuz is subject to the transit passage regime under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, under which all vessels have the right of innocent passage without prior authorization or notification (Batmanghelidj, 2026; Dalar, 2023).

the leaders of the Gulf states but also for the civilian populations affected by the strikes. This development has effectively brought an end to the engagement policy the Gulf states had pursued toward Iran (Haghirian, 2026). For that reason, as UAE Ambassador to Washington Yousef Al Otaiba put it, a ceasefire to be reached and/or the conflict to be ended while leaving Iran's capacity to threaten sea lanes, oil infrastructure, and trade routes intact is unacceptable for the Gulf states (Otaiba, 2026). The persistence of the Iranian threat to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf may push them toward diversifying their security relationships, deepening security cooperation with Israel, and reviving the framework of the Abraham Accords.

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April 2, 2026

TÜBA STATEMENT ON THE ESCALATING CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The [International Relations Working Group](#) of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA), at its meeting on March 12, 2026, examined the war that began following the attacks by the United States and Israel against Iran, the deepening of conflicts in the Middle East, the Gulf, and Lebanon, and the humanitarian crisis in its regional and global dimensions. Following the general situation assessment conducted at the meeting, it was unanimously decided to share the following declaration with the international academic community and the public.

TÜBA recalls that, pursuant to Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, no state may use force against another state. Under the claims of self-defense, no political, ideological, or security justification can legitimize the use of force against civilians or the violation of states' territorial integrity and sovereign rights.

The loss of civilian lives, particularly children, in the conflicts in the region is being followed with deep concern. Deliberate attacks on drinking water, energy, food, healthcare, education, and civilian residential areas constitute clear violations of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions. Environmental destruction and the destruction of cultural heritage are leading to irreparable consequences and large-scale displacement movements.

The targeting of educational and research institutions, regardless of the country of origin, is unacceptable. The loss of lives of students and scientists, and the rendering of academic institutions dysfunctional across all conflict geographies of the Middle East, particularly in Iran, Lebanon, and the Gulf region, signifies the breaking of the chain of scientific continuity. Wars come to an end, yet rebuilding a destroyed educational institution and restoring a generation of researchers that has been impeded takes generations.

In this regard, we call upon the international community and all relevant parties to take collective action on the following points:

- Attacks on drinking water, energy, food, health, education, and civilian residential areas, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions in all conflict zones must cease immediately, and obligations arising from the Geneva Conventions must be complied with unconditionally.
- The sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal affairs of all states in the region must be respected, and rights guaranteed under international law must be effectively protected across all geographies.
- Scientific research activities and the institutions in which these activities are conducted are protected against attacks within the framework of international law. In order for scientific activities to be sustained in conflict-affected areas, the conflicting parties must refrain from attacks that could affect these institutions.





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- All parties must make effective use of diplomatic channels for a permanent ceasefire encompassing the entire region, and international scientific organizations must promote science and cooperation as a bridge in peace processes.

Human life and dignity stand above all political considerations and disputes. Through this declaration, TÜBA draws attention to the common rights of all peoples living in the region, to the founding principles of the UN, and to the universal values of humanity. Our Academy will continue to defend the right to life with determination and to sustain its calls for the establishment of lasting peace.

Turkish Academy of Sciences Academy Council

About Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA):

TÜBA is an autonomous apex body for the development and promotion of science in Türkiye. The origins of the Academy go back to the Ottoman society called the Society of Scholars, which was founded in 1851. TÜBA covers all scientific fields, which are grouped under the following three categories, basic and engineering sciences, health and life sciences, and social sciences and humanities. TÜBA is committed to contributing to the promotion of scientific research by organizing working groups, offering grants and awards, preparing, and supporting the preparation of scientific reports, as well as by collaborating with sister academies all around the world.

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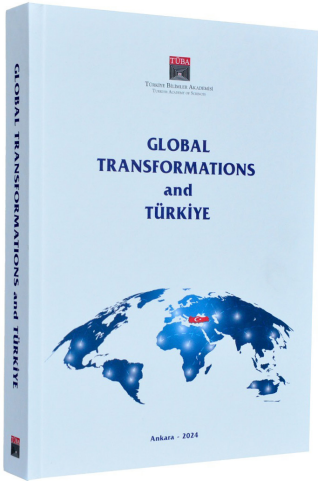
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TÜBA International Relations Working Group closely follows international developments from a science-based perspective and presents them to the benefit of the public. This work deals with the regional and global effects of the process, which started with the military operations of the US and Israel against Iran, from a multidimensional perspective. The study, prepared with the contributions of academics who are experts in their fields, comprehensively evaluates the historical background, security dimension, international legal framework and geopolitical consequences of the conflict. The work, which is an important reference source for decision makers, researchers and readers interested in the subject, sheds light on regional and global dynamics by analyzing current developments with scientific methods.



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