



# OPERATION EPIC FURY

**Matthew Borie** summarises America's conflict with Iran and considers what the future holds

**S**ince 28 February the US and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have reportedly conducted over 20,000 strikes since the start of the war, including the capital, Tehran. The US government has previously stated its four objectives related to the conflict with Iran: **destroy the Iranian missile programme; destroy the Iranian navy; interdict Iranian support to regional IBMGs; and degrade the Iranian nuclear facilities.**

Iran has responded with widespread drone and ballistic missile launches at the Gulf States and activated its Iranian-backed militant groups (IBMGs) to conduct similar attacks via Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

The conflict has led to airspace closures and restrictions across a wide swath of the Middle East. In addition, commercial maritime traffic and energy flows have been significantly disrupted due to the conflict.

There are international media reports from 23-30 March that indicate indirect negotiations between the US and Iran are occurring via Turkish, Egyptian and Pakistani facilitation. However, both the US and Iran continue to maintain maximalist demands in public regarding a peaceful resolution.

On 30 March, US President Trump stated the following: "The United States of America is in serious discussions with A NEW, AND MORE REASONABLE, REGIME to end our Military Operations in Iran. Great progress has been made but, if for any reason a deal is not shortly reached, which it probably will be, and if the Hormuz Strait is not immediately 'Open for Business,' we will conclude our lovely 'stay' in Iran by blowing up and completely obliterating all of their Electric Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island (and possibly all desalination plants!), which we have purposefully not yet 'touched'."

On 26 March, US President Trump announced a 10-day pause on potential strikes targeting Iranian power plants and energy facilities, through 6 April. He claimed the pause was to allow for further negotiations to take place aimed at reaching a peace deal with Iran; however, Tehran has denied that direct talks with the US are occurring, only noting discussions with mediators.

The above followed a 21 March statement from Trump threatening to conduct strikes on Iranian power plants if Tehran did not fully open the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours. The Iranian parliament's speaker stated on 22 March that any strikes on its power plants and energy facilities would lead to reciprocal attacks by Tehran on critical infrastructure sites in the Middle East region. In addition, Iran stated on 22 March that any strikes on Iranian power plants and energy facilities would lead to Tehran completely closing the Strait of Hormuz.

On 27 March, the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) stated that a US/Israeli strike impacted near the perimeter of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. In addition, on 27 March, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that airstrikes targeted Iran's Arak nuclear reactor complex and uranium production activity in Yazd. Previously, on 27 March, IDF airstrikes reportedly targeted Iranian steel production plants in Isfahan and Khuzestan provinces.

In the wake of the above strikes on 27 March, the Iranian foreign minister stated: "Israel has hit two of Iran's largest steel factories, a power plant and civilian nuclear sites among other infrastructure. Israel claims it acted in coordination with the US. Attack contradicts POTUS extended deadline for diplomacy. Iran will exact HEAVY price for Israeli crimes."

On 28 March, the US military confirmed that a US Navy amphibious assault group (AAG) had arrived in the Northern Arabian Sea, where an aircraft carrier strike group (CSG) is also located. A second US Navy AAG is reportedly currently enroute to the Middle East region with arrival expected by 15 April. In addition, a second US Navy CSG is confirmed to be in the process of undergoing a resupply at a port in the Adriatic Sea and is expected to return to the Red Sea region by 15 April. Along these lines, a third US Navy CSG is reportedly finalising preparations to depart the Atlantic coast to deploy to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, with arrival expected by 15 April.

## IRANIAN & IBMG ATTACKS

Since 28 February, Iran and IBMGs have responded to Israeli and US strikes by launching over c.4,000 drones and c.2,000 missiles in hundreds of attempted attacks on sites across the Middle East. The targets have included commercial vessels, oil and gas sites, diplomatic facilities, military installations, air and naval bases, airports and maritime ports.

Regional air and air defences have reportedly downed the majority of the incoming attacks; however, direct impacts in open as well as populated areas, and debris splashdowns have been reported at multiple locations. The following countries have been targeted in attacks by Iran and/or IBMGs: Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Israel, Iraq, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Jordan and Oman.

Since 28 February, Iraqi IBMGs have conducted over 500 drone and missile attacks, targeting US military bases in Iraq and the wider Middle East. Since 28 February, c.200 sets of IDF and/or US military strikes have reportedly targeted IBMG sites in the Baghdad, Kirkuk, Samawah, Jurf al-Sakhar, Al Qaim, Mosul, Nineveh and Diyala areas.

Since 2 March, the IDF has conducted over 2,000 strikes across Lebanon against Hezbollah targets, including over 100 in the capital, Beirut. Hezbollah has reportedly launched around 1,500 rockets and drones into Northern Israeli territory including near Haifa since 1 March. Tel Aviv was last targeted by launches from Hezbollah on 4, 9, 10, 11, 15, 25 and 30 March; however, the majority of the incoming ballistic missiles were shot down by Israeli military conventional surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems capable at all altitudes.

## THE HOUTHIS ARE LIKELY TO CONDUCT ATTACKS VIA DRONES, BALLISTIC AND/OR CRUISE MISSILES

On 27 March, the Yemeni Houthi military spokesman said the IBMG had three red lines for entering the Middle East conflict in support of Iran: if the Red Sea was used for hostile action against Iran; if new countries and/or alliances joined the US and Israel strikes against Iran; and the continuation of the escalation of the war against Iran and regional IBMGs, without providing details on exact parameters. On 26 March, the leader of the Yemeni Houthi IBMG once again publicly warned of a "military response" in support of Iran should the Middle East war require it, without providing specifics on actions or timings.

On 28-29 March, three Yemeni Houthi IBMG drones launched at Israeli territory were shot down by the IDF air-defences over Eilat. On 28 March, a Yemeni Houthi IBMG cruise missile launched at Israeli territory was shot down by IDF air-defences. Previously, on 28 March, a Yemeni Houthi IBMG ballistic missile launched at the Southern Israeli territory of the Negev was shot down by an IDF conventional SAM system capable at all altitudes. These mark the first three Yemeni Houthi attacks in support of Iran during the Middle East conflict since it began on 28 February and are also the first three launches at Israel since 7 October amid a lull during the Gaza ceasefire.

## FUTURE FORECAST

Osprey assesses that the ongoing US/Israel and Iranian regional conflict in the Middle East will likely persist in the short term. Widespread US military and IDF strikes in Iran with Iranian air-defence employment – including conventional SAM systems capable at all altitudes – in response are likely to persist in the short term. Widespread IDF airstrikes in Lebanon against Hezbollah coupled with targeted US military and Israeli strikes against IBMGs are also likely to continue in the short term.

An MV-22 Osprey prepares to take off on the flight deck of the USS Tripoli during Operation Epic Fury, 2 April, 2026

Osprey assesses that Iranian and/or regional IBMG missile and drone launches are likely to occur in the short term targeting sites in Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and/or Gulf of Oman – with air and air defences activated in response.

## THE ONGOING US/ISRAEL AND IRANIAN CONFLICT WILL LIKELY PERSIST IN THE SHORT TERM

It is also possible in the short term that a limited number of airports in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Israel, Jordan and Iraq will be targeted and/or sustain debris splashdown from drone/missile shoot-downs by air and air defences.

It is also possible additional limited numbers of ballistic missile, cruise missile and/or drone launches at Qatar, Oman, Turkey and/or Cyprus will occur in the short term, with military air and air defence activity expected in response.

Finally, Osprey assesses the Houthis are likely to conduct attacks in the short term via drones, ballistic missiles and/or cruise missiles targeting Israel. Air and air defences are likely to be activated

in response – including conventional SAM systems capable at all altitudes.

Osprey believes that Trump's 26 and 30 March statements provide a near-term period for diplomatic talks up to 6 April. However, given the reported US Navy amphibious assault group and aircraft carrier strike group deployment activity, should diplomatic talks between the US and Iran fail to lead to a peace deal, Osprey assesses a US military operation in the Strait of Hormuz and/or attempted seizure of Iran's Kharg Island are a realistic possibility in the short term.

Should the US conduct a military operation to fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz and/or to seize Kharg Island, Osprey assesses Iran is likely to respond with widespread attempts to conduct drone and missile attacks targeting oil and gas sites, data centres, energy facilities and desalination plants in Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE, with air and air defences activated in response.

Osprey also assesses it is a realistic possibility in the short term that the Houthis will also conduct attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden regions, with the aim of closing the Bab al-Mandeb Strait to maritime traffic, and it is also possible the group will target Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, if the conflict continues to escalate. Air and air-defences are likely to be activated in response – including conventional SAM systems capable at all altitudes ●

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**An EA-18G Growler prepares to launch from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in support of Operation Epic Fury, 7 March, 2026**

