



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

US-Israeli campaign in Iran persists; Washington, Jerusalem still project resolve.

Latest speeches and interviews with US administration officials, including Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and President Trump, point to a persistent hardline approach regarding the Iran war. Trump was cited as indicating that the decision on when to end the war will be a "mutual" Israeli-American decision. On March 8, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright stated that the US has "no plans" of targeting Iran's energy infrastructure (in reference to Israel's attack against oil depots in Tehran). Meanwhile, the IDF continued its airstrikes in Iran, focusing on March 8 on targeting ballistic missile launch sites and internal security infrastructures, as well as targets in Tehran. The IDF stated that it targeted the IRGC Air Force headquarters, from where Iran orchestrated its missile and UAV attacks against the region.

Iranian Response

On March 8, hardline Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of slain Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was announced as the new Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. Immediately after the announcement, Iran launched aerial attacks against regional states and continued to launch ballistic missiles against Israel, some of which incorporated cluster munitions. Iran continued to target strategic infrastructures in the region. On March 9, it targeted the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) refinery again, prompting BAPCO Energies to declare a force majeure. Multiple aerial attacks were also aimed at Saudi Arabia, including against some of the country's oil facilities. On March 8, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, stated that if the war continues, "there will be no way to sell oil, nor will there be any means to produce it." Taken together, this highlights that Tehran retains a policy of targeting the region's soft economic belly in the oil industry, which is already prompting a steep increase in global oil prices. Tehran perceives this as a key pressure point and leverage point over the US, rendering attacks on energy facilities across the region highly likely, amid an expected hardline stance by the new Supreme Leader.



Escalatory Dynamics

Iraq: Iran-backed militias continued to launch attacks against US-linked assets, including the Erbil International Airport and the Baghdad International Airport. The US Embassy issued a shelter-in-place directive on March 8 amid fear of anti-US civil unrest and violent action. Iraq's oil production has reportedly dropped substantially as of March 8. Notably, Iraq's most senior Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, issued a ruling on March 8 stating that popular support and solidarity with the Islamic Republic constitute a "collective duty." This is not a call for a religious war, but it will likely significantly contribute to grassroots protests and expressions of support to the Islamic Republic, which carry high risk of extending to violent acts against US and Israeli-linked individuals and establishments among Shiite communities in MENA and globally.

Maritime domain: No additional attacks occurred on the maritime arena during March 8. Nevertheless, the Joint Maritime Information Center (JMIC) issued an advisory indicating that the regional maritime threat environment remains critical, with attacks against commercial shipping likely. This threat will likely continue to be compounded by Tehran's interest in driving up global oil prices and inflationary pressures as leverage against the US. The situation would be compounded when the Houthis make the final decision to join the regional hostilities and launch maritime attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Israel-Lebanon: Israel and Hezbollah continued their escalatory trend.

Hezbollah is likely preserving long-range munitions for escalation ladders, such as for when the IDF would launch more extended incursions into Lebanon. This is particularly given that the degradation of Hezbollah in the previous conflict diminished its capacities to target central Israel without considering what their inventories and existing infrastructures allow. It thus continues to primarily target northern Israel, increasing the pace of launches in general. The IDF continued its strikes in Lebanon, including in Beirut's Dahiyeh, with an emphasis on attacks against the al-Qard al-Hasan Association, which forms part of Hezbollah's financial arm. The IDF has also commenced targeted raids into areas in southern Lebanon aimed at dismantling Hezbollah infrastructures and personnel.

Travel & Security Aspects

- Regional travel conditions remain highly volatile, with most states in the region exposed to extreme risk. Travel to these areas should be avoided, and a shelter-in-place procedure should continue to be implemented.
- In this vein, airspace restrictions and sudden closures continue to disrupt travel across the region, although **Gulf** authorities appear to be increasingly eager to facilitate commercial flight operations.
- 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.**
- **Egypt** and **Turkey** remain outside direct hostilities and are assessed as medium-risk environments compared with other regional states.
- Oman remains comparatively less affected and continues to function as a key transit point for evacuations and regional travel adjustments. As Iranian frustration grows, timely risk assessments should be conducted to estimate Iran's inclination to target alleged US-linked targets closer to Muscat.
- **Israel** commenced commercial flights with foreigners departing from the Ben Gurion International Airport as of March 8. There are current indications that Iran has been utilizing ballistic missiles with cluster munitions that spread small bombs across large areas. Several casualties have been reported from falling shrapnel, debris, and potentially such small munitions that may have been spread in the air. Foreign passengers departing from