

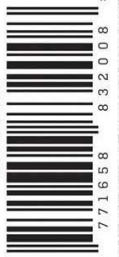
MONTHLY REPORT

# Iran Case File

February-March 2026

*Your window on Iran from inside and abroad*

ISSN 1658-8320



9 771658 832008 >



MONTHLY REPORT



# Iran Case File

February-March 2026

ISSN 1658 - 8320

[WWW.RASANAHIIS.ORG](http://WWW.RASANAHIIS.ORG)

Rasanah\_iis

[info@rasanahiis.com](mailto:info@rasanahiis.com)

+966.112.166696

---

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of Rasanah.

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Implications of the US-Israel War on Iran .....</b>	<b>9</b>
The Killing of Senior Political and Military Leaders .....	9
Mojtaba Khamenei at the Leadership Helm .....	9
Factors Contributing to the Failure of the US-Israeli Bet on Regime Change .....	10
Conclusion .....	11
<b>Strategic Blows to the Iranian Economy.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Energy Sector .....	11
Strategic Industries.....	12
Services and Critical Infrastructure.....	12
Impact on Daily Life.....	12
Conclusion .....	13
<b>US-Israeli Military Escalation and the Nature of the Iranian Response .....</b>	<b>13</b>
US-Israeli Decapitation Strikes and Iran's Retaliation .....	13
Overwhelming Defenses and Asymmetric Warfare .....	14
US-Israeli Escalation.....	14
Strategic Implications and Regional Realignment .....	15
Conclusion .....	15
<b>Social Repercussions Faced by Iran Following the US-Israel War.....</b>	<b>15</b>
The Devastating Social Consequences of the War Against Iran.....	15
State Policies to Address Social Repercussions .....	16
Conclusion .....	17
<b>Promoting Mojtaba Khamenei's Jurisprudential Standing .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Selecting the Infallible Imam's Representative and Assessing His Administrative Competence.....	17
Political and Religious Dimensions .....	18
Conclusion .....	19
<b>Iran's Regional Interactions.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>The Gulf States' Strategic Realization of the Conflict's Dimensions .....</b>	<b>21</b>
The Gulf Fending off Iranian Attacks.....	21
Gulf Unity .....	22
Conclusion .....	23
<b>The US-Israel War on Iran and Its Implications for Syria.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Syria's Position Amid Iran's Declining Influence as the Sharaa Government Seeks to Distance Damascus From the War .....	23
Potential Risks Should the War Continue .....	24
Conclusion .....	25

<b>The Functional Role of the Houthis in the US-Iran Confrontation and the Balance of Local Survival .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Significations of the Houthis' Delayed Involvement .....	25
Dimensions of Houthi Involvement .....	26
Conclusion .....	27
<b>Israel's Calculus in the Iran War .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Israel's Objectives in the War .....	28
The War's Impact on Israel .....	28
Israel's Position on the Ceasefire .....	28
Conclusion .....	29
<b>Iran's Relations With International Powers .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Challenges Facing the US Military Campaign Against Iran.....	31
A US Military Campaign Aimed at Regime Change.....	31
Iran's Pressure Cards and Looming Challenges for Washington .....	32
Conclusion .....	33
Russo-Chinese Positions on the US-Israel War Against Iran .....	33
Russia's Security and Operational Coordination .....	34
China Reaping the Benefits of "Oil Trade-offs" .....	34
Conclusion .....	35

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rasanah's *Iran Case File* (ICF) for February and March 2026 sheds light on the US-Israeli war on Iran and its repercussions across the country — particularly at the political, economic, military, social and ideological levels. The far-reaching regional impact of the conflict is also examined as well as the role of the United States and the positions adopted by other international powers, particularly Russia and China.

**The most pivotal domestic development** was the US-Israeli surprise attack on Tehran on Saturday, February 28, 2026, in which the country's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was killed along with numerous senior military and political figures. At the outset, both the United States and Israel appeared to bet on creating a political and security vacuum that would facilitate a popular uprising in Iran and ultimately lead to state collapse. However, the Iranian leadership demonstrated notable resilience, swiftly reorganizing its political and military structures. This included the appointment of a new supreme leader and the implementation of decisive emergency military measures to consolidate authority and ensure the continuation of operations against Israeli and US targets. As tensions escalated, Pakistani mediation succeeded in bringing Washington and Tehran to a temporary truce and subsequently onto a negotiation track, although no clear indications have emerged of a lasting agreement capable of preventing a renewed escalation.

**Economically**, as of March 2026, Iran's losses are estimated to exceed \$170 billion, following US-Israeli strikes on the three principal pillars of the economy. In the energy sector, key assets — including the South Pars gas field and Kharg Island — along with a substantial portion of power generation facilities, were targeted. In the industrial sector, major steel and petrochemical complexes — accounting for over one-third of non-oil exports — sustained damage. Meanwhile, the services and infrastructure sector, which contributes more than half of Iran's GDP, was severely

disrupted through strikes on ports, financial institutions, bridges and trade routes. These setbacks hold direct consequences for a population exceeding 90 million. Food inflation surged to 112% in March 2026 — the highest level since World War II — accompanied by shortages in approximately 150 types of medicine and a marked contraction in commercial activity. These pressures are compounding preexisting economic challenges, most notably inflation rates, which surpassed 40% annually prior to the war.

**On the military front**, the destruction of elements of Iran's security and intelligence apparatus and the degradation of its air defense systems represent a costly blow. Nevertheless, the country maintained the capacity to continue operations despite the sustained targeting of its command-and-control infrastructure. Its missile capabilities were demonstrated through the launch of large numbers of projectiles toward Israel, the US Navy and the Gulf states, as well as through the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, proxy groups launched retaliatory attacks on behalf of Iran, reshaping prevailing pre-war military doctrines and deterrence calculations in the region.

**Socially**, internal cohesion in Iran emerged as a decisive factor in sustaining the ruling establishment, particularly as the US-Israeli strategy appeared to rely on inciting domestic unrest following strikes on state command structures. At the same time, certain military actions — such as attacks resulting in civilian casualties and the targeting of infrastructure — boosted popular support for the beleaguered Iranian leadership. However, these dynamics do not obscure the extensive damage inflicted on

the country, where living conditions have deteriorated further amid severe disruptions to economic activity. Despite government measures aimed at mitigating the social consequences of the war, the risk of internal fragmentation persists, particularly in the event of renewed hostilities.

**Ideologically**, this month's ICF presents detailed analysis on the divine justification put forward for Mojtaba Khamenei's appointment as the country's new supreme leader following the assassination of his father. As the succession process unfolded within a highly sensitive political and ideological context, clerics did not frame it merely in constitutional terms but also in theological principles. This was undertaken to reinforce Mojtaba Khamenei's legitimacy by first emphasizing administrative competence and subsequently portraying his selection as divinely ordained by the Infallible Imam. He is thus presented as an indispensable leader, capable of ensuring stability and managing crises, a narrative aimed at appealing to both state institutions and the political elite. This narrative may strengthen the position in the short term, yet it simultaneously introduces long-term vulnerabilities. Any political or economic instability risks directly undermining the establishment's ideological claims, potentially broadening skepticism and eroding its religious and intellectual foundations.

**The February-March period was marked by significant regional developments which are discussed in the second part of the ICF.** Across the Gulf, the US-Israel-Iran confrontation created a complex escalation environment with direct implications for regional security. The

Gulf states were subjected to large-scale Iranian attacks involving ballistic missiles and drones, reflecting attempts to expand the conflict. Despite the intensity of these attacks, Gulf defense systems demonstrated considerable effectiveness in interception, limiting casualties and confining the damage largely to material and economic losses. Politically, the Gulf states coordinated their positions through joint statements, diplomatic engagement and international outreach, while affirming their right to self-defense under international law. The Gulf policy of strategic patience appears to represent a calculated approach that balances deterrence and containment, while avoiding direct military confrontation that could serve Iran's strategic objectives. Nevertheless, this posture remains conditional and could evolve into a broader strategic repositioning should escalation persist and its costs increase.

Beyond the Gulf, Syria emerges as a key theater affected by these developments. As a result of reduced Iranian influence in Syria following the ouster of the Assad regime, the country is less likely to become a direct battleground, affording Damascus a limited opportunity to recalibrate its position and distance itself from the conflict. However, risks remain, particularly in the context of continued hostilities, the expansion of "gray warfare," the exploitation of security vacuums in border regions and the persistence of intermittent military strikes within Syrian territory. In Yemen, relative calm followed the shifts observed in January 2026, but this was disrupted by the Houthis' late-March announcement of their entry into the conflict, a development with potentially

far-reaching implications for the Yemeni landscape.

Regarding Israel, its initial objective of toppling the Iranian political system was not realized, as the outcomes of the military campaign fell short of expectations. The conflict evolved through multiple phases, marked by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, intensified strikes against Israeli targets and the involvement of allied non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah. Although a truce was reached as a step toward a potential settlement, Israeli strategic calculations remain complex, oscillating between pursuing renewed military action to fulfill longstanding objectives — such as curbing Iran's nuclear and missile programs — and adapting to the realities imposed by the initial phase of the conflict. Within this framework, the Lebanese front has emerged as a critical flashpoint, becoming a central Iranian condition for ending the war, while Israel continues to insist on separating the various theaters of confrontation.

**As for Iran's engagement with international powers,** US-Iran relations entered a new phase of escalation following the war aimed at regime change. However, after approximately 40 days of hostilities, the conflict evolved into a protracted war of attrition, imposing pressures on the global economy and international security, while also contributing to the emergence of a highly complex and volatile regional crisis. During the war, Russia and China have adopted what the ICF characterizes as a strategy of "active pragmatism," positioning themselves as a buffer aimed at preventing the collapse of their Iranian ally while avoiding direct military confrontation. Russia's role is framed in terms of security engineering,

transforming its cooperation with Tehran into an operational framework that includes the provision of real-time satellite intelligence to identify the coordinates of US military positions. This has been accompanied by the activation of electronic jamming capabilities and the establishment of a logistical corridor across the Caspian Sea to reinforce Iran's air defense systems, thereby challenging Western dominance in air superiority. China, for its part, has assumed the role of an economic and diplomatic guarantor, utilizing the crisis to advance a broader vision of a more bipolar international order and to counterbalance US unipolarity. While Beijing has worked through diplomatic channels to safeguard energy routes and avert a global economic disruption, Moscow has leveraged the crisis to secure strategic gains, as the

conflict forced the Trump administration to ease sanctions on Russian oil in order to stabilize global markets. This development has provided relief to the Russian economy and contributed to divisions within the transatlantic alignment. In this context, the ICF suggests that the emerging Eastern alignment has effectively transformed the Iranian theater into both a testing ground for exposing vulnerabilities in Western military systems and a platform for strategic attrition. At the same time, Beijing and Moscow have sought to present themselves as indispensable mediators, emphasizing the protection of global energy infrastructure while positioning themselves to play a central role in shaping a reconfigured international order.

# **DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

The joint war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran during February and March 2026 cast a long shadow over Iran's domestic landscape, affecting political, economic, military, social and ideological spheres.

## Implications of the US-Israel War on Iran

For the second time in less than a year, the United States and Israel launched large-scale military strikes against Iran. This phase of the conflict was aimed at decapitating the senior leadership of Iran, most notably Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. These assassinations led to a sudden leadership vacuum and severe disruptions within the establishment's institutional hierarchy, placing the surviving leadership under unprecedented security pressure. Infiltrations attributed to Israeli intelligence indicated that senior officials were vulnerable to targeting, reinforcing the perception that no figure within the system was beyond reach. In response to the leadership vacuum and to preempt the perceived US-Israeli objective of regime change, Iran moved swiftly to reorganize its leadership structure, as evidenced in the swift appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father as the new supreme leader. The military chain of command also underwent rapid reshuffling following a wave of assassinations targeting senior commanders. This section of the ICF examines the consequences of these developments, including the elimination of prominent political and military figures, the appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei as supreme leader and the broader implications of the failure of the US-Israeli objective of regime change.

### The Killing of Senior Political and Military Leaders

US-Israeli strikes resulted in the killing of a significant number of senior Iranian officials. On the first day of the attacks, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and multiple high-ranking political and military figures were killed, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Mohammad Pakpour, former IRGC Commander Ali Shamkhani, Defense

Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Abdolrahim Mousavi, Head of the Supreme Leader's Military Office Mohammad Shirazi, Commander of the Police Intelligence Organization Gholamreza Rezaeian and the Director of the Ministry of Defense's Defense Innovation and Research Organization Reza Mozaffarinia.

In the following days, additional senior figures were also killed, including Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani, a figure regarded as central to maintaining regime continuity, as well as Alireza Tangsiri, commander of the IRGC's naval forces. These assassinations appeared intended to create a structural vacuum within the leadership system and destabilize the internal balance of power, thereby facilitating the broader objective of regime change.

### Mojtaba Khamenei at the Leadership Helm

Following the assassination of Ali Khamenei, Iran entered an exceptional and highly unstable transitional phase, marked by fears of internal collapse or mass unrest that could be exploited externally. To manage the vacuum and ensure regime continuity, Iran reportedly established a temporary leadership council on March 1, 2026, operating under Article 111 of the Constitution. The council included President Masoud Pezeshkian, Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i and Guardian Council Member Ali Reza Arafii. Shortly thereafter, the Assembly of Experts was reported to have selected Mojtaba Khamenei as the new supreme leader. His absence from public view since his selection generated speculation regarding his condition, including unconfirmed reports of serious injury during the opening phase of the war, while other accounts suggested that his

absence was due to heightened security considerations.

The Iranian leadership structure appears to have aimed, through these steps, to signal regime continuity and resilience to both domestic and external audiences. The message conveyed was that neither the assassination of senior figures nor sustained military pressure would lead to systemic collapse or a reversal of strategic policy, particularly the nuclear program. The rapid designation of a successor was also intended to counter expectations in Washington that succession might be delayed or contested.

Mojtaba Khamenei's appointment also drew a strong reaction from US President Donald Trump who reportedly conditioned acceptance of any new leadership arrangement on Washington's approval and threatened consequences similar to those faced by his predecessor. Israel, for its part, maintained a declared position of opposition to any succession process, warning that it would target individuals involved in selecting a new supreme leader. Israeli forces also struck the headquarters of the Assembly of Experts in Qom, which is constitutionally responsible for appointing the supreme leader, in what was described as an effort to disrupt the succession process.

### **Factors Contributing to the Failure of the US-Israeli Bet on Regime Change**

Initially, the United States and Israel based their strategy on the expectation that the assassination of Ali Khamenei would trigger rapid internal upheaval, ultimately leading to state collapse. However, this outcome did not occur. Iran succeeded in absorbing the initial shock despite the killing of a significant number of its political leadership, as well as strategic damage to its military capabilities and defense and economic infrastructure. As a

result, Washington's operational assumptions were disrupted, forcing repeated adjustments to its war objectives. At different stages, the focus shifted between dismantling Iran's nuclear program, neutralizing its missile capabilities, and ensuring the security of Israel. Following Iran's effective control over the Strait of Hormuz, US priorities shifted further toward securing its reopening, given the severe consequences of closure, including sharp increases in energy prices, disruption of global supply chains and surging shipping and insurance costs.

This sequence of developments suggests that the strategy premised on the assassination of the supreme leader as a trigger for internal uprising was fundamentally flawed, particularly in its reliance on simplified assumptions about Iran's internal dynamics. It failed to account for the structure of Iranian society and its ethnic composition, especially in scenarios involving foreign military intervention or attempts to fragment state unity. In such contexts, a significant portion of the population may interpret external intervention not as liberation but as an instrument of foreign agendas, weakening prospects for internal mobilization against the state. In these conditions, segments of society may instead rally around the ruling establishment as a defensive response to external pressure.

Moreover, Iranian perceptions of US support for Kurdish armed groups as a precursor to a ground invasion reinforced fears that external powers were seeking to exploit ethnic and sectarian diversity to fracture internal cohesion. This perception intensified concerns over potential fragmentation scenarios involving Kurdish, Baloch, Arab and Azeri entities in the event of state collapse.

Alongside these dynamics, US-Israeli calls for domestic protests to accelerate regime change contributed to a tightening of internal security measures and a reduction in political space for dissent. Iranian authorities responded with explicit warnings. Police Chief Ahmad-Reza Radan cautioned that individuals participating in demonstrations perceived as externally directed would no longer be treated as protesters but as hostile actors, adding that security forces were operating with hands on the trigger.<sup>(4)</sup> Despite sustained US-Israeli pressure, the Iranian establishment has thus far maintained leadership cohesion and continuity. However, the possibility of failed negotiations and renewed military escalation continues to keep a state-collapse scenario within the realm of theoretical possibilities, even if many assessments consider it unlikely in the near term.

### Conclusion

Pakistan's mediation represented a significant diplomatic breakthrough, producing a two-week truce between Washington and Tehran. Nevertheless, this does not eliminate the risk of renewed conflict, particularly given hardened positions, competing interpretations of the ceasefire terms and fundamental disagreements over core issues. While Washington insists on the full cessation of Iran's nuclear and missile programs, Tehran maintains its own positions while adding the issue of the Strait of Hormuz — an element the United States rejects incorporating into the negotiations. Consequently, despite the failure of the regime-change strategy, continued Iranian rigidity or attempts to prolong negotiations without concessions could prompt a resumption of hostilities. In such a

scenario, all strategic options, including regime change, would remain under consideration.

### Strategic Blows to the Iranian Economy

The US-Israel war on Iran targeted three core pillars of the Iranian economy: the energy sector (oil, gas and electricity), strategic industries (including steel and petrochemicals) and the services sector alongside critical infrastructure (banks, internet networks, markets, ports, airports, bridges and transportation). These sectors not only underpin state revenues and regime resources but also directly impact the daily lives and living standards of the population. Although Iran derived limited benefit from rising oil prices — exceeding \$110 per barrel — and an increase in exports to 1.6 million barrels per day, raising daily revenues from \$100 million to \$180 million, these gains remained marginal compared to the scale of the economic losses incurred. This section of the ICF outlines, in concise terms, the strategic economic losses suffered during the war, which have placed significant burdens on Iranian citizens and disrupted everyday life.

### Energy Sector

The energy sector was among the earliest and most heavily targeted from the outset of the war. Fuel depots in Tehran, a city of approximately 15 million inhabitants, were struck, disrupting internal transportation. The South Pars gas field — supplying more than 85% of Iran's power plants — was targeted, as was Kharg Island, which accounts for around 90% of Iran's oil exports. Power stations in Tehran, Isfahan, Alborz and other regions were also hit, leading to widespread electricity outages. Amid the consequences of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and during the preparation of this file, the US president threatened to target all Iranian

energy resources, granting Tehran several deadlines to reopen the strait. In the absence of successful regional mediation efforts and pressures, this sector would likely have faced near-total destruction.

### **Strategic Industries**

Strategic industries were also subjected to extensive targeting. Major steel production facilities, including the Mobarakeh Steel Complex in Isfahan, were struck. The steel sector accounts for approximately 4.5% of GDP and 16.5% of non-oil exports, with export revenues reaching \$8 billion two years prior, and Iran ranking among the world's top 10 steel producers. Damage to this sector undermines both financial and defense-related resources, while also affecting domestic industries such as construction and automotive manufacturing, which employs more than 4% of the workforce.

The petrochemical sector was similarly targeted, including major complexes such as the Mahshahr facilities linked to the IRGC. This sector represents the most significant industrial component of the Iranian economy, accounting for roughly one-third of non-oil exports and generating substantial revenues exceeding \$30 billion annually, part of which directly supports the IRGC.

### **Services and Critical Infrastructure**

The services sector and strategic infrastructure also sustained extensive damage. As the largest component of the Iranian economy — accounting for over 50% of GDP and employing the largest share of the workforce across trade, transportation, banking, financial markets, health-care and education — its disruption has had far-reaching consequences.

Key financial institutions were affected, including the targeting of the headquarters of Bank Sepah, which operates around 1,800 branches, while Bank Mellī experienced cyberattacks

that disrupted salary payments and ATM services. Commercial activity in Tehran's bazaar declined by 50%-70%, and the Tehran Stock Exchange remained closed for most of the war.

Critical transport and trade infrastructure also came under attack, including airports, major ports in both southern and northern regions, such as Bandar Abbas — which handles approximately 70% of Iran's foreign trade — and ports along the Caspian Sea. These disruptions severely affected supply chains, curtailed domestic trade, created shortages and drove up prices. In response, authorities turned to alternative trade routes through neighboring countries and free trade zones such as Jask and Chabahar. Infrastructure damage also extended to railway lines and key bridges, including the B1 Bridge — constructed at a cost of approximately half a billion dollars — linking Tehran to the industrial hub of Alborz and significantly reducing transportation time and costs.

### **Impact on Daily Life**

The cumulative effect of these developments has been a severe deterioration in the living standards of Iranians, with both immediate and long-term implications. Disrupting everyday life — within a market of more than 90 million people — has constituted a central objective of the war that aimed to generate internal pressure on the government.

According to official statistics, the targeting of the three principal economic pillars has already produced severe consequences for living standards. Despite the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture imposing a ban on the export of food and agricultural products at the outset of the war, data from the Iranian Statistics Center indicate a historic 112% increase in food prices in March 2026

compared to March 2025 — the highest rate recorded for this category since World War II.<sup>(2)</sup> Prices of staple goods such as rice, lentils and cooking oils have tripled, alongside sharp increases in the cost of meat, poultry, eggs and edible oils. The situation would have deteriorated further had the authorities not intervened to prevent a collapse of the national currency against foreign currencies. In addition, reports indicate shortages of approximately 150 types of medicine, including those required for critical conditions, as well as deficiencies in supplies for infants and children. These developments have occurred against the backdrop of pre-existing economic strain, characterized by annual inflation exceeding 40% and wage increases failing to keep pace with rising costs. The impact of the war has not been confined to food and medicine; it has also extended to stagnation in the real estate market, particularly in the capital, Tehran, following the bombardment. The domestic trade sector has likewise experienced a downturn, as many shops closed, compounded by insecurity and shortages of goods and raw materials. This is reflected in measures taken by official authorities, such as the activation of alternative trade routes to major ports, as previously noted. Reports have also indicated delays in salary payments and the depletion of cash from ATMs.

### Conclusion

The war's extensive repercussions are clear. It has affected not only the core pillars of the Iranian economy and the establishment's financial resources, but has also significantly complicated daily life for ordinary Iranians, placing additional strain on household budgets amid already severe challenges — most notably inflation which exceeded 40% prior to

the conflict. Under these conditions, the short-term outlook for living standards in the post-war period appears bleak, particularly given the anticipated need for substantial reconstruction funding, which may be financed through monetary expansion, thereby fueling further inflationary pressures.

Preliminary estimates suggest that financial losses resulting from the various military strikes amount to at least \$170 billion, a figure likely to rise. At the same time, the volume of frozen Iranian assets abroad, estimated at \$100 billion, remains insufficient to offset the scale of the damage. Recovery will require not only financial resources but also considerable time, placing the current Iranian system in an exceptionally precarious position.

### US-Israeli Military Escalation and the Nature of the Iranian Response

US and Israeli threats against Iran in January escalated into a full-scale war by the end of February, continuing throughout March. Washington, which entered the conflict with the objective of regime change and the dismantling of Iran's military and nuclear capabilities, ultimately faced a near-total disruption of global trade following Iran's enforced closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Despite sustaining substantial military losses under US-Israeli strikes, Iran retained a significant capacity to launch missiles and drones. This file examines four principal dimensions: the decapitation strategy and Iran's retaliation; the tactic of overwhelming defenses through asymmetric warfare; the trajectory of US-Israeli escalation; and the broader strategic repercussions and regional realignments.

### US-Israeli Decapitation Strikes and Iran's Retaliation

The period from February 28 to March 31, 2026 marked a definitive and catastrophic escalation in the Middle East, trans-

forming a long-simmering shadow war into a full-scale conventional conflict. Triggered by the coordinated US-Israeli Operation Lion's Roar and Operation Epic Fury strikes on February 28, the month-long engagement reshaped the regional security architecture, tested the limits of modern air defense and exposed the fragility of the regional and global order. The conflict began with a preemptive, high-intensity strike campaign targeting Iran's strategic nerve centers. The United States and Israel coordinated a massive air assault involving stealth bombers, fighter jets and cruise missiles, aiming to degrade Iran's nuclear program, missile production capabilities and command-and-control nodes. The strikes succeeded in killing the supreme leader and several senior security officials, a blow intended to paralyze the establishment's decision-making apparatus. However, US-Israeli commanders underestimated the resilience of the IRGC and the decentralized nature of Iran's military command. Rather than collapsing, the Iranian leadership, likely operating from deep underground bunkers, initiated a seemingly pre-planned retaliation protocol. The response was immediate and overwhelming, signaling a shift from "deterrence by punishment" to active "deterrence by denial" through asymmetric saturation.

### **Overwhelming Defenses and Asymmetric Warfare**

Iran's strategy throughout March relied on the sheer volume and diversity of its arsenal. The IRGC launched thousands of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and one-way attack drones in waves designed to overwhelm the layered air defenses of US-Israeli regional bases. The use of the Kheibar Shekan and Fattah hypersonic missiles represented a technological leap, challenging the efficacy of the Iron Dome, Arrow and Patriot systems.

Crucially, Iran expanded the theater of war beyond Israel. Targets included US military bases in Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE, as well as critical energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia. This widening of the conflict appeared aimed at compelling Gulf states to confront a strategic choice between hosting US forces or safeguarding their own stability. Attacks affecting the Strait of Hormuz, alongside disruptions to global supplies of oil, fertilizers and helium, heightened the risk of a broader economic crisis and intensified international calls for de-escalation.

### **US-Israeli Escalation**

The United States and Israel adopted a robust defensive posture, deploying advanced interception systems and electronic warfare capabilities to counter Iranian attacks. While interception rates remained high, the scale and intensity of Iranian missile and drone launches nonetheless resulted in human and material losses in locations including Tel Aviv, Dimona and several US bases across the Gulf, Iraq and Jordan. Losses among US military assets reportedly included F-35 aircraft, AWACS platforms and aerial refueling tankers, alongside the downing of a few US fighter jets over Iranian territory. The US commitment to the "never leave a fallen warrior behind" ethos was exemplified by the unprecedented rescue of a downed F-15E Weapon Systems Officer (WSO) deep inside Iranian territory. The Easter Miracle operation, involving SEAL Team 6, Delta Force and a massive air armada (an assortment of over 76 planes), demonstrated US operational reach but also underscored the vulnerability of US forces in contested airspace. The rescue, while a tactical success, further inflamed Iranian public opinion and hardened the establishment's resolve.

## Strategic Implications and Regional Realignment

By the end of March, the conflict had significantly altered the regional balance of power. Gulf states aligned with Washington found themselves drawn into a conflict not of their choosing, raising questions about the reliability of US security guarantees.

The war also highlighted the limits of the “deterrence by punishment” strategy. Although the United States and Israel inflicted considerable damage on Iran’s defense infrastructure, they fell short of effecting regime change or halting its missile program completely. In contrast, Iran demonstrated an ability to impose substantial costs on its adversaries despite lacking a conventional air or naval force comparable to that of the United States.

## Conclusion

US-Israeli attacks and Iran’s retaliation against regional countries represent a watershed moment, ushering in a new era of high-intensity conflict in the Middle East in which technological superiority can be undermined by volume and asymmetry. The war left extensive destruction, destabilized global energy markets and created a trust deficit that will take years to overcome. While the fragile ceasefire still holds for now, underlying grievances and security dilemmas remain unresolved, setting the stage for prolonged regional volatility. This war is not merely a clash of arms but a collision of ideologies and strategic imperatives that will define the geopolitics of the 21st century.

## Social Repercussions Faced by Iran Following the US-Israel War

Social repercussions represent a critical determinant of the US-Israel war against Iran. These repercussions extend across multiple sectors of Iranian society — in-

cluding the economy, healthcare, demographics, education and security — posing a serious challenge to social cohesion and to the resilience of the establishment’s domestic front. This is particularly significant in light of explicit calls by the US president for Iranians to rise against the state following the assassination of several of its leaders, most notably Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. This section examines the principal social repercussions of the war and the policies adopted by the Iranian authorities to contain them.

## The Devastating Social Consequences of the War Against Iran

Unlike the previous 12-Day War, which was largely confined to military targets, the ongoing war — now exceeding one month — has involved strikes on civilian areas and critical infrastructure. This has resulted in extensive human and material losses. Key sectors have sustained severe damage, particularly education, rendering numerous schools, universities and research centers inoperative, resulting in a shift to remote platforms. Approximately 154 scientific facilities have been destroyed across 21 universities and research institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Science,<sup>(3)</sup> including Iran University of Science and Technology and Isfahan University of Technology. In parallel, there has been a noticeable increase in the targeted killing of scientists and academic staff.

The healthcare sector has also been heavily affected by continuous bombardment, disrupting the functioning of the entire system and leading to shortages in medical services and pharmaceuticals.<sup>(4)</sup> These challenges are compounded by environmental damage caused by toxic emissions following strikes on petrochemical and nuclear facilities, including the gas facility at Sharif University of Technology,<sup>(5)</sup> resulting

in severe pollution and what has been described as an environmental disaster. Economically, the war has generated widespread insecurity due to the destruction of numerous companies, industrial complexes and commercial establishments,<sup>(6)</sup> including electronics manufacturing facilities. The intensification of airstrikes on the capital, Tehran, and the resulting damage to infrastructure and public safety have triggered large-scale internal displacement toward northern regions along the Caspian Sea, perceived as relatively safer due to reduced targeting. However, this movement is expected to place immense pressure on these regions, leading to sharp increases in population density and exacerbating existing economic, social, security and health challenges. This situation may also contribute to rising cross-border migration, which the authorities may struggle to contain.

According to UN estimates, approximately 3.2 million people have been displaced internally or across borders since the onset of the war,<sup>(7)</sup> with numbers expected to rise as the conflict continues. Destinations include Iraq, Pakistan, Türkiye, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia and parts of Europe. These migration patterns are accompanied by significant demographic shifts affecting the social fabric of the country.

These wartime developments have intensified pre-existing social crises that were already severe due to international sanctions. Prior to the war, Iran was facing deep economic recession, high inflation, unemployment, widespread poverty, rising living costs and a housing crisis exacerbated by damage to more than 100,000 civilian housing units across

multiple provinces.<sup>(8)</sup> The war has further amplified these pressures, increasing the burden on the state during and beyond the conflict.

### **State Policies to Address Social Repercussions**

In response, the Iranian authorities have adopted a combination of coercive and adaptive measures to manage the social impact of the war and preserve internal stability. Recognizing what it perceives as efforts by the United States and Israel to incite domestic unrest — drawing on precedents such as the December 2025 protests — the establishment has intensified the presence of its security and intelligence apparatuses. This includes expanded deployment of checkpoints, arrests and executions targeting individuals accused of collaboration or disloyalty, with the aim of preempting internal dissent.

At the same time, the government has sought to mitigate the impact of the conflict on living conditions by maintaining the provision of essential services, including electricity, water, healthcare, education and basic goods. It has also introduced targeted assistance for those directly affected by the war. According to official statements, approximately 5,200 institutions have been mobilized to provide services to various segments of the population, including children, the elderly, individuals with special needs and those with mental health conditions. Around 90,000 remote psychological consultations have been delivered, alongside 10,000 social emergency interventions.

Efforts have also included the repair and rehabilitation of approximately 400 damaged residential units with the support of volunteer initiatives, as well

as the provision of medical services to around 12,000 cases.<sup>(9)</sup> The Social Welfare Organization, in cooperation with affiliated entities, has distributed approximately 91,000 meals to individuals affected by the conflict, in addition to other forms of humanitarian and volunteer assistance.<sup>(10)</sup> Charitable organizations have likewise contributed by distributing essential goods to affected populations.

### Conclusion

Building on the apparent social cohesion and noticeable support for the leadership in the wake of US-Israeli attacks, the establishment has been able to further galvanize support through the explicit threats of the US president who does not distinguish between the establishment and the Iranian state as a whole. In particular, Trump's threat to target Iran's infrastructure and return the country to the Stone Age serves as a clear example. Yet, many citizens are enduring the continuous deterioration of living conditions due to the exceptional circumstances imposed by the war. Thus, all scenarios remain possible, including the fracturing of the domestic front, especially if all regional attempts and mediation efforts to halt the war fail.

### Promoting Mojtaba Khamenei's Jurisprudential Standing

Following the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, a critical question emerged regarding succession. His son, Mojtaba Khamenei, was swiftly appointed to replace him. While some viewed this appointment as a constitutional violation and a departure from established hawza norms, others considered it a natural step in light of his perceived merit and qualifications.

Notably, the Iranian establishment moved to reinforce Mojtaba Khamenei's

religious and political legitimacy, despite his public absence and amid doubts raised by some regarding his competence and the constitutional irregularities surrounding his appointment. This section of the ICF examines the efforts of the Iranian establishment — particularly the religious elite — to consolidate his standing, suggesting an underlying sense of crisis or unease associated with the succession process.

In this context, narratives were advanced to bolster his legitimacy. Some claimed that his appointment was sanctioned by the Infallible Imam, while others framed his selection as a guarantor of stability and continuity with his father's legacy. Such claims reflect attempts to reinforce both his religious authority and political position. Accordingly, this section addresses two principal dimensions: first, the notion of selection by the Infallible Imam alongside questions of administrative competence; and second, the broader political and religious dimensions shaping his legitimacy.

### Selecting the Infallible Imam's Representative and Assessing His Administrative Competence

Hossein Shariatmadari, editor-in-chief of Kayhan newspaper, argued that the selection of representatives by the Imam of the Age during the Minor Occultation is analogous to the designation of supreme leaders, both father and son — Ali Khamenei and Mojtaba Khamenei. In an article published in Kayhan, he wrote that the current era of the Major Occultation cannot constitute an exception to this principle. The supreme leader, as the representative of the Infallible Imam — particularly in a critical period — must be understood as having been personally chosen by him. In this view, the Assembly of Experts does not independently select the Infallible Imam's representative; rather, the Infallible

lible Imam designates his representative, who is then presented to the assembly for evaluation. On this basis, Shariatmadari asserted that Mojtaba Khamenei, too, should be regarded as chosen and endorsed by the Imam of the Age.<sup>(11)</sup>

In a similar vein, Ahad Azadikhah, spokesperson for the “principlist” bloc in Parliament, described Mojtaba Khamenei’s selection as the beginning of a new phase in the trajectory of the revolution. He emphasized that Mojtaba Khamenei’s qualifications in *ijtihad* (independent juristic reasoning) and in the broader domain of governance constitute a significant foundation for fostering comprehensive stability and for harnessing the state’s emerging capabilities.

### Political and Religious Dimensions

These statements carry significant implications across both religious and political dimensions. Politically, they reflect an effort to construct a layered form of legitimacy that merges the concept of state governance with crisis management. Azadikhah’s remarks not only praise the new leader but also present the image of an “indispensable leader” required by the state in a moment of existential threat: a learned scholar, strategist and actor capable of safeguarding security, social stability and economic development.

This narrative suggests that the establishment seeks to present Mojtaba Khamenei not merely as a political necessity emerging from exceptional circumstances, but also as a functional response to questions of survival, stability and institutional renewal. Accordingly, terms such as “stability,” “overall policies,” and “overcoming crises” should not be read as neutral descriptors, but rather as elements of a narrative directed at mobilization to consolidate a new form

of authority within the consciousness of the political elite, state, society and hawza institutions — particularly in a context in which it has been alleged that pressure was exerted by the IRGC to secure his selection.

From an ideological standpoint, Shariatmadari’s remarks are particularly significant as they redirect legitimacy from the Iranian Constitution to direct divine providence. He does not merely affirm that the Assembly of Experts reached the correct decision; rather, he implicitly suggests that the assembly is not the source of selection at all, but functions only as an institution that “reveals” the individual already chosen by the Hidden Imam. In this formulation, the institutional framework of the Iranian republic is effectively transcended, as the constitutional body in effect is a procedural formality for a decision that rests beyond history and politics.

The implication of this is that it elevates the leader above political accountability, since opposition is no longer directed at a human judgment or institutional process, but may be interpreted as dissent against a transcendent, messianic will. In this sense, loyalty is reframed: it ceases to be a political commitment and instead assumes the character of religious obedience.

From a philosophical perspective, this narrative reflects a deeper shift from a form of legitimacy open to political interpretation toward a mystical legitimacy that is beyond history and the will of both the people and institutional structures. The state, in this framing, does not merely instrumentalize religion to reinforce authority; it reconstitutes politics itself within a metaphysical order. Sovereignty is no longer understood as the outcome of a social contract, a

constitutional arrangement or even revolutionary legitimacy, but rather as the manifestation of a transcendent will embodied in the figure of the leader. This dynamic effectively negates the notion of public choice, as “selection” becomes, in practice, an earthly expression of a decision already presumed to have been divinely determined. In this way, legitimacy is confirmed at the political and ideological levels: the language of competence secures acceptance within the administrative apparatus, while the language of divine designation disciplines religious thought and pressures the clerical establishment toward acquiescence or silence. In both cases, the distance between authority and obedience is narrowed to the point where space for critique or institutional review is significantly constrained.

### **Conclusion**

The abovementioned statements reflect a comprehensive reconstruction of the concept of legitimacy in post-Ali Khamenei Iran. Rather than presenting the transfer of leadership as a constitutional procedure governed by institutional mechanisms, it is framed as a predestined outcome, reflecting a convergence between personal merit and divine selection. In this sense, the establishment is seemingly attempting to shield Mojtaba

Khamenei’s succession from two sets of challenges: political critiques that interpret it as a veiled form of dynastic succession and religious objections that question its legitimacy and the authority of its bearer.

Accordingly, two discourses are employed simultaneously. On the one hand, the language of the modern state — centered on administration, governance and stability — is invoked; on the other, the vocabulary of imamate, representation and guidance linked to the Hidden Imam is mobilized to foreclose avenues of dissent as comprehensively as possible. Yet this approach, while potentially effective in moments of crisis, contains an inherent paradox. By explicitly tying the system to the Hidden Imam, the establishment acquires a sacred aura, but it also renders any political, security or economic instability potentially reflective of a deeper crisis in its own ideological foundation. Thus, while this discourse may generate immediate cohesion and mobilization, it simultaneously exposes a longer-term structural anxiety regarding the fragility of legitimacy, and an increasing reliance on support that extends beyond institutions alone — resting not only on legal-administrative frameworks, but also on sacralized symbolism.

## **Iran's Regional Interactions**

Iran's regional engagement witnessed notable developments as a direct consequence of the US-Israeli war. In the Gulf, a policy of strategic patience was largely followed in response to Iranian escalation. In Syria, concerns have grown that the US-Iran confrontation may indirectly reinsert the country into conflict dynamics. In Yemen, the Houthis' late-March declaration of involvement in the war marked a significant move, with potential long-term implications for the Yemeni arena.

For Israel, its coordinated strikes with the United States achieved certain operational objectives, particularly in targeting and degrading key Iranian command-and-control structures. However, the conflict also underscored the complexity and cost of pursuing full regime change, a scenario likely requiring a ground intervention that the current US administration appears reluctant to undertake.

### **The Gulf States' Strategic Realization of the Conflict's Dimensions**

In the context of the ongoing conflict between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other, now entering its second month, a highly complex regional landscape is emerging— one in which military calculations intersect with power struggles and the reconfiguration of balances of power. Against the backdrop of Iran's continued and unjustified escalation against the Gulf states — through targeting civilian infrastructure and vital facilities, and relying on weak pretexts related to the presence of US military bases and alleged military operations launched against it from the Gulf states — it becomes clear that Tehran is not content with managing its direct conflict, but is instead seeking to expand its scope and impose new realities on the regional environment.

Despite this escalation, the Gulf states continue to pursue a policy of strategic patience, refusing to be drawn into a war imposed upon them and adhering to the option of de-escalation and restraint. This stance reflects a deep strategic awareness of the nature of the conflict and its real objectives. The Gulf states recognize that direct engagement in the confrontation would primarily serve the Iranian vision of expanding the war's scope and transforming it into a comprehensive regional conflict, thereby complicating the situation and increasing the cost of any potential settlement. In this section, two main themes are addressed: first, the Gulf states' response to Iranian escalation; and second, Gulf solidarity and the unification of positions.

### **The Gulf Fending off Iranian Attacks**

In the most serious regional escalation the Gulf has witnessed in decades, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain,

Kuwait and Oman) faced an unprecedented wave of Iranian attacks during February and March 2026. The attacks began on February 28 as a direct Iranian response to the joint US-Israeli strikes that killed top Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. For the first time in its history, Tehran launched hundreds of missiles and drones toward the Gulf states simultaneously.

According to the UAE Ministry of Defense, the UAE was the most targeted by drone and ballistic missile attacks, followed by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, while Oman was the least affected. The attacks targeted airports (such as Abu Dhabi International Airport and Dubai International Airport), ports (Jebel Ali), oil refineries (Ras Tanura in Saudi Arabia and Ras Laffan in Qatar), residential areas and hotels. In Saudi Arabia, drone attacks led to the temporary closure of the Ras Tanura refinery, the kingdom's largest. Qatar shot down two Iranian fighter jets, while Bahrain was targeted near the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet. Kuwait witnessed attacks on Ali Al Salem Air Base and its oil sector. These attacks continued throughout March, with daily waves of ballistic missiles and drones, but Gulf air defenses, through coordinated efforts, effectively countered them, achieving interception rates of 90%-96% in most cases. This minimized casualties despite material and economic damage. In addition, Iran repeatedly attempted to close the Strait of Hormuz and threaten the global economy by disrupting international shipping lanes.

These events were not merely an Iranian response to external attacks, but rather an attempt to broaden the scope of the conflict, draw in other countries in the region and strain Gulf defenses. This

was intended to exert indirect pressure on the United States by targeting its allies, as well as on the international community. Nevertheless, the Gulf states demonstrated defensive resilience and economic integration, with some Gulf countries and Iraq utilizing Saudi airports. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia activated the East-West Petroline, which mitigated disruptions to global energy supplies.

The Gulf states adopted a multidimensional approach that was not limited to refraining from a military response, but included intensive diplomatic action aimed at stopping the war and pushing for the reactivation of the political track as the only option to end the conflict. At the same time, they worked to enhance their defense readiness and raise the level of protection for vital infrastructure, which reduced the effectiveness of attacks and limited their repercussions, without slipping into reactions that would have expanded the circle of war. This collective response strengthened the position of the GCC states as an effective security entity and proved the effectiveness and capability of Gulf defenses.

### **Gulf Unity**

The GCC held an extraordinary ministerial meeting on March 1, 2026, issuing a joint statement condemning the Iranian attacks and affirming that the security of member states is indivisible. The statement referenced the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which guarantees the right of individual and collective self-defense in the event of aggression, and the right to take all necessary measures to preserve sovereignty, security and stability, including the option of responding to aggression.

On March 5, the GCC also held a joint ministerial meeting with the EU regarding the Iranian attacks on GCC member states. The UAE closed its embassy in Tehran, and Qatar declared members of the Iranian military and security attaché and embassy staff persona non grata and ordered them to leave within 24 hours. Saudi Arabia also notified the Iranian military attaché, his assistant and three other members of the mission, ordering them to leave within 24 hours.<sup>(12)</sup>

In the same vein, UN Security Council Resolution 2817, adopted on March 11, 2026, condemned Iran in the strongest terms for targeting residential areas and civilian infrastructure in the Gulf states and Jordan, demanding an immediate cessation of all unjustified attacks, while emphasizing the safety of international navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>(13)</sup> Furthermore, an Arab-Islamic consultative ministerial meeting was held in Riyadh on March 18, 2026, which reaffirmed the condemnation of Iranian attacks, the right of states to full self-defense and the demand that Iran immediately cease its attacks and respect international law and the principles of good neighborliness, in addition to the right of states to defend themselves.

There is no doubt that Iran seeks to impose an escalating pace that draws regional parties into the arena of confrontation. However, the Gulf states are working to manage the risks through multiple means that combine deterrence, containment and diplomatic openness. This balance remains subject to testing over time. The continuation of Iranian attacks and the rising cost of patience may force the Gulf states to reassess their options, especially since Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan expressed this by saying that the Gulf states' patience has its

limits. In this context, the continuation of Iranian aggression not only creates a direct security threat but also generates an escalating political cost in terms of trust. Regional relations are not built on declared intentions but on repeated actual behavior, and with each attack, the chances of building any framework for future understanding erode. This means that Iran is not only losing on the battlefield but is also squandering its long-term political capital, as its ability to be a reliable partner in any future regional security arrangement diminishes.

### Conclusion

The Gulf states exercise restraint and attempt to contain the conflict not merely as a temporary measure, but as a strategic framework for crisis management in a regional environment rife with diverse conflicts. They have demonstrated that restraint is fundamental to regional stability by adopting approaches that aim to prevent a slide into all-out war.

Simultaneously, they emphasize that restraint is not a sign of weakness, but rather a tool of strength capable of reshaping the region and imposing alternative paths leading to greater stability. Therefore, the policy of strategic patience pursued by the Gulf states is a likely option in the short term. However, it is not an open-ended policy, but rather a calculated and limited patience governed by multiple considerations. The continuation of Iranian attacks, particularly those targeting civilian infrastructure and vital facilities, will not go unaddressed. It will compound Tehran's escalating political and economic costs and reshape the Gulf's strategic outlook toward it. Hence, it can be said that while the Gulf states have thus far adhered to the option of de-escalation, they are simultaneously

sending a clear message that restraint is not limitless, and that the cost of these attacks will not be immediate but will have far-reaching consequences, impacting future relations and redrawing the map of the region. The features of the regional balance are based on more stringent foundations. If this course continues, the transition from strategic patience to strategic repositioning will not be a distant possibility, but rather a viable option imposed by the equations of security and survival.

### The US-Israel War on Iran and Its Implications for Syria

Analysis of Iran-Syria relations reflects the continuation of a central concern: the impact of the US-Israel war on ties between Tehran and Damascus. The military escalation is not confined to Iran's direct capabilities; it also extends to its broader regional network of influence, including its standing in Syria and the evolving nature of relations with Damascus in this phase. Against this backdrop, this section is structured around two principal axes: first, Syria's positioning amid Iran's waning influence and the Syrian government's attempts to distance itself from the conflict; and second, the risks that could arise should the war persist.

#### Syria's Position Amid Iran's Declining Influence as the Sharaa Government Seeks to Distance Damascus From the War

The US-Israel war on Iran has compelled a reassessment of Syria's place within regional power dynamics, particularly against the backdrop of transformations on the Syrian scene since December 2024. The collapse of the previous regime resulted in the fragmentation of the military and security structures that had formed the principal foundation of Ira-

nian influence, a development reflected in the marked decline of Tehran's role in Syria even prior to the outbreak of the recent war.

This structural erosion has granted Syria a measure of latitude for external repositioning. Syrian territory is no longer as readily available as a forward base for Iranian confrontation with Israel, as it had been over the past decade. In this light, Syria's absence as a direct battlefield in the current war appears as the cumulative outcome of Iran's loss of operational infrastructure within the Syrian state, rather than merely the consequence of engagement on a new front. Tehran's capacity to leverage airports, overland routes and militia networks — once sources of strategic depth — has weakened, reducing Syria's viability as a platform for retaliation or proxy conflict.

This shift has, in turn, created limited openings for the new authorities in Damascus, including the possibility of pursuing a policy of pragmatic neutrality, prioritizing internal stabilization and recasting Syria as a regional actor oriented toward reconstruction rather than conflict. The reduction of Iranian influence has also widened the scope for recalibrating Arab relations and exploring prospective economic roles, particularly amid a regional search for alternative transport and energy corridors away from zones of tension. These prospects, however, remain conditional on Syria's capacity to manage its internal transition and to prevent non-state actors from filling the existing security vacuum.

### **Potential Risks Should the War Continue**

The decline in Iranian influence has, to some extent, reduced the likelihood of Syria becoming a direct battleground.

However, the continuation of the war introduces growing risks that could gradually draw Syria back into the conflict's dynamics. A relative security vacuum in certain areas — particularly in eastern Syria and along the borders with Iraq and Lebanon — creates conditions that can be exploited by actors seeking to use Syrian territory as a logistical corridor or a staging ground for limited military operations. Continued Israeli preemptive strikes targeting suspected Iranian-linked sites or weapons depots risk entrenching a pattern of intermittent military activity within Syria, undermining stabilization efforts and negatively affecting the reconstruction environment. Moreover, the protracted nature of the war increases the likelihood of its evolution into what may be described as a "gray war," in which Syrian territory is used for low-intensity operations, such as rocket launches from border areas or the movements of loosely controlled armed groups. Such dynamics could prompt regional and international actors to expand their security interventions within Syria.<sup>(14)</sup> The significance of this trajectory is underscored by emerging indicators, including attempted missile launches toward US bases along the Iraqi-Syrian border,<sup>(15)</sup> followed by US retaliatory strikes targeting groups affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces in the same area. These developments point to the early emergence of a pattern of limited skirmishes falling short of full-scale confrontation but reinforcing low-intensity engagement.

With the recurrence of such incidents, border regions may increasingly become arenas for indirect military exchanges, raising the likelihood of Syria's gradual entanglement in the conflict without becoming a direct participant. At the same time, these conditions could

strengthen justifications for an expanded foreign military presence, framed in terms of deterrence or the protection of strategic interests.

At the same time, the regional uncertainty generated by the war is producing direct economic repercussions, slowing prospective investment, increasing reconstruction costs and intensifying fears of renewed military escalation. These pressures constrain Damascus' ability to capitalize on opportunities to distance itself from the conflict. As the war persists, the risk of Syria's gradual transformation into an arena for indirect confrontation grows — not through the large-scale Iranian presence seen previously, but through security vacuums that enable new actors to emerge and potentially reshape the conflict in new forms.

Geopolitically, Damascus finds itself navigating between two competing trajectories, each presenting distinct challenges. If Iran withstands the war, it may strengthen the position of its allies in Iraq and Lebanon, encouraging efforts to shift the balance of power in those arenas, with possible security repercussions for Syria through renewed lines of support and regional pressure. Conversely, if the United States and Israel succeed in weakening the current Iranian establishment, Israel may move to establish long-term security arrangements in southern Syria, including maintaining the buffer zone and reinforcing its presence around Mount Hermon. Such developments could complicate efforts to address sensitive internal issues, most notably the situation in Suwaida. In either scenario, Syria remains exposed to indirect repercussions due to its geographical position and fragile internal balance.

## Conclusion

These dynamics suggest that the US-Israel war on Iran did not serve as the primary catalyst for reshaping the Syrian landscape; rather, it followed an earlier trajectory marked by the erosion of Iranian influence in Syria after the fall of the previous regime. This decline provided Syria with relative latitude to avoid direct confrontation. However, this opportunity remains fragile, as the continuation of the war risks reintroducing threats through indirect channels. Syria's future, therefore, depends on its ability to consolidate internal stability, secure its borders and prevent any actor from once again turning its territory into an arena for regional conflict.

### The Functional Role of the Houthis in the US-Iran Confrontation and the Balance of Local Survival

Prior to the Houthis' announcement in late March of their involvement in the ongoing US-Israel-Iran confrontation — a period of relative calm marked Yemen during February and March 2026, following major political shifts in the southern arena in January. On March 28, 2026, the group declared that it had launched two ballistic missiles and a drone toward targets in Israel. Its official spokesperson Yahya Saree stated that the operation was a response to the US-Israeli offensive against the "Axis of Resistance," led by Iran. Although limited in scale, this intervention raises questions regarding its timing and its broader political and strategic significance. This section examines the factors behind the Houthis' delayed entry into the conflict alongside Iran, as well as the implications of their strikes on Israel.

### Significations of the Houthis' Delayed Involvement

Since the outbreak of hostilities on February 28, 2026, between the United States

and Israel on one side and Iran on the other, the Houthis refrained from immediate involvement, only entering the conflict after approximately one month. This delay appears linked to a combination of internal and external political and military considerations. The group is aware that direct engagement — whether through targeting US interests or threatening maritime routes in the Red Sea — could risk gains secured under the May 2025 understanding with Washington. That arrangement afforded the Houthis time to rebuild their military capabilities, consolidate internal cohesion and stabilize their strained economy, in return for refraining from threatening US interests and shipping. As such, the Houthis' return to military escalation would likely provoke a stronger US response, potentially undermining their survival and future role within Yemen.<sup>(16)</sup>

At the domestic level, the Houthis are also navigating significant internal shifts that unfolded in early 2026, including the dissolution of the Southern Transitional Council on January 9 and the restructuring of the internationally recognized government's political and military institutions. These developments represent major challenges, prompting the group to recalibrate its military engagement in light of evolving local dynamics that directly affect internal cohesion and public support. Additional concerns stem from the possibility that Yemeni government forces could secure the western coastline if backed by sufficient international military support, particularly after the UN ended its mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). The withdrawal of the UN mission effectively removed the protective framework established by the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, which

had enabled the Houthis to maintain influence along the western coast.<sup>(17)</sup>

In this context, the group appears intent on preserving its most significant strategic leverage: its capacity to threaten international maritime security in the Red Sea. This capability has long provided the Houthis with influence in Yemen by linking their role to broader international rivalries over critical waterways. It also aligns with Iran's interest in ensuring the group's continued survival and gradual military development, facilitated through continued arms smuggling and the deployment of military expertise to enhance its operational effectiveness as a strategic arm of Iranian policy.

### **Dimensions of Houthi Involvement**

Despite its limited scale, the Houthis' intervention in the US-Israel-Iran confrontation conveys deliberate political and strategic signals. Its timing coincides with indications of indirect Iran-US negotiations aimed at ending the war. Through this move, the group appears to be reinforcing Tehran's bargaining position by increasing pressure on Washington and Tel Aviv, signaling that the cost of the war will rise if the conflict is prolonged.

At the same time, the operation suggests a readiness to resume threats against maritime navigation and global trade routes in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, particularly if the conflict escalates and the United States proceeds with strikes against Iranian energy infrastructure. Such escalation would likely intensify global economic pressures, compounding existing disruptions linked to tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and placing additional strain on Washington as it seeks to secure multiple critical trade corridors simultaneously.

The Houthis' actions also coincide with reports of a potential US ground

operation targeting strategic areas in Iran to safeguard navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. These developments, alongside indications of possible regional participation in a joint US-Israeli campaign, prompted a direct warning from the group's military spokesperson. He threatened broader and more direct involvement should any regional actors join the alliance or if the Red Sea was used as a platform for attacks on Iranian territory.<sup>(18)</sup>

The Houthis' targeting of Israel in particular carries multiple strategic dimensions. Through these strikes, the group seeks to convey a dual message to both the United States and Israel, underscoring its capacity to operate and exert influence in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The attacks also aim to mobilize support from external actors opposed to Israel's policies, while reinforcing the domestic front by capitalizing on the symbolic and emotional weight of confrontation with Israel. At their core, these actions signal explicit alignment with Iran, undertaken in a manner that channels Yemeni public sentiment into a supportive front for Iranian interests. In this way, the group advances two parallel objectives: securing local political gains and reaffirming its commitments within a broader regional alliance framework.<sup>(19)</sup>

### Conclusion

The Houthis' participation in the war alongside Iran reflects their functional role within Tehran's broader strategic framework. This role centers on the threat of activating the Red Sea front in line with Iranian interests, employing a measured approach designed to increase pressure and raise the costs for adversaries. Given the Bab al-Mandab Strait's importance as a critical global chokepoint,

even limited disruptions are sufficient to drive up insurance premiums and unsettle international markets, particularly in the energy and oil sectors. This dynamic serves both Iran's current strategic objectives and the Houthis' local interests. At the same time, the group appears aware of the risks associated with uncontrolled escalation. A full-scale disruption of international navigation would likely trigger a direct confrontation with a broader set of global actors, extending beyond the United States and Israel. As a result, Houthi actions remain carefully calibrated, confined to providing Iran with limited and precise military support. This approach allows the group to maintain Tehran's backing while safeguarding the political and territorial gains it has accumulated.

### Israel's Calculus in the Iran War

Israel has secured several gains in the attacks it launched following the October 7, 2023 attacks, with the return of Donald Trump to power further emboldening its ambitions to reshape the Middle East. From Israel's standpoint, its mission remains incomplete without regime change in Iran, viewed as essential to dismantling Tehran's network of regional allies and proxies. While the US-Israeli strikes initiated on February 28 achieved part of this objective — most notably by destroying a large aspect of Iran's command-and-control infrastructure — they also underscored the difficulty and high cost of full regime change, which would likely require a ground invasion that the US president has shown reluctance to pursue. Amid mounting Iranian pressure, including the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on regional states with global economic repercussions, a ceasefire has emerged as the most viable temporary arrangement. This file examines Israel's calculations in the war, focusing

on its objectives, the war's domestic impact and its position on the ceasefire.

### **Israel's Objectives in the War**

Since October 2023, Israel has pursued a strategy of “comprehensive change” aimed at restoring its prior deterrence posture in the region. Central to this strategy is the transformation of Iranian behavior through three principal demands: the complete abandonment of its nuclear program, the termination of its missile program and the cessation of support for its regional allies and proxies. Given the improbability of Tehran accepting such terms, Israel's calculations have increasingly treated regime change as the only viable path to achieving its aims, particularly in light of Tel Aviv's view that Iran remains the central security threat in the region.

Reports suggest that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu played a key role in persuading Trump that regime change could be achieved through a rapid and decisive military campaign capable of triggering a popular uprising. In this context, Israel joined the US-led campaign against Iran. Israel's air force conducted hundreds of strike waves, deploying more than 13,000 munitions against a wide array of targets, including air defense systems, ballistic missile platforms, weapons production facilities, select nuclear sites and command centers.<sup>(20)</sup>

### **The War's Impact on Israel**

The course of the war diverged from initial expectations. Although much of Iran's senior leadership within command structures was killed, the establishment quickly absorbed the initial shock and launched counterattacks, including missile and drone strikes against Israel. The conflict soon expanded to include allied non-state actors. Despite having suffered prior setbacks, Hezbollah entered the

confrontation early, initiating attacks by the third day. The Houthis later joined, directing their operations exclusively against Israel, while Iraqi groups focused their attacks on US interests within Iraq. Although Iranian strikes caused limited casualties, they imposed significant economic costs. Beyond the substantial financial burden of sustaining both offensive and defensive operations, the wartime environment disrupted broader economic activity. Ports were partially damaged, impeding trade, while power plants, factories and military-related scientific infrastructure were also targeted. Air travel was suspended, adversely affecting tourism. More critically, the war exposed vulnerabilities on the home front, marked by limited societal resilience. Concerns have emerged over rising emigration and declining immigration, particularly among skilled professionals and business leaders.

### **Israel's Position on the Ceasefire**

Israel begrudgingly agreed to the ceasefire and confined its scope to Iran alone. Shortly after the US president announced its implementation, Israel carried out large-scale strikes on Lebanon, conducting approximately 100 attacks within 10 minutes. Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the attacks as a clear violation, asserting that Lebanon was covered under the ceasefire arrangement.<sup>(21)</sup> In response, Iran halted tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, citing the breach. The IRGC threatened retaliatory action against Israel in support of Hezbollah. The US president, however, maintained that Lebanon fell outside the framework of the ceasefire and pledged to address the situation separately.

This divergence reflects deeper strategic considerations. Iran seeks to strengthen the “unity of arenas” strategy that the

Israeli government had previously claimed to have degraded, viewing this as a strategic imperative. For Israel, the revival of this strategy would constitute a significant setback, effectively restoring the pre-October 2023 deterrence balance. Conversely, the Iranian establishment faces domestic pressure, having framed the cessation of attacks across all fronts as a key condition for entering negotiations. It must also contend with the expectations of its proxy groups, which risk increased exposure both to Israeli actions and to internal criticism, potentially strengthening their domestic opponents. As a result, both Iran and

Israel are drawn into a near zero-sum game.

### **Conclusion**

The ongoing war represents a rare strategic opportunity for Israel, one that may not easily be replicated. Despite the considerable costs it has incurred, Israel appears inclined to sustain the conflict until it achieves the objective of regime change. From this perspective, the current ceasefire offers limited utility. Instead, Israel favors either a US-led ground intervention or the continued degradation of Iran's military, political and security capabilities, with the aim of forcing capitulation or, at a minimum, creating an environment conducive to a popular uprising in the post-war phase.

## **IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL POWERS**

With regard to Iran's relations with Western powers, US-Israeli strikes against Iran on February 28 resulted in the killing of senior political and military figures, including the supreme leader. Critical military installations, energy infrastructure and strategic assets were also targeted throughout February and March.

As for the positions of Russia and China regarding the US-Israeli war on Iran, both powers have sought to avoid direct involvement while simultaneously rejecting the prospect of the Iranian state's collapse, which they view as a key barrier to Western expansion.

## Challenges Facing the US Military Campaign Against Iran

After Omani-mediated negotiations between the United States and Iran reached an impasse, the United States launched a large-scale military strike on Iran on February 28, 2026. It appears that the US president opted for military force over diplomacy. The operation resulted in the killing of the head of state and several senior commanders. Washington, in coordination with Israel, subsequently escalated its attacks, targeting military installations, oil refineries and key strategic and security assets. The campaign placed the Iranian system in an unprecedented predicament. Nevertheless, the Iranian state demonstrated a considerable degree of resilience and employed a range of tactics that increased the costs of the war and gradually transformed it into a prolonged war of attrition. This section seeks to examine the nature and objectives of the US campaign, Iran's responses and strategic adjustments, as well as the outcomes and broader repercussions of the confrontation.

### A US Military Campaign Aimed at Regime Change

For the second time in less than a year, the United States is engaged in a military campaign against Iran. While the earlier strikes in June 2025 were aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear capabilities, the current operation — referred to as Operation Epic Fury — has adopted the explicit objective of regime change, alongside additional goals including the destruction of Iran's missile capabilities, the prevention of nuclear weapons development and the disruption of Iranian support for its regional network of allies.

This military campaign falls within Washington's "peace through strength" doctrine. President Donald Trump may have been influenced by the perceived success of this approach in Venezuela

following the removal of President Nicolás Maduro, leading to the belief that a similar outcome could be achieved in Iran. However, the significant role of Israel — and in particular Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — in encouraging the US president to proceed with this course of action cannot be overlooked. Likewise, internal pressure from hardline figures within the Trump administration, who supported the initiation of the campaign and highlighted its potential political and strategic advantages, is also relevant.

In addition, the operation reflects confidence in overwhelming military superiority as a means of achieving strategic objectives, particularly in light of what Washington views as the declining popularity of the Iranian establishment.

By early March, Washington had conducted more than 12,300 strikes inside Iranian territory, resulting in the deaths of prominent figures, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani and close adviser to the supreme leader Ali Shamkhani, among others. According to the Commander of US Central Command Admiral Brad Cooper, the campaign against Iran was making tangible progress, based on several indicators: the strikes had significantly degraded Iran's naval fleet and operational capabilities, destroyed much of its air force and air defense systems, achieved near-complete air superiority over Iranian airspace and inflicted extensive damage on its missile infrastructure.<sup>(22)</sup>

Despite the significant damage inflicted on Iran, the objective of regime change was not achieved. Consequently, Washington was compelled to adjust its public rhetoric, moving away from an explicit declaration that regime change constituted the primary goal of the campaign. Instead, it articulated a revised set of objectives, including the complete

neutralization of Iran's missile capabilities, the destruction of its defense industrial base, the dismantling of its naval and air forces, the prevention of any advancement toward nuclear capability, the protection of US regional allies and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Accordingly, the US focus shifted toward degrading Iran's strategic capabilities in order to weaken the establishment and compel it to accept Washington's terms, while also constraining its capacity for post-war recovery. In this context, strikes on industrial facilities and oil refineries, as well as threats against energy infrastructure, are understood. Meanwhile, Iran escalated its drone and ballistic missile attacks, moved toward closing the Strait of Hormuz, and increased the economic cost of the war. Despite US threats of a potential ground invasion, such an option remains uncertain and is widely interpreted as a pressure instrument aimed at forcing Tehran to accept US demands, particularly in light of mediation efforts led by Pakistan and other regional actors.

#### **Iran's Pressure Cards and Looming Challenges for Washington**

It appears that Iran anticipated a US campaign despite ongoing negotiations and had prepared a response plan in advance. Accordingly, following the US attack, it rapidly launched retaliatory missile and drone strikes against occupied Palestinian territories, reaching nearly 90 waves of attacks by the end of March. At the same time, it carried out hundreds of strikes on US bases and installations across the region, escalating its response in parallel with the expansion of US and Israeli operations. This escalation was aimed at establishing a form of military balance and testing deterrence capabilities, including strikes on oil fields and refineries in Gulf states. Its operations also extended to civilian infrastructure, with the objective of increasing the overall cost of the conflict across the region.

Iran's regional network, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shiite armed groups in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen, also entered the confrontation. In addition, Iran leveraged the Strait of Hormuz as part of the conflict by restricting maritime traffic, contributing to a

rise in Brent crude prices above \$110 per barrel. It also issued threats against Israeli nuclear facilities, arguing that strikes on civilian sites and critical infrastructure would render such facilities legitimate targets. Although Washington inflicted substantial losses on Iran, other assessments indicate that Iran still retains significant operational capacity in the ongoing war, enabling it to sustain the conflict over a prolonged period.<sup>(23)</sup>

The military confrontation between the United States and Iran has produced wide-ranging political and domestic repercussions for Washington. There is no clear domestic consensus in support of the war, and this absence of majority backing risks shaping voter sentiment toward the end of the year, thereby increasing political pressure on Trump. At the same time, the conflict is beginning to strain the domestic economy,<sup>(24)</sup> with expectations of rising living costs as it continues. Within Trump's own political base, divisions are becoming increasingly visible: a significant portion views the war as incompatible with the "America First" doctrine, while others interpret it as a proxy campaign conducted on behalf of Israel. Compounding these tensions is the gap between initial expectations and the unfolding reality, as the war proves longer and more costly than anticipated, deepening both financial and human burdens and amplifying domestic scrutiny.

Beyond the United States, the regional escalation — particularly attacks on Gulf energy infrastructure and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz — has triggered severe volatility in global energy markets, with prices surging dramatically. This instability has placed additional pressure on national economies worldwide and led Washington to ease restrictions on Russian oil exports, an unintended shift that strengthens Moscow's position in its war against Ukraine and complicates European security calculations. The broader consequences extend further:

the risk of global recession, reduced investment flows and the potential emergence of wider regional instability that could feed transnational militancy. At the same time, the war has deepened transatlantic fractures, as European states have withheld logistical support and declined to join a broader military or maritime coalition, prompting questions about the durability of traditional alliances. Meanwhile, divisions within the international system have been exposed in UN Security Council debates over the Strait of Hormuz, where vetoes by China and Russia against resolutions on freedom of navigation highlight the erosion of consensus around international legal norms amid intensifying great-power rivalry.

### Conclusion

The United States is applying pressure through military operations and threats of escalation in an effort either to bring about regime change in Iran or to compel it to accept US conditions. However, as the conflict has evolved into a sustained war of attrition, the operation faces increasing challenges over time, with the costs of the war rising in unexpected ways. Trump is also operating under complex domestic political calculations. Nevertheless, the fragile nature of the truce and the difficulty of achieving a decisive breakthrough toward a final agreement may reinforce a tendency within Washington to continue the war until either regime change is achieved or Iran is forced to surrender, with military operations adjusted accordingly. This logic is linked to the perception that Trump, as the leader responsible for the “Make America Great Again” agenda, would be unlikely to initiate a major war only to conclude it through a negotiated settlement that could be framed as a loss of domestic popularity and a weaken-

ing of Washington’s global standing. At the same time, domestic pressures and the rising global costs of the war could also act as incentives pushing toward an eventual termination of a prolonged conflict.

### Russo-Chinese Positions on the US-Israel War Against Iran

Russia and China currently hold a pragmatic geopolitical position, monitoring developments from a calculated distance while extending support to Iran to prevent the collapse of a key strategic partner. The shared approach of Moscow and Beijing toward the US-Israel war is distinct from that observed during the earlier 12-Day War: they seek to avoid the costs of direct, large-scale confrontation, yet are unwilling to forfeit what is viewed as the “Iranian lever,” a critical element in counterbalancing Western influence.

Within this framework, Russia assumes the role of a security architect, providing Tehran with intelligence and defensive technologies, while China functions as an economic guarantor, mitigating the impact of sanctions and sustaining financial channels that preserve Iran’s economic resilience. This section examines how both countries have sought to convert an international crisis into an economic lifeline and a platform for challenging US unilateralism.

This approach reflects an increasing ability in Moscow and Beijing to navigate complex strategic balances, including leveraging US interest in stable energy markets to reassert themselves as indispensable intermediaries on the global stage. At the same time, both powers remain committed to a longer-term objective of weakening their adversaries in order to secure a more favorable position for an emerging

Eastern axis in any future international order. Accordingly, this section focuses on two principal themes: first, Russia's role in operational and security coordination; and second, China's energy gains.

### **Russia's Security and Operational Coordination**

Moscow's posture toward the US-Israel war on Iran is marked by a high degree of political pragmatism and calibrated maneuvering within gray zones. On the one hand, Russia recognizes that Tehran's defeat would likely translate into expanded US dominance across the Middle East, potentially imperiling Russian interests in the Caucasus. Accordingly, it has moved beyond conventional political coordination with Iran toward a phase of undeclared operational alignment.

This shift has been reflected in enhanced intelligence cooperation and the development of a highly refined target database. According to high-level intelligence sources, Russia supplied Iran with sensitive information<sup>(25)</sup> on the movements of US forces by transmitting real-time feeds from an advanced satellite network to IRGC command centers. This reportedly enabled Tehran to identify base coordinates and track naval movements with considerable precision, allowing its missile strikes to evade detection systems and hit strategically significant targets, thereby complicating Western operational calculations.

Russian support has not been confined to intelligence-sharing. It has also encompassed electronic warfare capabilities, contributing to efforts that challenge the notion of uncontested air superiority. Reports point to the provision of advanced electronic jamming systems in the Caspian Sea region,<sup>(26)</sup> which interfered with US reconnaissance drones and disrupted communications

signals. Such capabilities reportedly enhanced the guidance of precision munitions while providing a defensive layer for critical infrastructure, including nuclear facilities.

This role has been further reinforced through the establishment of a strategic logistical corridor across the Caspian Sea. Satellite observations have indicated sustained activity involving Russian cargo vessels departing from the port of Astrakhan, carrying advanced weaponry, technical equipment and ongoing military supplies.<sup>(27)</sup> These reportedly included radar systems and spare parts for air defense platforms such as the S-300 and S-400, aimed at repairing damage sustained during the initial waves of US-Israeli strikes. Such measures contributed to sustaining Iran's air defense capacity and its ability to impose continued costs on attacking forces.

### **China Reaping the Benefits of "Oil Trade-offs"**

During this crisis, Beijing's role emerged as that of a "quiet giant," managing developments through a macroeconomic lens and a form of cautious, preventive diplomacy aimed at safeguarding its core interests in the region. The geopolitical implications of this approach were reflected in the consolidation of an emerging multipolar order,<sup>(28)</sup> with China and Russia positioning themselves as guarantor powers for the stability of states resisting unilateral pressure. In this context, Beijing has sought to present itself as a reliable strategic and commercial partner in contrast to what it characterizes as "US chaos," leveraging international opposition to military escalation to deepen the reach of the Belt and Road Initiative across key regional sectors. At the same time, China has viewed threats to energy infrastructure with acute stra-

tegic concern. This was underscored by consultations between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his Chinese and Russian counterparts regarding the consequences of targeting oil facilities, which he described as constituting a full-scale war crime.<sup>(29)</sup> He further warned that any disruption to navigation through the Strait of Hormuz would trigger a profound shock to the global economy. Against this backdrop, China has reportedly intensified its behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts to contain escalation that could risk the steady flow of crude oil essential to its industrial economy. Accordingly, Beijing's position can be understood as one of political support for Tehran — manifested in its rejection of the US-Israel war on Iran — while stopping short of providing direct military or security assistance.

### Conclusion

The US-Israel war on Iran does not constitute a transient security crisis, but rather marks a structural shift in Russia's international position. Moscow has been able to transform the confrontation into a platform for redefining the terms of engagement with the West. This convergence of material gains and political ambition was reflected in the partial breaking of Russia's isolation and the restoration of de facto legitimacy to its oil exports, after the Trump administration was compelled to temporarily ease sanctions on

Russian shipments stranded at sea in order to stabilize global markets. This development helped shield the Russian economy from the risk of collapse that had loomed prior to January 2026 and positioned Moscow as a primary alternative supplier compensating for disruptions in Iranian oil. It also contributed to strains within the transatlantic framework, as European states found themselves compelled to resume purchases of Russian oil following the easing of US restrictions. In turn, this exposed a divergence between European and US interests and provided the Kremlin with an opportunity to capitalize on debates surrounding European strategic autonomy. Simultaneously, the Iranian theater offered Russia and China exposure to Western military systems, enabling them to identify potential vulnerabilities. This dynamic also created a strategic opening for Moscow in the context of the Ukraine war, reinforcing its position on the ground. In this context, the Russian and Chinese posture has increasingly taken the form of an "active observer," leveraging the prolonged strain on Western powers. While both Beijing and Moscow oppose actions that threaten energy infrastructure or international shipping routes, they continue to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a return to diplomatic engagement as the primary means of preserving state sovereignty.

## Endnotes

- (1) نگرانی از تهدید رئیس پلیس ایران به خشونت علیه شهروندان به بهانه «شرایط جنگی»، (11 مارس 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع: 07 أبريل 2026م. <https://2u.pw/idXm8F>
- (2) رادیو زمانه، «عبور تورم سالانه از مرز 50 درصد؛ خوراکی‌ها با ثبت تورم بیش از 112 درصد پیش‌تاز گران»، 9 فروردین 1405 ه.ش. <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/884171/>
- (3) حساب قنای همشهری علی تلگرام، تخریب 154 بخش علمی در 21 دانشگاه بر اثر حمله دشمن (30 مارس 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 30 مارس 2026م، <https://n9.cl/rwohd>
- (4) من أبرز المعاهد الطبية التي تم قصفها معهد باستور لإنتاج المكونات الصيدلانية النشطة المتقدمة، وتطوير الأدوية، وتضرر 322 مركزاً طبياً، و20 مركزاً للهلل الأحمر، وعدد من المروجيات والاسعاف، وأصابه 116 واستشهاد 24 من الطاقم الطبي. ينظر: موقع CGTN، به روزرسانی / حملات اسرائیل و آمریکا به ایران (6 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 6 أبريل 2026م، <https://n9.cl/y6eqi>
- (5) حساب وكالة برنا علی تلگرام، پست گاز دانشگاه صنعتی شریف مورد اصابت قرار گرفته است (6 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 6 أبريل 2026م، <https://bit.ly/3PTrrmun>
- (6) موقع CGTN، به روزرسانی / حملات اسرائیل و آمریکا به ایران (6 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 6 أبريل 2026م، <https://n9.cl/y6eqi>
- (7) موقع اقلیت ها، جنگ آمریکا و اسرائیل باعث جابجایی گسترده ایرانیان شد (15 مارس 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 27 مارس 2026م، <https://n9.cl/wec8d>
- (8) موقع CGTN، به روزرسانی / حملات اسرائیل و آمریکا به ایران (6 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 6 أبريل 2026م، <https://n9.cl/y6eqi>
- (9) موقع وكالة ایلنا، جابجایی 24 هزار مددجوی بهزیستی و ارائه 90 هزار مشاوره روانشناختی در ایام جنگ (5 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 5 أبريل 2026م، <https://n9.cl/s0joeb>
- (10) موقع **خبرفوری**، توزیع 91 هزار غذا بین افراد آسیب‌دیده اجتماعی از ابتدای جنگ / آسیب 2 خودروی گشت فوریت‌های اجتماعی (2 أبريل 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع 3 أبريل 2026م، <https://n9.cl/Oiixs>
- (11) آیت‌الله سید مجتبی خامنه‌ای برگزیده امام زمان است نه خبرگان / اطاعت از ایشان همان اطاعت از صاحب الزمان است، تاریخ الإطلاع: 6 أبريل 2026، <https://2u.pw/1PxLpv>
- (12) مجلس الامن الدولي، مجلس الأمن یثبی القرار 2817 (2026) الذي یدین «الهجمات الشنیعة» التي تشنها ایران ضد جيرانها في ظل تصاعد العنف في الشرق الأوسط بشكل سريع (11 مارس 2026م) تاریخ الإطلاع: 9 أبريل 2026م <https://docs.un.org/ar/s/res/2817/2026>
- (13) وكالة الأنباء السعودية، البيان المشترك الصادر عن الاجتماع الوزاري التشاوري لوزراء خارجية مجموعة من الدول العربية والإسلامية بشأن الاعتداءات الإيرانية (19 مارس 2026م) تاریخ الإطلاع: 9 أبريل 2026م <https://www.spa.gov.sa/ar/w2541534>
- (14) رويترز، مصدران: إطلاق صواريخ من الموصل بالعراق باتجاه قاعدة أمريكية في سوريا، (23 مارس 2026م)، تاریخ الإطلاع: 04 أبريل 2026م، <https://bit.ly/41fRTEE>
- (15) خبرگزاری تسنیم، تجاوز وحشیانه آمریکایی صهیونیستی به ایست و بازرسی در مرز عراق و سوریه، (25 آسفند 1404 ه.ش)، تاریخ الإطلاع: 06 أبريل 2026م، <https://bit.ly/484bADI>
- (16) یمن فیوتشر» حلیل: دخول الحوثیین إلى حرب الشرق الأوسط... ماذا بعد؟ (31 مارس 2026م) تاریخ الإطلاع 1 أبريل 2026م <https://2u.pw/q0GVft>
- (17) العربية «بعد انتهاء مهمة «اونما»... دعوات لفتح جبهة الحديدة من جدید 2 أبريل 2026م (تاریخ الإطلاع 2 أبريل 2026م، <https://2u.pw/xl2ouz>
- (18) یمن فیوتشر» حلیل: دخول الحوثیین إلى حرب الشرق الأوسط... ماذا بعد؟ (31 مارس 2026م) تاریخ الإطلاع 1 أبريل 2026م، <https://2u.pw/q0GVft>
- (19) المرجع السابق.
- (20) تایم أوف اسرائیل، اسرائیل تنتقل لاستهداف الاقتصاد الإيراني مع دخول الحرب "مرحلة الاستكمال"، (31 مارس 2026) تاریخ الإطلاع 07/04/2026 <https://urli.info/1n1p3>
- (21) حساب وكالة مهر علی تلگرام، إدانة شديدة للهجمات الصهيونية علی لبنان، (09 أبريل 2026) تاریخ الإطلاع 09/04/2026 <https://t.me/mehrnews/369629>
- (22) الجزيرة، القيادة المركزية الأمريكية: تقدم كبير في الحملة علی ایران و تدمير واسع لقدراتها الجوية، (03 أبريل 2026)، تاریخ الإطلاع: 9 أبريل 2026، <https://tinyurl.com/23txnt3>

- Haley Britzky, Natasha Bertrand, Natasha Bertrand, Tal Shalev, "Exclusive: US Intelligence Assesses Iran (23) Maintains Significant Missile Launching Capability, Sources Say," CNN, Apr 3, 2026, accessed Apr 9, 2026, <https://bit.ly/4cnqiqj>.
- (24) الشرق بلومبيرج، حرب ترفع راية ركود الاقتصاد الأمريكي وتضغط على التوقعات، (26 مارس 2026)، تاريخ الاطلاع: 9 أبريل 2026 <https://tinyurl.com/2ccvovmf>.
- (25) CNN بالعربية، روسيا تزود إيران بمعلومات استخباراتية عن أهداف أمريكية: مصادر تكشف لـ CNN التفاصيل. (07 مارس 2026 م)، تاريخ الإطلاع 01 أبريل 2026 م. <https://cnn.it/3Qe62je>.
- (26) DW بالعربية، دعم استخباراتي: أسرار البيانات التي زودت بها روسيا إيران. (10 مارس 2026 م)، تاريخ الإطلاع 01 أبريل 2026 م. <https://bit.ly/3PV7mYb>.
- (27) الشرق بلومبيرج، تقارير استخباراتية: أسلحة روسية ومساعدات في الطريق إلى إيران. (26 مارس 2026 م)، تاريخ الإطلاع 01 أبريل 2026 م. <https://bit.ly/4tkEozn>.
- (28) رصيف 22، ماذا كسبت الصين وروسيا من الحرب على إيران؟، تاريخ الإطلاع 01 أبريل 2026 م. <https://goo.su/OMXrUs>.
- (29) قناة وزير الخارجية الإيراني عباس عراقجي على منصة «تليغرام»، تاريخ الإطلاع 01 أبريل 2026 م. <https://bit.ly/47CsZfG>.



# Iran Case File

February-March 2026

[WWW.RASANAHIIS.ORG](http://WWW.RASANAHIIS.ORG)