



Iran War Update: 5/21/26

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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 21 at 10:30 am ET.

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

Days left in Israel-Lebanon ceasefire: **39**, following May 15 45-day extension

Iranian missiles and drones launched since ceasefire: **At least 298** (at least 5 on May 20–21)

Hezbollah attacks since ceasefire: **At least 127** (at least 3 on May 20–21)

Ships transiting Strait of Hormuz since ceasefire: **At least 360** (at least 8 between May 20–21)

- 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 98** (at least 1 between May 20–21)

Total blockade-eligible ships that [evaded the blockade](#): **At least 13** (0 between May 20–21)

- 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

- U.S. intelligence assessments [indicate](#) that Iran resumed production of its drone capabilities during the ceasefire, with its military rebuilding much quicker than initially expected, CNN reported on May 21.
 - » Some U.S. intelligence assessments reportedly showed that Iran could completely rebuild its drone capabilities in as little as six months.
 - » Previously, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Admiral Brad Cooper [testified](#) before Congress on May 19 that the United States “damaged or destroyed over 85 percent of Iran’s ballistic missile, drone, and naval defense industrial base.” He also stated that U.S. strikes “set the regime’s ability to build and stockpile ... long-range drones back by years.”
- On May 21, senior Iranian sources [revealed](#) that Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khomeini has demanded that the regime’s 440 kilograms of highly enriched uranium, potentially

capable of producing up to 10 nuclear weapons if further enriched, must remain in Iranian territory as part of any ceasefire deal with the United States.

- » That day, Israel's *i24 News* [reported](#) that President Donald Trump recently told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that any U.S.-Iran diplomatic agreement will require Iran to forfeit all its enriched uranium.
- Iran's newly-created Persian Gulf Waterway Management Authority (PGSA) [outlined](#) the boundaries of the regime's Strait of Hormuz supervision zone, which extends from Kuh Mo-barak and Fujairah in the east to Qeshm Island and Umm al-Quwain in the west.
- On a reportedly contentious call with Prime Minister Netanyahu on May 19, President Trump [stated](#) that the mediators were preparing a "letter of intent" in which Washington and Tehran would agree to officially end the war and commence a 30-day negotiating period to resolve key issues, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Iranian nuclear program, according to *Axios* reporting on May 20.
 - » During the call, Prime Minister Netanyahu reportedly [noted](#) Israel's distrust that Iran would abide by a deal limiting its nuclear program and cease its attacks on regional countries.
 - Israeli sources speaking to *Axios* [alleged](#) that President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu disagree about the path forward in Iran, as Prime Minister Netanyahu is reportedly skeptical about diplomatic approaches and prefers renewed military action.
 - » *Axios* also [reported](#) that Qatar and Pakistan have prepared an updated draft agreement, with input from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, with the aim of getting concrete commitments from Iran regarding its nuclear program, and establishing greater clarity about the potential release of frozen Iran funds.
- Iran executed two Iranian Kurds on May 21 for their [alleged involvement](#) in "separatist terrorist groups." The two men were accused of being members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), according to media reports.

2. Diplomatic Engagement

Iran

- On May 21, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei [confirmed](#) that the Iranians "have received US views and are reviewing them."
 - » The semi-official Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) [stated](#) on May 21 that the new U.S. proposal "has narrowed the gaps to some extent," noting that Tehran is forming its response to the draft.
- A directive from Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei [stated](#) that Iran should not send its highly enriched uranium outside of the country, according to two senior Iranians cited by Reuters on May 21.
- Pakistani Field Marshal Asim Munir will [visit](#) Iran on May 21 in the context of Pakistan's mediation of the U.S.-Iran negotiations.
- Newsmax [reported](#) on May 21 that hardliner Brig. Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is playing a key role in shaping Iran's stance in negotiations.
- President Trump [stated](#) on May 20 that reaching a deal could happen "very quickly, or [in] a few days."

- Diplomatic mediators are reportedly [strongly urging](#) President Trump to delay any strikes on Iran until the end of the Hajj period, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, which will not conclude for another week.
- Israel's *Walla News* [reported](#) on May 20 that Iranian negotiators have shown some flexibility in recent talks, but now insist that diplomatic talks must involve Hezbollah. The article indicated that Israeli officials believe Iran will reject any U.S. proposal indefinitely, and instead will plan to drag out talks.
 - » U.S. officials, *Walla News* reported, are trying to merely reach a broad principles framework with Iran, rather than an agreement with concrete next steps.
 - » Those officials hope that a more detailed deal on key issues would be negotiated at a later stage, per *Walla News*.
- According to *Axios* reporting from May 20, Qatar recently [sent](#) an updated peace memo to the United States and Iran that it had prepared with Pakistan to reconcile outstanding differences between the two sides' positions.
 - » This could be a new draft or just an attempt to bridge gaps from the previous Pakistani draft.
- On May 20, following a call between President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the office of the Turkish presidency [released](#) a statement, saying "During the meeting, our president stated that he viewed the decision to extend the ceasefire in the conflict zone in our region as a positive development [and] that he believed a reasonable solution to the disputed issues was possible."
- In President Trump's calls with regional leaders yesterday, according to a May 20 [article](#) from Israeli news outlet *Israel Hayom*, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Emirati President Mohammed bin Zayed supported a "tough line" against Iran and emphasized the importance of keeping sensitive facilities safe in their countries. However, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani advocated for the continuation of the ceasefire.
 - » *Israel Hayom* also reported on differing views within President Trump's senior national security team regarding the best path forward.
 - In a discussion on Wednesday, Vice President J.D. Vance, Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, and White House advisor Jared Kushner reportedly argued that flexibility in Iran's most recent proposal indicated that an agreement is possible.
 - In contrast, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth reportedly maintained that substantial pressure on Iran is required to achieve concessions, including maintaining the option of renewed military action and stronger sanctions.

3. U.S. and Israeli Operations

- Speaking at the Coast Guard Academy on May 20, President Trump [stated](#), "the only question is do we go and finish it up or are they gonna be signing a document. Let's see what happens."
 - » He [added](#), "If we don't get the right answers, it goes very quickly. We're all ready to go. We have to get the right answers—it would have to be a complete 100 percent good answers."
 - » Later that day, he [noted](#) that the United States and Iran were "right on the borderline" between reaching an agreement and returning to war.

- On May 21, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) [revealed](#) “Alumot,” a new unit within the Tele-processing Corps and Cyber Defense Directorate focused on deploying artificial intelligence in combat and bolstering the military’s information-processing activities.

Iran

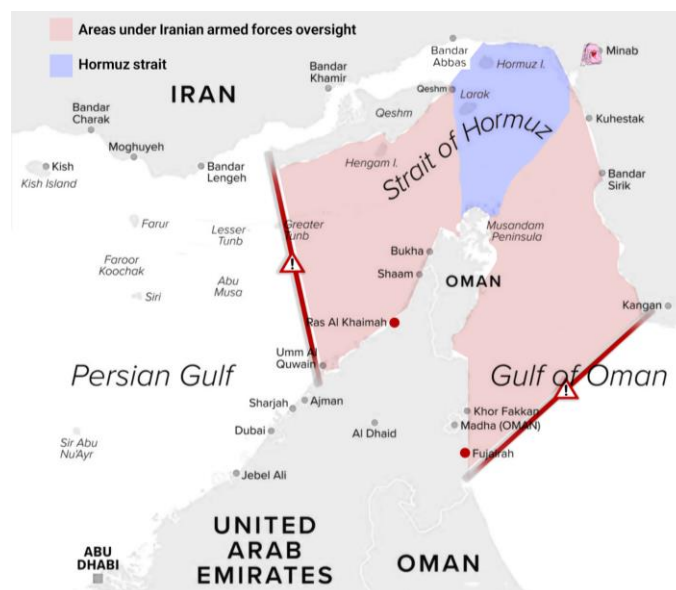
- On May 21, Israel’s *Arutz Sheva* [reported](#) that the Israeli military is preparing to resume kinetic strikes on the Iranian regime. The article quoted a senior Israeli official as saying that “U.S. President Donald Trump is leaning toward giving a green light for a military strike against the Islamic Republic, but is leaving one final, very short window of opportunity for negotiations.”

Lebanon

- Israel’s defense industry is [close to finalizing](#) advanced systems to counter Hezbollah’s new tactic of using fiber-optic drones, according to a May 21 article from Israel’s *Maariv*.
 - » These systems include quantum-based systems and electromagnetic systems that block drones’ movement without signal jamming.
 - » Some of these systems are, at most, several months away from field deployment, according to *Maariv* reporting.

4. Strait of Hormuz Shipping and Blockade Status

- On May 20, CENTCOM [announced](#) that it redirected 94 vessels in total—an increase of four vessels since JINSA’s last update—since the U.S. naval blockade took effect.
- On May 20, the United States [boarded](#) an Iranian-flagged oil tanker, the M/T Celestial Sea, suspected of trying to breach the U.S. blockade. The ship was ordered to change course.
- 20 Iranian nationals that had been on ships seized by the United States in recent weeks have now returned to Iran from Singapore, *Arab News* [reported](#) on May 21.
- Iran’s PGSA [stated](#) on May 20 that Iran defines the Strait of Hormuz management supervision area as extending from a line connecting Kuh Mobarak in Iran to southern Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E) east of the strait, westward to a line connecting Qeshm Island and Umm al-Quwain in the U.A.E.
 - » Vessels operating on designated frequencies while transiting the Strait must coordinate with the PGSA and obtain authorization prior to passage.



Source: [PGSA](#)

5. Iranian and Proxy Operations

Lebanon

- On May 21, the IDF [identified](#) the “suspicious aerial target” that prompted drone sirens in the northern Israeli town of Misgav Am, eventually losing contact with the projectile and declaring the incident’s conclusion without injuries.
- On May 20, seven Israeli soldiers were [injured](#), including one seriously, when a Hezbollah drone attacked their position in southern Lebanon.

Iraq

- On May 21, a Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDKI) civilian camp was [targeted](#) by a drone outside Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan without any reported casualties.
- On May 21, a Komala Toilers of Kurdistan base was [targeted](#) by two drones outside Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan without any reported casualties.

Outside the Middle East

- On May 21, Germany [charged](#) a Danish national identified as Ali S. with espionage and attempted murder after the IRGC allegedly directed him to gather information on Jewish German groups. The suspect was arrested last year.

Internal Dynamics and Repression

- Iran [executed](#) two Kurdish men, Ramin Zelleh and Karim Marufpour, on May 21 for alleged membership in what the judiciary described as “separatist terrorist groups.” Human rights organization Hengaw reported the men were secretly hanged at Naghadeh Central Prison without prior notice to the families.

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.
- 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.

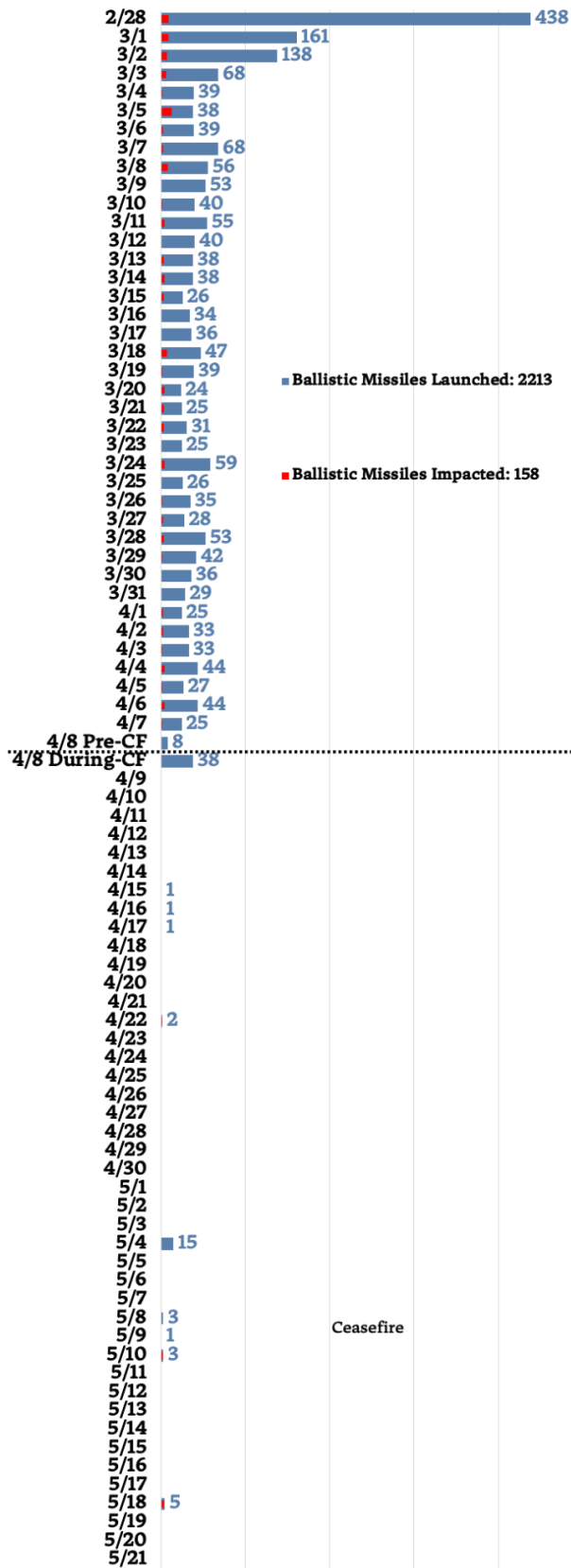
7. Threats, Condemnations, and Statements from Iranian Officials

- Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [stated](#) on May 20 that Tehran “has consistently honored its commitments” and remains open to diplomacy, while rejecting efforts attempting to force Iran into “surrender through coercion.”
- Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf [warned](#) May 20 that Tehran distrusts Washington’s intentions, stating that “obvious and hidden moves by the enemy” indicated the United States was preparing additional attacks.

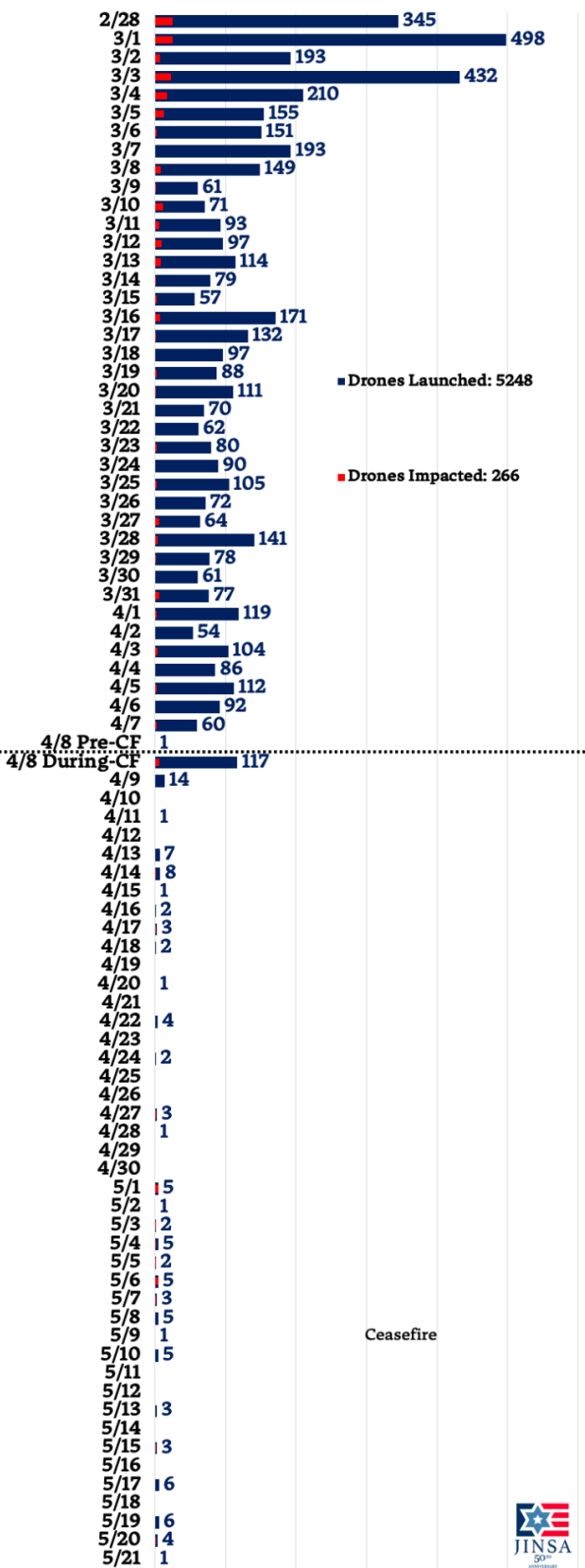
8. International Response

- On May 21, the European Parliament [released](#) a statement, urging “for more sanctions against Iranian officials, while Iranian people face the largest mass murder of protestors in the country’s history.”
 - » The statement also condemned the Islamic Republic for executing political prisoners and called on European Union countries to shutter the regime’s diplomatic missions that repress Iranians abroad, as well as help Iranian civilians bypass their government’s internet restrictions.
- On May 21, Spokesperson for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pascal Confavreux [stated](#) that the “North Atlantic Treaty applies to the North Atlantic” and that it is not the “purpose” of the alliance to focus on issues in the Middle East.
- On May 21, Spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova [stated](#) that solving the Iran crisis will require diplomacy that considers Iranian interests.
 - » She added that only Tehran should determine the future of its uranium stockpile.

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