

FEATURE

2026 Iran war

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Part of the [Iran–Israel conflict](#) and the [Middle Eastern crisis](#)



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Locations struck by:

- Black United States and Israel
- Red Iran, [Hezbollah](#), [Houthis](#), and [PMF](#)

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From 28 February to 17 June 2026, the United States and Israel were at war with Iran and its regional allies. Hostilities broke out after US–Israeli airstrikes targeting Iranian military and government sites resulted in the assassination of [Iranian officials](#) and supreme leader [Ali Khamenei](#).

These attacks were launched amidst [Iran–US negotiations](#) to reach a nuclear peace agreement. Iran fired back missiles and drones on Israel, US-aligned Arab countries, and US bases; the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait retaliated.

Iran [blocked the Strait of Hormuz](#), which [disrupted the global economy](#) by causing [a fuel crisis](#).

In January, the Iran government [massacred thousands of civilians](#) in a crackdown on [the country's largest protests](#) since the [Iranian Revolution](#) in 1979. President [Donald Trump](#) responded by starting the [largest US military buildup in the region](#) since the [2003 invasion of Iraq](#).

In Iran, US–Israeli airstrikes damaged military bases, government buildings, schools, hospitals, and heritage sites, while also inflicting

[civilian casualties](#). In retaliation, the Iranian military launched [hundreds of drones](#) and ballistic missiles at [Israel](#) and [Arab countries](#), including [Bahrain](#), [Jordan](#), [Kuwait](#), [Oman](#), [Qatar](#), [Saudi Arabia](#), and the [United Arab Emirates](#), as well as the [Kurdistan Region of Iraq](#) (KRI).

At the same time, the [Hezbollah–Israel conflict](#) escalated into the [2026 Lebanon war](#).

The [Trump administration](#) gave various [explanations for starting the war](#), including forestalling Iranian retaliation after an expected Israeli attack, destroying Iran's [missile capabilities](#), preventing Iran from building a [nuclear weapon](#), seizing [Iran's oil](#) and [gas resources](#), or [regime change](#).

Iranian and some US officials rejected claims that Iran had been preparing an attack. The [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) said there was no evidence of a nuclear weapons program. [United Nations](#) secretary-general [António Guterres](#) and several countries condemned the US–Israeli strikes; the [UN Security Council](#) passed a [resolution](#) condemning Iran's retaliatory strikes on Gulf states.

Critics, including legal and international relations experts, described the US attacks as illegal under US law, an act of [imperialism](#), and a violation of Iran's sovereignty. Trump claimed victory several times, [falsely claiming](#) that Iran had "nothing left in a military sense," and that the US had brought about regime change, despite the fact that the Islamic Republic remains in power.

[The war's economic impact](#) includes the largest ever supply disruption of the global oil market, disruptions to the natural gas, fertilizer, aviation and tourism industries, as well as volatility in financial markets. Oil and gas shipments were disrupted by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and Israeli and Iranian attacks on energy facilities.

On 21 June, the cost of the war to the US military was estimated at US\$40 billion, and Trump requested a further US\$87 billion, the majority of which is tied to the war. By 31 March,

the cost to Arab countries was estimated at US\$120 billion. Iran's government assessed the damage to Iran's economy as possibly \$1 trillion by 11 April.

Iran, the US and Israel agreed to a [two-week ceasefire](#) brokered by Pakistan, beginning on 8 April. The Iranian ceasefire came under strain as Iran refused to re-open the Strait of Hormuz, blaming [Israeli attacks on Lebanon](#).

After the failure of the [Islamabad Talks](#), Trump announced a [naval blockade of Iran](#) from 13 April. There remained a "dual blockade" of the [Persian Gulf](#), by Iran and the US. Trump said over 30 times after March that the US and Iran were nearing a deal to end the war.

On 14 June, the US and Iran announced the [Islamabad Memorandum](#) to end the war and blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

On 17 June, Trump signed the memorandum at the [Palace of Versailles](#) following the [G7 summit](#), and Iran's President [Masoud Pezeshkian](#) signed it in [Tehran](#). On 18 June, the US military removed the naval blockade of Iranian ports.



Israeli prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) successfully lobbied the [Trump administration](#) for military intervention.

Prelude

Tensions between [Iran](#) and the [United States](#) over [Iran's nuclear program](#) began to intensify in January 2026 amid Iran's [massacres of Iranian civilians](#) in their crackdown of the [2025–2026 anti-government protests](#). The US and Iran began indirect negotiations in February

in Oman and, by late February 2026, Iran made a surprising offer on its nuclear program and the sides agreed to meet again in Vienna to work out technical issues.

The US began [amassing air and naval assets in the region](#) at a level not seen since the outset of the [2003 US-led invasion of Iraq](#), including a pair of [carrier strike groups](#) and hundreds of aircraft at bases in the area.

The US government signaled that airstrikes remained an option, emphasizing that all responses were under consideration while maintaining that diplomacy was still preferred. US president [Donald Trump](#) and administration officials including Vice President [JD Vance](#), Secretary of State [Marco Rubio](#), and Special Envoy [Steve Witkoff](#) all accused Iran of building up its nuclear and missile programs to threaten the United States and its interests. Iran in turn accused the US of waging "disinformation and misinformation" campaigns against it.

The [Council on American–Islamic Relations](#) accused Trump of manufacturing justifications for war similar to those for the [Iraq War](#) while [Qatar Tribune](#) asserted that the administration was falsely claiming that [WMDs were being built in Iran](#).

Regional actors, including [Qatar](#), cautioned that any escalation could have severe consequences for the [Middle East](#). [Negotiations regarding the Iranian nuclear program](#) were held in February, and on 28 February 2026 the US and Israel conducted military strikes in Iran.

Diplomatic efforts

On April 12, 2025, [Iran](#) and the [United States](#) began a series of negotiations aimed at reaching a nuclear peace agreement, following a letter from US president [Donald Trump](#) to Iranian supreme leader [Ali Khamenei](#). Trump set a 60-day deadline for Iran to reach an agreement. After the deadline passed without an agreement, Israel launched numerous strikes against Iran, igniting a [war between the two countries](#) in June.



President [Donald Trump](#) at [Versailles, France](#) signing the [Islamabad Memorandum](#)

The first round of high-level meetings was held in [Oman](#) on April 12, 2025, led by US special envoy [Steve Witkoff](#) and Iranian foreign minister [Abbas Araghchi](#). At the time, both the White House and the Iranian Foreign Ministry said that the discussions held were constructive. A second round of Omani-mediated talks took place in [Rome](#) on April 19, 2025, again with indirect discussions between Witkoff and Araghchi. This was followed by a third round in [Muscat](#) around a week later, and an expert-level meeting to develop a framework for a possible nuclear agreement was led by [Michael Anton](#) for the US and by [Majid Takht-Ravanchi](#) for Iran.

June 2026 Memorandum of Understanding

After concluding that continued hostilities would risk economic calamity, Donald Trump signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) on behalf of the United States during a ceremony at the [Palace of Versailles](#) on 17 June 2026. The signing followed an earlier, digital signing of the MOU by the foreign ministers of the two principal belligerents. In the MOU, the United States and Iran agreed to suspend

hostilities for 60 days and to establish a framework for a permanent peace under which the US would make major financial and political concessions to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Trump characterized the MOU as representing the "unconditional surrender" of Iran. Iran declared the document as an enduring "record of US failure". The [Foreign Policy](#), and [The Atlantic](#) described the outcome of the war as a "defeat" for the United States and Israel. [The Independent](#) said that America had lost the war, and called Iran's now-proven ability to close of the Strait of Hormuz a "weapon of mass economic destruction of unique power" and "far more useful option than any nuclear device." Jeremy Brown, international editor for the [BBC](#) that, "the US and Israeli air forces scored a series of tactical victories. But they were not enough to avoid a strategic defeat."

[Robert Kagan](#), a senior fellow at the [Brookings Institution](#), said the deal was "a total victory for Iran and a total defeat for the United States," citing major US concessions, and characterized increased Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz as "a major blow to the United States' position in the region, and it's also a major blow to Israel's security going forward." American diplomat [Richard Haas](#) described the deal a "a massive victory for Iran," pointing to the failure of the United States to topple the Iranian government, Iran's keeping of its drone and missile arsenal, deferral of issues regarding its nuclear program, continued ability to support [its network of non-state allies in the Middle East](#), sanctions relief and future reconstruction fund, and a commitment from the United States not to

interfere in Iran's internal affairs. He also said US-Israel relations were badly damaged, and that Israel's "freedom of action has been significantly curtailed."

[Paul Musgrave](#), an associate professor of government at [Georgetown University in Qatar](#), said the deal indicated that "the Iranians had greater strategic patience, greater strategic leverage and the ability to shape a deal that was always going to be more favorable to them relative to the Americans." [Susan Rice](#) described the MOU as "a jaw-dropping, horrific surrender document complete with hundreds of billions in reparations."

[The Indian Express](#) evaluated the outcome as an asymmetrical victory for Iranian endurance over Western military objectives, noting that while political leaders claimed success based on contrasting criteria, the conflict left the United States and Israel diplomatically isolated and unable to achieve regime change or eradicate Iran's nuclear program. The paper said that by securing its core objective of regime survival and retaining critical leverage over the Strait of Hormuz, Tehran successfully outwaited the political patience of the coalition.

Moving forward, Iranian chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated Iran would unilaterally begin imposing permanent tolls on ships passing the Strait of Hormuz 60 days following the withdrawal of the US Navy. The war helped entrench the power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps within Iranian politics and society, and, according to [Robert Pape](#), began the process of transforming Iran into a major power.