

MIDDLE EAST

IRAN RAMPS UP ATTACKS AFTER INCREASED THREATS



ARIEL SCHALIT, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Israeli security forces survey a site Sunday that was struck by an Iranian missile in Dimona, southern Israel.

Leaders also threaten to close crucial Strait of Hormuz

ALON BERNSTEIN, SAM METZ AND SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

ARAD, Israel — The United States and Iran threatened to target critical infrastructure Sunday as the war in the Middle East, now in its fourth week, puts lives and livelihoods at risk throughout the region.

Iran said the Strait of Hormuz, crucial to oil and other exports, would be “completely closed” immediately if the U.S. follows up on President Donald Trump’s threat to attack its power plants. Late Saturday, Trump set a 48-hour deadline to open the strait.

Israeli leaders visited one of two southern communities near a secretive nuclear research site struck by Iranian missiles late Saturday, with scores of people wounded. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it was a “miracle” no one was killed. Israel detected more Iranian missiles fired toward the area Sunday evening.

Netanyahu claimed Israel and the U.S. were well on their way to achieving their war goals. The aims ranged from weakening Iran’s nuclear program, missile program and support for armed proxies to

enabling the Iranian people to overthrow the theocracy.

The developments signaled the war, which the U.S. and Israel launched Feb. 28, was moving in a dangerous new direction, despite Trump’s comment last week he is considering “winding down” operations. It has killed more than 2,000 people so far, rattled the global economy and sent oil prices surging.

Iranian-backed Hezbollah claimed responsibility for an airstrike that killed a man in northern Israel, while Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called Israel’s targeting of bridges in the south “a prelude to a ground invasion.”

Plants threatened

Iran practically closed the Strait of Hormuz that connects the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world. About one-fifth of global oil supply passes through it, but attacks on ships and threats of further strikes stopped almost all tanker traffic. Some of the largest oil producers made cuts because their crude has nowhere to go.

Iranian officials said they would keep

providing safe passage through the strait to vessels from countries other than its enemies.

The U.S. and its allies in Europe and Asia rely heavily on the oil to meet energy demand. In its most recent attempt to relieve pressure on energy prices, the U.S. lifted some sanctions on Iranian oil at sea.

Trump said on social media if Iran didn’t open the strait, the U.S. would destroy its “various POWER PLANTS, STARTING WITH THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST!”

Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf responded that if Iran’s power plants and infrastructure are targeted, then vital infrastructure across the region — including energy and desalination facilities — would be considered legitimate targets and “irreversibly destroyed.”

Under international law, power plants that benefit civilians can be targeted only if the military advantage outweighs the suffering it causes to civilians, legal scholars say.

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Israel’s strikes on leaders has limits, experts warn

Attempts to topple regimes via targeted killings have historically backfired

SAM METZ
Associated Press

Israel has killed one senior Iranian leader after another in airstrikes as it seeks to topple the Islamic Republic. But its past experience of targeting senior militants shows the strategy has limits and can sometimes backfire.

Israel killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. The group still fires rockets.

It took out Hamas’ top brass. The group still controls half of Gaza and has not laid

down arms.

As a strategy, targeted killing has rarely been employed against a state. While it may provide tangible achievements that leaders can brand as victories — especially in wars with no clear endgame — it rarely addresses the underlying grievances that propel conflicts.

Jon Alterman, chair of Global Security and Geostrategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the impact of targeted killings often fades over time.

He noted that Iran’s government and military are made up of several overlapping institutions that have so far survived waves of punishing U.S. and Israeli strikes.

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VAHID SALEMI, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A mourner holds a poster depicting Ayatollah Khamenei, right, the successor to his late father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, as supreme leader, during the funeral procession for senior Iranian military officials and civilians killed during the U.S.-Israel campaign in Tehran, Iran, on March 11.