



Gulf Situation

Assessment: Iran's Attacks on Arab States Will Backfire

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Iran has launched over [400 ballistic missiles and nearly 1,000 drones](#) at Arab Gulf states since the beginning of Operation Epic Fury on February 28. All six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states plus Jordan, Iraq, and Oman have been hit—the first time a single actor has targeted all [GCC states simultaneously](#). Iran escalated in stages: military bases (Day 1), civilian infrastructure and airports (Day 2), energy infrastructure (Day 3), and the [U.S. embassy in Riyadh](#) (Days 3–4).

In the Strait of Hormuz, tanker traffic dropped to near zero by March 2, with at least five tankers damaged, two crew members killed, and over 150 ships anchored outside the strait. All major shipping lines—Maersk, MSC, Hapag-Lloyd, and CMA CGM—have suspended transits. War [risk insurance was withdrawn](#) for the Persian Gulf effective March 5. [Brent crude surged](#) above \$80, up 10–13 percent. European gas prices [spiked 50 percent](#).

The Gulf states issued an unprecedented joint statement with the United States condemning Iran’s “indiscriminate and reckless missile and drone attacks against sovereign territories across the region,” reaffirming their “right to self-defense.” Signatories were the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, and the United States.

President Donald Trump [told CNN](#) that the Iranian attacks on the Gulf were “the biggest surprise” of the conflict and that Gulf countries “were going to be very little involved and now they insist on being involved.”

Qatar: Dramatic Transformation

Since Saturday, Qatar’s Ministry of Defense reports detecting 3 cruise missiles, 101 ballistic missiles, and 39 suicide drones directed at its airspace. On Day [1, 66 missiles were fired at Qatar](#), producing 114 reports of falling shrapnel and 16 injuries, with one person in serious condition. Two missiles struck Al Udeid Air Base, and a drone targeted an early warning radar system, though officials reported no casualties.

On March 2, Qatar shot down two Iranian Su-24 bombers—the first time any Gulf state has [engaged Iranian aircraft directly](#) in this conflict. The Qatar Emiri Navy also participated in shooting down several drones alongside the air force, marking an operational use of the fleet’s air defense capabilities. *Al Jazeera*’s correspondent in Doha described the downing as “the beginning of air-to-air combat” and “a serious escalation.”

According to Israel's *Channel 12* and confirmed by senior Western diplomatic sources to the *Jerusalem Post*, [Qatar carried out strikes inside Iran over the past 24 hours](#). The Qatari action came after the country thwarted an [attempted attack on Hamad International Airport](#). No details were provided about targets, type, or scope. Qatar has not publicly announced the strikes.

A senior Israeli official separately told the *Kan* public broadcaster that Israel assesses Saudi Arabia will also strike Iran soon. If confirmed, [Qatar would be the first Gulf state to conduct offensive operations](#) against Iran in this conflict.

Iranian drones struck QatarEnergy's facilities at Ras Laffan Industrial City and Mesaieed Industrial City on Monday, [forcing a complete halt of LNG production](#). Qatar accounts for roughly a fifth of global LNG export capacity; its entire output is [now offline with no timeline for resumption](#). On Tuesday, QatarEnergy expanded the shutdown to downstream products, including urea, polymers, methanol, and aluminum.

European benchmark gas prices spiked approximately 50 percent. Asian LNG benchmarks jumped nearly 39 percent. [Over 8,000 transit passengers were stranded](#) in Doha and housed in hotels.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari said Tuesday that Iran did not notify Qatar of incoming attacks, that Iranian targets were "not limited to military sites but included all Qatari territory," and that there is currently zero communication between Doha and Tehran. The Iranian ambassador was summoned and told the attacks could lead to a "deterioration" of relations.

Qatar issued its strongest condemnation in its history, calling the strikes "reckless and irresponsible." This represents a complete inversion from June 2025, when Qatar expressed "regret" over U.S. "attacks on the sisterly Islamic Republic of Iran." Al-Ansari explicitly rejected the assumption that pressure on Gulf states [would push them back into nuclear negotiations with Tehran](#).

Saudi Arabia: On the Escalation Ladder

Iran initially demonstrated relative restraint toward Saudi Arabia—just two attacks in the first 48 hours, compared to more than 150 missiles and 500 drones against the UAE. This changed on Day 3 when Iran escalated to targeting energy infrastructure. [Drones hit Aramco's Ras Tanura](#) refinery, one of the world's largest with 550,000 barrels per day capacity. Two drones were intercepted but debris caused a fire and forced a precautionary shutdown. The U.S. embassy in Riyadh [was also struck by drones on March 3](#), with fire breaking out in the Diplomatic Quarter.

The Saudi army raised its readiness to full alert. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) [authorized military retaliation](#), reportedly securing full U.S. backing from President Trump. He described Iran's strikes as "cowardly," noting that ["Iran knew that Saudi airspace was not being used to attack Iran."](#)

A source close to the Saudi government told *AFP* that Saudi Arabia would target “Iranian oil facilities if Iran mounts a concerted attack on Aramco.” However, [the same source added](#): “At this stage I think Saudi will watch and wait.” GCC foreign ministers gathered for an extraordinary meeting to coordinate possible collective steps.

Saudi rhetoric shifted dramatically from June 2025, when Riyadh’s statement highlighted “the need to exercise restraint” and “avoid further escalation.” Now, [Riyadh offered to “place all its capabilities” at the region’s disposal](#). MbS called Sheykh Mohamed bin Zayed (MbZ) to express “full solidarity.” Saudi Arabia summoned the Iranian ambassador.

United Arab Emirates: Heaviest Target, Détente Collapsed

The UAE absorbed the heaviest barrage of any Gulf state. The UAE Ministry of Defense reported dealing with 174 ballistic missiles (161 intercepted, 13 fell into the sea), 6 cruise missiles, and 541 drones, of which 35 penetrated defenses and caused material damage. Three foreign nationals [were killed and 58 injured](#). Strikes hit Dubai International Airport, Jebel Ali Port, a hotel on the Palm Jumeirah, [and areas across Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Ras al-Khaimah](#).

The UAE recalled its ambassador from Iran, shuttered its embassy in Tehran, summoned the Iranian ambassador, and delivered [a formal protest note describing the attacks as](#) “terrorist attacks.” Anwar Gargash, a close advisor to MbZ, called Iran’s behavior “irrational.” Another UAE senior figure told *CNN* the UAE “will not sit idly by,” but on March 3 stated the UAE’s “stance remains measured” and it [rules out military solution](#).

The Atlantic Council assessed that the UAE had invested heavily since 2019 in building a stable relationship with Tehran. That strategy is now destroyed, and the confrontation is [“forcing the UAE much closer to the U.S. and Israeli position than it wants to be.”](#) The Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange and Dubai Financial Market were closed Monday and Tuesday.

Kuwait: Friendly Fire and Embassy Strikes

Kuwait intercepted 97 ballistic missiles and 283 drones. The U.S. embassy in Kuwait was struck directly by drones. Three U.S. F-15E Strike Eagles were shot down by Kuwaiti air defenses in a friendly-fire incident; crews survived. Two Kuwaiti naval officers were killed on duty. Shrapnel hit the Mina Al Ahmadi refinery (346,000 bbl/day), injuring two workers but not disrupting production.

Kuwait’s rhetorical shift is notable. In June 2025, Kuwait “expressed deep concern” over “the targeting of Iranian nuclear facilities” and implicitly accused the U.S. of violating “international laws.” Kuwait has now joined the joint condemnation of Iran.

Bahrain: Fifth Fleet Headquarters Hit

Bahrain intercepted 70 missiles and 59 drones, [including Shahed-136 kamikaze drones](#). The U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet headquarters in Manama was directly targeted and sustained damage. A Shahed drone struck a residential tower block near the headquarters, setting it ablaze. At least one person was killed. Air raid sirens were activated and the main bridge linking Manama was closed.

Strait of Hormuz: Effectively Closed

On March 2, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officially declared the strait closed. IRGC senior adviser Ebrahim Jabari stated: "The Strait of Hormuz is closed. If anyone tries to pass, we will set those ships ablaze. [Not a single drop of oil will leave the Persian Gulf.](#)"

Tanker traffic dropped to near zero by March 2. At least five tankers damaged, two crew killed, approximately 150 ships anchored outside. All major shipping lines suspended transits. CMA CGM imposed an Emergency Conflict Surcharge of \$2,000–\$4,000 per container. Protection and indemnity insurance [was withdrawn effective March 5](#).

U.S. Central Command maintained the strait was "still open," but operationally it is closed for commercial traffic. Approximately 20 percent of global daily oil supply and a fifth of global LNG shipments normally transit the strait.

For the GCC states, the energy disruption is existential in a way that transcends market prices. Qatar's entire LNG output—the foundation of its sovereign wealth, diplomatic leverage, and social contract—is offline indefinitely. Saudi Arabia's largest refinery is shut down. The Strait of Hormuz closure means even undamaged facilities cannot export. Iran has just attacked the economic model that sustains Gulf statehood, striking what no Gulf government can absorb losing.

Proxy Responses: Muted

Despite being a moment of truth for Iran's proxies, proxy groups are yet to mobilize at scale despite prior threats. Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel—the first since the November 2024 ceasefire—[prompting Israeli strikes on Lebanon, killing at least 31](#). Lebanon's government moved to ban Hezbollah's military activities.

Iraqi Shia militia Saraya Awliya al-Dam claimed drone attacks on U.S. forces in Baghdad. Kataib Hezbollah warned it would "[soon begin attacking American bases](#)." However, the Houthis have notably [not resumed Red Sea attacks](#). The UK authorized use of British bases for defensive strikes on Iranian launchers, and France [declared readiness to defend Gulf nations](#).

The Trajectory

(Day 1): Shock and defensive interception. Condemnation but no offensive action. Gulf states closed airspace and activated civil defense measures, including shelter-in-place alerts, school closures, and controlled public movement.

(Days 2–3): Active military defense escalating. Qatar shot down Iranian fighter jets. Saudi Arabia went to full alert. Joint U.S.-GCC statement issued.

(Days 3–4): Energy infrastructure targeted. Qatar’s LNG production taken offline. Aramco’s Ras Tanura shut down. U.S. embassies hit. Saudi Arabia threatened to strike Iranian oil facilities. UAE recalled ambassador from Tehran.

(Days 4–5, emerging): Offensive operations begin. Qatar reportedly struck inside Iran. Israeli assessments indicate Saudi Arabia will follow. Gulf states shifting from defense to active participation in the war—the opposite of what Iran intended.

Iran intended its strikes to pressure the U.S.-Israeli operation to stop. Instead, Iran may have created conditions for the Gulf to join it. Before the war, Gulf states had adopted a narrative that views Israel as a greater threat to regional stability than Iran. For now, that narrative has completely collapsed.