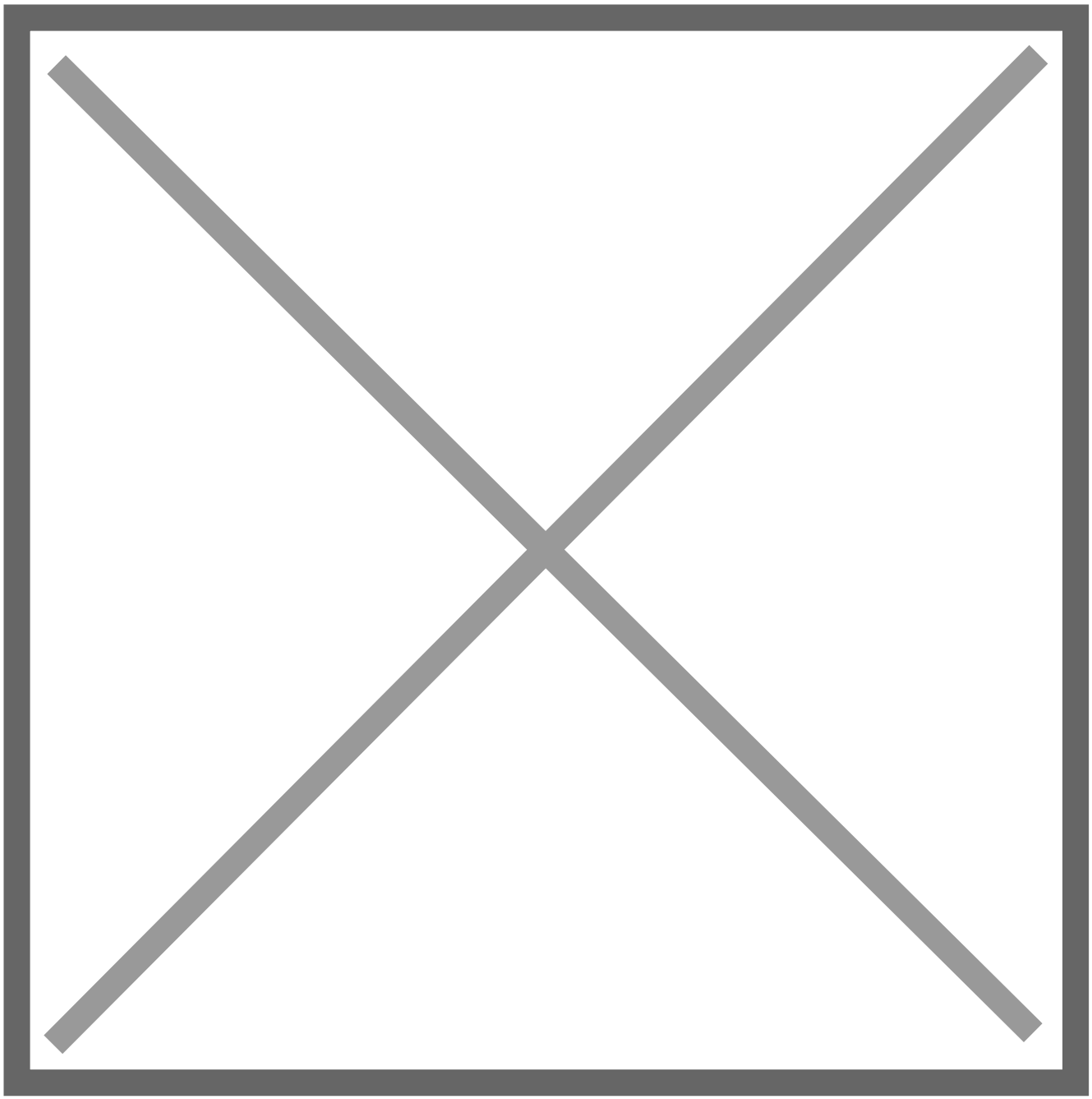
News



U.S. Navy sailors move ordnance on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford while supporting the Operation Epic Fury attack on Iran from an undisclosed location Feb. 28, 2026. (OSV News/U.S. Navy/Handout via Reuters)

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Washington — March 1, 2026

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The leader of the U.S. Catholic bishops has echoed Pope Leo XIV's call for deescalation and dialogue in the Middle East, following the joint attacks on Iran launched Feb. 28 by the U.S. and Israel, which killed Iran's longtime supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The attacks prompted a wave of strikes by Iran across the region, with deaths and casualties — including the loss of at least three U.S. military personnel — on all sides.

In a March 1 statement, Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, warned the "growing conflict risks spiraling into a wider regional war."

Noting Leo's plea for peace in his March 1 Angelus remarks — with the pope warning of an "irreparable abyss" if the violence continues to spiral — Archbishop Coakley said, "We are faced with the possibility of a tragedy of immense proportions.

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"My brother bishops and I unite our voice with our Holy Father and make the heartfelt appeal to all parties involved for diplomacy to regain its proper role," Coakley said. Quoting the pope's remarks, he said, "We ask for a halt to the spiral of violence, and a return to multilateral diplomatic engagement that seeks to uphold the 'well-being of peoples, who yearn for peaceful existence founded on justice.'"

The USCCB president stressed that "all nations, international bodies, and partners committed to peace must exert every effort to prevent further escalation."

Describing the present moment as "critical," Coakley invited "Catholics and all people of goodwill to continue our ardent prayers for peace in the Middle East, for the safety of our troops and the innocent, that leaders may seek dialogue over destruction, and pursue the common good over the tragedy of war."

His statement contained a link to a June 2025 appeal for prayer and diplomacy by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, chair of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, after the U.S. had launched precision strikes on several of Iran's key nuclear facilities.

In that statement, Zaidan, head of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, had urged "multilateral diplomatic engagement for the attainment of a durable peace between Israel and Iran."

Coakley concluded his March 1 statement by imploring "the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Mary, Queen of Peace, to pray for our troubled world and for a lasting peace."