

# US-Iran: A History of Rising Tensions

■ US ■ Iraq (Regional Allies) ■ Iran

The faceoff between the US and Iran dates back decades before the two teetered on the brink of war in January. The nations have had a rollercoaster relationship since at least 1953, when the US backed a coup that overthrew the democratically elected government in favor of a monarchy under the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. In 1979, after years of protest, the Shah was ousted and a new Islamist revolutionary government was established. In the midst of the upheaval, the US embassy was stormed and 52 American hostages were seized and held captive at the embassy for 15 months.

Iran has supported terrorist and insurgent forces across the Middle East, periodically threatened to shut down shipping in the Persian Gulf and to attack Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other regional US allies. Iran has also persisted in seeking to develop nuclear capabilities. In 2015, the Obama administration agreed to a multiparty international deal constraining Iran's nuclear program, but President Donald J. Trump withdrew from the agreement in May 2018, reinstated economic sanctions, and implemented a "maximum pressure" campaign intended to compel Iran to abandon support for terrorism and insurgents in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere, and to forswear nuclear weapons. How tensions escalated from April 2019-January 2020.

**April 8, 2019:** The White House designates the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including its elite Quds Force, as a foreign terrorist organization.

**May 7, 2019:** US deploys B-52 bombers and the USS *Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group to the Middle East in response to "clear indications" of potential Iranian attacks on US forces.

**May 14, 2019:** US Central Command elevates Operation Inherent Resolve to "a high level of alert" in response to "credible and possibly imminent threats to US forces in Iraq."

**May 15, 2019:** US pulls diplomatic personnel from Iraq; NATO allies suspend training of Iraqi troops.

**May 24, 2019:** US says it will deploy additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft and another fighter squadron to the Middle East to "improve our force protection and safeguard US forces" from Iranian threats.

**June 13, 2019:** F-15Es from Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C., deploy to Al Dhafra AB, United Arab Emirates.

**June 20, 2019:** An Iranian surface-to-air missile shoots down a US Navy Broad Area Maritime Surveillance drone over the Strait of Hormuz.



Photo: DOD video/screenshot

**June 21, 2019:** President Trump calls off a retaliatory strike saying he wanted to avoid loss of life.

**June 24-27, 2019:** US State Department sanctions the Supreme Leader's Office and associated people. F-22 deployment to Al Udeid AB, Qatar, approved.

**July 18, 2019:** The US downs an Iranian drone as the Defense Department prepares deployments to Saudi Arabia.

**July 24, 2019:** USAF jets practice supporting and defending US surface ships in a Persian Gulf exercise.

**Aug. 29, 2019:** The Pentagon launches a maritime security effort amid de-escalation with Iran.

**Sept. 14, 2019:** Iran or proxies launch a major air attack on Saudi oil facilities. Iranian drones and cruise missiles are recovered from the site. The US sends aircraft to reinforce Saudi defenses.

**Oct. 7, 2019:** The White House announces that US forces will withdraw from Syria.

**Oct. 11, 2019:** US deploys fighter squadrons, an air expeditionary wing, and missile defenses to Saudi Arabia.

**Oct. 25, 2019:** B-1s deploy to Saudi Arabia.



Photo: MSgt. Joshua L. DeMatris

**Nov. 9, 2019:** Iranian-backed Shia militias launch a rocket attack against Q-West Air Base in Northwest Iraq.

**Nov. 19, 2019:** Defense Intelligence Agency says Iran's military is gaining strength. The report details Iran's advancing missile capabilities.

**Nov. 30, 2019:** Iraqi PM announces plans to resign; Parliament approves resignation two days later.

**Dec. 3, 2019:** Iranian-backed Shia militias launch rocket attack against Al Asad AB, Iraq.

**Dec. 5, 2019:** Kataeb Hezbollah launches rocket attack on Balad AB, Iraq.

**Dec. 9, 2019:** Iranian-backed Shia militias fire rockets at the Baghdad diplomatic support center at Baghdad International Airport.

**Dec. 27, 2019:** A US contractor is killed in a rocket attack near Kirkuk. In response, President Trump orders strikes against Kataeb Hezbollah forces in Iraq and Syria.

**Dec. 31, 2019:** Shia militias attack the US embassy in Baghdad. DOD deploys Marines from Kuwait to Iraq and an Army brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division from the US to Kuwait.

**Jan. 3, 2020:** IRGC Quds Force Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani is killed in a US drone strike. Also killed is Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces.



Photo: khamenei.ir via CC BY-4.0

**Jan. 5, 2020:** Iraq's Parliament approves a nonbinding resolution seeking the expulsion of US forces from the country.

**Jan 7, 2020:** Iran fires 16 tactical ballistic missiles at Al Asad Air Base and a second base in Erbil, Iraq, damaging buildings but causing no casualties.

**Jan. 8, 2020:** President Trump announces that "the United States will immediately impose additional punishing economic sanctions on the Iranian regime," as tensions ease.

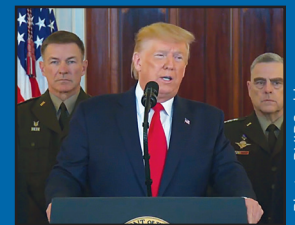


Photo: DVIDS video screenshot