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# Middle East on the edge: What if Washington and Tehran trigger war for real?

As US forces gather in the Gulf of Oman, analysts debate whether negotiations can prevent a regional war with global consequences



As a growing American naval armada moves into position in the Gulf of Oman, the long-simmering confrontation between Washington and Tehran is entering one of its most dangerous phases in years. While diplomacy remains

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officially on the table, starting in several days, regional experts warn that miscalculation, ambiguity, and hardened positions on both sides could push the Middle East toward a conflict with global consequences.

The American military buildup in the Gulf of Oman continues, placing US forces within striking distance of Iran should Washington decide to act. President Donald Trump has repeatedly insisted that Tehran must return to the negotiating table and make far-reaching concessions, not only on its nuclear program, but also on its ballistic missile arsenal, which the US and Israel view as a direct threat, and on Iran's support for armed groups such as Yemen's Houthis and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Last week, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi signaled that Tehran was open to negotiations, and reports [suggest](#) talks could take place in the coming days. Yet many analysts remain skeptical that the Islamic Republic would agree to concessions touching what it considers its core strategic principles. If diplomacy fails, the risk of war looms large.

To better understand the motivations behind Washington's posture and what a conflict could mean for the region, RT spoke with three experts from Gulf states that could face Iranian retaliation.

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## President Trump to launch a potential war on Iran?

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**Salman Al-Ansari, prominent Saudi geopolitical researcher:** From Washington's perspective, Iran has long been viewed as a destabilizing regional actor through its support for militias, its nuclear enrichment program, and its ballistic missile capabilities. President Trump holds a strong personal conviction about the fundamentally negative nature of the Iranian regime, reinforced by sustained Israeli lobbying that urges decisive action against Tehran.

At its core, Trump's objectives can be summarized in three demands: dismantling Iran's nuclear enrichment, dismantling its network of Iran-backed militias in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, and dismantling its ballistic missile program. In contrast, Tehran's strategy is far simpler: buying time. Time until Trump leaves office. Time to avoid irreversible concessions. Time to wait out political change in Washington.

**Ahmed Khuzai, Manama-based political consultant:** President Trump's threats of military action against Iran appear to be driven by a combination of strategic pressure, domestic political signaling, and regional power dynamics.

His rhetoric has emphasized support for Iranian protesters facing regime crackdowns, while also warning Tehran that the US is *"ready, willing and able"* to act with overwhelming force if necessary.

The deployment of a US carrier strike group and the presence of tens of thousands of American

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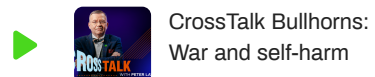


'China wants to back its currency with gold while the dollar is backed by nothing.'

troops in the region serve as visible demonstrations of this intent, aimed at deterring Iran and forcing it into negotiations. However, the administration has not clearly defined its ultimate objective: whether it seeks regime change, deterrence, or simply leverage in talks, leaving the situation volatile and open to miscalculation.

That's checkmate' – Peter Schiff

0:00 46:59



0:00 26:5



Ahmed Khazaie

The risks of such ambiguity are significant. Iran has vowed to retaliate immediately if attacked, raising the possibility of a wider regional conflict involving its proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.

A military confrontation could destabilize global oil markets, disrupt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, and strain US relations with European allies who favor diplomacy over force. Without a clearly articulated endgame, Trump's threats risk creating chaos similar to the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's fall in Iraq, undermining both regional stability and international trust.

In essence, the intention behind Trump's posture toward Iran is





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less about a concrete war plan and more about coercive diplomacy and political

theater, but the danger lies in how quickly symbolic shows of strength could spiral into a full-scale conflict.

### **Ali Al Hail, political analyst based in Qatar:**

The answer to this question is simple. President Donald Trump wants a regime change in Iran, and he thinks that what he did to Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, he can replicate it in Iran as well.

### **Military feasibility of regime change**

***RT: From a strategic and historical perspective, how realistic is the possibility that the United States could trigger regime change in Iran through military action?***

**Al-Ansari:** Uncertainty is the norm when it comes to regime change. Historically, the United States has had a highly counterproductive record in this domain, most notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the US unquestionably has the military capability to severely damage the Iranian state apparatus, military success does not automatically translate into political stability or a favorable post-war order.

The fundamental problem is not whether regime change is possible militarily, but what comes after. Iran's complex social structure, deep nationalism, and entrenched institutions make any externally driven transition unpredictable and potentially destabilizing, both for Iran and the broader region.



Salman Al Ansari

**Khuzai:** From a strategic and historical perspective, the idea of the United States achieving regime change in Iran through military action is highly unrealistic. While the US military has the capability to strike Iran's infrastructure and leadership targets, Iran's geography, large population, and strong defense posture make occupation and control far more difficult than past interventions in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Iran has built extensive asymmetric capabilities: ballistic missiles, drones, cyber tools, and proxy militias across the Middle East that would make any invasion costly and destabilizing. Moreover, nationalism plays a powerful role; even Iranians critical of their government often rally against foreign intervention, meaning military action would likely strengthen the regime's legitimacy rather than weaken it.

The obstacles to such a campaign are immense and



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US

counterproductive. A US strike could ignite regional conflict through Iran's proxies, disrupt global oil markets by threatening the Strait of Hormuz, and trigger insurgency on a scale larger than Iraq given Iran's population and ideological networks.

Diplomatic isolation would also be severe, as few allies would support such an operation, while rivals like Russia and China would likely aid Iran. Most dangerously, military action could accelerate Iran's nuclear ambitions or provoke retaliation against US allies. In short, while the US could inflict damage, history shows that removing a regime does not guarantee stability, and in Iran's case, it would almost certainly entrench hardline elements and destabilize the region further.

Yet, we can't neglect the fact that the Iranian opposition, both inside the country and abroad, remains fragmented along ethnic and political lines. Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, and others often pursue their own agendas rather than working together toward a unified vision. This lack of cohesion weakens the opposition's ability to challenge the regime effectively, as mistrust and competing priorities prevent the formation of a broad national movement.



Beside the  
fact that the  
most  
immense  
danger facing



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Iran is not simply the prospect of war, but the deep-rooted grievances of separatist groups who

aspire to reclaim or establish their own historic states. Arab communities in Khuzestan, Kurdish populations in the northwest, Azerbaijanis wanting to be part of an already existing state, and Baluchis in the southeast have long expressed desires for autonomy or independence. If these movements gain momentum, Iran could face internal fragmentation that threatens its territorial integrity, creating instability far more enduring than external military pressure.

**Al Hail:** The people of Iran make 110 million inhabitants. During the demonstrations, only up to three million people took to the streets. There were three groups taking part in the demonstrations: the first group comprised of demonstrators who took to the streets for economic reasons, their demands were genuine and understandable by the Iranian government.

Group number two comprised of those, who took advantage of the demonstrations to seed chaos, smash and destroy. Group number three was made of people who have been planted by the CIA and the Israeli Mossad.

Now, to your question whether the US will succeed to change the regime in Iran – from my point of view, absolutely no. The Iranians genuinely don't favor the United States of America. And the United States would not

succeed to either change the regime or destroy the country, especially after the military exercises between Iran, China and Russia that took place over the past three days in the Straits of Hormuz.



Ali Al hail

## Iran's proxy network and regional escalation

***RT: How likely is it that Iran's regional network of allies and proxies such as Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, or the Houthis would escalate the conflict, and how prepared are Gulf states to manage such multi-front pressures?***

**Al-Ansari:** Iran-backed militias do not act independently. They have no strategic autonomy, and their movements are dictated almost exclusively by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Any escalation by Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, or the Houthis would therefore be a calculated Iranian decision rather than spontaneous action.

On the other side, Gulf states have significantly



increased  
their  
defensive  
preparedness



over recent  
years. Air  
defense  
systems,  
intelligence

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coordination, and regional military integration  
have all improved, enabling Gulf countries to  
manage and contain multi-front pressures more  
effectively than in the past.

**Khuzai:** Iran's regional network of allies and proxies – Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shi'a militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen would almost certainly escalate any major conflict involving Tehran. But this time they did it from within (as a first step), through sending their militants to curb the demonstrations. These groups are designed to act as force multipliers, giving Iran the ability to project power beyond its borders without direct confrontation. Hezbollah could threaten Israel with rocket attacks, Iraqi militias could target US forces and Gulf infrastructure, and the Houthis have already demonstrated their capacity to strike Saudi and Emirati targets with drones and missiles. This decentralized network makes escalation highly likely, as Iran could activate multiple fronts simultaneously to overwhelm adversaries and deter direct attacks on its own territory.

Gulf states, while increasingly investing in advanced missile defense systems and air power, remain vulnerable to such multi-front pressures and militant, non-formal warfare. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have improved their ability to intercept drones and missiles, often

with US and Western support, but their critical oil infrastructure and shipping routes remain exposed. Coordinating defenses across multiple theaters – Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and potentially Syria – would stretch their resources and test their resilience.



Pro-Iranian Hezbollah militants, Beirut, Lebanon. © Marwan Naamani / picture alliance via Getty Images

Moreover, Gulf states rely heavily on external security guarantees, meaning their preparedness is limited without sustained US and allied involvement. In short, while Gulf defenses have improved, Iran's proxy network is structured to exploit vulnerabilities, making containment of simultaneous escalations a daunting challenge.

**Al Hail:** The Gulf states do not like to see a regional war between Iran and the United States of America. It would affect the stability and the security of the region. The Gulf states export strategic commodities like oil and gas to the world. It is essentially crucial to their politics and to overall life, and a war might put that at risk. The people of the Gulf do not like President Trump in particular, especially after his speech in Davos and because of his total alignment with

Israel against the innocent and poor people of Gaza and the West Bank.



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## consequences

***RT: How likely is it for Iran to start firing rockets into the Gulf states, prompting a regional war?***

**Al-Ansari:** It is unlikely that Iran would directly target Saudi Arabia. The Beijing-mediated Saudi–Iranian agreement remains a major deterrent, as does the fact that Saudi Arabia does not host US military bases [but it does host American troops – ed.] and has clearly stated that it will not allow its airspace, land, or sea to be used to launch attacks against Iran.

That said, the risk cannot be entirely dismissed for other GCC states. This makes heightened GCC military coordination and intelligence sharing essential to prevent miscalculation and to respond rapidly should Iran choose escalation elsewhere.

**Khuzai:** The likelihood of Iran directly firing rockets into Gulf states is relatively low under normal circumstances, as Tehran generally

prefers to operate through its network of proxies to avoid direct escalation. Iran's leadership is aware that overt missile strikes on Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain or other Gulf states would almost certainly trigger a large-scale regional war and invite US military retaliation. Instead, Iran has historically relied on groups like the Houthis in Yemen or militias in Iraq to pressure Gulf states indirectly, maintaining plausible deniability while still signaling its reach. Direct rocket attacks would represent a major escalation, one that Iran would likely reserve for scenarios where its survival feels directly threatened.

That said, the risk cannot be dismissed entirely. Iran possesses a significant arsenal of ballistic missiles and drones capable of striking Gulf infrastructure, and in a crisis such as a US or Israeli strike on Iranian territory or nuclear facilities it could decide to retaliate openly. Such an action would almost certainly prompt a regional war, as Gulf states would respond militarily with US backing, and Iran's proxies would join the fight across multiple theaters.



An Iranian surface-to-surface Ghasedak missile during the annual army day military parade. April 17, 2008, Tehran. © Majid / Getty Images

In this scenario, the conflict could quickly spiral into a multi-front confrontation affecting oil exports, shipping routes, and regional stability.

Thus, while Iran is unlikely to initiate direct rocket attacks under normal conditions, the probability rises sharply in the event of existential threats or major external strikes.

**Al Hail:** Iran could fire rockets on certain U.S. military bases in the Gulf if the war breaks out, as they say, upon me and upon my enemies simultaneously. There is indeed such a possibility. But I don't think the United States will get involved in a war. The United States in no way can be dragged by Israel into a strategic and fatal war against Iran. This time Iran is different from June 2025. Russia, China, and North Korea supplied Iran with strategic and lethal weapons, and the CIA plus the Mossad are pretty much aware of it.

## Global



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## repercussions of a war

***RT: What repercussions would such a war have on the region and the world?***

**Al-Ansari:** History shows that an all-out war without a clear political horizon rarely produces

stability. The consequences would likely include regional destabilization, energy market shocks, and wider global economic disruption.

Saudi Arabia's position remains consistent and pragmatic: encouraging flexibility from both Washington and Tehran, urging diplomatic engagement, and emphasizing dialogue as the only sustainable path to resolving fundamental disagreements. Military confrontation may reshape realities temporarily, but only diplomacy can produce lasting outcomes.

**Khuzai:** A full-scale war involving Iran and the Gulf states would have devastating repercussions for the Middle East, beginning with widespread instability across multiple fronts.

Iran's proxies such as Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, and the Houthis would likely escalate attacks against US forces, Israel, and Gulf infrastructure, creating a multi-front conflict that strains regional defenses. Critical oil and gas facilities in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar would be prime targets, and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz could choke off nearly a fifth of global oil supplies.

This would not only cripple Gulf economies but also trigger humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and sectarian violence across the region.





A US carrier strike group en route to the Middle East in 2024 as the region braced for Iranian retaliation to the killing of a senior Hamas leader in Tehran. © Global Look Press / Keystone Press Agency / US Navy

Globally, the economic shock would be immediate and severe. Energy prices would surge, fueling inflation and slowing growth worldwide, while shipping disruptions in the Gulf could destabilize global trade.

The war would also deepen geopolitical divides, with Russia and China likely backing Iran diplomatically or materially, while the US and its allies support Gulf states. Such polarization could weaken international institutions and heighten tensions in other flashpoints. In essence, a regional war sparked by Iran would reverberate far beyond the Middle East, reshaping global energy markets, alliances, and security dynamics in ways that could endure for decades.

**Al Hail:** Such a war would have fatal and lethal



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repercussions and consequences on the Gulf

states, the Middle East, and the world. And if they end up doing it, Iran will show the United States and Israel so many military surprises.

There is a military assumption that Iran could fire 700 ballistic missiles on Israel. These are not the missiles of June 2025, these are the most advanced systems supplied by Russia, China, and North Korea. Also important to note that the military armada of the United States and the USS Abraham Lincoln would be within the range of those missiles.

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For now, diplomacy remains a fragile lifeline amid rising tensions and military posturing. Yet as history has shown, wars in the Middle East often begin not with deliberate intent, but with miscalculation and hardened assumptions. Whether Washington and Tehran can step back from the brink may determine not only the future of the region, but the stability of an already fractured global order.



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**E** Erich Larsson 2/3/2026 at 12:21 PM 0

If their homeland is attacked and their people killed, the **fair and just thing for Iran to do** is to attack homeland America and Israel, both countries. If the Iranian banking system, economy, and oil industry infrastructure are destroyed, here are the targets to be struck and wiped out by Iranian Shahab-5 and Sejil-2, which had 1,800 kg of warhead, simultaneously: **Niagara Falls hydroelectric power plant, nuclear power plants in New York State, Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky; NYSE on Wall Street; Black Rock headquarter building in New York; Federal Reserve banks containing printed currency and gold bars; JP Morgan Chase, CitiGroup, CIA main headquarters in Langley, Virginia; Newport News Shipbuilding, Virginia; Lockheed Martin Corporation, Maryland; White House, US Capitol, Supreme Court building; all Hudson river bridges; Meta conglomerate headquarters in California; dams on the Tennessee river; Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco; etc, etc, etc.**

Destroying all these targets is not an act of terrorism; it is mankind getting even with the evil empire, for all the suffering and the millions of human beings murdered by the USA in the 20th and 21st century.

[Reply](#)**Carlo** 2/3/2026 at 12:11 PM

1

The insanity of the US congress and a treasonous president Trump are considering invading Iran on behalf of maniacal Netanyahu. Alarming and disturbing is the facts that American military will die representing a foreign regime.

[Reply](#)**Stan Allan** 2/3/2026 at 11:37 AM

1

Until the US and Isreal are deleted from existence, there can be no hope ever of peace.... Accountability and punishment and extermination are a mandatory prerequisite!!!... There can be no such reset as..forgive and forget... It is far far too criminal now!!!... Humanity itself has been weighed in the balances ...and found wanting!!!...

[Reply](#)**Yanos Sibirjanin**

1

2/3/2026 at 12:01 PM ↕

Until Israel exists there will be no peace on the planet.

[Reply](#)**criolla10** 2/3/2026 at 12:01 PM

1

The Butcher of Gaza Netanyahu wants a war and Trump will obey.

[Reply](#)**Mohammad Doofesh**

0

2/3/2026 at 11:37 AM

In the representations we see the Iranian flag and lion, and the US flag and eagle. in the Iranian flag the red tulip-shape stands for the name «Allaah». In the US flag the stars are