

## U.S. Strikes Iran's Nuclear Sites at Israel's Urging With Bunker Buster Bombs, Triggering Retaliation and Escalating Middle East Tensions

The U.S. bombed Iranian nuclear sites at Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan with bunker busters and Tomahawks. Iran's retaliatory missile strikes on Israeli cities followed swiftly, as fears of a broader regional war intensify.

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The U.S. B2 Stealth Bomber pictured here resembles the type used in the recent operation targeting Iran's nuclear facilities.

In a dramatic escalation of the Middle East conflict, the United States launched airstrikes on three Iranian nuclear facilities—Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan—on June 21, acting in close coordination

with Israel to target Iran's nuclear program. President Donald Trump hailed the operation as a "spectacular military success," claiming the sites were "completely and totally obliterated" to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The strikes, which marked the first direct U.S. military action against Iran, followed Israel's surprise attack on June 13, which killed top Iranian military commanders and nuclear scientists, igniting a cycle of retaliation that has deepened regional instability and drawn global condemnation. Iran's swift and devastating missile barrages on Israeli cities have caused significant damage, while the ongoing war in Gaza, widely criticized as a humanitarian catastrophe, continues to fuel tensions.

### U.S. Strikes: A Joint Operation with Israel

The U.S. operation involved B-2 stealth bombers dropping 30,000-pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs, known as "bunker busters," designed to penetrate deeply buried targets like the Fordo enrichment facility, located 300 feet underground near Qom. Navy submarines also fired 30 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Natanz and Isfahan, key sites in Iran's uranium enrichment program. Trump announced the strikes on Truth Social at 19:50 local time, declaring, "All planes are now outside of Iran air space. A full payload of BOMBS was dropped on the primary site, Fordow. All planes are safely on their way home." In a televised address flanked by Vice President JD Vance, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, he warned Iran that "future attacks will be far greater" unless it pursues a diplomatic solution.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who described the U.S. action as a "bold decision" that would "change history," confirmed full coordination with Washington. Israel had lobbied for U.S. involvement, as only American bunker-buster bombs could effectively target Fordo's fortified structure. The strikes followed a June 8 briefing from Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Dan Caine, which convinced Trump of Israel's concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions, despite his initial preference for negotiations.

Iranian officials acknowledged the attacks but downplayed their impact, with the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization stating there were "no signs of contamination" and that key materials had been evacuated prior to the strikes. Deputy political director Hassan Abedini claimed on state TV that Iran "didn't suffer a major blow because the materials had already been taken out." The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported no increase in radiation levels but noted damage to Natanz's above-ground pilot enrichment plant and power supply disruptions at all three sites.

### Israel's Initial Strike: The Spark of Conflict

The current conflict began on June 13, when Israel launched a surprise attack on Iran, targeting nuclear facilities at Natanz, Isfahan, and possibly Fordo, as well as military bases and leadership. The operation, dubbed "Rising Lion," killed top Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders, including Hossein Salami and Mohammad Bagheri, and six nuclear scientists, including Fereydoon Abbasi, a former atomic energy chief. Israel's Mossad reportedly smuggled drones and precision weapons into Iran to disable air defenses, enabling over 200 fighter jets to strike more than 100 targets.

Netanyahu justified the attack as a preemptive measure to prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons, claiming Iran had enough enriched uranium for "nine atom bombs" and was days away

from weaponization. However, this assertion contradicted a March 2025 assessment by U.S. National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard, who stated that Iran had increased its uranium stockpile but was not actively building a nuclear weapon—a view Trump later dismissed as “wrong.” The IAEA also reported in June 2025 that Iran’s nuclear program was for civilian purposes, though it violated non-proliferation obligations by enriching uranium to 60% purity, near weapons-grade.

The international community, including the United Nations and European allies, criticized Israel’s unilateral action. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned that “any additional military interventions could have enormous consequences,” urging restraint to avoid a broader war. Iran’s U.N. ambassador, Amir Saeid Iravani, told the Security Council that Israel’s strikes killed 78 people, mostly civilians, and injured 320, accusing Israel of trying to “kill diplomacy.”

### Iran’s Retaliation: Devastating Strikes on Israel

Iran responded swiftly to both Israel’s initial attack and the U.S. strikes, launching hundreds of ballistic missiles and drones at Israel in operations dubbed “True Promise 3.” On June 13, Iran fired over 100 missiles, striking Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem, with at least nine sites hit, causing widespread damage. Israeli media reported three deaths and 174 injuries, though Iran’s IRGC claimed its missiles evaded Israel’s Iron Dome defenses, hitting strategic targets. A direct strike on Soroka hospital in Beersheba on June 19 injured 32 people, with Iran claiming it targeted an adjacent IDF command center, while Israeli officials accused Tehran of deliberately attacking civilians.

By June 21, Iran’s missile barrages had wounded dozens and killed at least 10 in Israel, with significant damage to residential areas and infrastructure. In Ramat Gan, a missile strike trapped 15 people in a damaged house, and in Tel Aviv, images showed mangled cars and shattered buildings. Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi condemned the U.S. strikes as a “barbaric violation” of international law, asserting Tehran’s right to retaliate and accusing Trump of betraying promises to end U.S. involvement in Middle East wars. A senior U.S. intelligence official warned that Iran had readied missiles for potential strikes on U.S. bases if Washington deepened its involvement.

Iran’s ability to retaliate has been hampered by the weakening of its regional proxies, including Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, both decimated by Israel’s campaigns. Nonetheless, residents in Tehran reported heavy civilian tolls, with 224 deaths, including 60 children in a flattened 14-story apartment block, and over 1,200 injuries since Israel’s initial strikes. “Smoke and dust were filling all the house and we couldn’t breathe,” said Mohsen Salehi, a 45-year-old Tehran resident, after an airstrike.

### The Gaza Crisis: A Humanitarian Catastrophe

The Israel-Iran conflict is deeply intertwined with Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack, which killed 1,200 Israelis and took 250 hostages. Israel’s retaliatory campaign, widely criticized as disproportionate, has killed over 55,000 Palestinians, with 90% estimated to be civilians, according to Gaza’s Hamas-run health ministry and independent monitors like Human Rights Activists, prompting accusations of genocide. The war has displaced nearly 2 million people, destroyed 70% of Gaza’s infrastructure, and created a humanitarian crisis, with famine and disease rampant due to Israel’s blockade.

The international community, including the U.N. and human rights groups like B’Tselem, has condemned Israel’s actions in Gaza, arguing they violate international humanitarian law. Protests

in the U.S. and Europe have demanded a ceasefire, with some Democratic lawmakers, like Rep. Jim Himes, criticizing Trump's Iran strikes as unconstitutional without Congressional approval. Israel's simultaneous campaigns in Gaza, Lebanon, and now Iran have stretched its military but also weakened Iran's "Axis of Resistance," reducing Tehran's regional influence.

### Global Reactions and Uncertain Future

The U.S. strikes have divided American policymakers. Republicans like Sen. Ted Cruz and former Vice President Mike Pence praised Trump's "decisive leadership," while Democrats like Sen. Jeanne Shaheen urged de-escalation, warning against rushing into war. Trump's decision to act without Congressional briefing has fueled accusations of overreach, with Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chairman Mark Warner demanding a clear strategy.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Israel's actions a "declaration of war" and vowed "severe punishment," while rejecting U.S. demands to halt uranium enrichment as a "big mistake." Negotiations mediated by Oman, aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, collapsed after Israel's June 13 attack, with Iran refusing to negotiate under fire. Trump, speaking at the G7 summit in Canada, expressed hope for a ceasefire but suggested that "sometimes countries have to fight it out first."

The conflict's trajectory remains uncertain. Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar claimed the campaign has delayed Iran's nuclear program by "two or three years," but experts warn that strikes may only set back enrichment temporarily, potentially hardening Iran's resolve. With civilians bearing the brunt in Iran, Israel, and Gaza, the international community faces mounting pressure to broker a resolution before the region descends into a broader war.