



IT'S A TOUGH WORLD.

MENA Executive SITREP

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**MAX
INTELLIGENCE**



Executive Brief: US – Israeli Operations Against Iran and Regional Implications

Explainer: This daily report provides an executive summary of major developments related to the ongoing war in the Middle East. It complements MAX Security's more in-depth Situation Update reports. If you haven't yet received our situation updates and other reporting amid the current escalation, or would like to receive more details, join our [WhatsApp community](#). For operational support, please contact our Protection Division at operations@max-security.com.

Operational Overview

The Israeli-US aerial campaign against Iran continued on March 17-18. Following the killing of Ali Larijani and the commander of the Basij in Tehran, Israel also announced the killing of Iran's Minister of Intelligence, Esmail Khatib, in an overnight airstrike in Tehran on March 17-18. This further highlights Israel's continued pursuit of high-ranking Iranian officials, whose killing should contribute to further destabilization of Iran's political elite and encourage anti-government Iranian groups to reignite protest activity. Israeli leaders continued to pledge more surprises, including Defense Minister Katz, who stated that the IDF is allowed to target any Iranian leader surfacing in intelligence, without the approval of the political echelon. This highlights Jerusalem's "gloves off" approach and resolve to deeply damage Iran's governance.

In another notable development, on March 18, Israel struck Iran's largest gas complex in Busher, the South Pars complex, which accounts for the overwhelming majority of Iran's gas condensate exports. This was reportedly done in coordination with the US, highlighting a significant escalatory step by the parties. This will substantially increase Iran's desire and effort to target major energy facilities in the region, as it was already transitioning to target production sites in a more consistent manner on March 17.

Iranian actions

Iran continues to project governance resilience and demonstrate control on the streets. Thousands of government supporters participated in funerals that were held for Larijani and the other senior officials killed by Israel. As of the time of writing, the high-profile assassinations have not led to an eruption of civil unrest.

Iran continued to launch attacks against different states in the region, despite decreasing operational capacities, over the course of March 17-18. For example, on March 18, Saudi forces intercepted a ballistic missile launched toward al-Kharj Governorate. Debris from the intercepted missile fell near Prince Sultan Air Base, with no damage or casualties reported. In Kuwait, two medical team members were wounded

after falling shrapnel hit an ambulance center. Following Israel's attack against Iran's gas installation in Busher, Tehran has threatened to target the "enemy's" infrastructures in response.

Meanwhile, Iran also continued to launch ballistic missiles against Israel, prioritizing the utilization of cluster munition warheads that spread across an extended radius to prompt civilian casualties. During the evening hours of March 17, such munitions impacted a house in Ramat Gan, killing a couple who were not in a protected residential area (Mamad), and impacted the Savidor Merkaz Station in Tel Aviv. This highlights the persisting risks emanating from Iranian missile attacks, despite the relatively small number of missiles launched in each barrage.

Other notable developments

Gulf: In response to Israel's targeting of Iran's South Pars Gas Complex, Iran called for the evacuation of several major energy facilities in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. Tehran will likely dedicate efforts to target major energy hubs in the region as retribution for the Israeli strike.

Iraq: Baghdad has confirmed that Iran's gas flows to Iraq have completely stopped following the Israeli attack on Pars. This is resulting in the loss of 3,100 megawatts in the Iraqi system. This will likely prompt significant blackouts in Iraq.

Maritime domain: On March 17, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that it employed 2000kg deep penetrator munitions on hardened Iranian missile sites along Iran's southern coastline along the Strait of Hormuz, eliminating anti-ship cruise missile capabilities. This is part of the US's effort to diminish Iranian maritime attack capabilities and secure the Strait of Hormuz.

Israel-Lebanon: During the evening hours of March 17, the IDF notified the Israeli public of Hezbollah's preparation to launch extensive barrages into Israel. IDF forces commenced preventative efforts to thwart launches, and Hezbollah eventually launched around 40 rockets instead of approximately 100 it was planning. This highlights Israel's significant clout and operational readiness as opposed to Hezbollah's challenges. The escalation between the parties will continue, with Israel further escalating on March 18 to target bridges along the Litani River, in a signal that it is further poised to target civilian infrastructures.

Travel & Security Aspects

- Regional travel conditions remain highly volatile, with most states in the region exposed to extreme risk due to repeated and unpredictable missile and UAV attacks.
- Iran's intent to execute attacks will be much higher on March 18-19, following Israel's attack on its South Pars Gas Complex. Continue to implement a shelter-in-place procedure broadly.
- Airspace restrictions and sudden closures continue to disrupt travel across the region. Risks to travelers also remain high despite **Gulf** authorities' eagerness to facilitate commercial flight



operations. Continued UAV penetration into Gulf airspaces and attacks against airports continue to underscore the threat, especially in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

- Evacuations outside of the country and safe havens within countries should be considered as part of contingency planning.
- Extraction routes are still most viable through **Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt**. Despite not releasing formal statistics, Saudi Arabia appears to be increasingly impacted by Iranian attacks.
- Risks in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, especially around its oil and gas infrastructures in Jubail and Dhahran, will be heightened, posing risks to those evacuating from Bahrain into eastern Saudi Arabia.
- **Egypt and Turkey broadly** remain outside direct hostilities and are assessed as medium-risk environments compared with other regional states. Turkey is exposed to risks in its southeastern border areas near Iran and around its NATO bases, as tensions increase.
- Oman remains comparatively less affected and continues to function as a key transit point for evacuations and regional travel adjustments.
- **Israel** is still allowing commercial flights with foreigners departing from the Ben Gurion International Airport. There are frequent flight cancellations and delays, extensive traffic, and congestion at the airport. Color Red sirens have also been sounded in the airport as part of the general attacks against the country, which now may also include short-notice Hezbollah fire, making it difficult to get to a protected space in time. El Al is now operating six direct flights to New York intended for American citizens who wish to return to the US. The flights are expected to operate at full capacity, subject to approval by Israeli authorities, upon request by the US Embassy.

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