

European Security Concerns of the Iran Conflict

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Key Judgements



- The March 1 Iranian drone strike on Royal Air Force (RAF) Akrotiri marked the first confirmed spillover of the Middle East crisis into European territory, prompting limited defensive reinforcements by the United Kingdom, France, Greece and other European countries.
- Nearly all European countries prefer deterrence and defensive deployments over direct intervention amid political, economic and security constraints.
- A reinforced European military presence in Cyprus, the eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf increases exposure to Iranian strikes, raising the risk of escalation despite Europe's cautious posture.
- Further attacks causing casualties or indicating deliberate targeting would significantly increase the chances of limited coalition-based military responses, though NATO-wide action remains unlikely.
- Oil shortages imposed by the conflict in Iran are likely to impact health sector organizations in Europe through rising costs of mission-critical utilities and medical materials.

European Response to Drone Attacks on Cyprus

Further Iranian attacks on Cyprus or other European-linked targets causing casualties or indicating deliberate targeting would likely push European governments from defensive containment toward limited, direct military action, most likely through a coalition of select European countries rather than a NATO-wide operation, given minimal appetite for prolonged involvement in a Middle Eastern conflict.

The March 1 Iranian drone strike on the United Kingdom's RAF Akrotiri base in Cyprus, which caused limited damage, marked the first confirmed spillover of the US-Israeli war with Iran onto European territory. Tehran then increased pressure on March 2 by warning that further missile strikes against Cyprus could follow, citing what it described as an expanded US military footprint on the island and implying that British and allied facilities could be targeted. Additional missiles reportedly launched toward Cyprus on or close to the March 1 strikes were intercepted before impact. Since then, several European countries have reinforced their military posture in and around the island.



At the EU level, the response has so far focused on reinforcing existing maritime missions, such as Aspides in the Red Sea and Atalanta off the Horn of Africa, while keeping them within their current mandates, reflecting Europe's preference for a stronger regional posture without direct participation in the war despite US pressure for European warships to help secure the Strait of Hormuz.

Greece announced the deployment of two frigates and four F-16s to Cyprus and said it would support Cypriot defense against further threats, while France sent a frigate and anti-drone and anti-missile systems to the island. The United Kingdom also expanded its presence, readying an aircraft carrier for possible mobilization while deploying a destroyer, an auxiliary ship, and three helicopters for drone defense.

Beyond Cyprus, regional posture was also bolstered more broadly across the Middle East. The United Kingdom sent additional fighter jets to Qatar and Jordan, while France deployed a carrier strike group to the eastern Mediterranean and expanded support to Lebanon's armed forces. Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands also sent additional naval contributions.

High Threshold for European Engagement

The strikes that have already hit or threatened European assets and bases in the region without provoking military retaliation – including strikes on Cyprus itself, a French base in Abu Dhabi, an Italian base in Erbil, and facilities hosting European personnel in Jordan – show how high the threshold for direct European military response remains. Although the March 2 strike prompted discussion around triggering Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, the bloc's mutual defense clause, Cyprus chose not to invoke it and said on March 19 it was satisfied with the support received so far, reinforcing that European governments still prefer deterrent posturing, defensive deployments, and consultations over formal collective military action.

The growing European military presence on Cyprus and across the wider eastern Mediterranean and Gulf, however, is increasing the risk that an Iranian retaliation campaign could hit a European-linked target, whether deliberately or accidentally, in a way that causes casualties and substantially raises the likelihood of more direct European involvement. The more European countries reinforce bases, naval assets and support infrastructure in and around the war theater, the more targets they present to Iran as it expands its retaliation strategy against the military and logistical architecture supporting US and Israeli operations.





Tehran likely understands that deliberately and systematically targeting European assets could rally and unify otherwise cautious governments, and for that reason would likely prefer to avoid sustained direct attacks on European targets, especially given Iran's much higher priorities in targeting Israeli and US regional assets. That said, as more European air defense, naval and support assets are moved into the region, the risk of accidental strikes increases, particularly if Iranian retaliation grows more indiscriminate under mounting military pressure.

In a less likely scenario, Tehran could also deliberately broaden its campaign to include European targets, for instance, through pre-emptive strikes, if it judges that European states are moving toward a more active operational role or increasing their political backing for emerging factions within Iran to replace the regime. Either pathway would significantly raise pressure on European governments to initiate NATO Article 4 or Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, both of which would trigger consultations that could lead to larger military deployments, and/or accelerate national decisions to deploy additional air, naval and missile-defense assets, steps that would likely stop short of immediate war but could nonetheless accelerate a path toward deeper and more direct involvement.

Potential Iranian targets would include not only installations on Cyprus itself, but also air refueling hubs in southern Europe, pre-positioned equipment sites, missile defense systems, intelligence nodes, and command-and-control facilities enabling allied deployments, as well as naval vessels operating in the eastern Mediterranean or Gulf.

Health Sector Takeaway

The escalating energy crisis could create immense pressure on the healthcare sector in Europe by jeopardizing the stability of the medical technology (in vitro diagnostics (IVDs) and medical devices) supply chain.

Surging gas prices, which have been steadily increasing since the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, could create increased costs and inflationary pressures for manufacturers of medical equipment. Because the industry often operates under fixed-price tenders with national health systems, these rising production and assembly costs are difficult to offset through pricing adjustments.

Medical imaging devices in particular have been impacted by the conflict in Iran because they require helium to operate. Helium is a byproduct of natural gas production. Since Qatar has halted its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production, the cost of helium has significantly increased.



Beyond financial strain, physical disruptions such as brownouts or power cuts/rationing threaten the manufacturing process, potentially leading to spoiled batches in laboratories. Critical third-party services are also vulnerable; power failures can compromise sterilization cycles, particularly those using heat or ethylene oxide, and disrupt climate-controlled storage needed to keep devices safe. Each of these potential consequences could create hospital backlogs and compromise patient care.

