



## Iran War Update: 5/20/26

**Ari Cicurel**  
*Associate Director of Foreign Policy*

**Yoni Tobin**  
*Senior Policy Analyst*

**Jonah Brody**  
*Policy Analyst*

**Sarah Havdala**  
*Policy Analyst*

**Rena Gabber**  
*Research Associate*

The United States, Israel, and Iran reached a two-week ceasefire agreement on April 7, which President Donald Trump extended indefinitely on April 21. JINSA continues to release regular updates about the conflict. The update below includes information since [JINSA's last update](#) as of May 20 at 10:30 am ET.

Days left in U.S.-Israel-Iran ceasefire: **Extended indefinitely**

Days left in Israel-Lebanon ceasefire: **40**, following May 15 45-day extension

Iranian missiles and drones launched since ceasefire: **At least 294** (at least 1 on May 20)

Hezbollah attacks since ceasefire: **At least 125** (at least 4 on May 19–20)

Ships transiting Strait of Hormuz since ceasefire: **At least 360** (at least 10 between May 19–20)

- Note: Many of these ships are local fast boats, tugboats, or landing craft, not commercial vessels. Numerous ships in the area are also transmitting false locations.

Total blockade-eligible ships disabled or rerouted by U.S. forces: **At least 94** (at least 2 between May 19–20)

Total blockade-eligible ships that [evaded the blockade](#): **At least 13** (0 between May 19–20)

- Note: The blockade line that the Pentagon announced crosses where the Gulf of Oman opens into the Arabian Sea, beyond the Strait of Hormuz itself. Some of the ships that evaded the blockade are small vessels with limited utility to the Iranian regime.

### 1. Overview

- On May 20, President Donald Trump [stated](#) that he is in “no hurry” to agree to a deal with the Iranian regime.
  - » President Trump commented to reporters, “Everyone is saying, ‘Oh, the midterms.’ I’m in no hurry.” He added, “ideally I’d like to see few people killed, as opposed to a lot.”
  - » President Trump responded to a reporter’s question about the prospect of Israel acting unilaterally against Iran, saying Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will “do whatever I want him to do.”
- Vice President J.D. Vance [stated](#) on May 19 that while the United States has “made a lot of progress” in talks and prefers diplomacy with the Iranian regime, the Trump administration is “not going to have a deal that allows the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon. So, as the president just told me, we’re locked and loaded.”

- » That day, *Israel Hayom* [reported](#) that the United States is considering loosening sanctions against Iran if there is “progress on the nuclear issue.” The outlet also indicated that Iran’s missiles, terror support, and maritime aggression are no longer priorities in U.S.-Iran negotiations.
- On May 19, the Senate [voted](#) 50-47 to advance a war powers resolution, which aims to curtail President Trump’s ability to continue the Iran war. This is the first time the Senate pushed through a war powers resolution since February 28—a sign of growing opposition to resuming the war, including among Senate Republicans.
- When asked by reporters on May 19 about how long he would hold off on military action to give diplomacy a chance, President Trump [stated](#) that he was willing to postpone renewed strikes by “two or three days—maybe [until] Friday, Saturday, Sunday, maybe early next week—a limited period of time.”
- On May 19, Admiral Brad Cooper, Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), [testified](#) before the House Armed Services Committee that the war against Iran has led to a situation where “ Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis have been cut off from the decades-long flow of military supplies, thus mitigating and eliminating any chance of a future October 7.”
- The United States and Israel hoped to install former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the new leader of the country after Israeli strikes killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei early in the war, according to U.S. officials cited in a May 19 *New York Times* [article](#).
- Overnight on May 19–20, U.S. forces [seized](#) the *Skywave*, a Botswanan-flagged Iran-linked oil tanker previously sanctioned for transporting Iranian crude oil, in the Indian Ocean as part of Operation Economic Fury.
- *Axios* reported on May 19 that President Trump [met](#) with his national security team on May 18 to discuss military options for Iran. The meeting reportedly centered on the status of talks with Iran, the war’s path forward, and military plans for renewed strikes.
  - » The meeting occurred after President Trump announced on May 18 that he had decided to postpone strikes on Iran planned for the following day.

## 2. Diplomatic Engagement

### *Iran*

- On May 19, President Trump [stated](#), “I hope we don’t have to do the war, but we may have to give them another big hit ... I’m not sure yet, you’ll know very soon.” He [added](#), “Everyone tells me [the Iran war] is unpopular, but I think it’s very popular when they [Americans] hear that it’s having to do with nuclear weapons, weapons that could take out Los Angeles, could take out major cities.”
- On May 19, Israel’s *Walla News* outlet [reported](#) that if diplomatic talks do not make progress soon, the United States is likely to resume the war. *Walla News*, citing senior Israeli officials, said that Iran seems unwilling to make real compromises on its nuclear program and is seeking to buy time.
- On May 19, *Israel Hayom* [reported](#) that the Iranian regime submitted a new ceasefire proposal on May 18 that focuses mainly on its nuclear program and U.S. sanctions.
  - » According to the *Israel Hayom* article, which cites American officials, sanctions relief for Iran is “already in the early stages,” and U.S. officials have indicated that “progress on the nuclear issue could lead to understandings on sanctions and the freezing of [Iranian] funds.”
  - » The issues of Iran’s maritime aggression, drone and missile arsenals, and terror support have reportedly been relegated to a lower-level priority in U.S.-Iran talks.

- » However, the article indicated that President Trump is losing patience with Iranian leaders and views many of their demands as arrogant and problematic.

#### *Lebanon*

- On May 19, Israel's *Maariv* outlet [reported](#) that Israeli and Lebanese officials are expected to meet at the Pentagon on May 29 to discuss next steps regarding the temporary ceasefire, which is slated to expire in late June.
  - » *Maariv* also reported that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) seems [unable](#) to disarm Hezbollah, as Israel has demanded in Israel-Lebanon talks.
  - » According to *Maariv*, the LAF's plan to disarm Hezbollah has been stymied by unknown factors. In addition, Lebanon's government reportedly lacks clear intelligence about Hezbollah's military activities in central and northern Lebanon.

### 3. U.S. and Israeli Operations

#### *Iran*

- Speaking to reporters on May 19 regarding his decision the previous day to postpone new strikes on Iran, President Trump [stated](#) that he had been "an hour away from making the decision" to strike Iran when he decided to hold off on resumed military action.
  - » Contradicting this, President Trump then [claimed](#) that he had already "made the decision" to resume strikes when Gulf leaders asked him to delay the attack.
  - » President Trump also reiterated that Iran can never obtain a nuclear weapon, stating that a nuclear-armed Iran "would start with Israel. They would blow it up, and they would blow it up fast." After that, Iran would "go after Saudi Arabia, they go after Kuwait, they go after U.A.E., they go after Qatar."
- President Trump noted that he thought a nuclear-armed Iran would target "the entire Middle East," adding that "It would be [a] nuclear holocaust." *The New York Times* [reported](#) on May 19 that an early war goal to install former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the new Iranian leader included consulting with Ahmadinejad.
  - » However, his injury during airstrikes on the first day of the war, which was supposedly intended to free him from home confinement, disrupted the plan. Ahmadinejad has not been seen since the strike, and his whereabouts and health remain unknown.
- On May 19, the U.S. Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) Amin Exchange, an Iran-based currency exchange house that operates a front company network for the Iranian government to evade sanctions and access foreign currencies, as well as 19 vessels helping export sanctioned Iranian petrochemicals and petroleum.
- While testifying before Congress on May 19, CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper [claimed](#) that the United States is investigating a February 28 strike on a girls' school in Iran, but that the investigation is "complex" because the school was fixed on an active cruise missile facility for Iran's military.

#### *Lebanon*

- On May 20, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) addressed two recent instances in which its troops struck Hezbollah sites concealed as civilian infrastructure.
  - » On May 19, Israeli forces [struck](#) Hezbollah surveillance infrastructure in southern Lebanon embedded in a civilian facility.
  - » On May 18, the IDF, while operating in the Tyre area of southern Lebanon, [bombed](#) a Hezbollah weapons production facility that the group built on the site of a former civilian clinic in close proximity to a mosque.

- On May 20, the IDF also [announced](#) that its forces struck a weapon storage warehouse, killing a Hezbollah fighter.

#### 4. Strait of Hormuz Shipping and Blockade Status

- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy [said](#) on May 20 that it coordinated the transit of 26 commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz over the previous 24 hours, including oil tankers and container ships.
- CENTCOM [announced](#) on May 20 that it has redirected 90 vessels in total—an increase of two vessels from JINSA’s last update—since the U.S. naval blockade took effect, and that four other vessels have been disabled as part of CENTCOM’s blockade enforcement operations.
- The United States [seized](#) an Iranian-linked oil tanker, the *Skywave*, in the Indian Ocean overnight May 19–20, with the vessel having been sanctioned in March for transporting Iranian oil as part of Operation Economic Fury.
  - » Also, as part of Economic Fury, the Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) 19 vessels on May 19 for transporting vast amounts of Iranian petrochemical products.
- A recent U.S. intelligence assessment [detected](#) at least 10 mines in the Strait of Hormuz, CBS News reported on May 19, citing unnamed U.S. officials.
  - » The United States steered commercial traffic toward a cleared corridor farther from Iranian waters, having previously cautioned that the standard shipping lane through the Strait is “extremely hazardous” due to Iranian mining activity.
- Three supertankers [carrying](#) a combined six million barrels of Middle East crude were transiting out of the Strait of Hormuz on May 19–20, bound for Asian markets after idling in the Gulf for more than two months, with a fourth vessel entering the Strait, according to Reuters, citing shipping data from LSEG and Kpler. The tankers used a transit route designated by Iranian authorities.
- The Maltese-flagged bulk carrier *Thalassini* crossed the blockade line on May 19 en route to Bandar Imam Khomeini, Iran, JINSA-reviewed data from the Kpler shipping analytics firm showed. The ship departed from Paranagua, Brazil, in March.
  - » Over a dozen ships have traveled along Iran-Brazil or Brazil-Iran routes since the blockade began, but JINSA [assesses](#) that most, if not all, were authorized to do so by the United States for humanitarian reasons.

#### 5. Iranian and Proxy Operations

##### *Lebanon*

- On May 20, three Israeli officers operating in southern Lebanon were [wounded](#) in a drone attack, including Col. Meir Biderman, the commander of the IDF’s 401st Brigade, who was seriously injured in the incident.

##### *Jordan*

- On May 20, Jordan [intercepted](#) a drone of unknown origin that entered the country’s airspace without any reported casualties.

##### *Outside the Middle East*

- On May 20, Germany’s internal intelligence service [claimed](#) that several individuals have left Germany to assist the Iranian government, and it “assesses that, following the end of the war, the Iranian regime could deploy its intelligence services to track down and target opponents of the regime,” according to Belgian news outlet *Euractiv*.

- » In its assessment, German intelligence assessed that the threat to Iranian opposition figures, as well as Jewish and Israeli communities, in Germany “remains high.”

## 6. 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 Khork, 35; Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor, 39; Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42; and Sgt. Declan Coady (posthumously promoted from specialist), 20.
  - » A U.S. servicemember, Sgt. Benjamin Pennington, 26, was [killed](#) in 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 Ashley B. Pruitt, 34; Captain Seth R. Koval, 38; Captain Curtis J. Angst, 30; and Technical Sergeant Tyler H. Simmons, 28.
- At least 400 members of the U.S. military have been [injured](#) thus far in the war.
  - » Ten have been seriously [wounded](#), and at least 354 of the injured have reportedly returned to duty.
  - » At least 15 Americans were [hurt](#) in an Iranian drone strike on Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait on April 6, most of whom were lightly injured.
  - » In the March 27 Iranian attack on a U.S. base in Saudi Arabia, at least 15 U.S. servicemembers were [injured](#), including two who were seriously wounded.
- Since the war began, [at least 51 people have been killed in Israel](#), while over 7,795 have been [injured](#). At least 21 of these [casualties](#) include Israeli soldiers who have been killed while fighting Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.
  - » On May 19, the IDF [confirmed](#) that Israeli reserve soldier Maj. Itamar Sapir, 27, was killed in combat operations against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.
- Since the war’s outbreak, numerous other casualties have been reported:
  - » Iran: At least 3,636 people, including at least 1,221 military personnel, have been [killed](#), with at least 26,500 [wounded](#). *Iran International* reports that over 4,700 security personnel have been [killed](#), including members of the Basij, IRGC, and police forces.
  - » Azerbaijan: Four civilians have been [injured](#).
  - » Bahrain: Three people have [been killed](#), including a [Moroccan contractor](#), and at least 46 people [have been injured](#), including five [Emirati soldiers](#).
  - » Iraq: At least 119 people have been [killed](#), including 20 [people](#) in Iraqi Kurdistan.
  - » Jordan: At least 31 people have [been injured](#).
  - » Kuwait: Two [Kuwaiti navy sailors](#), two [Kuwaiti interior ministry officers](#), two [Kuwaiti civilians](#), and an [Indian national](#) have been killed; over 90 Kuwaiti military [personnel have been injured](#), and eight [civilians](#), including two [medical staff](#), have been wounded.
  - » Lebanon: At least 3,094 people have been [killed](#), and nearly 9,210 have been wounded—figures that do not distinguish between Hezbollah operatives and civilians.
  - » Oman: At least [three people](#) have been killed, and at least 17 have [been wounded](#).
  - » Qatar: Around 20 people have been [wounded](#), and seven were [killed](#) on March 22 in a helicopter crash in Qatari territorial waters due to a technical issue.

- » Saudi Arabia: Three people have been killed, including a Saudi [national](#) and two [foreign nationals](#), and at least 23 others [have been injured](#).
- » Syria: At least four people have been [killed](#) in Syria, and several others have been [injured](#).
- » United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.): 13 people have been [killed](#), and at least 230 have been injured.

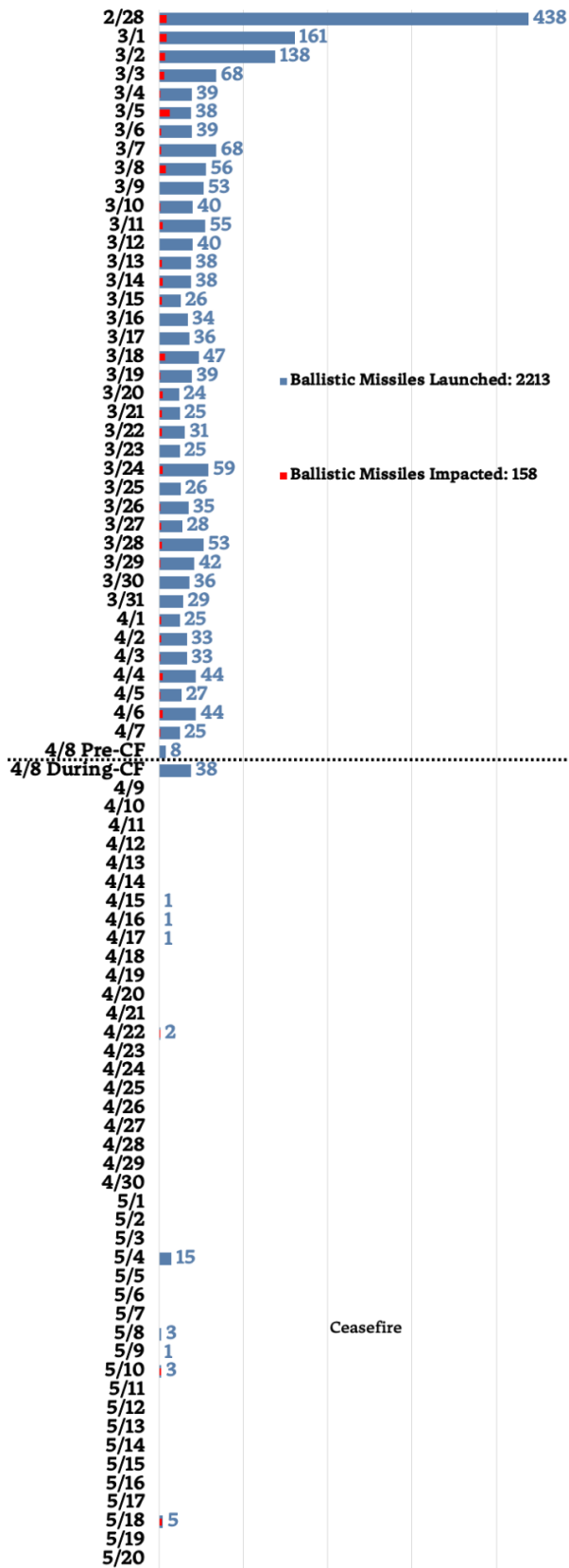
## 7. Threats, Condemnations, and Statements from Iranian Officials

- On May 20, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament and lead Iranian negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf [claimed](#) that “the enemy’s movements, both overt and clandestine, show that despite economic and political pressure, it has not abandoned its military objectives and is seeking to start a new war.”
  - » He added that “close monitoring of the situation in the United States reinforces the possibility that they still hope for the surrender of the Iranian nation.”
- On May 20, the IRGC [released](#) a statement, threatening that “If the aggression against Iran is repeated, the promised regional war will this time spread far beyond the region, and our devastating blows will crush you.”
- On May 20, Iran’s Ambassador to China Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli [posted](#) on X that “China has played a key role in the mediation process currently underway in Islamabad, and the current mediation process is the result of cooperation between Iran, Pakistan, and China.”

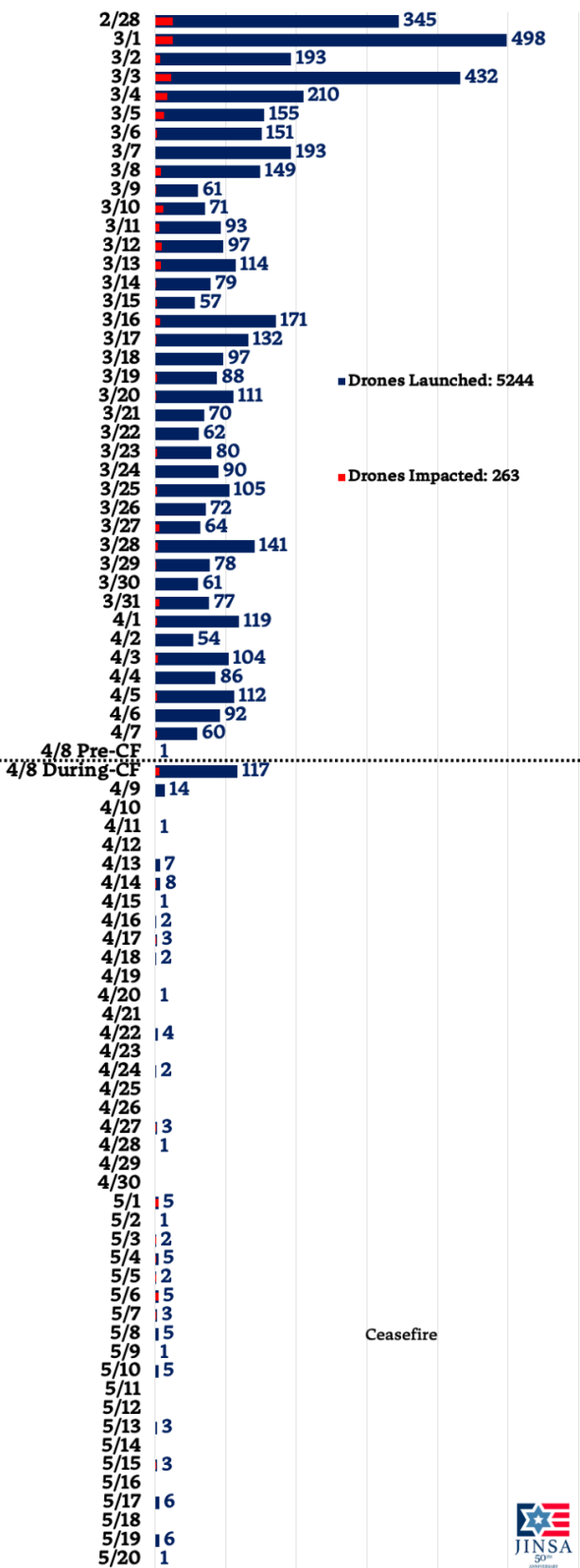
## 8. International Response

- On May 20, the U.A.E.’s foreign ministry [released](#) a statement demanding that Iraq crack down on attacks originating from its territory, adding that Iraqi leaders “need to address those threats promptly, immediately, and responsibly.”
  - » The statement follows a May 17 attack in which drones from Iraq targeted a nuclear power plant in the U.A.E., with one drone striking a nearby electrical generator.
- Turkey [announced](#) on May 20 that Germany would deploy a Patriot air defense battery to the country for a six-month deployment beginning in June.
  - » The Turkish Defense Ministry stated that “in addition to the Spanish Patriot air defence system currently deployed in our country, one of the two additional Patriot systems deployed by NATO due to the conflicts between the U.S., Israel, and Iran will be replaced by a German system.”
- On May 19, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [met](#) with the United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General António Guterres to talk about U.S. efforts to keep Iran from imposing fees for transit through the Strait of Hormuz and deploying mines through the Strait, including a U.N. Security Council resolution.

### Iranian Missiles Launched Per Day



### Iranian Drones Launched Per Day



## 9. JINSA Resources

- LTG Charles Hooper, USA (ret.), and Yoni Tobin, [Abraham's Fortress: Strengthening Middle East Defenses Against Iran](#), May 19, 2026
- Yoni Tobin, [Blockade Evasion Update – 5/19/26](#), May 19, 2026
- Rena Gabber and Jonah Brody, [Holding China Accountable for Iran](#), May 13, 2026
- Gen Charles Wald, USAF (ret.), VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), VADM Robert Harward, USN (ret.), LTG Karen Gibson, USA (ret.), VADM John Miller, USN (ret.), VADM John Bird, USN (ret.), Blaise Misztal, Jonathan Ruhe, and Ari Cicurel, [Epic Fury II: Securing U.S. Objectives in Iran](#), May 8, 2026
- Michael Makovsky, PhD, and Blaise Misztal, "[The U.S. Blockade of Iran Is a Means, Not an End](#)," *The National Interest*, May 8, 2026
- Yoni Tobin, [Blockade Evasion Update - 5/8](#), May 8, 2026
- Giran Ozcan, [Iranian Attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan Threaten a Vital U.S. Partnership](#), May 7, 2026
- Yoni Tobin, [Turning Tides: U.S. Blockade Enforcement Exceeds Iranian Evasion](#), May 1, 2026
- Hussein Aboubakr Mansour, [The UAE's OPEC Exit: Strategic Implications for the Gulf Order](#), April 29, 2026
- Ari Cicurel, [Iron Dome Deployment to U.A.E. Showed Abraham Accords Defense Potential](#), April 28, 2026
- Michael Makovsky, PhD, and Blaise Misztal, [The Iranian People: America's Most Powerful Weapon](#), April 26, 2026
- Hussein Mansour, [The Emirati Moment: The U.A.E.'s Strategic Cycle and the Iran War](#), April 24, 2026
- Michael Makovsky, PhD, and Blaise Misztal, [In Defense of the War, And How to Finish It](#), April 17, 2026