

## Middle East war

# Military briefing: The US-Israeli strikes and Iran's retaliation

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American military assets in the region and Gulf oil supplies are vulnerable to attack and Israel is a renewed target

**Charles Clover** and **Malcolm Moore** in London, **Mehul Srivastava** in Istanbul, **Steff Chávez** in Washington and **James Shotter** in Jerusalem

Published 18 HOURS AGO | Updated 21:51

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On Saturday morning, explosions rang out around Iran, with smoke rising over Tehran while sirens wailed over Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Israel had begun a war against Iran, the defence minister Israel Katz announced, with Israelis calling it Operation Roar of the Lion. Israelis were told to brace for incoming Iranian missiles.

The US called it a “massive and ongoing” operation, branding it Operation Epic Fury. “This regime will soon learn that no one should challenge the strength and might of the United States Armed Forces,” President Donald Trump said in a social media post.

Iranian state TV confirmed early on Sunday that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader for nearly four decades, had been killed. Satellite imagery showed widespread destruction of his residential compound.

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A plume of smoke rises over Tehran following Israeli air strikes on Iran © Reuters

## What did Israel and the US strike?

Early reports indicated that strikes on Tehran had hit areas around Pasteur Street in Tehran, near the Presidential Administration of Iran. Iranian news agencies also reported explosions in other cities.

Those included Isfahan, where strikes were reported near the site of a nuclear complex that both the US and Israel struck last year during the 12-day war; Kermanshah, in north-western Iran, home to an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps base; and Shiraz, where Israel has alleged Iran has a large underground missile production facility.

The local judiciary said 108 people were killed in a missile attack on a school in the city of Minab.

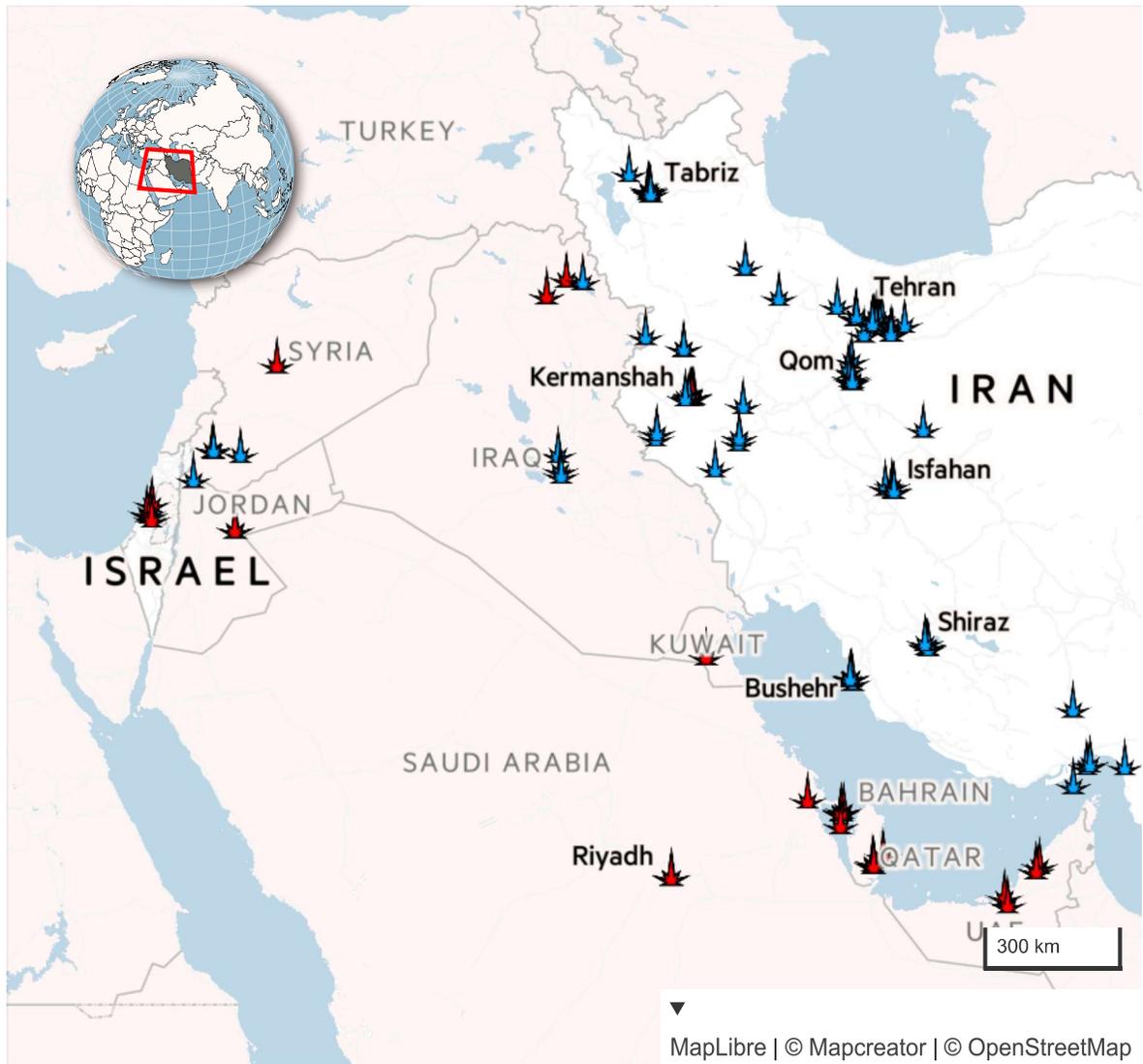
Most of the dozens of reported strikes on Iran on Saturday took place before 1pm Tehran time, according to LiveUA data.

# Iran retaliates to US/Israel airstrikes

Feb 28 2026

 Iran airstrikes

 US/Israel airstrikes



FINANCIAL TIMES

Sources: [Liveuamap](#), FT research

Trump said Washington wanted to stop Iran from building a nuclear weapon and destroy its ability to make long-range missiles that could hit the US.

But he also called on the Iranian people to “take over your government” once the strikes had ended.

PLAY | 00:17

Footage of explosion in the distance in the port city of Bushehr © X

Earlier on Saturday, Israel's northern command carried out several strikes in southern Lebanon, hitting what it described as Hizbollah infrastructure.

Israel had warned Hizbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese Shia militant group, not to rush to Iran's defence.

## What military assets does the US have?

The US has about 40,000 [troops in the region](#), spread across bases and ships, and has amassed its largest naval force in the region since its 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Washington's newest and largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, was in the Mediterranean this week, with sightings off Israel's northern coast on Friday, while the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group was off Oman's coast this month.

The two strike groups include one carrier and three guided-missile destroyers, with an array of weapons to attack and defend its own troops and partner countries.

The carriers also have dozens of planes and helicopters aboard, including F-18s, E-2 airborne early-warning aircraft and cargo planes. The Gerald R Ford also carries F-35 jets. The US has also sent planes to bases in the region.

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The USS Gerald R Ford aircraft carrier was seen leaving Crete on Friday © Reuters

The US has deployed additional Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense and Patriot air-defence systems. Both were used in the 2025 war and earlier assaults, [depleting their stockpiles of interceptors](#).

The US operates eight permanent bases in the Middle East, in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. It has access to about a dozen other military sites, including in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

The biggest is Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar — the headquarters for US Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East. The base has about 10,000 troops. In June, Iran fired missiles at Al Udeid in retaliation for the US bombing the republic's three main nuclear facilities.

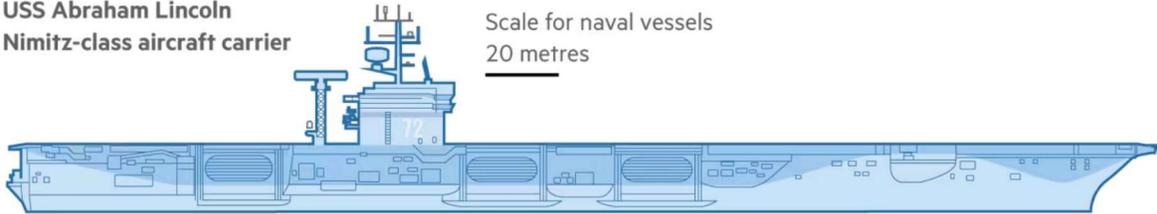
# Key US military assets in the Middle East

## USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group

Currently reported to be in Arabian Sea

**USS Abraham Lincoln**  
Nimitz-class aircraft carrier

Scale for naval vessels  
20 metres



**Three Arleigh Burke-class**  
destroyers

'Multi-mission' ships equipped for anti-air,  
anti-submarine, and anti-surface warfare



USS Michael  
Murphy

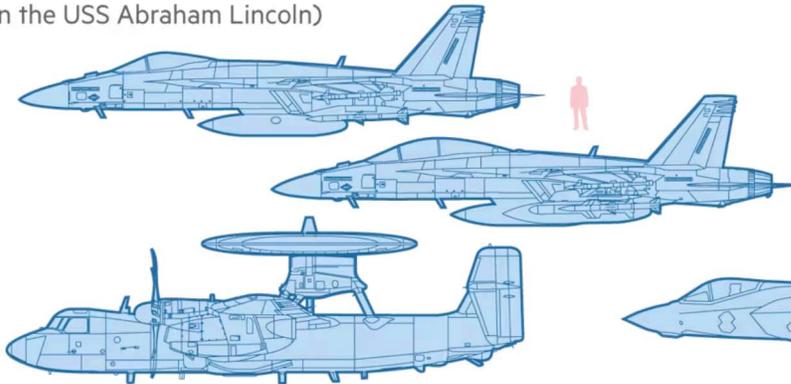


USS Frank E  
Petersen Jr



USS Spruance

**Carrier Air Wing Nine** (embarked  
on the USS Abraham Lincoln)



**Strike Fighter squadrons**

F/A-18E, two squadrons

F/A-18F, one squadron

**Electronic Attack Squadron**

E/A-18G, one squadron

**Airborne Command and Control Squadron**

E-2, one squadron

**Marine Fighter Attack Squadron**

F-35C, one squadron

**Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron**



MH-60S, one squadron

**Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron**



MH-60R, one squadron

## Other vessels

**Two Arleigh Burke-class**  
destroyers



USS McFaul



USS Mitscher

Both in the Arabian Sea

**Three Independence-class**  
littoral combat ships

Optimised for a variety of roles in coastal waters,  
such as mine, anti-submarine and surface warfare



USS Canberra  
In the Gulf of Oman



USS Tulsa  
In the Arabian Gulf

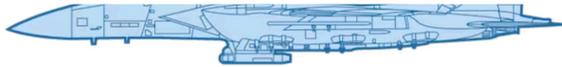


USS Santa Barbara  
In the Arabian Sea

**F-15 Strike Eagles**

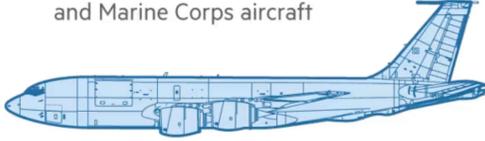


US Air Force fighters capable of  
air-to-air and air-to-ground missions  
in day or night and all weathers



### Support aircraft

KC-135 tanker aircraft can provide air refuelling support for Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps aircraft



Boeing C-17 Globemaster III can perform airlift and airdrop missions as well as transporting troops and cargo



Confirmed journeys from North America towards Europe or Middle East in past week by 39 KC-135s and 43 flights by C-17s

Latest available information as of Feb 19

Sources: US Navy; US Air Force; US Naval Institute; FlightRadar24; FT research

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## How is Iran responding?

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards force said on Saturday that it had hit US bases in Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates "hard", as well as "military and security centres" in Israel.

"Missile and drone attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran's armed forces will continue," it added.

Verified footage posted on social media showed a huge explosion at the US Navy's Fifth Fleet base in Juffair, Bahrain, which serves as the headquarters of US naval operations in the Middle East.

PLAY | 00:10

A missile targets the US air base in Bahrain © X

Qatar said it had “intercepted and neutralised” three waves of Iranian missile attacks targeting several areas across the country, while Jordan said it had intercepted two ballistic missiles.

Saudi Arabia said Iran had targeted its capital, Riyadh, and its oil-rich eastern province. Kuwait said a drone struck its international airport, causing limited damage.

Israel declared a state of emergency, shutting its airspace and most businesses and restricting gatherings. Israeli air defences intercepted most of the missiles in an Iranian salvo, though fragments and shrapnel caused small numbers of injuries.

American Thaad batteries and other defences are also positioned to protect Israel.

Alongside its medium- to long-range missiles capable of hitting Israel, Iran has a far greater number of short-range ballistic and cruise missiles that are able to strike US bases and naval assets.

When the US struck Iran in June last year, Tehran's response was swift — choreographed with Washington to avoid escalation. Air defences shot down Iranian missiles aimed at Al Udeid, which had been emptied.



Iran has learned to fine-tune the tempo and timing of salvos to maximise their effectiveness. The US and Israel's stockpiles of interceptor rockets are at unprecedented lows, adding to the risks of this conflict for them.

But firing those missiles reveals the launchers' location. Israel has previously attacked launch sites immediately after the missiles are fired, a tactic it calls "killing the archer".



Satellite images of Iran's nuclear facilities near Qom following US and Israeli attacks last year © Satellite image Maxar Technologies/AFP/Getty Images

## Will the conflict expand?

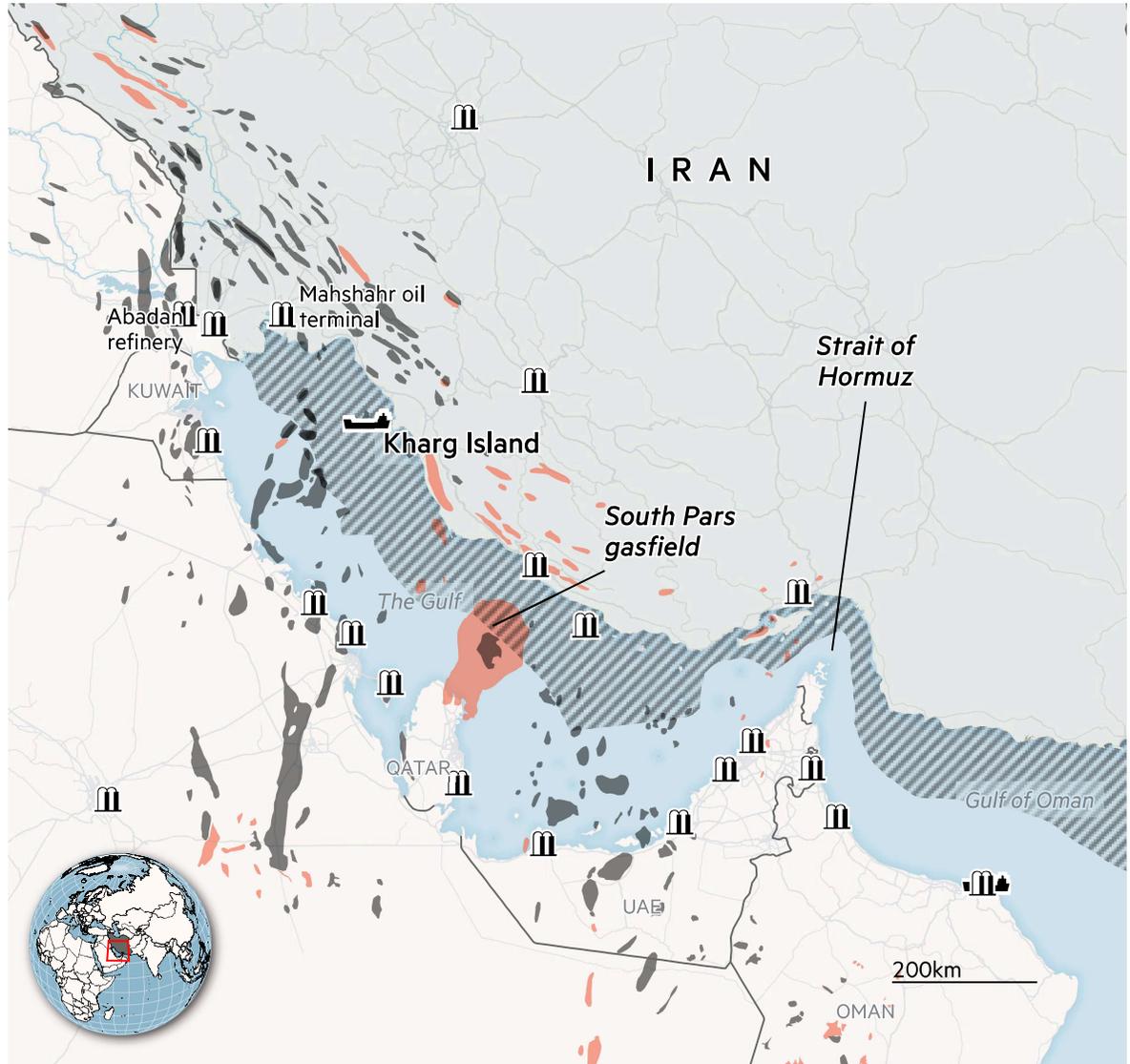
Tehran has been replenishing its missile arsenal since last June, after firing more than 500 during its brief war with Israel. Experts estimate the combined missile stocks to be in the thousands, capable of an extended salvo war.

Mining the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping lane for global energy supplies from the Gulf, is another option for retaliation. But this could spark a backlash from China, which depends heavily on Gulf oil.

Several ships turned back from the strait on Saturday, after the Revolutionary Guard Corps warned that the waterway was now unsafe for them. Iran's Tasnim news agency said the strait had been "effectively" closed.

# Iran's oil industry and the Strait of Hormuz could be affected by conflict

-  Oilfield
-  Gasfield
-  Oil terminal
-  Oil refinery
-  Iran's exclusive economic zone



FINANCIAL TIMES

Sources: CIA; marinetrffic.com, FT research

Gulf states also fear Iran could attack energy infrastructure. In 2019, Iran was blamed for an attack in Saudi Arabia that temporarily knocked out half the kingdom's crude output.

Iran could harass or seize nearby individual tankers as it did in 2019, or direct allied militias to attack regional energy infrastructure. Regional proxies such as the Houthis or Iraqi Shia militias could strike embassies or lightly defended bases.

As recently as November, Iran-backed groups were blamed for a rocket attack on the Khor Mor gasfield in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Speaking before the attack, Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington said he expected retaliation to be calibrated. "Iran has never been interested in having an extended conventional war," he said.

## What are the implications for oil?

Oil markets will not reopen until Monday morning in Asia, but Brent crude rose as much as 3 per cent on Friday to touch a seven-month high of \$73 a barrel.

The international oil benchmark has risen nearly 12 per cent over the past month as markets brace for potential supply disruptions from a US-Iran conflict. But it remains below the level of more than \$80 briefly touched during the 12-day war in June.

Iran exports about 2 per cent of global oil supply, most of it to China. More importantly, it exerts influence over the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 30 per cent of the world's seaborne oil trade passed last year.

The strait has never been closed, despite repeated threats from Tehran. Energy flows were not interrupted during last summer's war with Israel. Even so, the surge in crude prices during that conflict underlined how sensitive markets are to perceived risks in the region.

*Additional reporting by Najmeh Bozorgmehr, Simeon Kerr and Sam Joiner*

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FT foreign editor Alec Russell's Instant Insight on the US and Israeli attack on Iran ©  
Produced by Daniel Garrahan

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