

US begins pulling staff from Beirut embassy amid Iran attack buildup

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The State Department ordered the evacuation of non-essential personnel and family members from the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on Monday, amid a major buildup of forces in the Middle East and intensifying preparations for war against Iran. Reuters reported that 32 embassy staff and family members flew out of Beirut airport, while an embassy source put the total at 50 people evacuated.

The State Department updated its travel advisory for Lebanon on Monday, warning US citizens not to travel to the country and imposing travel restrictions on remaining personnel “with little to no notice.”

The pullout follows a pattern established before Operation Midnight Hammer in June 2025, when the US reduced its presence at embassies in Baghdad, Kuwait and Bahrain in the days before B-2 bombers struck Iran’s nuclear facilities on June 22.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, the world’s largest warship, arrived at Souda Bay on the island of Crete on Monday after transiting the Mediterranean and is expected off the coast of Israel within days. The USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group is operating in the Arabian Sea. Scores of fighter jets, bombers, refueling aircraft and antimissile batteries have poured into the region. More than 40,000 US personnel are stationed across military bases and naval assets in the Middle East.

The *New York Times* reported Sunday that this is “the largest military force [the US] has concentrated in the region since it prepared for the invasion of Iraq, nearly 23 years ago.” The *Washington Post* wrote Monday that a senior Persian Gulf official told the paper that Arab countries have informed Washington they would not allow their bases to be used for a strike against Iran, and that Iran’s threat to retaliate against any country that supports the US operation has raised questions about Washington’s ability to secure overflight rights.

Talks between the US and Iran are scheduled for Thursday, February 26, in Geneva. But the record of US “diplomacy” with Iran refutes any belief that Washington is seeking a negotiated settlement.

In April 2025, the White House gave Iran a 60-day ultimatum while five rounds of indirect talks were held. On June 8, 2025, while talks were still ongoing, Special Envoy Steve Witkoff sat in a war planning session at Camp David alongside CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and senior military officials. Axios reported on June 10 that Ratcliffe briefed Trump that Israel was on the verge of launching strikes and already had operatives inside Iran. CNN reported on June 22 that Trump’s advisers had drawn up options for the US to join Israel’s campaign “in the months beforehand.”

Five days after the Camp David session, on June 13—precisely one day after the ultimatum expired—Israel launched Operation Rising Lion. On June 22, the US launched Operation Midnight Hammer, striking three nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Iran’s foreign minister told the United Nations: “We were attacked in the midst of an ongoing diplomatic process.”

The same fraud was carried out against Venezuela, where Maduro sought to negotiate as late as January 2, 2026, the day before the invasion. Trump said afterward on Fox News: “I didn’t want to negotiate.”

The reported debates within the administration point to the massive stakes and consequences of the threatened war. An attack on Iran would involve a vastly greater scale of retaliation than Venezuela, potentially involving significant numbers of US casualties. Iran possesses over a thousand ballistic missiles, advanced drones, cruise missiles and a network of proxy forces. It has threatened to strike US

bases across the region if it is attacked.

The *Washington Post* reported Monday that Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Dan Caine cautioned Trump and senior officials at a White House meeting on Tuesday, February 17, that “shortfalls in critical munitions and a lack of support from allies will add significant risk to the operation and to U.S. personnel.”

According to the *Post*, Caine warned that the US munitions stockpile has been “significantly depleted” by Washington’s defense of Israel and support for Ukraine. Two munitions critical to protecting US troops from Iranian ballistic missiles—THAAD interceptors and Patriot missile systems—have been extensively consumed in recent operations, and the US produces only several hundred of each per year.

The *Times* reported Sunday that during the Venezuela planning, General Caine told Trump there was “a high likelihood of success.” But Caine “has not been able to deliver the same reassurances to Mr. Trump during the Iran discussions, in large measure because it is a far more difficult target.”

Trump responded on Truth Social on Sunday by calling the reports “100 percent incorrect,” claiming that Caine believes an attack on Iran would be “something easily won.” The people who spoke to the *Post* “directly contradicted Trump’s optimistic characterization.”

RANE (formerly Stratfor) assessed in a February 19 analysis that “a wider, longer-lasting campaign is more plausible this time around unless a nuclear deal is reached.” In an earlier January assessment, RANE concluded that “the risk of a U.S. attack on Iran will remain high in the coming days and weeks,” while a February analysis found that “U.S.-Iran negotiations remain likely to stall or collapse over irreconcilable demands, sustaining the risk of U.S. (and likely Israeli) military action.”

The Atlantic Council published a detailed analysis on Sunday predicting that a campaign targeting regime change “could extend for weeks or months, require much more munitions and expose U.S. forces to more intense retaliation.”

The scale of a potential campaign is staggering. The *Washington Post* reported that taking out Iran’s missile program alone would require hitting “hundreds of targets across a country more than three times the size of Iraq,” including mobile launchers, supply depots, air

defense systems, and transportation networks. If the objective is regime change, “the target set would expand dramatically to thousands of sites, including command-and-control nodes, security services, and key buildings tied to Khamenei.”

Iran has placed its armed forces on the highest state of alert and is positioning ballistic missile launchers along its western border with Iraq and along the Persian Gulf, within range of US military bases.

Ayatollah Khamenei told an audience last week: “The most powerful military in the world might receive such a slap that it won’t be able to get on its feet.” He has named four layers of succession for each military and government role, named three potential successors to himself, and delegated authority to a tight circle of confidants in the event he is killed.

The Democratic Party has offered no opposition to the preparations for war. None of its leading figures, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, has issued any statement condemning the threatened attack.

Far from opposing the war, prominent Democrats have actively endorsed it. Senator Fetterman went on Newsmax to pledge his support for bombing Iran. Representative Gottheimer opposed a bipartisan resolution by Representatives Thomas Massie and Ro Khanna that would have required congressional authorization for military action against Iran.

The Democrats funded every weapon now being assembled for the attack, with 115 House Democrats voting for the \$901 billion National Defense Authorization Act in December and 149 voting for \$839 billion in defense appropriations in January.



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