



**IT'S A TOUGH WORLD.**

# **MENA Executive SITREP**

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

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**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](mailto:operations@max-security.com).

### Operational Overview

The Israeli-US aerial campaign against Iran continued on March 19-20, with multiple rounds of strikes in several areas of the country, including Tehran. On March 20, the IDF killed Mehdi Rostami Shamstan, a commander in the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. Israeli reports indicated that weather conditions in Iran, which involve heavy clouds, partially strain the US and Israeli air forces in hunting Iranian launchers, which have been the reason for an increase in launches over the past 24 hours, at least against Israel.

On March 20, US President Donald Trump stated that the US is getting “very close to meeting their objectives and is considering winding down” their military campaign against Iran. At the same time, he stated that the US does not want a ceasefire, adding that “you do not do a ceasefire when you are literally obliterating the other side.”

Meanwhile, according to an unconfirmed March 20 report citing unspecified officials, approximately 2,500 US Marines, along with the USS Boxer, an amphibious assault ship, and accompanying warships, are set to deploy to the region. The officials added that no decision has been made on deploying troops into Iran itself. According to an unconfirmed March 20 report citing unspecified sources, the Trump administration is considering plans to either occupy or blockade Iran's Kharg Island to pressure Tehran into reopening the Strait of Hormuz. One source indicated that such an operation would likely only be pursued after the US military further degrades Iran's capabilities around the Strait. The sources added that an alternative under consideration is imposing a naval blockade to prevent tankers from reaching the island.

As of March 20, the US secured a UK authorization for the US to use British bases for attacks against Iranian missile sites that pose a risk to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. In response, Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi, stated that by “ignoring his own People, Mr. Starmer is putting British lives in danger by allowing UK bases to be used for aggression against Iran.



## Iranian actions

Iran continued to attack regional states over the course of March 20-21, with multiple states, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. According to March 21 unconfirmed reports, an Iranian UAV targeted the Ali al-Salem Air Base, resulting in a fire at the base. During the overnight hours of March 20-21, Iran threatened to target Ras al-Khaimah “due to the use of this area in operations against Iranian islands,” underscoring an Iranian intent to target the city more systematically, albeit Abu Dhabi and Dubai will likely remain Iran’s focus.

According to March 20 Israeli reports, there had been an uptick of missile fire from Iran due to heavy cloud cover hindering Israeli and American UAV operations in Iranian airspace. One of the reports also circulated an Israeli security assessment that Iran will attempt to increase and refocus launches toward Israel in the coming days. On March 20, Iran launched multiple missiles, with an emphasis on cluster munitions, in several barrages toward Israel, some of which resulted in direct impacts on the ground. This includes central Israel, and one impact that was recorded in Jerusalem’s Old City.

## Other notable developments

**Indian Ocean:** During the overnight hours of March 20-21, Iran reportedly fired two intermediate-range ballistic missiles at the US-UK-used military base at the UK’s Diego Garcia Island in the Indian Ocean, around 4000km from Iran. Neither missile struck the base. One reportedly failed mid-flight, while a US warship launched an SM-3 interceptor against the other. This is an Iranian escalation likely formed to reciprocate the abovementioned UK’s approval for the US to use its own bases for attacks in Iran. It will likely prompt additional attempted attacks of this nature against the base and other British sites, such as the RAF Akrotiri base in Cyprus, which has already been targeted several times. More broadly, Tehran is demonstrating its ability to attack targets as far as 4000km from its territory, which is meant to convey a deterring message to regional actors and those beyond that, cooperation with the US will result in backlash.

**Iraq:** According to an unconfirmed report from March 20, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil has declared force majeure across all foreign-operated oilfields in the country. This measure follows ongoing military operations in the region that have disrupted navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, effectively hindering the movement of most of the country’s crude exports. This underscores the adverse impact of the conflict on Iraq’s oil industry. Attacks against US-linked assets, such as the Baghdad International Airport’s Victory Base, continued on March 20. US airstrikes were recorded against additional Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) bases in the country.

**Israel-Lebanon:** During the overnight hours of March 20-21, the IDF reiterated its call for residents of southern Beirut’s Dahiyeh area to evacuate the area ahead of Israeli strikes against Hezbollah infrastructures. Subsequently, the IDF conducted airstrikes in the area. IDF forces also engaged with



Hezbollah militants on the ground in southern Lebanese territory close to the border. Hezbollah continued to launch rockets and UAVs into northern Israel.

**Iran-US:** The US Treasury Department eased oil-related sanctions on Iran by permitting the sale of Iranian crude and refined products. It applies to oil already loaded onto vessels and extends until April 19. Secretary Scott Bessent indicated that the action aims to add around 140 million barrels of crude to the global market. This reflects some of the challenges the US is facing in implementing the maximum economic pressure campaign amid the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, which has led to rising oil prices. Nevertheless, the long-term US maximum pressure campaign and further coercive measures vis-a-vis Iran will likely outlive the easing of sanctions.

### 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.
- 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, Dubai, and Saudi's Eastern Province**.
- Current Iranian threats against the **UAE's Ras al-Khaimah**, are liable to prompt specific disruptions to ground and air travel within the emirate, including the Ras al-Khaimah International Airport (RAK).
- 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. El Al has cancelled flights to multiple destinations, including Boston, London, Budapest, Zurich, Barcelona, Berlin, Frankfurt, Prague, and Vienna. The airline stated that the decision follows further reductions in operations at Ben Gurion Airport (TLV) as well as new Home Front Command restrictions. Meanwhile, an Israeli media outlet stated that the number of passengers departing Israel will be reduced due to an increase in missile launches and impacts near TLV. Three private jets were impacted by debris, one of them caught fire at the airport. This



underscores persistent risks to assets on the ground and aviation in general, amid continued Iranian attempts to launch missiles.

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