News

An explosion in the sea, after missiles were launched towards Israel from Iran following strike

An explosion in the sea, after missiles were launched towards Israel from Iran following strikes by Israel and the U.S. on Iran, is seen from Haifa, northern Israel, Feb. 28. U.S. President Donald Trump described the attacks as part of "major combat operations" to overthrow Iran's regime in order to "defend the American people." (OSV News/Reuters/Rami Shlush)

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Catholics across the Middle East are reeling with shock and sorrow, and responding with prayer, amid joint strikes Israeli and U.S. forces launched on Iran Feb. 28.

U.S. President Donald Trump described the attacks as part of "major combat operations" to overthrow Iran's regime in order to "defend the American people."

Trump, who gave an eight-minute statement from his Mar-a-Lago residence, warned that "the lives of courageous American heroes may be lost, and we may have casualties."

Separately, Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz announced the Feb. 28 "preemptive strike" against Iran, with a state of emergency declared across Israel.

The U.S. and Israel have claimed that Iran's supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is among the country's senior leaders killed in the initial assault, which targeted Tehran and cities across Iran. Iranian authorities have not yet confirmed — and initially denied — Khamenei's reported death.

Iran's capital of Tehran, along with several cities across the nation, has been struck, with conflicting early reports as to whether Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is among the country's senior leaders killed in the initial assault.

Iran has retaliated with several counterstrikes, targeting Israel and several U.S.-interest locations across a number of Middle East nations, including Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. Flights across the Middle East have been disrupted.

Casualties on both sides are still being assessed amid the ongoing exchanges, but Iran's foreign minister, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, claimed on the X social media platform that a girls' school in Minab was bombed in the U.S.-Israeli air assault and showed a photo.

Dozens of innocent children have been murdered at this site alone," he said. "These crimes against the Iranian People will not go unanswered."

Iranian media has put the toll at least 108 students killed and dozens unaccounted for, but there is not yet independent confirmation of the strike and its casualties.

Iran's Red Crescent organization (part of the Red Cross global humanitarian network) reported more than 200 killed and 700 wounded in Iran by the U.S.-Israel strikes as of Feb. 28.

The United Nations Security Council convened an emergency session Feb. 28 in response to the attacks.

The New York Police Department announced it was monitoring the situation and would be "enhancing patrols to sensitive locations throughout the city, including diplomatic, cultural, religious, and other relevant sites," citing "an abundance of caution."

Bishop Aldo Berardi, apostolic vicar of northern Arabia — who shepherds the estimated 2.2 million Catholics, most of them migrant workers from other nations, in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — issued a Feb. 28 statement on Facebook, urging the faithful "to remain calm, united in prayer, and attentive to the safety of everyone."

"Please follow carefully the instructions of civil authorities and take all necessary precautions in your homes, workplaces, and parishes," Berardi said.

He also directed "all parish priests and rectors to take appropriate action and to make the necessary decisions, with prudence and responsibility, to ensure the safety of the faithful entrusted to their care.

"Let us remain united in faith and charity, caring especially for the elderly, the sick, and the vulnerable," Berardi said. "May the Lord protect you and your families, and may Our Lady of Arabia, our mother, watch over us all."

In Doha, Qatar, Our Lady of the Rosary Church announced on its website that it would "remain closed until further notice," given "recent events in Qatar" and "the advisory issued by the ministry."

Benedictine Abbot Nikodemus Schnabel of Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion in the heart of Jeru

Benedictine Abbot Nikodemus Schnabel of Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion in the heart of Jerusalem and of Tabgha Priory at the Sea of Galilee is seen on this selfie photograph taken Feb. 28, 2026, in the shelter on the premises of the Tabgha Priory, where a group of French pilgrims sheltered with monks. (OSV News /Courtesy Nikodemus Schnabel)

In Israel, Benedictine Fr. Nikodemus Schnabel — abbot* of Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and of Tabgha, the community's priory on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee — sheltered with some 60 pilgrims at Tabgha, the traditionally revered site of Jesus Christ's multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

Schnabel, who was at Tabgha since Feb. 27 for a chapter meeting of his community — told OSV News he was caught off guard by the attacks.

"It was always in the air that maybe something could happen," he explained. "But it was then a surprise that it really happened today, especially before Wednesday,

because Wednesday there were plans for a new round of negotiations."

The strikes follow a June 2025 U.S. attack on three Iranian nuclear facilities — Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan — which Trump at the time said were aimed at destroying Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity.



Protesters gather in London Feb. 28 after U.S. and Israeli forces carried out a series of strikes on Iran on Saturday morning. (AP/Alastair Grant)

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Iranian media has put the toll at least 63 students killed and 60 injured, but there is not yet independent confirmation of the strike and casualties.

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Schnabel said the Benedictine's international group, which included children and the elderly, had been in the shelter for two hours, describing the time — which video obtained by OSV News showed the pilgrims praying and singing — as unifying amid the attacks.

"It was a good experience. We don't know each other, but then we sing songs in different languages. We pray together," he said.

He said the experience was an example of Benedictine hospitality, one of the charisms of the order.

"Very often I say, 'I want that our two monasteries are two islands of hope in an ocean of suffering,' " Schnabel said. "And this was exactly the feeling. We were also today an island of hope in an ocean of suffering."

Jesuit Fr. John Paul, rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute — located on a 40-acre hilltop campus between Bethlehem and Jerusalem — told OSV News that he had spent his morning "in and out of shelters," although he believed "Jerusalem is not a target area."

The priest, whose institute is staffed by both Palestinians and Israelis, pointed to the sorrow evoked by the strikes, which follow the Israel-Hamas war and ongoing tensions between Israel and Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

"Overall, with local Palestinians" there is "a feeling of real sadness — my guess is with Israelis as well," Paul said.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil told OSV News that there were "a lot of missiles" in his region of northern Iraq that had been intercepted without casualties.

"Thank God, no injuries; no one had been hurt," he said, noting that schools in the area — including the Catholic University of Irbil, which he established in 2012 and formally opened in 2015 — were closed "for the time being."

Warda added that the faithful in the Irbil region were "really holding strong."

"Prayer is the only hope we have," he said, while also asking for prayers, noting that the faithful had been marking Lent as "a very blessed season for the community."

*This story has been updated to correct Fr. Nikodemus Schnabel's title and the location of Dormition Abbey.

The story also has been updated to include comment from Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda.

This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.