



**| Flash |**

# **Military Strikes on Iran – SITREP**

## **#26: March 20, 2026**

F-2026-03-20a

Classification: TLP:CLEAR

Criticality: High

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitics

**March 20, 2026**

## Scope Note

*ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were **identified prior to 4:00 AM (EDT) on March 20, 2026**; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.*

# | Flash | Military Strikes on Iran – SITREP #26: March 20, 2026

## | Key Findings

- Over the past 48 hours, Israel and Iran have intensified attacks on key regional energy facilities, signaling a significant escalation in the conflict. While U.S. President Donald Trump has denied involvement and warned both nations against further targeting of energy infrastructure, his comments likely reflect diverging strategic aims between the United States and Israel.
- Energy prices have surged as these latest strikes increase the prospect of a long-term impact on global supplies and suggest a slower resumption of production once the conflict ends. Furthermore, Israel's targeting represents a notable shift toward degrading Iran's economic infrastructure to limit its combat capabilities.
- The United States and Israel continued a campaign targeting senior Iranian security officials, a tactic which is very likely part of efforts to set the conditions for a civil uprising in Iran. In turn it has left the IRGC in control of most decision making at the political and military level.

## Latest Details

The United States and Israel continued a campaign targeting senior Iranian security officials; most recently, strikes on Tehran killed Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib.<sup>1</sup> This follows the deaths of Chief of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani and head of the Basij militia Gholamreza Soleimani on Tuesday.<sup>2</sup> Strikes against key security personnel are reportedly hurting “rank-and-file morale,” leading security forces and leaders to sleep in vehicles, mosques, and sports complexes.<sup>3</sup>

- Israel is reportedly aware of security forces hiding in sports complexes and has begun targeting the facilities.<sup>4</sup> These strikes have likely been some of the most intense of the war, as Israel almost certainly seeks to weaken Iran’s internal security apparatus.
- Israel has reportedly also made personal phone calls to individual, internal security personnel, urging them to stand down in the event of protests. Israel used a similar tactic in the 12-Day War of June 2025.<sup>5</sup>

The targeting campaign against Iran’s security infrastructure—and particularly their internal security forces—is very likely an effort by the United States and Israel to set the conditions for an Iranian civil uprising and anti-regime revolution. Israel especially very likely sees regime change as a primary objective of the war, so targeting the security forces that would likely be used to crack down on any protests almost certainly serves that strategic aim.

Anti-government protests in Iran are unlikely to take root at this time, due in large part to the dangers posed by ongoing U.S. and Israeli airstrikes. Additionally, the regime very likely continues to crack down on any dissent—likely in an effort to prevent the very uprising the United States and Israel are almost certainly seeking to initiate.

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1

[hXXps://www.dailymail\[.\]co\[.\]uk/news/article-15656589/iran-israel-war-trump-gulf-nato-netanyahu-live-updates.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15656589/iran-israel-war-trump-gulf-nato-netanyahu-live-updates.html)

<sup>2</sup> [hXXps://www.bbc\[.\]co\[.\]uk/news/articles/c24deeq6meo](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c24deeq6meo)

<sup>3</sup> [hXXps://understandingwar\[.\]org/research/middle-east/iran-update-special-report-march-18-2026/](https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-special-report-march-18-2026/)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>

[hXXps://www.timesofisrael\[.\]com/in-leaked-call-israeli-operative-tells-iranian-general-you-have-12-hours-to-escape/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-leaked-call-israeli-operative-tells-iranian-general-you-have-12-hours-to-escape/)

- Iran reportedly executed three men accused of killing police officers during the January anti-regime protests. The men were denounced for supporting the United States and Israel, as well as “waging war against God.”<sup>6</sup> Executions such as these very likely serve as a further deterrent to renewed protests during the current conflict.

## Energy Targeting Escalates

On March 18, 2026, Israel targeted the Iranian portion of the South Pars natural gas field, Iran’s biggest. South Pars is part of the world’s largest natural gas reserve, which is jointly owned by Iran and Qatar.<sup>7</sup> This is almost certainly an escalation on Israel’s part, because it is the first known instance of an attack on Iranian oil production facilities. Until now, Israel and the United States have largely refrained from targeting Iran’s energy production facilities, almost certainly in part due to fear of Iran retaliating with strikes on Gulf countries’ oil and gas industries.

- Iran has similarly avoided Gulf energy production facilities (upstream energy assets), instead focusing on delivery nodes such as ports and refineries (mid- and downstream assets). Targeting upstream assets is almost certainly seen as an escalation because they are more difficult to repair and are key to energy production; downstream assets can normally be repaired more easily, and targeting them primarily impacts delivering already-produced energy.

Depending on the severity of the damage and continued targeting of similar locations, these actions likely deprive Iran of natural gas to secure political concessions. However, in the short term, these developments pose risks to global energy supplies because they likely incentivize Iran to retaliate against other energy production facilities in the region.

- Alone, the South Pars attack will very likely have a limited effect on the global gas supply, since Iran uses most of its reserves domestically to generate electricity.<sup>8</sup> Disruptions will likely cause power shortages, harming businesses and consumers.

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<sup>6</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/middle-east/iran-executes-three-individuals-arrested-over-january-protests-state-media-2026-03-19/](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-executes-three-individuals-arrested-over-january-protests-state-media-2026-03-19/)

<sup>7</sup> [hXXps://www.cnn\[.\]com/2026/03/19/middleeast/iran-qatar-south-pars-gas-field-explainer-intl](https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/19/middleeast/iran-qatar-south-pars-gas-field-explainer-intl)

<sup>8</sup> [hXXps://understandingwar\[.\]org/research/middle-east/iran-update-special-report-march-18-2026/](https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-special-report-march-18-2026/)

- A key exception is Iraq. The country is one of the few recipients of Iranian gas exports and announced shortly after the South Pars strike that it had stopped receiving gas shipments.<sup>9</sup> Iraq is heavily reliant on Iranian natural gas to power its electricity generation, and a prolonged shortage would likely weaken the country's already blackout-prone grid. Iraq's previous electricity shortages have sometimes resulted in nationwide protests and violent unrest.
- If Israel extends the escalation to target Iran's export facilities, it would immediately impact Iranian revenues that likely fund its weapons programs and maintain the larger military-political establishment.

In response, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said energy sites in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia have become direct targets. The IRGC listed several prominent energy sites it plans to target, including Saudi Arabia's Samref Refinery and Jubail Petrochemical Complex, the UAE's al-Hosn gas field, and Qatar's Mesaieed Petrochemical Complex and Ras Laffan Refinery.<sup>10</sup>

- Later, QatarEnergy confirmed that Ras Laffan Industrial City had been the "subject of missile attacks" that caused "extensive damage."<sup>11</sup> Ras Laffan Industrial City houses the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) export plant. The plant was already closed following previous drone strikes. Details regarding the latest attacks indicate the facility sustained far more damage that will likely require months or years, rather than weeks, to repair. QatarEnergy CEO Saad al-Kaabi said the attacks disrupted 17 percent of the company's export capacity, and the damage will take two to five years to repair.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [hXXps://www.newarab\[.\]com/news/iraqs-gas-imports-iran-halted-due-war](https://www.newarab[.]com/news/iraqs-gas-imports-iran-halted-due-war)

<sup>10</sup>

[hXXps://www.wsj\[.\]com/livecoverage/iran-us-israel-war-news-2026/card/gulf-countries-evacuate-energy-facilities-after-iran-warns-it-will-target-them-zSKkZ5OSucyAOnxiTfj9](https://www.wsj[.]com/livecoverage/iran-us-israel-war-news-2026/card/gulf-countries-evacuate-energy-facilities-after-iran-warns-it-will-target-them-zSKkZ5OSucyAOnxiTfj9)

<sup>11</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/qatarenergy/status/2034338511311012171](https://x[.]com/qatarenergy/status/2034338511311012171)

<sup>12</sup>

[hXXps://dohanews\[.\]co/iran-attack-wipes-out-17-of-qatars-Ing-capacity-for-up-to-five-years-qatarenergy-ceo-says/](https://dohanews[.]co/iran-attack-wipes-out-17-of-qatars-Ing-capacity-for-up-to-five-years-qatarenergy-ceo-says/)

Additionally, a gas facility in Abu Dhabi, UAE, shut down following an intercepted strike, and two oil refineries in Kuwait were set on fire by drone attacks. Saudi Arabia reported damage after a drone fell on the Samref refinery in Yanbu on the Red Sea.<sup>13</sup>

- Prior to the gas targeting in Iran, the country launched targeted missile and drone attacks against the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait following the confirmed death of its security chief, Ali Larijani. Additionally, a strike on Tel Aviv resulted in two fatalities.<sup>14</sup>
- Meanwhile, Kuwait announced more arrests involving a group reportedly affiliated with Hezbollah, adding that it had foiled a plot to target vital facilities there.<sup>15</sup>
- However, there is a risk that Iran's targeting of Gulf neighbors will backfire and solidify Gulf opposition against Iran, leading those countries to join the ongoing military operations against Iran. This is particularly likely if Gulf leaders see Iran as a continued risk to their energy assets even once the war concludes and is likely to push the United States and Israel to deal a more lasting blow to the Iranian political and military establishment.

Following the South Pars strike and subsequent Iranian threats and attacks, oil and European natural gas prices surged. Brent crude rose to almost USD 120 a barrel; European gas futures rose as much as 35 percent.<sup>16</sup> This likely reflects concern that the conflict will devolve into direct hits on wider Gulf energy infrastructure. If that is the case, further energy price spikes are almost certain.

- The upstream energy industry had previously been largely spared until now, mitigating concerns the war would have a bigger impact on supply. Current price increases suggest a slower resumption of production once the conflict concludes.

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<sup>13</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/business/energy/saudi-red-sea-port-yanbu-targeted-aerial-attack-minimal-impact-source-says-2026-03-19/](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/saudi-red-sea-port-yanbu-targeted-aerial-attack-minimal-impact-source-says-2026-03-19/)

<sup>14</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/china/trump-criticises-allies-over-rejection-hormuz-request-iran-israel-trade-2026-03-17/](https://www.reuters.com/world/china/trump-criticises-allies-over-rejection-hormuz-request-iran-israel-trade-2026-03-17/)

<sup>15</sup>

[hXXps://www.timesofisrael\[.\]com/liveblog\\_entry/hezbollah-denies-it-has-members-in-kuwait-after-arrest-of-16-suspects-arrested/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/hezbollah-denies-it-has-members-in-kuwait-after-arrest-of-16-suspects-arrested/)

<sup>16</sup> [hXXps://apnews\[.\]com/article/stocks-markets-oil-iran-trump-labeleddf7c4bf19d1dc96b3f23c1de402](https://apnews.com/article/stocks-markets-oil-iran-trump-labeleddf7c4bf19d1dc96b3f23c1de402)

Additionally, the possibility of damage to output has now almost certainly increased.

- Notably, oil futures pricing has spiked above USD 100 for the next three months.<sup>17</sup> This shift indicates growing concerns over prolonged disruptions to oil markets, departing from previous market indications that the current price levels would not be sustained.

President Trump said that the United States was not involved in the South Pars attack, adding that Israel would refrain from further strikes on the location. He also warned that any additional attacks by Iran on Qatar’s LNG facilities would prompt the U.S. military to “massively blow up the entirety” of the South Pars field.<sup>18</sup>

U.S. targeting continues to reflect a desire to avoid striking Iranian energy sites. U.S. forces reportedly dropped bunker-buster munitions on Iranian missile sites near the Strait of Hormuz (SoH), likely targeting IRGC locations that could be used to target commercial ships.<sup>19</sup> However, loadings at Kharg Island, Iran’s key energy export terminal, are continuing. This likely reflects President Trump’s preference to avoid direct attacks on sites that would harm global supply while at the same time seeking to limit Iran’s ability to restrict container traffic through the SoH.

- U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stated the U.S. Treasury and Commerce Departments are considering removing sanctions on some Iranian oil products to limit price surges.<sup>20</sup>

On March 18, Iran’s foreign minister, Abbas Araqchi, stated that a “new protocol” for the SoH would be needed once the war ends. Araqchi claimed that Gulf countries bordering the SoH would need to work together to draft new rules governing the safe passage of ships through the strait, in a way that “aligned with Iranian and regional interests.”<sup>21</sup> This

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<sup>17</sup> [hXXps://www.investing\[.\]com/commodities/brent-oil](https://www.investing.com/commodities/brent-oil)

<sup>18</sup> [hXXps://www.nytimes\[.\]com/2026/03/19/world/middleeast/trump-iran-south-pars-gas-field.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/world/middleeast/trump-iran-south-pars-gas-field.html)

<sup>19</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/CENTCOM/status/2034040698954031326](https://x.com/CENTCOM/status/2034040698954031326)

<sup>20</sup> [hXXps://thehill\[.\]com/homenews/administration/5791639-bessent-oil-sanctions-lift-iran-conflict/](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5791639-bessent-oil-sanctions-lift-iran-conflict/)

<sup>21</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/middle-east/irans-nuclear-doctrine-not-likely-change-foreign-minister-says-2026-03-18/](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-nuclear-doctrine-not-likely-change-foreign-minister-says-2026-03-18/)

very likely suggests that Iran hopes to exert greater institutionalized control over traffic through the SoH in the future, likely as a method of deterring future aggression.

- The IRGC is very likely dictating Iran's wartime strategy due to Israel's successful targeting of Iran's political leadership. Therefore, Iran is likely to sustain its strategy of exerting control of the SoH and targeting its Gulf neighbors to leverage energy price shocks.

## Cyber Activity

Coordinated cyber operations targeting government infrastructure and private-sector entities continue across Israel, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. These activities appear to be driven primarily by pro-Iranian, pro-Palestinian, pro-Israel, anti-Iran, and pro-Russian hacktivist collectives employing a combination of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, website defacement, data exfiltration, and claimed intrusions into Industrial Control Systems (ICS).

## Advisory

The Council of the European Union sanctioned three Chinese and Iranian companies and two individuals for their alleged involvement in cyberattacks, including one firm that provided "technical and material support" leading to the hacking of more than 65,000 devices and another offering services targeting "critical infrastructure and critical functions."<sup>22</sup>

## NoName057(16)

Pro-Russian hacktivist group "NoName057(16)" allegedly conducted cyberattacks in support of Iran, targeting Israel- and U.S.-based entities. As of this report, the group has claimed responsibility for conducting DDoS attacks on multiple Romania and Israel-based entities, including:

- Romania-based entities:
  - rarom[.]ro
  - revasimeria[.]ro

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<sup>22</sup>

[hXXps://www.consilium.europa\[.\]eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/16/cyber-attacks-against-the-eu-and-its-member-states-council-sanctions-three-entities-and-two-individuals/](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/16/cyber-attacks-against-the-eu-and-its-member-states-council-sanctions-three-entities-and-two-individuals/)

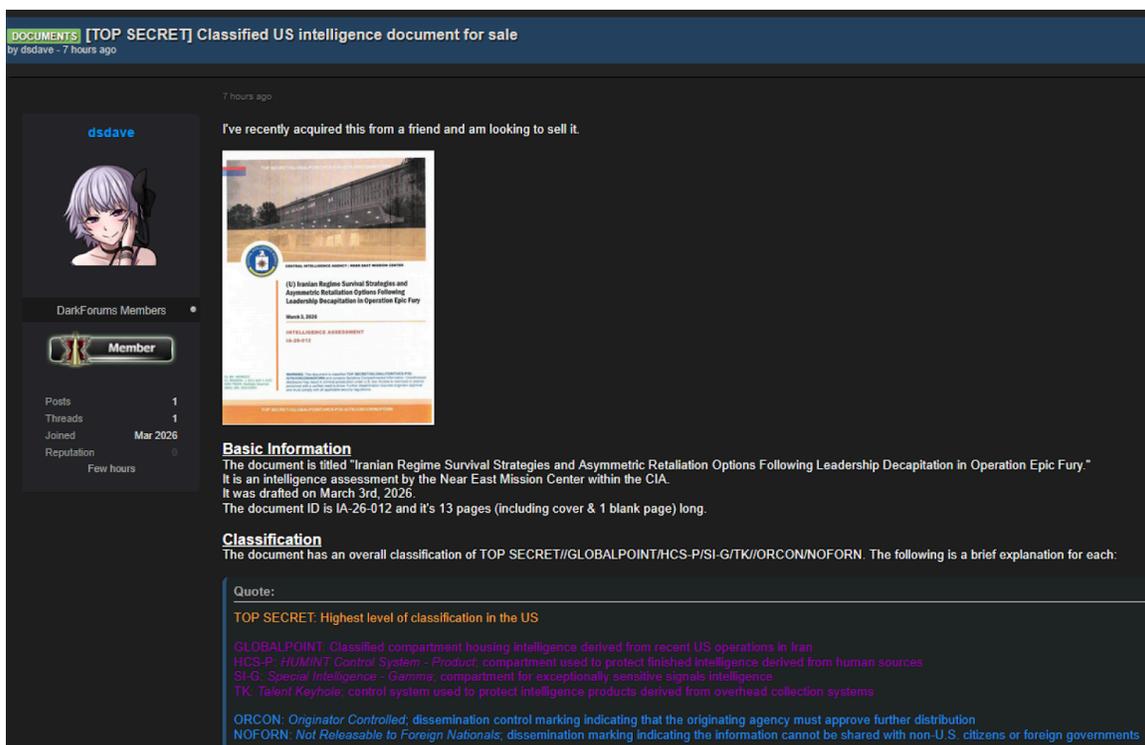
- onrc[.]ro
- portal.just[.]ro
- inm-lex[.]ro
- unbr[.]ro
- imm[.]gov[.]ro
- mapn[.]ro
- timrailcargo[.]ro
- afer[.]ro
- just[.]ro
- scj[.]ro
- Israel-based entities:
  - gahat[.]com
  - nk-ins[.]co[.]il
  - shomera[.]co[.]il
  - harel-group[.]com
  - igudbit[.]org[.]il
  - hcsra[.]co[.]il

## DarkForums Post

On March 19, 2026, a newly registered and untested threat actor using the alias “dsdave” shared their first post on the dark web forum DarkForums advertising allegedly top secret U.S. intelligence documents relating to operations in Iran. In the post, the actor claimed to have leaked a confidential document titled “Iranian Regime Survival Strategies and Asymmetric Retaliation Options Following Leadership Decapitation in Operation Epic Fury,” allegedly an intelligence assessment produced by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) dated March 3, 2026. The actor set the price at USD 4,599 and instructed interested buyers to contact them via Session ID.

- The alleged CIA document is purportedly marked with multiple, high-level U.S. classification and compartmentalization controls, including “TOP SECRET, GLOBALPOINT, HCS-P, SI-G, TK, ORCON, and NOFORN,” indicating highly sensitive intelligence derived from human sources, signals intelligence, and overhead collection, with strict dissemination restrictions.

According to the actor's claims, the document outlines potential response strategies available to the Iranian regime following Operation Epic Fury, tracks subsequent military and proxy activities, and highlights internal factional disputes impacting operational tempo. It further provides an assessment of the anticipated trajectory of Iranian behavior over three weeks, examines long-term implications for the United States, and identifies existing intelligence gaps within the intelligence community.



### **dsdave's DarkForums post**

Source: ZeroFox Intelligence

The actor dsdave appears to be a new forum member, having joined in March 2026, and alleges that the leaked information came “from a friend”, which is likely to fuel suspicion surrounding the actor's claims. Despite this, dsdave stated they will use escrow services for payment, offered to share two redacted pages as samples, and provided detailed information regarding delivery upon purchase, suggesting the actor's claims are legitimate. [Analyst Note: On dark web forums such as DarkForums, sales through escrow are often considered more likely to be trustworthy, as this is one way actors offer

assurances to buyers—often alongside middle man services, which the actor did not offer in the post.]

- There is a roughly even chance that the actor is in possession of such a CIA document, with some elements of the actor’s claims likely to be exaggerated.
- However, if authentic, a relevant and recent top secret U.S. intelligence document would very likely be used by U.S./Israeli adversaries to gain insights or advantages in the conflict.
- Even if the information cannot be used directly to influence military operations, it could likely be used to curate propaganda or otherwise sway public opinion surrounding the conflict.

## Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>
<b>WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?</b>	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
<b>HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?</b>	<b>Recipients may NOT share</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	<b>Recipients may ONLY share</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. <b>Note that</b> <b>TLP:AMBER+STRICT</b> restricts sharing to the organization only.
	<b>Green</b>	<b>Clear</b>
<b>WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?</b>	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
<b>HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?</b>	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

## **Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale**

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%