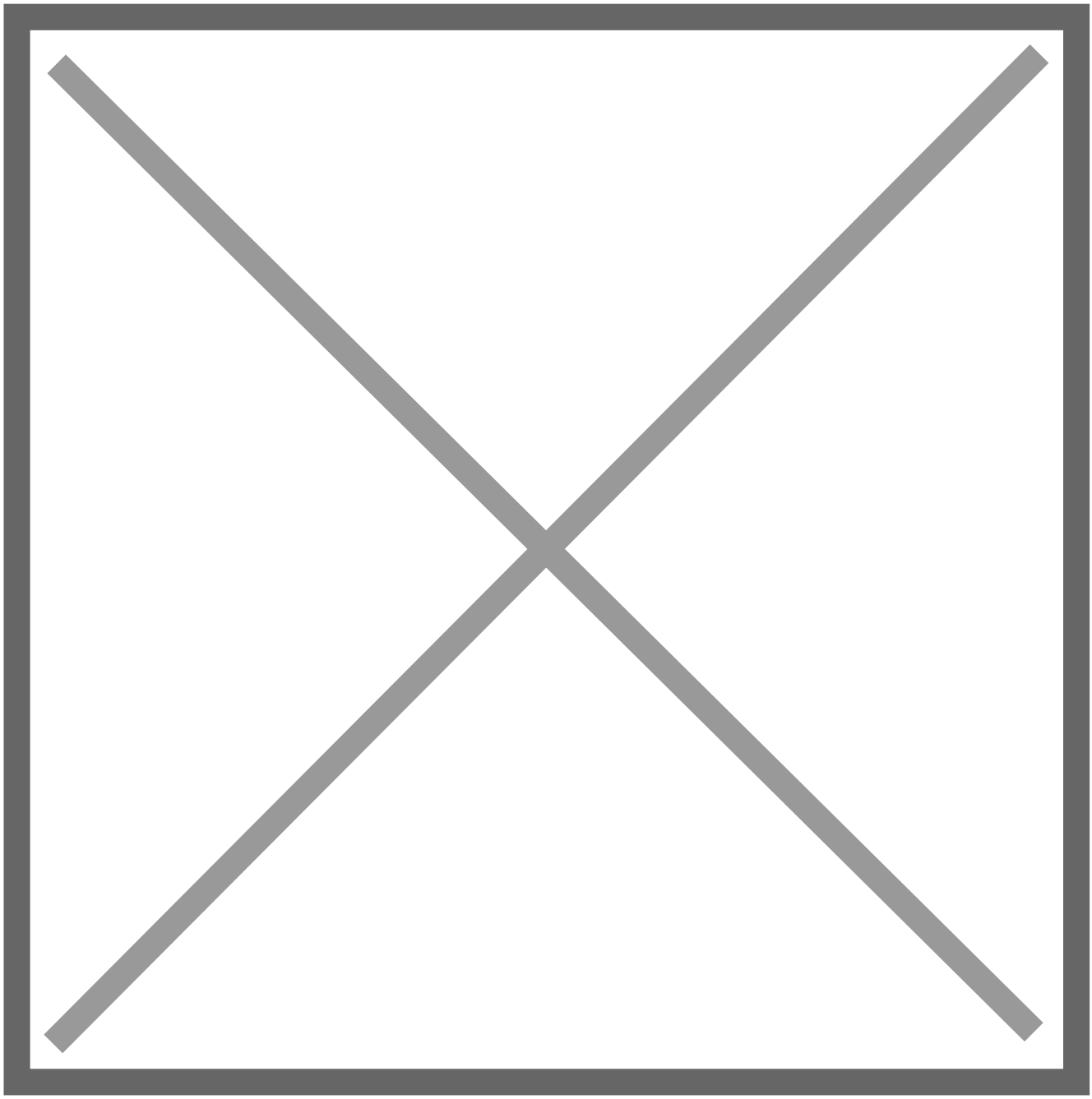
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People inspect the damage in the Lebanese town of Nabi Chit March 7, 2026, where the Israeli military carried out an airborne operation that dropped troops overnight. (OSV News/Reuters/Mohammad Yassine)

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Pope Leo XIV called for an end to the war in Iran and warned that the conflict could drag more countries in the Middle East into instability.

Speaking to pilgrims after praying the Angelus prayer March 8, the pope said that developing news from Iran and from across the Middle East has caused "deep dismay."

"Amid episodes of violence and devastation, and the widespread climate of hatred and fear, there is also the concern that the conflict may widen and that other countries in the region, including Lebanon, may once again sink into instability," he said.

According to The Associated Press, Israeli forces struck an oil storage facility in Tehran, as well as targeted assaults in southern Lebanon against commanders of the Lebanese branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Iran has continued striking U.S. allies in the Gulf, including Bahrain, where it fired missiles at a desalination plant. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi defended the attack, arguing that the "U.S. set this precedent" after it struck a desalination plant in Iran, AP reported.

The pope's concern for Lebanon came as government officials confirmed that the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah militants resulted in the deaths of 394 people, including 83 children.

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Since the start of the war Feb. 28, at least 1,230 people in Iran, about a dozen in Israel and six U.S. service members have been killed, AP said.

In his appeal, Leo called on Catholics to pray so that "the roar of bombs may cease, that the weapons may fall silent, and that a space for dialogue may open in which the voice of the peoples can be heard."

"I entrust this supplication to Mary, Queen of Peace," the pope said. "May she intercede for those who suffer because of war and guide hearts along the paths of reconciliation and hope."

Less than a day after the start of the war, the pope called for diplomacy to "regain its proper role" and that "the well-being of peoples, who yearn for peaceful existence founded on justice, be upheld."

At his Angelus address March 1, several hours after the U.S. and Israel revealed that Iran's supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed, the pope expressed his concern, highlighting that "stability and peace are not achieved through mutual threats, nor through the use of weapons, which sow destruction, suffering, and death, but only through reasonable, sincere, and responsible dialogue."

"Faced with the possibility of a tragedy of immense proportions, I make a heartfelt appeal to all the parties involved to assume the moral responsibility of halting the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss," the pope warned.

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