



Weekly



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MENA Weekly Summary - March 18-March 25, 2026

Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events in the Middle East and North Africa this week. These include the prospects for negotiations and further escalation between the **US/Israel** and **Iran**, the expansion of **Israel's** ground campaign against Hezbollah in **Lebanon**, escalating hostilities between the US and Iran-backed **Iraqi** militias, increased interest from Europe and Asia in **Algerian** gas exports, and a surge in **Israeli** settler violence in the **West Bank**.

MENA

Current Situation

1. On March 24, an Iranian official told a US-based news agency that Tehran received “points from the US through mediators.” Concurrently, an Iranian official told another US-based news outlet that there has been “outreach” between the US and Iran, adding that “Iran is ready to provide all

the necessary guarantees that it will never develop nuclear weapons but is entitled to peaceful use of nuclear technology.”

2. In a press conference with President Trump during the overnight hours of March 24-25, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth stated that “we’re negotiating with bombs. You have a choice as we loiter over the top of Tehran, about your [Iran’s] future. The President has made it clear that you will not have nuclear weapons. The War Department agrees, we should ensure that...and we are keeping our hand on that throttle, as long and as hard as is necessary.”

Assessments & Forecast: Continued indications of engagement between the parties suggest a mutual desire to explore an off-ramp, with President Trump clearly stating that he wants to pursue this avenue. Yet, there has been no indication that either party is suspending its military operations, nor that any side is willing to renounce its red lines in negotiations. US Secretary of War Hegseth’s comments, made during a press conference with President Trump, were likely intended to delineate more explicitly that the administration’s goal remains to ensure Iran will not be able to obtain nuclear weapons. It is also possible that Secretary Hegseth’s comments signal that the US maintains the option of continuing the war, countering portrayals of the US yielding to Iranian resistance, and retaining leverage in any negotiations. Despite President Trump’s projected desire to negotiate and indications of backchannel efforts and mediation, the conflict will likely persist and carry risks of further escalation if both parties maintain their hardline stances, which appear to remain the case. At this juncture, both parties will maintain their offensive posture and seek to avoid any perception that they are capitulating to violent action.

Source: [DWS News](#)

Algeria

Current Situation

1. According to reports from March 23, Italian Prime Minister (PM) Giorgia Meloni is scheduled to travel to Algeria on March 25 to secure additional gas supplies.
2. According to reports from March 19, Vietnamese PM Pham Minh Chinh has urged Algeria to supply crude oil and natural gas.

Assessments & Forecast: The US/Israel-Iran conflict has triggered significant disruptions to global energy markets and resulted in spikes in oil and gas prices across Europe and Asia, which remain dependent on exports emanating from or transiting through the Middle East. The enforced closure of the Strait of Hormuz, alongside retaliatory Iranian strikes on Gulf energy infrastructure, has effectively halted energy exports, forcing European and some Asian states to urgently secure alternative sources. Against this backdrop and given that Algeria already accounts for roughly 30 percent of Italy’s gas supply, PM Meloni’s visit reflects an effort to negotiate additional volumes and fill this gap. According to a March 17 report, Spain is also pursuing a similar approach by exploring increased imports via the Algeria-Spain Medgaz pipeline. These dynamics have restored Algeria’s centrality in European energy security calculations, similar to what was

observed following the breakout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Based on the Vietnamese PM's reported statement, this has also prompted increased interest from non-traditional markets. However, Algeria's ability to significantly expand exports in the near term remains constrained by domestic demand and existing contractual obligations. That said, elevated interest is likely to strengthen Algeria's negotiating position in future supply agreements and may accelerate foreign investment. To capitalize on renewed European demand, Algiers is likely to launch new oil and gas licensing rounds and build momentum for major infrastructure projects, such as the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline. This will help position Algeria to capture longer-term gains if Europe and Asia further diversify away from Gulf supply routes.

Source: [Reuters](#)

Iraq

Current Situation

1. On March 24, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced that two Iranian ballistic missile attacks targeted Peshmerga positions in Erbil's Soran.
2. Alleged US airstrikes on March 24 targeted Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) headquarters near Anbar's Habbaniyah, killing 15 PMF personnel, and the residence of Falih al-Fayyadh, the Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Commission (PMC) in Nineveh's Mosul. Al-Fayyadh was not present.
3. Iraq's National Security Council on March 24 summoned the US's and Iran's envoys to protest the incidents. It also authorized the PMF to retaliate against such airstrikes "by all possible means."

Assessments & Forecast: The US's alleged targeting of al-Fayyadh is notable because the PMC is responsible for integrating PMF groups under state authority. Therefore, the action indicates Washington's objective to expand its ongoing campaign from specific PMF factions deemed responsible for attacking US interests to the PMC, thereby holding it collectively accountable for hostile acts. Meanwhile, although PMF factions have carried out high-intensity attacks on KRG territory throughout March, the latest incident marks an escalation because the KRG attributed responsibility directly to Iran. The Iraq National Security Council's recognition of the PMF's right to retaliate contradicts its simultaneous pledge to hold perpetrators of attacks against diplomatic facilities and [state security institutions](#) accountable. This will likely embolden rogue PMF factions to sustain such attacks against US interests in the country. In response, the US is expected to further intensify strikes against PMF assets. This will adversely impact Iraq's security landscape overall, while Baghdad's stance is also likely to exacerbate friction with KRG authorities, who have repeatedly criticized the federal government's inaction regarding PMF attacks on KRG territory.

Source: [INA](#)

Israel & Palestinian Territories

Current Situation

1. An Israeli civilian was struck and killed by a Palestinian driver on [March 21](#) near Beit Imrin in the northern West Bank. Authorities are investigating whether the incident was a terror attack.
2. On [March 21-22](#), extremist Israeli settlers reportedly assaulted Palestinians and damaged property in approximately 20 locations across the West Bank. 11 Palestinians reportedly sustained light injuries. IDF troops intervened and detained five Israeli suspects.
3. According to March 23 reports, the IDF diverted a battalion set to be deployed to Lebanon, to the West Bank to curb settler violence.

Assessments & Forecast: This comes amid a significant rise in [settler violence](#) in recent months, with the UN reporting a spike since the February 28 eruption of the US/Israel-Iran war. The latest March 21-22 violence was seemingly precipitated by the Beit Imrin incident, which far-right elements have framed as a deliberate terror attack. This mirrors a long-term trend wherein Israeli extremists have targeted Palestinian communities in retaliation for lethal terror incidents. Despite the fact that investigations into the Beit Imrin incident remain ongoing, extremists were likely emboldened by the backing of far-right members of the Israeli government. This is demonstrated by the fact that on [March 22](#), Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich spoke at the funeral of the Israeli killed in Beit Imrin, pledging to “collapse” the Palestinian Authority (PA) and expand settlements across the West Bank. In the coming days, settler violence can be expected to recur at an elevated rate. As underscored by the diversion of an IDF battalion from Lebanon to the West Bank, this will place further strain on Israel’s security apparatus.

Source: [Times of Israel](#)

Lebanon & Israel

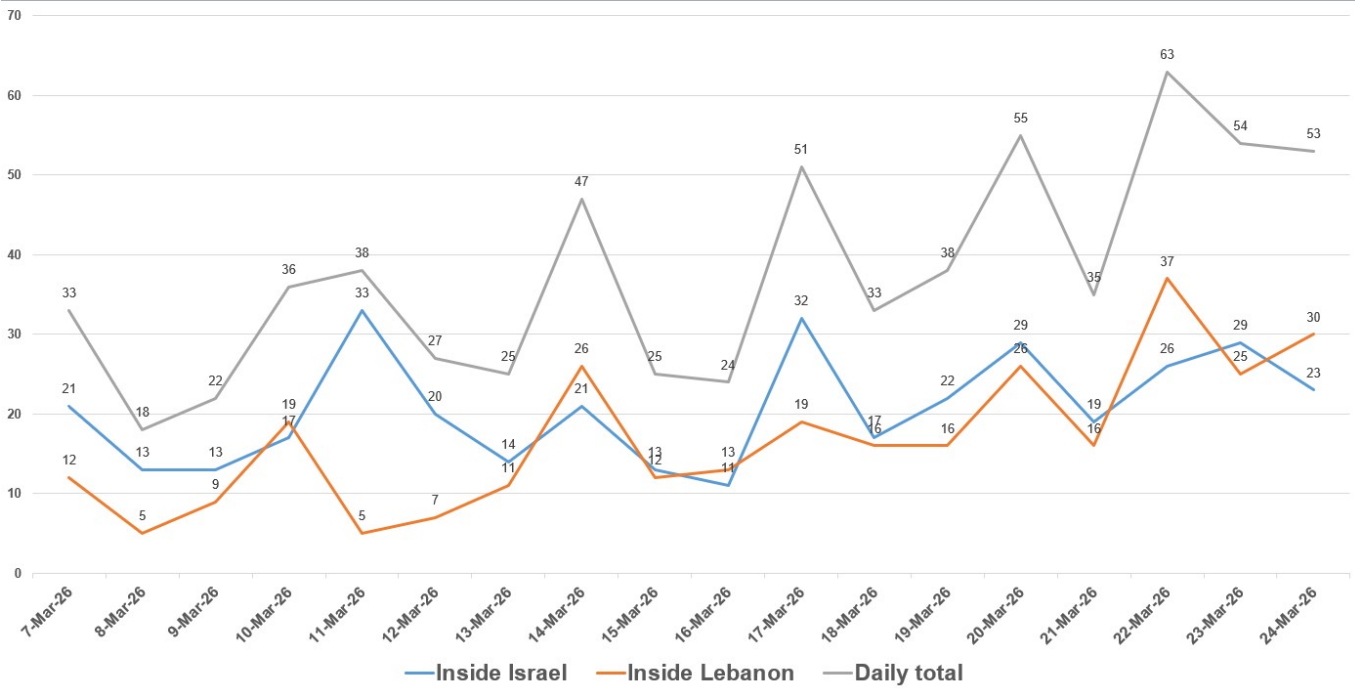
Current Situation

1. On March 21, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir approved plans to intensify the ground offensive in southern Lebanon for a “long campaign.”
2. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz reportedly stated on March 24 that the IDF will maintain control of a “security zone” extending up to the Litani River, with displaced residents not permitted to return, until the Hezbollah threat is removed.

Assessments & Forecast: The approved expansion of a “long campaign,” alongside Katz’s articulation of a security zone up to the Litani River, indicates that Israel is moving beyond consolidating positions near the border toward a deeper and more sustained ground presence in south Lebanon. This is reinforced by continued IDF [airstrikes on crossings](#) over the Litani River, likely intended to restrict Hezbollah movement into areas south of the river and isolate the operational theater. This will facilitate more systematic

clearing operations in previously evacuated villages where Hezbollah has maintained a presence, thereby limiting its ability to operate near Israeli border communities. The timeline outlined by Zamir and Katz, along with the explicit prevention of civilian return to southern Lebanon, also points to a prolonged, phased campaign. The resulting displacement of nearly one million people, and the reported reluctance in some non-Shiite communities to host them due to concerns over being drawn into the conflict, is liable to heighten sectarian tensions in the country. This is compounded by incidents such as the [March 23](#) IDF strike in Beirut's Hazmieh area targeting an Iranian official and debris from Iranian missiles falling in the [Keserwan district](#), both Christian-majority areas. Growing intercommunal tensions are likely to increase pressure on Lebanese authorities to more actively constrain Hezbollah's activities, which the group repeatedly signaled it would resist, raising the risk of internal escalation.

HEZBOLLAH'S CLAIMED OPERATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL



Source: [IDF](#)

Other Developments

- **MENA:** On March 20, US Secretary of Treasury, Scott Bessent stated that the Department of Treasury issued a “narrowly tailored, short-term authorization” permitting the sale of 140 million barrels of Iranian oil currently stranded at sea.
- **MENA:** On March 20, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine has deployed specialist teams to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Jordan to support UAV interception efforts and provide air defense advisory assistance.
- **Bahrain:** According to an unconfirmed March 23 report, Bahrain submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council seeking authorization to use “all necessary means”, to protect commercial shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Libya:** On March 21, Libya’s National Oil Corporation announced that it contracted a specialized international company to deal with a damaged Russian liquefied natural gas tanker that has begun drifting towards the Libyan coast.
- **Saudi Arabia & Iran:** Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on March 22, declaring the Iranian military attaché, assistant attaché, and three staff members persona non grata, ordering them to leave the Kingdom within 24 hours.
- **Turkey:** On March 18, Turkey’s Defense Ministry announced that NATO deployed a second Patriot missile battery at Adana’s Incirlik Air Base.
- **Turkey:** According to March 24 reports, Turkish authorities arrested nine Islamic State (IS)-affiliated suspects from Istanbul and Yalova who were accused of transferring funds to families of individuals linked to the group.

The Upcoming Week

- **March 25:** The Feast of the Annunciation will be celebrated in **Lebanon** to mark the Virgin Mary’s announcement that she would conceive Jesus.
- **March 28:** BDS Turkiye will hold a protest at Istanbul’s Levent Metro Station at 16:00 (local time), marking the 77th anniversary of **Turkey’s** recognition of Israel and demanding full diplomatic, economic, and military severance.
- **March 29:** Palm Sunday, which commemorates Jesus Christ’s entry into Jerusalem, will be observed throughout the **MENA** region.
- **March 29:** The Pro-Palestinian Global “Sumud” Flotilla is set to depart from Barcelona for the **Gaza Strip** in what it describes as “the largest coordinated humanitarian intervention for Palestine in history.”
- **March 30:** Land Day will be marked in the **Palestinian Territories** and Arab locales in **Israel** to mark the alleged appropriation of land in 1976 by the Israeli government.
- **March 30-April 1:** The **Egypt** Energy Show will take place at the Egypt International Exhibition Center in Nasr City, with over 50,000 attendees and over 500 companies expected to participate.