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# WEST ASIA DIGEST

*Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia*

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## War in West Asia

Following the joint US-Israeli war on Iran on 28 February 2026, escalations aimed at destroying Tehran's military infrastructure and leadership continued in March 2026. The conflict began with precision strikes killing Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and a number of high-ranking Iranian officials. Israeli and US strikes in March targeted uranium processing sites, missile production facilities and military and naval infrastructure. Iran retaliated by launching missiles and drones towards Israel and Gulf states hosting US bases, and blocked the Strait of Hormuz, which has disrupted the global energy trade. The US on 24 March proposed a 15-point plan delivered to Iran via Pakistan. The key elements of the plan include a 30-day ceasefire, dismantling Iran's nuclear facilities, permanent renunciation of nuclear weapons, handover of stockpile of enriched uranium to the IAEA, limits on range and number of Iran's missiles, ending support for regional allies, stopping strikes on regional energy facilities, reopening Strait of Hormuz, sanctions and offered US support for electricity generation. Israel's conditions to end the war include complete dismantling of nuclear capabilities, elimination of ballistic missile program and creating conditions and Regime Change. Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on 11 March laid terms including recognition of Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations and international assurances against future aggression. Iran also wants lifting of all sanctions, closure of all US military bases in Gulf states and a new legal mechanism to

control transit through the Strait of Hormuz, asserting its control over this sea route.

The US and Israel have conducted hundreds of coordinated strikes across 26 provinces in Iran. Key nuclear installations such as Natanz, Arak and Ardakan have been struck, while major missile production centres at Khojir, Shahroud, and Parchin are heavily damaged. Strategic raids, including the bombing of Kharg Island, degraded Iran's naval and missile infrastructure. Historical sites in Isfahan and Golestan Palace in Tehran have suffered damage. Israel and the US have also suffered significant losses, with around 20 aircraft damaged or destroyed, including F-15E jets and multiple drones, while an F-35 made an emergency landing. Iranian retaliatory strikes targeted US bases in the Gulf states and Iraq. Iranian missile and drone strikes have targeted chemical plant in Beersheba, Oil refinery in Haifa, Negev Industrial Hub and urban centres in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Dimona, Arad and Jerusalem. The fatalities in March has been around 1,900 deaths in Iran, alongside 15 US personnel and nearly 20 in Israel.

## Attacks on Gulf States

Iran has launched a series of retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the Gulf region as well. Following US-Israeli attacks on Iranian military and energy infrastructure, Iran targeted Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Iraq focusing on oil facilities, airports, ports, desalination and aluminum plants and locations hosting US forces and diplomatic posts. The attacks caused

significant damage to energy infrastructure and disrupted global oil markets. The daily oil exports from the Gulf region have dropped by at least 60 per cent from pre-war levels. Civilian areas were also affected, raising humanitarian and legal concerns. The Gulf States have resorted to cautious de-escalatory measures. On 11 March, Bahrain proposed UN Security Council resolution condemning Iranian attacks on GCC and Jordan which was passed with a 13-0 vote with Russia and China abstaining. On 26 March, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan issued joint statement condemning attacks by Iran and its allies in Iraq. Saudi Arabia emphasising right to self-defence, urged for diplomatic solutions and immediate ceasefire.

### **Crisis in the Strait of Hormuz**

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz faced severe disruptions amid escalating regional tensions. Iran declared a de-facto blockade, striking vessels such as Safeen Prestige and asserting control over the strait. On 6 March, the sinking of the tugboat *Mussafah 2* during rescue operations underscored the risks to maritime support missions. The crisis escalated on 10 March when Iran reportedly began laying naval mines, prompting US retaliatory strikes on Iranian minelayers. A surge of coordinated drone and missile attacks on 11 March further intensified the blockade, targeting multiple vessels. By late March, shipping traffic had dropped by nearly 95 per cent, with Iran enforcing selective passage near Larak Island. The blockade highlighted the vulnerability of global energy supply chains. Several

commercial vessels were rerouted or delayed, leading to increased shipping costs and insurance premiums. Energy markets reacted sharply, with oil prices surging due to fears of prolonged supply disruptions. On 4 March 2026, the *IRIS Dena* was sunk by a US submarine torpedo attack in the Indian Ocean off Galle, killing over 80 sailors.

### **Israel-Hezbollah Conflict**

In response to killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Hezbollah launched large-scale missile and drone strikes on 2 March 2026 on northern Israel, including key military installations, while Israel responded with extensive airstrikes across Lebanon, particularly in Beirut, the Beqaa Valley, and the south. By mid-March, hostilities intensified with over 200 rockets fired into Israel and expanded Israeli ground operations in southern Lebanon. Key infrastructure, including bridges over the Litani River, was destroyed, while senior Hezbollah and Iranian commanders were targeted. By late March, Israel pushed for a buffer zone, and Hezbollah continued rocket attacks, including a deadly strike in Nahariya. The conflict resulted in over 1,000 deaths in Lebanon and 6 IDF and 2 civilians in Israel, alongside nearly one million displaced in Lebanon.

### **India urges for dialogue and diplomacy on US-Israel war on Iran**

India has reiterated its official position on the ongoing West Asia conflict by calling for immediate de-escalation, restraint and a return to dialogue and diplomacy, as articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr. S.

Jaishankar in March 2026. Addressing the Parliament, the Prime Minister Modi stressed that India sought an early restoration of peace and opposed attacks on civilian infrastructure and commercial shipping, particularly disruptions in critical maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz. He underscored that freedom of navigation and the stability of global energy supplies were vital concerns. As part of the evacuation effort, till 22 March 2026, more than 3,75,000 Indians have safely returned to India since the war began, including approximately 1,000 Indians from Iran alone, of whom over 700 are medical students.

### **Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye in Islamabad**

On 29 March 2026, in Islamabad, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar chaired a quadrilateral meeting with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt to deliberate on the ongoing West Asia crisis, where participants held detailed discussions on the deteriorating regional situation and explored pathways for an early and lasting end to the conflict. Previously, the first meeting of consultations was held in Riyadh on 19 March 2026. Ishaq Dar briefed about the prospects of potential US-Iran talks in Islamabad.

### **UN Secretary General urges immediate end to West Asia conflict**

On 26 March 2026, António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, called for an immediate end to the ongoing West Asia

conflict, warning that its humanitarian and economic consequences were disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable populations. He stressed that civilians were bearing the brunt of the crisis despite having no role in the conflict, and underscored that diplomacy and adherence to international law remained the only viable pathways to resolution. The UN chief also highlighted the broader economic fallout, noting that disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz were severely impacting the global movement of oil, gas, and fertilisers, particularly during a critical agricultural period.

### **Zelensky visits West Asian countries**

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky visited Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Jordan from 27-29 March 2026. Ukraine has signed agreements on air defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE amid the ongoing regional conflict. Speaking after the visit, he noted that the deals – some finalised and others under negotiation – could extend up to 10 years and be worth billions, focusing on counter-drone technologies and air defence collaboration. Ukraine, seeking to reposition itself from an aid recipient to a security provider, offered battlefield-tested expertise developed during the war with Russia, particularly in intercepting Iranian-origin drones. Zelensky added that Ukraine had already deployed over 200 air defence specialists to the region while ruling out direct combat involvement. He emphasised that Gulf partners valued Ukraine's operational experience against drone warfare, with Qatar confirming cooperation on countering unmanned systems.