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USA & Israel vs. Iran: The Escalating Conflict

A comprehensive timeline of the U.S.-Israel-Iran confrontation spanning nearly five decades, from the 1979 Islamic Revolution to the 2026 nuclear standoff. Covers diplomacy, military strikes, proxy wars, sanctions, and nuclear milestones based on publicly available government records, IAEA reports, and major news sources.

by timelines.me · 44 events · Created 30 Mar 2026

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1979-02-11

Islamic Revolution Topples the Shah

[revolution, diplomacy, iran]

Ayatollah Khomeini returns from exile and Iran's monarchy collapses after months of mass protests. The Shah flees on January 16; by February 11 the military declares neutrality, ending 2,500 years of Persian monarchy. The new theocratic republic immediately brands the U.S. the 'Great Satan.'

1979-11-04

Iran Hostage Crisis Begins

[diplomacy, iran, usa]

Iranian students storm the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and take 52 American diplomats hostage. The crisis lasts 444 days, destroys Carter's presidency, and severs U.S.-Iran diplomatic relations — which remain broken to this day.

1979-11-14

U.S. Imposes First Major Sanctions on Iran

[sanctions, usa, iran]

President Carter freezes approximately $12 billion in Iranian assets held in U.S. banks, ten days after the embassy seizure. This marks the beginning of a sanctions architecture that will expand over four decades into one of the most comprehensive in history.

1980-09-22

Iran-Iraq War Erupts

[military, proxy, iran, usa]

Iraq invades Iran, triggering an eight-year war that kills an estimated 500,000–1,000,000 people. The U.S. provides intelligence and military support to Iraq, while Israel secretly sells weapons to Iran. The war shapes Iran's threat perception for decades.

1982-07-01

Hezbollah Founded with Iranian Backing

[proxy, military, iran, israel]

Iran's Revolutionary Guard helps establish Hezbollah in Lebanon during the Israeli invasion. The Shia militia becomes Iran's most powerful proxy, eventually fielding over 100,000 rockets aimed at Israel. Annual Iranian funding is estimated at $700 million–$1 billion.

1983-10-23

U.S. Marine Barracks Bombing in Beirut

[military, proxy, iran, usa]

A truck bomb kills 241 U.S. Marines and 58 French paratroopers at their barracks in Beirut. The attack, attributed to Hezbollah with Iranian support, is the deadliest terrorist strike against Americans until 9/11. The U.S. withdraws from Lebanon within months.

1986-11-03

Iran-Contra Affair Exposed

[diplomacy, military, iran, usa]

A Lebanese magazine reveals that the Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to Iran, using profits to fund Nicaraguan rebels in violation of U.S. law. The scandal exposes covert U.S.-Iran dealings even as both countries publicly treat each other as enemies.

1988-07-03

USS Vincennes Shoots Down Iran Air Flight 655

[military, iran, usa]

A U.S. Navy cruiser in the Persian Gulf mistakenly shoots down an Iranian civilian airliner, killing all 290 passengers and crew. The U.S. never formally apologizes but pays $61.8 million in compensation in 1996. Iran views the incident as deliberate aggression.

1994-07-18

AMIA Bombing in Buenos Aires

[proxy, military, iran, israel]

A car bomb destroys the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association building, killing 85 people and injuring over 300. Argentine prosecutors attribute the attack to Hezbollah operatives directed by Iran. It remains the deadliest terrorist attack in Argentine history.

1997-05-23

Khatami Elected, Signals Openness to Dialogue

[diplomacy, iran, usa]

Reformist Mohammad Khatami wins Iran's presidency with 70% of the vote, calling for a 'dialogue among civilizations.' The U.S. responds cautiously; Clinton eases some sanctions on food and medicine. The diplomatic thaw proves short-lived as hardliners retain control of security policy.

2002-08-14

Iran's Secret Nuclear Program Revealed

[nuclear, iran, diplomacy]

An Iranian dissident group publicly exposes two undeclared nuclear facilities: a uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy-water reactor at Arak. The revelation triggers a decade of escalating confrontation between Iran, the IAEA, and Western powers.

2003-10-21

EU3 Begin Nuclear Negotiations with Iran

[nuclear, diplomacy, iran]

France, Germany, and the UK negotiate the Tehran Declaration, under which Iran agrees to suspend uranium enrichment and allow IAEA inspections. The agreement buys time but collapses in 2005 when Iran resumes enrichment under new president Ahmadinejad.

2005-10-26

Ahmadinejad Calls for Israel's Destruction

[diplomacy, iran, israel]

Newly elected Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declares that Israel 'must be wiped off the map' at a conference in Tehran. The remarks galvanize international opposition and give Israel and the U.S. powerful rhetorical ammunition for tougher sanctions.

2006-12-23

UN Security Council Imposes First Nuclear Sanctions

[sanctions, nuclear, diplomacy, iran]

Resolution 1737 demands Iran suspend all enrichment and reprocessing activities, imposing targeted sanctions on nuclear-related entities. It passes unanimously, including votes from Russia and China, signaling rare great-power consensus against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

2007-09-06

Israel Destroys Syrian Nuclear Reactor (Operation Orchard)

[military, nuclear, israel, proxy]

Israeli jets strike and destroy a plutonium reactor under construction in Deir ez-Zor, Syria, built with North Korean assistance and suspected Iranian involvement. Syria and Israel both stay silent for months. The strike signals Israel's willingness to act preemptively against regional nuclear threats.

2010-06-15

Stuxnet Cyberattack Cripples Iran's Centrifuges

[military, nuclear, cyber, usa, israel]

A sophisticated computer worm, later attributed to a joint U.S.-Israeli operation (Olympic Games), destroys roughly 1,000 of Iran's 9,000 uranium enrichment centrifuges at Natanz. It is the first known cyberweapon to cause physical damage to infrastructure, setting a new

precedent in warfare.

2010-11-29

Assassination Campaign Targets Iranian Nuclear Scientists

[assassination, nuclear, iran, israel]

Iranian nuclear physicist Majid Shahriari is killed by a magnetic bomb attached to his car in Tehran; another scientist is wounded the same day. Between 2010 and 2012, at least four Iranian nuclear scientists are assassinated in similar attacks widely attributed to Israel's Mossad.

2012-01-01

Obama Signs Sweeping Oil and Banking Sanctions

[sanctions, usa, iran]

The National Defense Authorization Act targets Iran's Central Bank and oil exports, the regime's primary revenue source. Iran's oil exports drop from 2.5 million barrels/day to roughly 1 million, and the rial loses two-thirds of its value within months.

2012-07-15

Secret U.S.-Iran Back-Channel Talks Begin in Oman

[diplomacy, nuclear, usa, iran]

Senior U.S. and Iranian officials hold clandestine meetings in Muscat, Oman, laying the groundwork for the eventual nuclear deal. The talks, authorized by Obama and kept secret from most allies including Israel, represent the first sustained high-level U.S.-Iran diplomacy since 1979.

2015-07-14

JCPOA Nuclear Deal Signed in Vienna

[nuclear, diplomacy, iran, usa]

Iran and the P5+1 (U.S., UK, France, Russia, China, Germany) sign the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Iran agrees to reduce centrifuges from 19,000 to 6,104, cap enrichment at 3.67%, and accept intrusive inspections in exchange for sanctions relief. Israel's Netanyahu calls it a 'historic mistake.'

2016-01-16

Iran Begins Receiving Billions in Unfrozen Assets

[sanctions, diplomacy, nuclear, iran]

Implementation Day: the IAEA certifies Iran has met its nuclear commitments, triggering sanctions relief. Iran gains access to approximately $100 billion in frozen overseas assets. The same day, Iran releases four American prisoners in a separate deal.

2018-05-08

Trump Withdraws U.S. from JCPOA

[nuclear, diplomacy, sanctions, usa, iran]

President Trump unilaterally pulls the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal, calling it 'the worst deal ever negotiated.' He reimposes all U.S. sanctions despite IAEA certification that Iran was in compliance. European allies condemn the move but cannot shield their companies from secondary sanctions.

2018-11-05

Trump Launches 'Maximum Pressure' Campaign

[sanctions, usa, iran]

The U.S. reimposes the harshest sanctions yet, targeting Iran's oil exports, banking sector, and shipping. The goal is to drive Iran's oil exports to zero. Iran's economy contracts by an estimated 6% in 2019, and inflation exceeds 40%.

2019-07-01

Iran Begins Exceeding JCPOA Enrichment Limits

[nuclear, iran, diplomacy]

Iran announces it has surpassed the 300 kg stockpile limit for low-enriched uranium set by the JCPOA, and begins enriching beyond the 3.67% cap. Tehran frames the moves as reversible leverage to pressure Europe into providing sanctions relief. The nuclear deal's constraints begin to unravel.

2019-09-14

Iran Attacks Saudi Oil Facilities at Abqaiq

[military, proxy, iran]

Drone and cruise missile strikes hit Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq processing plant and Khurais oil field, temporarily halving Saudi oil output (5.7 million barrels/day). The U.S. and Saudi Arabia attribute the attack to Iran directly, though Houthi rebels initially claim responsibility.

2020-01-03

U.S. Assassinates General Qasem Soleimani

[assassination, military, usa, iran]

A U.S. drone strike at Baghdad International Airport kills Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force and architect of its regional proxy network. Also killed is Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The strike brings the U.S. and Iran to the brink of open war.

2020-01-08

Iran Retaliates with Ballistic Missiles on Al-Asad Airbase

[military, iran, usa]

Iran fires 16 ballistic missiles at Al-Asad airbase in Iraq, housing U.S. troops. No Americans are killed, though over 100 are later diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries. It is the first direct Iranian ballistic missile attack on U.S. forces, and both sides pull back from further escalation.

2020-11-27

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh Assassinated Near Tehran

[assassination, nuclear, iran, israel]

Iran's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, is killed in an ambush outside Tehran using a remote-controlled AI-assisted machine gun, according to Iranian and Western reports. Iran blames Israel. The killing devastates Iran's nuclear weapons expertise and inflames tensions weeks before Biden takes office.

2021-04-16

Iran Enriches Uranium to 60%, Approaching Weapons Grade

[nuclear, iran]

Iran announces it has begun enriching uranium to 60% purity at Natanz, far beyond the 3.67% JCPOA limit and a short technical step from the 90% needed for a weapon. The move follows a sabotage attack on Natanz attributed to Israel. The IAEA confirms the enrichment level.

2022-09-15

Vienna Nuclear Talks Stall Indefinitely

[nuclear, diplomacy, iran, usa]

After 18 months of indirect U.S.-Iran negotiations in Vienna to restore the JCPOA, talks collapse over Iran's demand to close the IAEA investigation into undeclared nuclear material. Iran's brutal crackdown on the Mahsa Amini protests further poisons the diplomatic atmosphere.

2022-10-15

Iran Supplies Shahed Drones to Russia for Ukraine War

[military, proxy, iran]

Russia begins using Iranian-made Shahed-136 kamikaze drones against Ukrainian civilian infrastructure. The transfers deepen Iran's military partnership with Moscow and complicate any Western diplomatic outreach to Tehran. Iran initially denies, then acknowledges a 'small number' were sent before the war.

2023-10-07

Hamas Launches October 7 Attack on Israel

[military, proxy, iran, israel]

Hamas militants breach the Gaza border fence and kill approximately 1,200 Israelis, taking over 250 hostages. Iran denies direct involvement but has provided Hamas with funding, weapons, and training for decades. The attack triggers Israel's massive military operation in Gaza and reshapes the entire regional dynamic.

2024-04-01

Israel Strikes Iranian Consulate in Damascus

[military, iran, israel, assassination]

An Israeli airstrike destroys the Iranian consular annex in Damascus, killing seven IRGC officers including Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi. It is the highest-ranking Iranian military official killed by Israel since Soleimani. Iran vows direct retaliation for the first time.

2024-04-13

Iran Launches Unprecedented Direct Attack on Israel

[military, iran, israel, usa]

Iran fires over 300 projectiles at Israel — including 170+ drones, 30+ cruise missiles, and 120+ ballistic missiles — in Operation True Promise. A U.S.-led coalition with the UK, France, and Jordan intercepts 99% of them. It is the first direct Iranian military strike on Israeli territory in history.

2024-09-27

Israel Eliminates Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah

[military, assassination, israel, iran, proxy]

Israeli airstrikes on Beirut's southern suburbs kill Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who had led the organization for 32 years. The strike also kills several senior commanders. Iran loses its most important and experienced proxy leader, fundamentally weakening its 'Axis of Resistance.'

2024-10-26

Israel Strikes Deep Inside Iran (Operation Days of Repentance)

[military, israel, iran]

Israeli jets strike military targets across Iran, including air defense systems, missile production facilities, and IRGC bases in Tehran, Isfahan, and Khuzestan provinces. It is Israel's first publicly acknowledged direct military strike on Iranian soil. Iran's air defenses prove largely ineffective.

2024-12-08

Assad Regime Falls, Iran Loses Syria as Strategic Corridor

[proxy, military, iran, diplomacy]

Syrian opposition forces capture Damascus and Bashar al-Assad flees to Moscow after a rapid offensive. Iran loses its most critical land bridge for supplying Hezbollah and projecting power into the Mediterranean. Decades of investment in the Assad regime — estimated at over $30 billion — evaporate.

2025-01-20

Trump Returns, Reimposes Maximum Pressure 2.0

[sanctions, diplomacy, usa, iran]

President Trump takes office for his second term, immediately signing executive orders reimposing and expanding sanctions on Iran. The new policy targets remaining oil export channels, including Chinese refineries buying Iranian crude, and threatens secondary sanctions on any entity dealing with Tehran.

2025-02-15

IAEA Reports Iran's Enriched Uranium Stockpile at Record High

[nuclear, iran, diplomacy]

An IAEA quarterly report reveals Iran has accumulated over 150 kg of uranium enriched to 60% purity — enough, if further enriched, for roughly three nuclear weapons. Iran's total enriched uranium stockpile exceeds 6,000 kg, more than 30 times the JCPOA limit.

2025-03-15

U.S. and Israel Conduct Joint Military Exercises Simulating Iran Strike

[military, usa, israel, iran]

The U.S. and Israel hold their largest-ever joint aerial exercise, 'Juniper Oak III,' with B-2 bombers, F-35s, and aerial refueling tankers simulating long-range strikes on fortified underground targets. Pentagon officials describe it as a 'clear message' to Tehran about military options remaining on the table.

2025-06-15

Iran Installs Advanced IR-9 Centrifuges at Fordow

[nuclear, iran]

IAEA inspectors confirm Iran has begun operating next-generation IR-9 centrifuges at the fortified underground Fordow facility, which can enrich uranium 50 times faster than the IR-1 models permitted under the JCPOA. The installation dramatically shortens Iran's potential nuclear breakout time to an estimated two weeks.

2025-09-15

Houthis Escalate Red Sea Attacks Amid Regional Tensions

[proxy, military, iran]

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen intensify attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, forcing major carriers to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope. Shipping costs through the Suez Canal corridor increase by over 300%. The U.S. and UK conduct repeated strikes on Houthi positions but fail to stop the campaign.

2026-01-15

U.S. Deploys Second Carrier Group to Persian Gulf

[military, usa, iran, nuclear]

The Pentagon sends a second aircraft carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf amid intelligence suggesting Iran may be preparing a nuclear test or final weaponization steps. The dual-carrier presence — the largest U.S. naval deployment to the region since 2003 — signals Washington's readiness for a potential military confrontation.

2026-03-10

Iran Restricts IAEA Inspectors' Access to Key Sites

[nuclear, diplomacy, iran]

Iran bars IAEA inspectors from accessing centrifuge workshops and the Fordow enrichment plant, citing 'national security concerns.' IAEA Director General Grossi warns the agency can no longer guarantee the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. The U.S. and Israel describe the move as a potential casus belli.