

# Military Powers in 2026

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I specialize in some overlapping areas of international relations, but *weapons systems* and *military hardware* are not among them. Upon the outbreak of the Iran conflict, in an effort to obtain a rapid and structured overview of contemporary military powers, I talked to an LLM and posed a series of targeted questions. The exchange resulted in the Summary Table on the next page, and some structured assessments further below.

While this exercise is not a fully-verified evaluation, it demonstrates how AI can serve as a preliminary tool for quickly mapping complex strategic issues when new developments or crises emerge.

9 questions, 9 responses, 1 table

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## Acknowledgements

Minor edits for size and clarity.  
LLM chatbot name and version: Grok 4, expert mode.

<b>Superpowers</b>	<b>League 2</b>	<b>League 3</b>	<b>League 3, tier 2</b>
United States Russia China	United Kingdom France India Pakistan Israel North Korea	Japan South Korea Germany Poland Australia Turkey Italy	Sweden Netherlands Spain Canada Saudi Arabia UAE Brazil Indonesia Vietnam Singapore Ukraine Iran Egypt / Algeria

**Summary Table.** Military Powers, 2026.

--conversation starts

**PROMPT 1:**

**Summarize the 2026 Iran Conflict by day, as in:  
 Day 1 (Feb 28), Day 2, Day 3, and so on, in a coherent manner.**

**Key highlights only, brief and compact.**

**End with an addendum of commonly-voiced fears and concerns regarding  
 the remainder of the conflict--itemized, brief.**

Day 1 (Feb 28):

US and Israel launch coordinated Operation Epic Fury strikes on Iran, hitting ~900 targets including command centers, air defenses, and Tehran leadership sites. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, his family members, Defense Minister, and IRGC commander killed. Iran retaliates immediately with missiles and drones on Israel, US bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Gulf civilian/oil sites.

Day 2 (Mar 1):

Strikes intensify (>2,000 targets total); US B-2 bombers hit underground nuclear sites (Fordow, Natanz); Israeli focus on missile launchers; naval/oil facilities (Kharg Island, Bandar Abbas) damaged. Air superiority achieved over Tehran. Iranian retaliation weakens (fewer barrages on Israel) but hits Gulf states.

Day 3 (Mar 2):

Campaign expands; new waves pound Tehran; Hezbollah joins with strikes on Israel (met by Israeli response in Beirut). IRGC closes Strait of Hormuz; attacks target Gulf energy infrastructure. Trump states operation could last 4–5 weeks or longer. Death toll surpasses 600.

Day 4 (Mar 3, ongoing):

Fresh Israeli/US strikes on Tehran and Beirut; Iranian drones hit Gulf targets (including US-linked sites in Saudi Arabia). Escalation continues amid disrupted oil flows and proxy involvement. UN calls for de-escalation; regional war widens.

Addendum – commonly-voiced fears and concerns:

- Full regional war drawing in Hezbollah, Houthis, and more proxies
- Global oil shock from Hormuz closure and damaged export terminals
- Regime collapse triggering Iranian civil war or ethnic fragmentation
- Mass civilian casualties and humanitarian/refugee crisis
- Radiation leaks or unsecured nuclear material from struck sites
- Prolonged US entanglement or superpower escalation (Russia/China backing Iran)

**PROMPT 2:**

**Talk briefly about the attack on the Iranian navy, and the sunk warships.**

US/Israeli strikes on Iran's navy (priority target in Operation Epic Fury, Days 1–3):

- Tomahawk missiles, airstrikes, and naval forces hit ports

Ships sunk:

- Trump announced 9 destroyed; CENTCOM confirmed 11 vessels in Gulf of Oman (Iranian naval presence there now zero)

**PROMPT 3:**

"9 destroyed" sounds like most news reports that don't actually mean much to the average reader, and arguably aren't meant to inform in the full sense of the word, because it lacks proper context and frame-of-reference.

- 9 out of how many?

- What is left of the Iranian navy, if anything?

- Also indicate why the US carriers in the region were not hit, unlike US bases in the Middle East.

9 sunk (Trump claim) / 11 confirmed (CENTCOM):

- These were all of Iran's major surface combatants and auxiliaries then operating in the Gulf of Oman and primary southern ports.

What's left:

- Virtually no major warships at sea or in southern ports. Remaining assets are scattered IRGC fast-attack boats, a handful of submarines (some damaged), and northern/Caspian forces—incapable of sustained operations or Hormuz blockade enforcement.

US carriers untouched (e.g. USS Abraham Lincoln):

- Mobile at sea, protected by full carrier strike group air/missile defenses; Iranian ballistic missiles and drones lack the precision, ISR, and reach to locate or penetrate them. Fixed land bases (Bahrain, UAE, etc.) were static, easier targets—hence the hits there.

**PROMPT 4:**

How come all of Iran's major warships were so easily wiped out but the few large US carriers in the region are not? (Explain briefly with reference to capabilities.)

Iran's "major" warships were:

- mostly tied up in fixed ports (easy to locate)
- had weak radars, no real air cover, and almost no modern missile defenses
- couldn't see or stop stealth jets, Tomahawk cruise missiles, or B-2 bombers coming from 500+ miles away.

Result:

they were sitting ducks and got sunk on the first day or two.

US carriers (like the Abraham Lincoln) are the opposite:

- always moving fast across the open ocean — super hard to find without satellites or spy planes
- surrounded by a “shield” of destroyers/cruisers with Aegis radar that can detect and shoot down incoming missiles hundreds of miles out
- carry 60–70 of their own fighter jets that fly constant combat air patrols and can destroy threats before they get close.

**PROMPT 5:**

**Which militaries in the world are in possession of at least one such capable carrier group?**

**Also, list nuclear powers, along with size.**

**Also, list what other military assets are key as of the 2020s, besides nuclear weapons. In other words: what are the first assets most military analysts look at when assessing a country's military capabilities?)**

Carrier groups:

- United States: 11
- China: 3
- United Kingdom: 2
- India: 2
- France: 1

Nuclear powers:

- Russia: 5,459
- United States: 5,177
- China: 600
- France: 370
- United Kingdom: 225
- India: 180
- Pakistan: 170
- Israel: 90

- North Korea: 50

Other key military assets as of the 2020s:

- 5th-generation stealth fighters & air superiority aircraft
- Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs)
- Hypersonic & long-range precision missiles
- Integrated air & missile defense networks
- Main battle tanks & armored formations
- Cyber & electronic warfare capabilities
- Military satellites & space ISR assets
- Unmanned systems (UAVs, UUVs, drone swarms)

**PROMPT 6:**

Considering the above high-end capabilities and potential other unmentioned advantages, how many countries, out of 195, with or without nuclear weapons, are strong enough for even military superpowers to think twice before messing with, as of the 2020s? Respond in two categories.

List, first, military superpowers, and then other notable powers.

Military superpowers (global reach + full-spectrum high-end capabilities):

- United States
- Russia
- China

Other notable powers (enough combined assets + nukes/geography):

- United Kingdom
- France
- India
- Pakistan
- Israel
- North Korea

**PROMPT 7:**

In the briefest terms possible, and using the appropriate measures,

summarize the extent to which each of the above nine powers have the key military assets you listed earlier.

(To simplify for non-experts, use simple ordinal measures instead of jargon, where applicable.)

### **5th-Gen Stealth Fighters & Air Superiority**

United States:	Top-tier (largest fleet; combat-proven; global reach)
China:	High (large and growing J-20 fleet)
Russia:	Moderate (small Su-57 fleet)
United Kingdom:	High (F-35 fleet, smaller scale)
France:	Moderate (advanced 4.5-gen; no 5th-gen)
India:	Limited (no operational 5th-gen yet)
Pakistan:	Limited
Israel:	High (F-35 fleet; highly integrated)
North Korea:	Minimal

### **Nuclear-Powered Attack Submarines (SSNs)**

United States:	Top-tier (largest, most advanced fleet)
Russia:	Top-tier (large fleet; mixed modernization)
China:	High (smaller but expanding)
United Kingdom:	High (small but advanced)
France:	High (small but capable)
India:	Limited (1–2; developing)
Pakistan:	None
Israel:	None (diesel-electric only)
North Korea:	None

### **Hypersonic & Long-Range Precision Missiles**

United States:	High (strong precision strike; hypersonics emerging)
Russia:	High (operational hypersonic claims; large missile inventory)
China:	High (DF-series; hypersonic glide capability)
United Kingdom:	Moderate
France:	Moderate (developing hypersonics)
India:	Moderate (developing; strong missile base)
Pakistan:	Moderate (regional reach)

Israel: Moderate (advanced precision strike)  
North Korea: Moderate (ballistic focus; limited accuracy)

### **Integrated Air & Missile Defense**

United States: Top-tier (global layered systems)  
Russia: High (S-400/500 systems)  
China: High (indigenous + Russian-derived systems)  
United Kingdom: Moderate  
France: Moderate  
India: Moderate (mixed imports/domestic)  
Pakistan: Limited  
Israel: Top-tier (Iron Dome, Arrow, David's Sling)  
North Korea: Limited

### **Main Battle Tanks & Armored Forces**

United States: Top-tier  
Russia: High (large numbers; mixed modernization)  
China: High  
United Kingdom: Moderate (small force)  
France: Moderate  
India: High (large armored force)  
Pakistan: Moderate  
Israel: Moderate (small but advanced)  
North Korea: Moderate (large, outdated)

### **Cyber & Electronic Warfare**

United States: Top-tier  
Russia: Top-tier  
China: Top-tier  
United Kingdom: High  
France: High  
India: Moderate  
Pakistan: Moderate  
Israel: Top-tier  
North Korea: High (asymmetric cyber focus)

## **Military Satellites & Space ISR**

United States:	Top-tier (dominant global network)
China:	High (rapidly expanding)
Russia:	High (legacy + modernized systems)
United Kingdom:	Limited (allied-dependent)
France:	Moderate (independent ISR capability)
India:	Moderate (regional ISR)
Pakistan:	Limited
Israel:	Moderate (small but capable)
North Korea:	Minimal

## **Unmanned Systems (UAVs, UUVs, Swarms)**

United States:	Top-tier (full spectrum)
China:	High (large production/export base)
Russia:	Moderate (rapidly expanding under combat pressure)
United Kingdom:	Moderate
France:	Moderate
India:	Moderate
Pakistan:	Moderate
Israel:	High (early pioneer; strong export base)
North Korea:	Limited

## **Overall Pattern**

Full-spectrum leaders:	United States
Near-peer across most domains:	China, Russia
Advanced but smaller-scale powers:	United Kingdom, France, Israel
Regionally strong:	India
Primarily regional deterrence-focused:	Pakistan, North Korea

### **PROMPT 8:**

**If the above are the first two leagues, of the remaining 186 countries, which are in the third league? And how many in this third**

league are realistically positioned to join the second league above within the foreseeable future, and why? List this third league, giving priority to those with greater potential to join the second league. (be brief; no technicals)

About 7 in the third league are realistically positioned to reach the second league soon:

Japan, South Korea, Germany, Poland, Australia, Turkey, Italy.

### **Why these 7?**

- Sustained higher spending plans  
(Japan, Poland, Sweden, Netherlands)

- Serious industrial base  
(Germany, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Italy, Sweden)

- Alliance integration + access to advanced systems/training  
(Japan, South Korea, Australia, Poland, Sweden, Netherlands, Italy, Germany)

- Clear threat-driven urgency  
(especially Europe's eastern flank and the western Pacific)

Countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Brazil, Indonesia have elements of potential, but are less likely to "graduate" soon because the limiting factors are typically cohesion, depth, and consistency (turning spending and purchases into a reliably integrated, sustained capability).

Third-league powers, listed in priority order by realistic potential to reach the second league:

#### **1. Japan**

Very strong, rapidly expanding.

Growing: budget + long-range strike + national warfighting depth.

#### **2. South Korea**

Very strong, export-capable defense base.

Growing: domestic fighter program + munitions depth + integrated kill-chain.

#### **3. Germany**

Top European industrial and land/air base, rebuilding readiness.

Growing: scale and sustainability of rearmament.

#### **4. Poland**

Fast-rising major land power in Europe.

Growing: mass + readiness + staying power via very high spending.

#### **5. Australia**

Advanced but small, heavily alliance-enabled.

Growing: long-range strike and (if AUKUS stays on-track) nuclear-submarine pathway.

#### **6. Turkey**

Strong regional military with growing self-reliance.

Growing: domestic combat aviation + drones + munitions.

#### **7. Italy**

Strong regional air/naval power.

Growing: next-gen airpower and air/missile defense.

Next tier of third-league powers (credible, but less likely to reach second league soon):

8) Sweden

9) Netherlands

10) Spain

11) Canada

12) Saudi Arabia

13) United Arab Emirates

14) Brazil

15) Indonesia

16) Vietnam

17) Singapore

18) Ukraine

19) Iran

20) Egypt / Algeria

**PROMPT 9:**

**In closing:**

**the above, though important, are hardware lists, after all.**

What else should I ask you to have a more complete overview of military powers in the world as of the 2020s?

If you systematically examine:

- High-end capabilities (already done),
- Sustainability and industry,
- Logistics and global reach,
- Economic base,
- Alliances,
- Nuclear posture, and
- Political stability,

you will have a near-complete strategic picture of global military power in the 2020s.

--conversation ends