News

A missile launched from Iran is intercepted as seen from Ashkelon, Israel, June 21.

A missile launched from Iran is intercepted as seen from Ashkelon, Israel, June 21. The U.S. early June 22 attacked three nuclear facilities in Iran, joining Israel's war against Iran. Iran vowed to defend itself. (OSV News/Reuters/Amir Cohen)

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The U.S. has attacked three nuclear facilities in Iran, in a move that comes amid repeated pleas from Pope Leo XIV and other church leaders for peace and dialogue in ending multiple conflicts throughout the world, including that between Israel and Iran.

In a brief address to the nation from Washington at 10 p.m. June 21, President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. military had carried out "massive, precision strikes on the three key nuclear facilities in the Iranian regime."

Speaking from the White House, Trump said the objective was "the destruction of Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity and a stop to the nuclear threat posed by the world's No. 1 state sponsor of terror."

"Iran, the bully of the Middle East, must now make peace," Trump said. "If they do not, future attacks will be far greater and a lot easier. ... There will either be peace or there will be tragedy for Iran, far greater than we have witnessed over the last eight days."

Following the strikes — dubbed "Operation Midnight Hammer" by U.S. defense officials — Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X that his nation "reserves all options" to retaliate, warning the U.S. attack would have "everlasting consequences."

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In remarks following his June 22 Angelus address, Leo said, "Alarming news continues to emerge from the Middle East, especially from Iran."

"Today more than ever, humanity cries out and calls for peace," the American-born pope said.

"This is a cry that requires responsibility and reason, and it must not be drowned out by the din of weapons or the rhetoric that incites conflict," said Leo. "Every member of the international community has a moral responsibility to stop the tragedy of war before it becomes an irreparable chasm. There are no 'distant' conflicts when human dignity is at stake."

The strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities took place just two days after Leo — in an exclusive interview with journalist Ignazio Ingrao of RAI, Italy's state media network — said he wished to renew his "appeal for peace."

"We must try at all costs to avoid the use of weapons and seek dialogue through diplomatic means," the pope told Ingrao. "Let us work together to find solutions."

U.S. President Donald Trump delivers an address to the nation alongside U.S. Secretary of Sta

U.S. President Donald Trump delivers an address to the nation alongside U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the White House in Washington, June 21 following U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria via Pool)

Moments after Trump's media address, Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News in a statement, "With all men and women of goodwill, we beg Almighty God to end the proliferation of acts of war and to inspire dialogue before more innocent people are harmed.

"My heart goes out to all victims and also to those whose lives are in danger," Broglio said. "Let us beg the Prince of Peace for an end to hostilities."

One priest in Israel, whose name and location OSV News is not identifying for safety reasons, said, "The response from Iran after the U.S. attack ... has been more intense."

On June 19, Trump had indicated he would decide "in two weeks" whether to intervene on behalf of Israel in its military conflict with Iran. Israel launched "Operation Rising Lion" against Iran June 13 as what Israel called a "preemptive" strike to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapon capabilities.

Operation Rising Lion has been met by repeated retaliatory strikes on Israel by Iran — with some 24 killed in Israel and 400 in Iran, according to authorities in each country. The U.S. strikes on Iran have increased rising fears of a wider regional war breaking out.

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United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a June 21 post on the X social media platform he was "gravely alarmed" by the U.S. use of force, which marked a "dangerous escalation in a region already on the edge" and "a direct threat to international peace and security."

He called for deescalation and the rule of international law, warning, "At this perilous hour, it is critical to avoid a spiral of chaos."

"There is no military solution," he said. "The only path forward is diplomacy. The only hope is peace."

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Leo echoed those thoughts in his June 22 Angelus remarks, saying, "War does not solve problems; on the contrary, it amplifies them and inflicts deep wounds on the history of peoples, which take generations to heal. No armed victory can compensate for the pain of mothers, the fear of children, or stolen futures.

"May diplomacy silence the weapons! May nations chart their futures with works of peace, not with violence and bloodstained conflicts!" the pope said.

> 'Let us beg the Prince of Peace for an end to hostilities.'
> —Archbishop Timothy Broglio
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"If diplomacy is possible, war is unlawful," Mary Ellen O'Connell, professor of law and international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame, told OSV News. "Diplomacy is needed now more than ever to end the senseless bloodshed throughout the Middle East. While Iran is correct that it is the victim of a grave

breach of international law, it has no right to retaliate merely for the sake of revenge."

The sites named by Trump in his late night address were Fordo, a key uranium enrichment facility located more than 260 feet below ground; Natanz, an enrichment facility previously targeted by Israel as part of its Operation Rising Lion; and Isfahan, a research facility also struck earlier by Israel.

The U.S. assault on Iran was conducted in coordination with Israel, which lacked the U.S. weaponry and aircraft — specifically, the 30,000-pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator, often called the "bunker buster" bomb, and the B-2 Stealth Bomber capable of carrying it — to destroy the underground Fordo site.

In a June 22 on-camera media briefing, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Air Force General Dan Caine revealed that the "strike package" had in total comprised more than 125 U.S. aircraft, 75 precision-guided missiles and 14 "bunker buster" bombs, and included a decoy mission to evade detection by Iran's defenses. The operation had been launched at approximately 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on June 21, preceded by planning over "a matter of weeks."

Iran confirmed the strikes, but officials claimed to have evacuated uranium and equipment from the Fordo site and said the damage was "not irreversible."

However, Trump said the attacks, which he described as a "spectacular military success," had left the sites "completely and totally obliterated."

He also warned Iran "there are many targets left."

"If peace does not come quickly, we will go after those other targets with precision, speed and skill. Most of them can be taken out in a matter of minutes," he said.

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Trump's order, however, drew criticism from some in Congress for not briefing them first before taking military action, given the increased risks to American civilians and 40,000 U.S. military personnel in the Middle East.

"We are still waiting to understand the extent to which that action has deterred Iran's nuclear threat," Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a June 21 statement. "The United States must not rush into war with Iran."

Recently retired Bishop David Zubik of Pittsburgh was also among the first U.S. bishops, along with Broglio, to issue a statement June 21 in response to the U.S. strikes on Iran, calling for prayers of peace "in these uncertain and fragile moments."

"May our hearts resist fear and turn instead toward hope, compassion and unity," said Zubik. "Let us ask God to guide world leaders with wisdom, protect the innocent and lead all nations toward a path of lasting peace. Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us."

This story has been updated throughout with new strike details and reactions from Pope Leo and others.