



## Weekly



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## MENA Weekly Summary - March 26-April 2, 2026

### Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events in the Middle East and North Africa this week. These include **Iran's** threat against American tech firms operating in the **MENA** region, Iran's decision to institute a toll system in the **Strait of Hormuz**, President Trump's comments indicating an end to the US military campaign in **Iran**, the abduction of an American journalist in **Iraq**, and the continuation of **Israel's** military campaign in **Lebanon**.

### MENA

#### Current Situation

1. On March 31, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) issued threats to target multiple American tech firms operating in the MENA region, with attacks reportedly set to begin on April 1 at 20:00 (Iran time) in retaliation for the "assassination of Iranian citizens."
2. The firms explicitly referenced in the statement were Cisco, HP, Intel, Oracle, Microsoft, Apple,

Google, Meta, IBM, Dell, Palantir, Nvidia, JP Morgan, Tesla, General Electric (GE), Spire Solutions, G42, and Boeing.

**Assessments & Forecast:** Iran has on multiple occasions issued direct threats against specific firms over the course of the conflict and pinpointed their alleged associated sites throughout the region. In many of these instances, there was no follow-up intelligence suggesting that the threatened sites were actually targeted which could indicate that these threats are part of Iran's psychological warfare campaign or that Tehran failed to carry out these threats. Nevertheless, Iran traditionally views soft targets in the civilian and economic realm as legitimate targets and has demonstrated its willingness to target such sites, with the Gulf's high-tech industry considered an attractive and vulnerable target where kinetic damage can increase Iran's reputation as a formidable adversary. At the same time, Iran's capabilities to project force in Israel and Gulf states have been significantly degraded since the outset of the war, constraining its ability to execute many of its desired attacks. However, Iran's attacks targeting critical infrastructure in the region, including Israel's Bazan refinery, the UAE and Bahrain's largest aluminum factories, and Kuwait's Doha West Power and Water Treatment Plant, among others, indicate Iran's capability to execute at least some of its desired plans and threats. Therefore, Tehran is likely to prioritize certain sites, particularly in the Gulf, to maximize impact while generating psychological pressure on companies.

**Source:** [IRGC Cyber Corps](#)

## MENA

### Current Situation

1. On March 30, the Iranian Parliament Security Committee reportedly approved the Strait of Hormuz Management Plan, which includes a financial mechanism and a rial-based toll system, among other restrictions.
2. Meanwhile, on March 30-31, an Iranian projectile targeted a Kuwaiti tanker at the Jebel Ali Port in the UAE.

**Assessments & Forecast:** Collectively, these incidents reinforce that the Strait of Hormuz remains a key central flashpoint in the ongoing conflict, serving as one of Tehran's most effective asymmetric pressure levers. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy's use of a "tollbooth" model, subjecting vessels to Iranian vetting and at times, financial charges, is an effort to assert de facto Iranian control over the strait. Selective access, with vessels connected to or aligned with states such as China, India, and Pakistan receiving preferential treatment, underscores a politicized transit regime intended to generate a revenue stream for Iran while reinforcing diplomatic alignments in its favor. The move to collect tolls in Iranian currency reflects the Iranian government's intention to further institutionalize sovereignty over the Strait. Concurrently, Iran's UAV attack on a fully laden Kuwaiti oil tanker is likely intended as a complementary signaling mechanism to demonstrate Iran's continued capacity to harass maritime traffic. This model is likely to sustain elevated tensions with Washington, which views uninterrupted

maritime traffic through the strait as a strategic imperative. The US is unlikely to accept arrangements that allow Iran to selectively restrict access as was seen with Secretary of State Marco Rubio stating that the strait will “reopen one way or another.” However, any attempt to forcibly dismantle Iran’s control mechanisms would likely trigger Iranian retaliatory responses, elevating the risks of miscalculations in the short term.

**Source:** [Iran in Arabic](#)

## MENA

1. On March 31, President Donald Trump stated that the US could soon conclude its military campaign in Iran, indicating that American forces could withdraw “within two to three weeks,” while signaling that reopening the Strait of Hormuz is no longer a necessary condition for ending the conflict.
2. On March 31, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth reiterated that the upcoming days will be decisive in the war with Iran, adding that “Iran knows that, and there is almost nothing they can do militarily about it.” Hegseth refused to comment on the potential deployment of ground forces.

**Assessments & Forecast:** President Donald Trump’s shifting messaging appears aimed at reassuring domestic audiences and maintaining flexibility, as he downplays the need for a formal deal to end the war despite earlier escalation threats against Iran. This likely reflects both an effort to manage public concerns over a prolonged conflict and to avoid being constrained by difficult negotiation terms, particularly as Iran shows limited willingness to concede regarding the Strait of Hormuz. However, Secretary of Defense Hegseth’s remarks indicate that no immediate off-ramp is being pursued, with fighting likely to intensify as the US advances remaining objectives, including targeting Iran’s highly enriched uranium stockpile. Meanwhile, continued US troop deployments and ambiguity around potential ground forces highlight a gap between public messaging and military planning, likely intended to preserve operational surprise while maintaining a favorable domestic narrative ahead of the November 3 midterm elections. This gap, alongside continued US military buildup, is likely to deepen mistrust in Iran toward the US. Overall, despite Trump downplaying nuclear concerns, Iran’s nuclear program will remain a central challenge, as its accumulated expertise cannot be eliminated through military means. In light of these challenges, an off-ramp is unlikely in the immediate term, and hostilities will thus persist in the short term at least.

**Source:** [Reuters](#)

## Iraq

### Current Situation

1. The Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced during the evening hours (local time) on March 31 that a foreign journalist was kidnapped by unknown individuals.
2. Reports indicate that the victim is the prominent US journalist, Shelly Kittleston, and that she was kidnapped near the Palestine Hotel in central Baghdad's al-Saadoun Street.
3. The MoI indicated that law enforcement authorities had apprehended one of the suspects, seized a vehicle used in the crime, and that search operations remain ongoing. No group has claimed responsibility for her kidnapping at the time of writing.
4. Kittleston's US point of contact, CNN reporter Alex Plitsas claimed that Kittleston may have been taken hostage in Baghdad by Kataib Hezbollah (KH).

**Assessment & Forecast:** The risk of kidnapping in Iraq remains extremely elevated, with similar incidents well established in precedent. The most notable recent case was the [abduction](#) of Israeli-Russian academic Elizabeth Tsurkov in Baghdad's Karrada district in March 2023. The latest kidnapping of Kittleston is particularly notable as it occurs amid the ongoing US/Israel-Iran conflict, which has significantly heightened regional tensions and driven increased activity by Iran-backed militias. In this context, and given both precedent and the victim's nationality, it is likely that the kidnapping was carried out by an Iran-aligned militia. Kataib Hezbollah (KH) remains the most plausible actor, given its prominence and strong ideological alignment with Tehran. The incident is highly likely to be politically motivated and unlikely to follow a conventional kidnap-for-ransom trajectory. It is plausible that Kittleston will be used as leverage, potentially to exert pressure on the US to alter or scale back its military posture toward Iran. Overall, the incident underscores heightened risks to US nationals, including businesspeople, journalists, academics, and other travelers, particularly in environments where Iranian influence is deeply entrenched. Similar incidents are likely in the near term, especially if regional tensions persist or escalate further.

**Source:** [Mol](#) ; [Alex Plitsas](#)

## Lebanon & Israel

### Current Situation

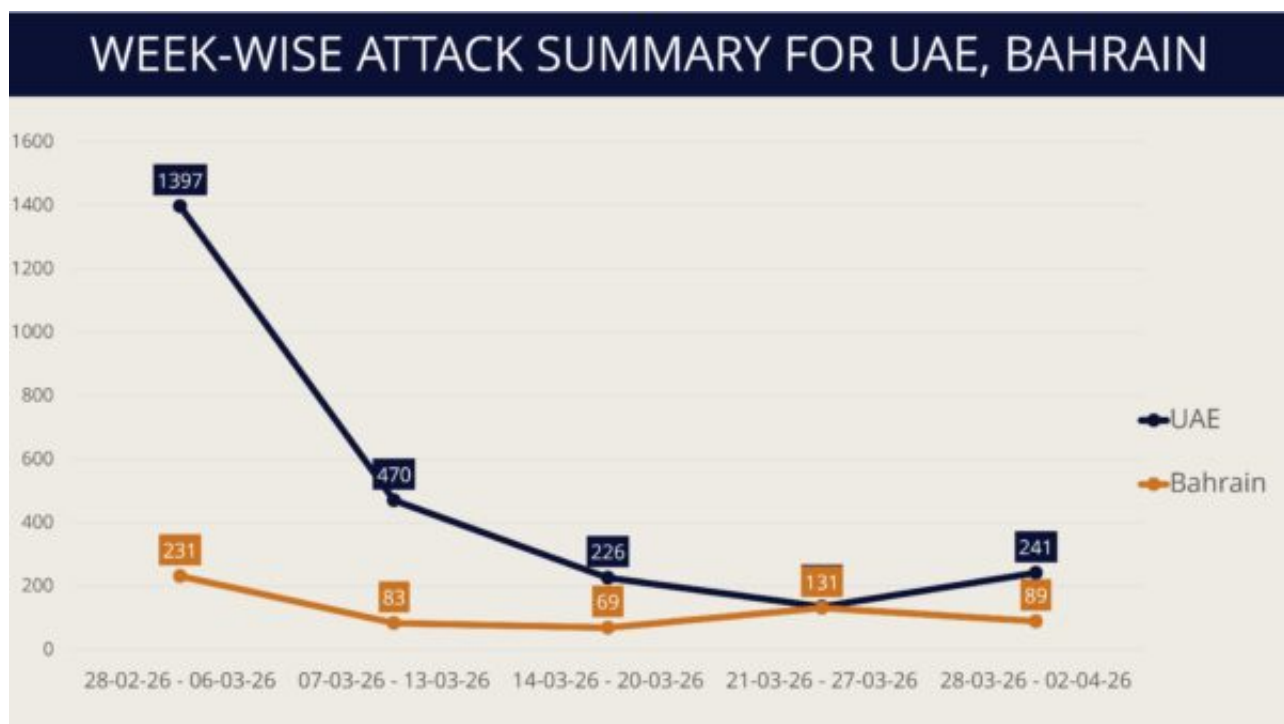
- On March 30, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that senior Hezbollah figures, including Hamza Ibrahim Rakhin, deputy commander of Unit 1800, and the unit's operations chief were killed in an Israeli strike in Beirut.
- On March 31, the IDF announced that four IDF troops were killed in clashes with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon during the evening hours of March 30.

**Assessments & Forecast:** The IDF's latest strike is notable given that Unit 1800 is responsible for coordinating Hezbollah's activities with Palestinian militant organizations operating across Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and the West Bank. This underscores that Israel is not only seeking to curb the threat posed directly by Hezbollah, but also to diminish its role as a coordinating node within the broader Iranian proxy network, thereby constraining the activation of additional fronts against Israel. This also aligns with Israel's broader strategy of leadership decapitation aimed at disrupting command-and-control

structures. However, the killing of four IDF soldiers on March 30, the highest fatality toll in a single incident since the launch of the campaign, highlights that Hezbollah continues to pose a significant threat on the ground. This is particularly relevant as Israeli forces advance toward the Litani River and consolidate positions in southern Lebanon. The reported sequence of events, entailing initial close-quarters engagement followed by anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) fire targeting rescue efforts, demonstrates Hezbollah's effective use of guerrilla warfare tactics. Despite the IDF's progress, the group will continue to leverage terrain familiarity, prepared positions, and layered attacks to maximize Israeli casualties. These will negatively impact domestic perceptions of the ongoing conflict.

Source: [IDF](#)

## Infographic of the Week



## Other Developments

- **MENA:** According to a March 27 report, the UAE informed the US and other Western countries that it will join a multinational maritime task force to help secure transit through the Strait of Hormuz, including by deploying naval assets.
- **MENA:** According to March 28 reports, Ukraine secured ten-year defense cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and will sign an agreement with the UAE, to support military technology sharing, weapons production, and air defense cooperation.
- **Bahrain:** On March 29, the Bahraini Ministry of Interior announced a nighttime ban on maritime

navigation and approaching coastal areas until further notice from 18:00 to 04:00 (local time), citing “blatant Iranian aggression.”

- **Bahrain:** On March 30, the Bahraini Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of three individuals accused of forming a terrorist cell affiliated with Lebanese Hezbollah.
- **Egypt & Libya:** According to an unconfirmed March 29 report, Egypt will import at least one million barrels of Libyan crude oil per month to offset a halt in Kuwaiti supplies.
- **Iran & Lebanon:** On March 30, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei stated Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon would remain in the country despite being declared a persona non grata and ordered to leave.
- **Iraq:** On March 30, Iraq’s Defense Ministry reported that rockets struck the Mohammad Alaa Air Base near Baghdad International Airport, destroying a military aircraft without causing casualties.
- **Saudi Arabia:** On March 27, an Iranian strike damaged a US Boeing E-3 Sentry (AWACS) aircraft at Prince Sultan Air Base.
- **Syria:** On March 29, the Syrian Arab Army discovered and sealed two smuggling tunnels between Syria and Lebanon in the Homs countryside that were reportedly used by Lebanese militias.
- **Turkey:** On March 25, authorities detained 88 Islamic State (IS)-affiliated suspects during security operations conducted across 24 provinces, including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.
- **Turkey:** According to March 26 reports, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lowered Turkey’s 2026 economic growth forecast to approximately 3.3 percent from its previous estimate and projected higher inflation due to rising energy prices and global economic pressures.
- **Yemen & Israel:** Between March 28-30, the Yemen-based Houthis launched ballistic missiles and UAVs toward southern Israel.

## The Upcoming Week

- **April 1-9:** The Jewish holiday of Passover will be observed in **Israel** commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.
- **April 2:** Sizdah Bedar Festival (Nature’s Day) will be celebrated in **Iran** that takes place on the thirteenth day of Nowruz and marks the last day of the Persian new year festival.
- **April 3:** Good Friday commemorates Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and death and will be observed across the **MENA**
- **April 4:** Iraqi Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr called for nationwide protests in **Iraq** on April 4 to denounce US-Israeli strikes on Iran.
- **April 5:** Easter commemorates Jesus Christ’s resurrection from death and will be observed across the **MENA**
- **April 6:** US President Trump’s ultimatum to Iran regarding the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is set to expire at 20:00 (Eastern time), corresponding to 03:30 on April 7 in Iran.
- **April 7-9:** The GITEX Africa summit will take place in **Morocco**, bringing together policymakers, investors, and technology leaders to shape Africa’s integrated economic future through capital, policy, finance, and digital infrastructure.