

ISSUE BRIEF | American Security

AMID THE STRIKES: A BLUEPRINT TO PROTECT AMERICAN INTERESTS

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TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ The objective of Operation Epic Fury is to eradicate imminent threats to the American people emanating from the Iranian regime.
- ★ As the United States works to meet this objective by the precise targeting of regime capabilities and leadership, conditions on the ground will change allowing for an opportunity for the Iranian people to make determinations about the future of their country.
- ★ These changing conditions will have implications for the security of the American people, both in the region and beyond it.
- ★ With much still unknown about the course of the operation and the totality of its effects as of this writing, this paper seeks to provide context for understanding and building further on its efforts to protect the American people.

Overview

In the early hours of February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched joint military operations targeting Iranian regime ballistic missiles, launchers, nuclear facilities, and senior Iranian leadership sites ([Macias, 2026](#)). In his remarks shortly after the onset of the U.S. operation, “Operation Epic Fury,” President Trump described it as “major combat operations in Iran [whose objective is] to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime, a vicious group of very hard, terrible people” ([Ott, 2026](#)). In response, the Iranian regime launched a barrage of missiles at Israel and at U.S. bases throughout the region, causing at least one casualty in the United Arab Emirates ([Abdel-Baqui, 2026](#)), and targeting infrastructure in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Israel reportedly targeted Iranian regime leadership, and during the first day, eliminated Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Assembly of Experts as they convened to elect his successor, and several layers of the regime’s military leadership ([Lachter & Eglash, 2026](#)).

Much remains unknown as of this writing, including the duration and scope of the U.S. and Israeli military operations, the full scale of the Iranian regime's response, and which allies and partners in and potentially beyond the region will join the United States. Multiple partners have come out in support of U.S. actions, with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney saying that Canada supports the U.S., "acting to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and to prevent its regime from further threatening international peace and security," and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese noting that, "we support the United States acting to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and to prevent Iran continuing to threaten international peace and security," ([Schneid, 2026](#)). On March 1, the United States, along with Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, released a joint statement condemning Iran's "indiscriminate and reckless missile and drone attacks against sovereign territories across the region," and emphasized their "right to self-defense in the face of these attacks" ([Department of State, 2026](#)). On the same day, responding to the same developments, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany released a joint statement vowing to "take steps to defend our interests and those of our allies in the region, potentially through enabling necessary and proportionate defensive action to destroy Iran's capability to fire missiles and drones at their source," ([Elysee, 2026](#)).

As the U.S. and Israeli operations continue, an urgent priority will be protecting the safety and security of Americans in the region and in other parts of the world amid the newly fluid conditions in Iran—namely, the unpredictable response of a degraded regime on the defensive, coupled with an opposition that is not yet capable of governance.

This paper does not address questions about who will govern Iran or the role of the United States (if any) in that regard, or on other issues pertaining to Iran's governance. Rather, the intent of this paper is to define the enduring U.S. interests at stake and to explain how the United States can work with its partners and allies to ensure they are preserved during the current period of transition.

Strategic Context

In his remarks as the operation began, President Trump noted the Iranian regime's "unending campaign of bloodshed and mass murder, targeting the United States, our troops and innocent people in many, many countries" ([Ott, 2026](#)). In launching this operation, President Trump is acting on his authority as Commander-in-Chief as articulated in Article II Section 2 of the Constitution to protect the American people from threats, and is in compliance with the War Powers Act – particularly in having articulated this justification immediately after launching it. And in approving Operation Epic Fury, President Trump is ending the Iranian regime's war against the American people over the course of half-a-century.

The President's characterization of the threats from the Iranian regime in his remarks is consistent with his views on Iran's threats since his 2015 speech announcing his run for the presidency, where he said that "[o]ur enemies are getting stronger and stronger by the way, and we as a country are getting weaker" and that he "will stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons" ([CBS News, 2015](#)).

This phrasing reflects the multifaceted and global nature of the threat from the Iranian regime to the American people and others, and therefore the unprecedented nature of whatever next



steps the United States takes. In addition to its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, the regime oversees the world's oldest global terror network, with proxies around the region that target dissidents and foreign officials in Europe, Latin America, and even President Trump and members of his team ([Dunleavy, 2026](#)).

Iran's response so far has been limited to its predictable barrages of missiles and drones. It remains to be seen whether and how its proxies around the region and the world escalate on its behalf or, as has been the case with some, mostly remain on the sidelines ([Choudhary, 2026](#)). It is yet to be determined how and to what extent U.S. allies and partners from the region and beyond will join the United States and Israel in the ongoing operations. Of consequence would be a more robust European involvement, particularly on the heels of the recent European Union (EU) designation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization and the acute threats they face within their borders from Iran's terror network ([European Council, 2026](#)). It is also unclear how other adversaries dependent on Iran—particularly Russia and China—will act with their diminished foothold in the Middle East and without a key element of their destructive agendas in their own theaters. These dynamics will certainly shift if the war extends to the energy infrastructure, which—outside of a regime-directed attack on one of its own ships—has thus far been largely unaffected.

These dynamics are all reflective of the Iranian regime's decades-long global effort of destruction. The framing of the Iranian regime as a global terrorist organization with vast connectivity to conflicts and threats beyond the region is necessary to understand the policy equities concerning Iran that make it more than a bilateral issue about U.S. relations with another nation.

Operation Epic Fury and Israel's Operation Roaring Lion offer lessons on how the Trump administration uses force and leverages partners' strengths to achieve key goals. Although the specific targets are not yet public, the unprecedented twin strikes by the U.S. and Israel show a level of resolve and coordination that has not been seen before. These operations build on the successes of operations Midnight Hammer and Rising Lion in shaping a new geopolitical landscape. ([Olidort, 2025](#)).

Following the first days of military actions that demonstrate the will and decisiveness of the United States, continued use of force will serve as a means of guaranteeing key interests are secured. This does not require a prolonged ground presence. Instead, coordinated, multi-domain strikes enable sustained pressure and the targeting of key assets. This establishes conditions for ongoing leverage, disrupts Iranian command-and-control, threatens key leadership, and damages or destroys critical sectors of Iranian infrastructure.

After new conditions are established on the ground, efforts could potentially shift to a multi-layered approach. These efforts can be supported by Israel and other affected U.S. partners in the region. The people of Iran also possess a unique opportunity to guarantee their own destiny and work with the United States in securing a new future for both Iran and the Middle East. Trump pointedly called on the people of Iran, stating, "When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be, probably, your only chance for generations... Now is the time to seize control of your destiny and to unleash the prosperous and glorious future that is close within your reach" ([Ott,](#)



[2026](#)). However, if this opportunity is seized, it could become a factor in how the U.S. and partners engage militarily and diplomatically to achieve the objective of eliminating threats to the American people from regime remnants and affiliates.

Americans' Safety and Security at Stake

- **Iran's Nuclear Efforts:** A central failure of past administrations has been the belief that Iran participates in negotiations as a good-faith actor. Iran repeatedly demonstrated bad faith in prior agreements, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran used these failed diplomatic efforts to secure sanctions relief while preserving and advancing its nuclear capabilities in violation of those agreements. These deals did not eliminate Iran's capacity to enrich uranium, but only slowed it, thereby allowing Tehran to quietly improve its technology. Tehran demonstrates that a nuclear weapons capability remains a strategic objective that it is unwilling to abandon.
- **Iran's Transfer of Weapons:** The Iranian regime occupies a distinct position as a global supplier of weapons and other instruments of instability to our adversaries ([Woolsey, 2025](#)). The regime has expanded its production and export of drones and missiles around the world. These capabilities have reached into America's own backyard and the hands of armed groups openly hostile to U.S. interests. Iranian weapons transfers have directly contributed to the deaths of Americans and the strengthening of our adversaries.
- **Regime Influence in the Western Hemisphere:** Iran's presence in the Western Hemisphere represents a direct challenge to U.S. hemispheric primacy and an acute threat to the homeland ([Tan & Woolsey, 2026](#)). The 2025 National Security Strategy and Operation Absolute Resolve reflect the Trump Administration's shift in focus to prioritizing the security of our hemisphere. As Operation Epic Fury proceeds, there will likely also be a focus on eliminating the threat posed by the political, intelligence, financial, and operational networks of the regime's remnants and those of its proxies—particularly Hezbollah—in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Iran's Role as a Corollary to America's Adversaries:** Iran has served as a financial outlet and a supplier of fuel and weapons to America's adversaries. Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion take on a key objective of targeting a regime that is intent on arming America's adversaries, such as China and Russia. China is the primary buyer of Iranian oil, purchasing more than 80% of Iran's shipped oil, which is over 1.38 million barrels in 2025, making up 13.4% of the total oil imported by sea ([Reuters, 2026](#)). Like Venezuela, China was the primary beneficiary of its oil exports at a significant discount. Iran has also supplied Russia with thousands of drones in support of the country's war with Ukraine ([Woolsey, 2025](#)). By removing this regime, it marks another major stride in dismantling the anti-American architecture that Iran has participated in for decades.



- **Existential Economic Lifelines:** In coordination with its regional network of proxies, Iran has profited at the cost of the American people by exploiting the weak leadership of past administrations and an unwillingness to enforce American interests. Future conditions must ensure that Iran can no longer sustain itself through sanctions evasion or illicit trade. Iran's participation in the global system must be transparent, lawful, and detached from activities that undermine U.S. interests.
- **Remnants of the IRGC:** The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is not merely part of the regime's domestic infrastructure of terror but serves as the key conduit for the coordination and support of terror operations around the world, a military unit that acts as a hybrid terror, intelligence, and economic enterprise, overseeing the support and direction of the regime's global terror network. They can operate through plausible deniability by establishing a wide-reaching proxy network and illicit financing. The IRGC is responsible for thousands of American deaths, and it is in the interests of the United States to see the IRGC weakened beyond recovery ([Olidort, 2026a](#)).
- **Iran's Proxy Network:** Iran's proxies have notable influence beyond the Middle East. In addition to their operations in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, as well as in Gaza and the West Bank, have leveraged instability in the Middle East and beyond to export Tehran's goals and financially support the regime ([Tan, 2025](#)). In times when the Iranian regime has previously been crippled, they have looked to these proxies to rebuild militarily and financially. While most of their focus has been in the Middle East, the Axis has partnered with cartels and other criminal groups in Africa and Latin America.



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