



## **Background on Iran and Operation Epic Fury**

On Saturday, February 28, 2026, the United States launched Operation Epic Fury and Israel launched Operation Roaring Lion which coordinated large-scale airstrikes against Iranian leadership, nuclear-related sites, ballistic missile infrastructure, air defenses, and military command centers.

The initial results of this operation led to the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei along with scores of other senior Iranian government and military officials. Hundreds of strikes have occurred since, with U.S. and Israeli forces claiming air superiority over parts of Tehran and significant degradation of Iranian capabilities. Iran has retaliated with multiple waves of ballistic missile and drone attacks targeting not only Israel and U.S. facilities across the Gulf, but also civilian areas in every country of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Iran has also closed the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most vital oil export route, which connects the biggest Gulf oil producers, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. President Trump has stated that the U.S. Navy may escort tankers through the Strait to ensure the free flow of energy to the world, and that the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation would [provide](#) political risk insurance and financial guarantees to support maritime trade and energy shipments in the Persian Gulf.

### **Nature of the Regime**

- Since 1979, Iran has operated as an Islamic Republic that combines elected bodies — including a president and parliament along with a clerical class which holds all actual power in the country. Under the doctrine of [Wilayat al-Faqih](#) (Guardianship of the Jurist) espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader holds ultimate religious and political authority. The system views the Supreme Leader as the representative of the “Hidden Imam,” the last of the 12 Shia Imams, who are regarded as both religious and political successors in Shia Islam.
- Khamenei served as the second Supreme Leader of Iran from June 1989 until February 28, 2026. Following Khamenei's assassination, hardline cleric Alireza Arafī has been appointed interim Acting Supreme Leader until a permanent leader is selected. Arafī, a [Khamenei loyalist](#), is a front-runner for the position along with Khamenei's son Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the regime's real backbone [consisting](#) of a force of at least 150,000 active duty personnel and 600,000 reserves, reporting directly to the Supreme Leader. The IRGC controls vast business holdings including in construction, oil, and telecoms, as well as Iran's ballistic missiles program. It also includes the Quds Force responsible for overseas operations and support for terrorism. The IRGC has been listed as a terrorist organization since it was designated by President Trump in 2019.

### **Iran's Nuclear Program**

- On June 22, 2025, the U.S. launched Operation Midnight Hammer, which [targeted](#) Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan to degrade their nuclear program with U.S. forces using B-2 bombers and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

- Before the launch of Operation Epic Fury on February 28, 2026, during negotiations, the U.S. [offered](#) Iran a proposal to supply nuclear fuel free of charge on a long-term basis which Iran rejected insisting on retaining uranium enrichment capabilities.
- Additionally, Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff [stated](#) that Iranian negotiators claimed to have access to 460 kilograms of 60% enriched uranium, which could be enriched to weapons-grade materials over seven to ten days.

### Iran's Missile Program

- Iran possesses the [largest](#) and most diverse missile arsenal in the Middle East with thousands of ballistic and cruise missiles. The arsenal consists of short-range (SRBM) and medium-range (MRBM) ballistic missiles, with ranges between 180 to 1800 miles.
- According to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Iran was [producing](#) at least 100 missiles a month, prior to the launch of Operation Epic Fury.

### Iran's Energy Capabilities

- Iran [produces](#) 3.3 million barrels a day of crude oil, and 1.3 million barrels a day of condensate/liquids, constituting around 4% of global supply, with the third [largest](#) proven oil reserves in the world.
- Iran also holds the world's [second largest](#) proven natural gas reserves, estimated at approximately 33–34 trillion cubic meters, second only to Russia. The country possesses roughly 17% of the world's total conventional gas reserves, with the massive South Pars field in the Persian Gulf being a primary source.
- Despite heavy sanctions from the U.S., the vast majority of Iranian energy exports go to China, accounting for 89% of Iran's crude oil and condensate exports in 2023 [according](#) to the Energy Information Administration (EIA). In 2024, Iran exported 1.4 million barrels per day to China [according](#) to EIA.
- Iran's oil exports reached near-record levels in 2025, with nominal revenue [estimated](#) between \$40 to \$60 billion. However, actual revenue is estimated to be [far less](#) due to 30–50% discounts and sanctions-evasion costs.

### The Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is a critical global shipping lane and is considered a global oil transit chokepoint.
- In 2025, an [estimated](#) 20 million barrels of oil passed through the strait each day, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration — amounting to nearly \$600 billion in annual energy trade.
- The oil shipped through Hormuz comes not only from Iran but also from major Gulf producers including Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. [In 2022](#), about 82% of crude oil and condensates passing through the strait were destined for Asian markets.

## Iran's Proxy Army

- Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the regime has defined itself in opposition to the U.S. and Israel. It built the “Axis of Resistance” including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iran-backed militias in Iraq to project power asymmetrically and deter direct attack.
- Hezbollah has been the largest of Iran's proxy militias [with](#) roughly 40,000 to 50,000 fighters and an arsenal of 150,000-200,000 rockets, missiles, and drones, though recent conflicts have heavily depleted its capabilities. Hezbollah has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department since October 8, 1997.
- The Houthis in Yemen [control](#) the highlands of northwest Yemen, including the capital city of Sanaa, and over two thirds of Yemen's population, possessing significant stockpiles of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and suicide drones which have struck targets deep inside of Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have demonstrated their capabilities by shutting down maritime traffic in the Red Sea using anti-ship missiles and sea mines. The Houthis were [designated](#) as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department in January 2021 at the end of President Trump's first term, a designation which the Biden administration [lifted](#) weeks later. On March 5, 2025, the Trump administration redesignated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization.
- In Iraq, Iran-backed militias such as the Badr Corps, Kata'ib Hezbollah, 'Asaib ahl al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, and others, hold significant political and military power including through controlling government ministries and being part of official Iraqi security forces. These militias have attacked U.S. targets on multiple occasions including through participating in the January 2019 terrorist attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. On September 17, 2025, the U.S. State Department [designated](#) four Iran-backed militias in Iraq as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs).

## Iran's History of Attacks on Americans

- From November 1979 to January 1981, students backed by Ayatollah Khomeini seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, holding over [50 American hostages for 444 days](#).
- In April 1983, Iran-backed Islamic Jihad [killed 17 Americans in a suicide car bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut](#), followed months later in October 1983 with the [Hezbollah bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut which killed 241 U.S. servicemembers, including 220 Marines](#).
- According to Department of War (then Department of Defense) estimates in 2019, [Iranian backed militias were responsible for the deaths of at least 603 American troops](#) throughout the Iraq war.
- In January 2020, direct Iranian ballistic missile strikes on U.S. bases in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of terrorist IRGC leader Qassem Soleimani [led to over 100 traumatic brain injuries for U.S. troops](#).
- Since October 7, 2023, Iranian backed militias in Iraq launched [over 180 attacks](#) on U.S. forces in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, including killing one U.S. contractor in a March 2023 drone strike near al-Hasakah, Syria, and [killing three U.S. soldiers on January 28, 2024 in the attack on Tower 22 in Jordan](#).