



## Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion: 3/18/26 Update

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With the United States and Israel launching a joint campaign—Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion, respectively—against Iranian regime targets and Iran launching retaliatory missile and drone attacks against U.S. forces in the region, Israel, and Arab nations—dubbed Operation True Promise IV—JINSA will regularly release updates detailing the conflict. The update below includes information since [JINSA's last update](#) as of March 18 at 11:00 am ET.

### 1. Overview

- Overnight, the Israeli military [eliminated](#) Iran's intelligence minister, Esmail Khatib. According to a [statement](#) from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Khatib was responsible for “the arrest and killing of protesters” and also “led terrorist activities against Israelis and Americans throughout the world.”
- President Donald Trump [offered](#) new remarks on March 17 about the war's timeline, saying “a couple of weeks, it won't be much longer,” and adding that his “biggest problem” is not knowing who to negotiate with after the elimination of top Iranian leaders.
  - » President Trump later [stated](#) that if the United States terminated operations over Iran “right now, it would take 10 years for them to rebuild. But we're not ready to leave yet. We'll be leaving in the near future.”
- While Iran's overall fire is substantially down from the early days of the war, Iran has focused its efforts in recent days on conducting ballistic missile attacks against Israel with cluster munitions and drone launches targeting Saudi Arabia.
  - » After reaching a peak of 98 drones on March 16, Iranian drone attacks against Saudi Arabia declined to 31 drones on March 17 and 20 so far on March 18.
  - » Iran's use of cluster munitions that disperse at high altitudes over populated areas has achieved four hits in Israel already on March 18, resulting in two fatalities in Ramat Gan.
  - » Iranian missile fire increased 19 percent on March 17, with 37 missiles fired, up from 31 on March 16. So far on March 18, Iran has fired 20 missiles.
  - » Iran has launched roughly 3,200 drones, 1,357 ballistic missiles, and 28 cruise missiles since the war began.
- According to reporting from the *Wall Street Journal*, citing a European intelligence official, Russia has [given](#) the Iranian regime satellite images, drone technology, and tactical guidance throughout the war to help Tehran target and kill American forces in the region.
- Emirati presidential advisor Anwar Gargash said on March 18 at the Council on Foreign Relations that Iran's [sustained](#) missile and drone campaign against Gulf states has backfired against Tehran, pushing Gulf nations closer to Israel and the United States.

## 2. U.S. and Israeli Operations

- According to a senior Israeli military source who spoke with Israel's *Walla News*, both the United States and Israel have [increased](#) their strikes targeting Iran's nuclear sites.
  - » Airstrikes in recent days targeted the Taleghan 2 site in Parchin used for detonation testing and researching nuclear device assembly; the Min-Zadayi site used to conduct technological research on weapons delivery systems; and the Talua site used for explosives testing. In addition, strikes in recent days targeted nuclear scientists, research centers, labs, and component production lines.
  - » Reportedly, the U.S. Air Force, in particular, has been responsible for many of these operations.
- Israel has changed its targeting procedures to enable [more rapid strikes](#) on senior Iranian and Hezbollah figures, according to Israel's *Channel 12* outlet.
  - » Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz reportedly directed the military to immediately strike top Iranian or Hezbollah leaders without seeking the chain-of-command approval required in typical protocols.
- The Israeli military [apologized](#) after one of its tanks mistakenly struck a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping site in Lebanon on March 6 while responding to Hezbollah fire, injuring several Ghanaian UN troops.
- The USS *Gerald R. Ford* aircraft carrier is [expected](#) to temporarily dock in Crete following a fire on board.
- Over a dozen U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drones have been [destroyed](#) by Iran throughout Operation Epic Fury, according to *ABC News*.

### **Day 19 of Operations: March 18**

#### *Iran*

- Israeli Air Force (IAF) strikes [hit](#) gas facilities at the South Pars Special Economic Energy Zone, causing a fire. The strikes were [reportedly](#) the largest yet on an Iranian energy asset in the war, and were closely coordinated with the United States.
- Overnight, the Israeli military [launched](#) a targeted airstrike on Tehran, killing Iran's intelligence minister, Esmail Khatib.
  - » According to the *Wall Street Journal*, tips from the Iranian people have [allowed](#) Israel to carry out successful strikes on security forces and military officials.

#### *Lebanon*

- The IDF has struck a large number of Hezbollah targets across Lebanon over the past 24 hours, including:
  - » Hezbollah [weapons depots, military headquarters, and launchers](#) to disrupt an imminent rocket attack;
  - » [Sites](#) in Beirut's Zuqaq al-Blat neighborhood and a building in the city's Bashoura area, reportedly [killing](#) the political programs director for Hezbollah-linked Al-Manar TV;
  - » Major [facilities](#) of Hezbollah's financial body, Al-Qard al-Hassan, and a "key terrorist";
  - » Hezbollah's Hassan brigade [headquarters](#) in southern Lebanon; and
  - » Weapons depots and Hezbollah headquarters in the southern city of [Tyre](#).
- The IDF also [announced](#) that it killed Wissam Mustafa Hussein Taha, a senior Hamas financier, in Sidon in a March 15 strike.

## **Day 18 of Operations: March 17**

### *Iran*

- The U.S. military [used](#) 5,000-pound bunker-buster bombs to hit missile sites in Iran that stored anti-ship cruise missiles.
- A projectile [struck](#) Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant complex without causing injuries or damage, according to a report from the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Throughout the day, Israeli forces bombed an [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\) security unit's headquarters](#); a [headquarters for the country's ballistic missile forces](#); and at least 10 [Basij checkpoints](#), as well as an IRGC and Basij "emergency position," in Tehran.

### *Lebanon*

- Before a major planned Hezbollah attack, the Israeli military [bombed](#) the group's rocket launchers, weapons depots, and command centers throughout Lebanon.

## *U.S. and Israeli Rationale and Policy Objectives*

### *United States*

- President Trump [stated](#), "Iran was a threat ... The question is whether or not they wanted to do something about it, and many people ... are saying that the president should have taken out Iran because they wanted a nuclear weapon."
  - » White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt [added](#) that President Trump "had strong and compelling evidence that Iran was going to attack the United States first." A U.S.-Israeli joint attack on Iran, therefore, "would greatly reduce the risk to American lives that would come from a first strike by the terrorist Iranian regime and address this imminent threat to America's national security interests."
  - » Leavitt also noted that Iran was leveraging its growing missile arsenal "as a shield to continue achieving their ultimate goal – nuclear weapons."
- President Trump [posted](#) on Truth Social that the United States should finish off what remains of the Iranian government and leave countries dependent on the Strait of Hormuz to secure it themselves, suggesting the prospect would get unresponsive allies "in gear, and fast."
- The United States reportedly [encouraged](#) Syria to deploy forces into eastern Lebanon to help disarm Hezbollah, but Syrian President Ahmed al-Shaara has hesitated over fears of being drawn into a wider conflict and stoking sectarian tensions.

### *Israel*

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a video message to the Iranian people yesterday, [encouraging](#) them to celebrate Nowruz publicly: "Our aircraft are hitting the terror operatives on the ground, in the crossroads, in the city squares. This is meant to enable the brave people of Iran to celebrate the Festival of Fire. So celebrate, and happy Nowruz. We are watching from above."
  - » Israeli officials, while encouraging a mass uprising against the Iranian regime, have also privately [acknowledged](#) that doing so poses risks to the Iranian people.

## **3. Iranian Operations**

- Iran and Hezbollah continue to target Israel with an array of drone, missile, and rocket attacks. Over the past 24 hours, these attacks have included:
  - » A Hezbollah barrage on northern Israel [comprising](#) approximately 40 rockets, several missiles, and five drones. All drones were intercepted, although one rocket struck a home in Karmiel.

- » A midnight volley caused damage at several sites, including Tel Aviv's [Savior train station](#) and sparked fires in Petah Tikvah and Kafr Qasim, [killing](#) two people in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan and injuring at least one in Bnei Brak.
- » Iranian missiles carrying cluster munitions lightly [injured three people](#), including two children, in Petah Tikvah, and caused damage to [three private planes](#) at Ben Gurion Airport, a [home](#), and a [road](#) in central Israel.
- Arab countries continue to come under Iranian fire. Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the U.A.E. have each reported Iranian attacks on their country over the past day:
  - » Iraq:
    - The American embassy in Baghdad was [targeted](#) by an unspecified number of rockets and drones, with one drone causing a [direct impact](#), while at least three drones [targeted](#) a U.S. diplomatic facility near the Baghdad International Airport.
    - In Iraqi Kurdistan, a base in Koya belonging to the Iranian Kurdish opposition group the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) was [targeted](#) by Iranian drones, and at least four [explosions](#) were heard in Erbil, likely from intercepted drones.
  - » Kuwait:
    - Kuwait [intercepted](#) seven drones targeting the country.
  - » Qatar:
    - Qatar [intercepted](#) a ballistic missile fired toward Doha.
  - » Saudi Arabia:
    - Saudi Arabia has intercepted 14 drones and 1 [ballistic missile](#) so far on March 18.
  - » U.A.E.:
    - The U.A.E. [intercepted](#) 13 ballistic missiles and 27 Iranian drones.
- Iranian authorities [announced](#) the arrest of 111 alleged monarchist cells across 26 provinces, along with suspected spies and individuals accused of cooperating with London-based *Iran International*.
- The IDF's Northern Command [assessed](#) that Hezbollah has adapted its tactics following the group's September 2024 launches on Israel, dispersing its short-range rocket arsenals across numerous locations—including private homes and mobile truck-mounted launchers north of the Litani River—rather than storing them in large centralized warehouses.
  - » While the new approach complicated IDF efforts to track launch sites, it has also weakened Hezbollah's ability to produce large coordinated salvos.

#### 4. Estimated Casualties of Iranian Operations

- Thirteen U.S. service members have died during Operation Epic Fury.
  - » An Iranian drone attack [killed](#) six U.S. servicemembers at Port Shuaiba in Kuwait on March 1: Maj. Jeffrey O'Brien, 45; Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Marzan, 54; Capt. Cody Khorak, 35; Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor, 39; Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42; and Sgt. Declan Coady (posthumously promoted from specialist), 20.
  - » Another U.S. servicemember, Sgt. Benjamin Pennington, 26, was [killed](#) during a March 8 Iranian attack targeting U.S. troops at the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.
  - » Six U.S. servicemembers were [killed](#) when a KC-135 aerial refueling aircraft crashed over western Iraq on March 12: Major John A. Klinner, 33; Captain Ariana G. Savino, 31;

Technical Sergeant Ashle B. Pruitt, 34; Captain Seth R. Koval, 38; Captain Curtis J. Angst, 30; and Technical Sergeant Tyler H. Simmons, 28.

- At least 200 members of the U.S. military have been [injured](#) thus far in the war, 10 of whom have been “seriously wounded,” according to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson CAPT Tim Hawkins.
- Two Israeli civilians were [killed](#) in a March 18 Iranian missile attack on Ramat Gan.
- An Israeli soldier was [wounded](#) after being struck by gunfire during an “operational accident” on March 17, according to the IDF.
- Since the war’s outbreak, numerous other casualties have been reported:
  - » 19 Israelis [have been killed](#), including two soldiers [killed](#) in southern Lebanon and a civilian couple in Ramat Gan on March 18, while over 3,727 people have been [hospitalized](#);
  - » In the U.A.E., eight people have [been killed](#), and at least 157 have been [injured](#);
  - » Two [Kuwaiti navy sailors](#), two [interior ministry officers](#), and a [Kuwaiti civilian](#) have been killed, over 70 Kuwaiti military personnel have [been injured](#), and two medical staff have been [wounded](#);
  - » Four people have been [killed](#) in Syria, and several have been [injured](#);
  - » Two foreign nationals have been [killed](#) in Saudi Arabia, and 12 others have been [injured](#);
  - » In Qatar, around 20 people have been [wounded](#);
  - » In Oman, at least [three people](#) have been killed, and at least 10 people have been [wounded](#);
  - » In Bahrain, two people have [been killed](#), and 35 people have [been injured](#);
  - » At least 27 [people have been killed](#) in Iraq, including an [Iraqi security officer](#) and [several fighters](#) in Iran-backed militias. A woman was [killed](#) after being hit by rocket shrapnel, and an airport employee [was wounded](#) in Iraqi Kurdistan. An Indian national was [killed](#) following a strike on an oil tanker in Iraqi waters. A French soldier was [killed](#) in a drone strike on a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan.
  - » In Azerbaijan, four civilians have been [injured](#);
  - » In Lebanon, at least 912 people have been [killed](#), and more than 2,200 have been wounded—figures that do not distinguish between Hezbollah operatives and civilians; and
  - » In Iran, at least 3,100 people, including at least 1,130 military personnel, have been [killed](#). However, *Iran International* suggests at least 5,000 military personnel have been [killed](#), with over 15,000 wounded.

## 5. Threats, Condemnations, and Statements from Iranian Officials

- Iranian state television [announced](#) on March 18 that Iran will target Qatari, Saudi, and Emirati gas and oil facilities, particularly Jubail Petrochemical Complex, Al Hasan Gas Field, and a refinery and petrochemical sites in Qatar, following an Israeli strike on Iran’s South Pars gas field.

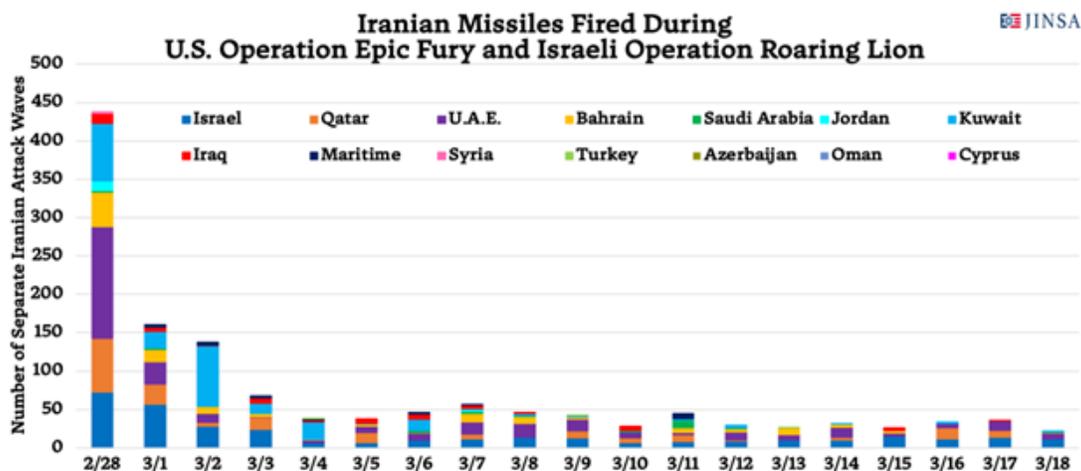
## 6. International Response

- Russia is [providing](#) the Iranian regime with satellite imagery and drone technology to help Tehran target American forces in the region, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

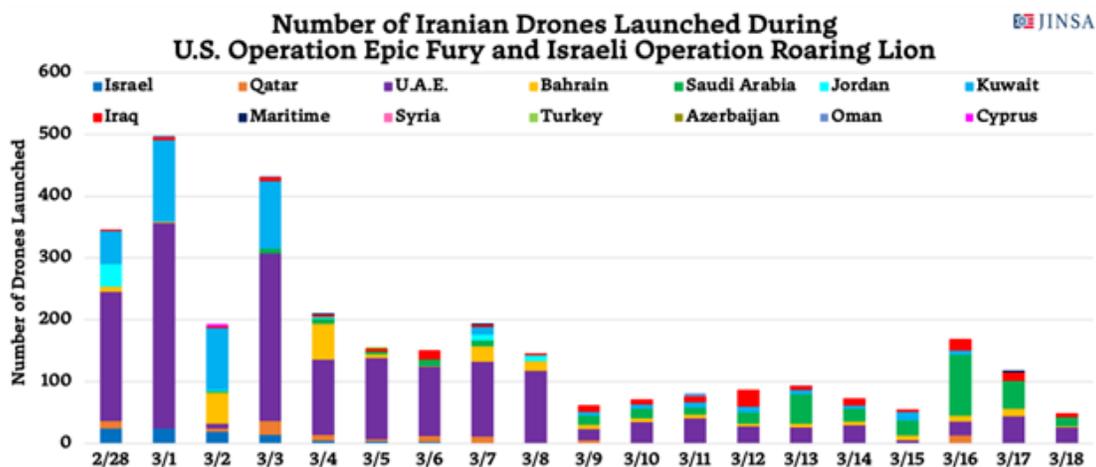
- » Russia is reportedly supplying Iran with Shahed drone components, which are meant to enhance Iran’s ability to use the drones and improve targeting accuracy.
- » Moscow is also giving Iran specific details on how to use drones in its operations, including how many to use in a given attack and at what height they should fly.
- President Trump [announced](#) that most North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies have declined his request to assist with securing the Strait of Hormuz, but declared the United States does not need their help, citing U.S. military success in decimating Iran’s military and leadership.
  - » French President Emmanuel Macron [said](#) on March 17, “France will never take part in operations to open or liberate the Strait of Hormuz in the current context.”
- German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful [stated](#) on March 17 that, regarding Iran, “there will be no military solution. And to have a controlled regime change, is, I would say, a hypothetical idea, which is not realistic.”
- Albania’s government formally [designated](#) Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism and the IRGC as a terrorist organization on March 17, actions that Israel’s foreign ministry praised as a “clear moral dimension in Albania’s foreign policy.”
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country can [send](#) roughly 1,000 interceptor drones daily to allies in the Middle East. He noted that there are currently 201 Ukrainian anti-drone experts in the region.
- U.A.E. presidential adviser Anwar Gargash [said](#) Iran’s attacks on Gulf states are pushing them closer to both Israel and the United States, arguing that Tehran’s campaign has strengthened rather than diminished Israel’s role in the Gulf.

## 7. Charts and Trends

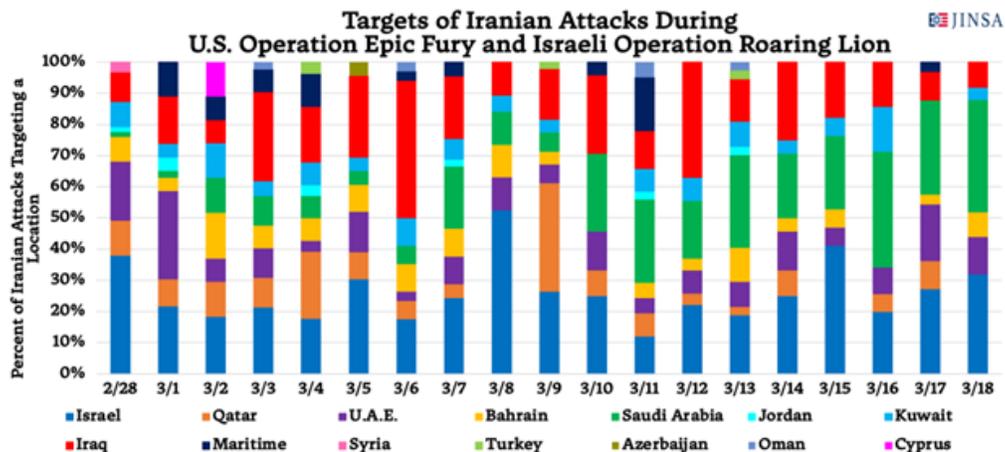
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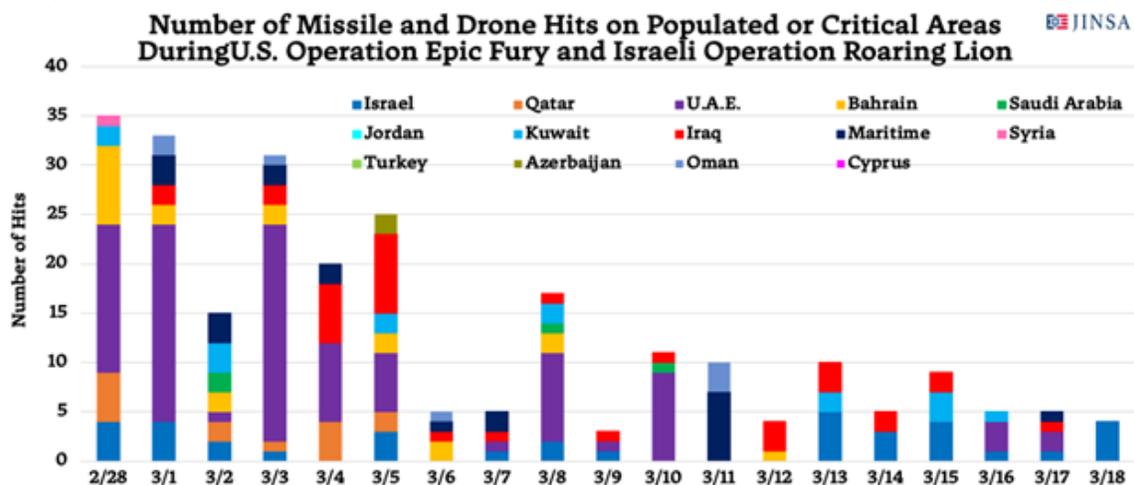
- After reaching a high of 98 drones on March 17, the number of Iranian drones targeting Saudi Arabia declined by 68 percent on March 17 to 31 drones targeting the country, returning Iran’s attacks to similar levels over the past 10 days. So far on March 18, Iran has launched 20 drones at Saudi Arabia.
  - » Iran increased drone attacks against the U.A.E. by 105 percent, launching 45 drones on March 17, up from 22 on March 16. Already on March 18, Iran has launched 12 drones at the U.A.E.



- Despite this decline in overall fire and launches against Saudi Arabia, Iran has continued to launch more attacks against the country—primarily through drones—than any other location, with 38 percent of attacks so far on March 18 targeting Saudi Arabia, up from 26 percent on March 17.



- Iran’s use of cluster munitions against Israel has already enabled it to achieve four hits so far on March 18, nearly reaching the five hits it achieved across all fronts on March 16 and 17.



## 8. JINSA Resources

- Hussein Mansour, [\*If Tehran Falls: How Iran's Collapse Reshuffles Arab Gulf Relations\*](#), March 16
- Infographic: [\*Operation Epic Fury—What is the Aim Point?\*](#), March 13, 2026
- VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, and Jonathan Ruhe, “[\*Webinar: Washington and Jerusalem's Next Moves\*](#),” March 12, 2026
- Meriem Mokhtari, [\*How the Muslim Brotherhood Funds Iran's Proxies\*](#), March 11, 2026
- Robert McNally and Michael Makovsky, PhD, “[\*Webinar: Iran War Energy Disruption: Short-Term or Here To Stay?\*](#)” March 10, 2026
- Blaise Misztal, [\*Principles for U.S.-Kurdish Partnership\*](#), March 6, 2026
- Hussein Mansour, [\*Gulf Situation Assessment: Iran's Attacks on Arab States Will Backfire\*](#), March 5, 2026
- Ari Cicurel, [\*Iran's Missile Fire Has Almost Run Out\*](#), March 5, 2026
- Blaise Misztal, [\*Iran is Not Iraq\*](#), March 4, 2026
- Giran Ozcan and Jonah Brody, [\*The Kurdish Moment in Iran\*](#), March 4, 2026
- Gen. Frank McKenzie, USMC (ret.), IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, IDF MG (ret.) Oded Bassiuk, and John Hannah, “[\*Webinar: Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion\*](#),” March 1, 2026
- Jonathan Ruhe and Ari Cicurel, [\*U.S.-Israel Joint Operations Against Iran's Regime\*](#), February 28, 2026
- Blaise Misztal, Giran Ozcan, and Jonah Brody, [\*The Rise of Iran's Kurdish Coalition\*](#), February 27, 2026
- Jonathan Ruhe and Ari Cicurel, [\*Israel: America's Third Aircraft Carrier in the Middle East\*](#), February 25, 2026
- Jonathan Ruhe and Ari Cicurel, [\*Iran's Evolving Missile and Drone Threat\*](#), February 20, 2026