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## As war widens, US assets become easy targets

US economic and military interests across West Asia could come under direct fire as Israel's aggressions drag Washington into a region-wide escalation.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

During a White House [press conference](#) on 31 July, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby underscored the US commitment to maintaining readiness to protect its security interests in West Asia.

**We have and will maintain a level of readiness to preserve our national security interests in the region. It's not like we take a blind eye to what Iran is capable of doing and has shown their capability of doing in the region.**

His comments came amid spiked regional tensions, the highest since 7 October. Protecting Washington's interests in the Levant and the Persian Gulf is a top priority for the Biden administration, especially given Tel Aviv's dangerous recent provocations, including attacks and assassinations in Beirut, Tehran, and Hodeidah – inside key countries within the [Axis of Resistance](#), which could escalate into a major conflict threatening US interests.

### **US militarization in West Asia**

Nearly a month after the Gaza war began, the Pentagon outlined its [primary goals](#) in West Asia. These include protecting US forces and citizens, ensuring the continuous flow of critical security assistance to the occupation state, coordinating with occupation authorities to secure the release of prisoners held by Hamas, including American citizens, and bolstering the US military presence to deter any state or non-state actors from escalating the crisis further. Clearly, Washington's focus extends well beyond Gaza.

As of last October, when the Gaza war erupted following Hamas' Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, [over 45,000 US troops](#) were stationed in West Asia, spread across US military bases in about 12 countries. This number does not include the naval fleets permanently stationed in the region's many waterways.



### US military presence in West Asia

Additionally, the US intermittently deploys thousands of troops to respond to crises and rising tensions, as evidenced by the [relocation](#) of nearly 1,200 service members and

thousands more aboard the Navy aircraft carrier and the deployment of the nearly 2,000-strong Marine expeditionary unit following the war on Gaza's onset.

In response to the escalating situation, particularly after Israel's [targeted assassinations](#) of senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr and Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh in Beirut and Tehran, respectively, the US Department of Defense [announced](#) strategic adjustments to its military posture in the region.

These adjustments have two main goals: enhance the protection of US forces and support Israel's defense. To maintain a robust presence, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered the USS Abraham Lincoln strike carrier group to replace the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Pentagon's Central Command area of responsibility.

He also deployed additional cruisers and destroyers capable of defending against ballistic missiles to the US European Command and US Central Command regions. Furthermore, the Pentagon is increasing its readiness to deploy additional land-based ballistic missile defenses and has ordered the deployment of an extra fighter squadron to West Asia.

These adjustments augment the extensive capabilities the US military already maintains in the region, including the USS Wasp Ready Amphibious Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit operating in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **US economic imperium in West Asia**

In addition to the significant US military build-up in West Asia, US civilian companies also play a major role in the region, primarily in critical sectors involving oil and gas, technology, and telecommunications.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into West Asia saw remarkable growth in 2023, with companies [announcing](#) 1,848 projects worth an estimated \$88.3 billion. As a result, West Asia ranked as the fourth most attractive region for FDI in 2024 in terms of investor interest.

The US was the leading source of FDI into West Asia in 2023, with US firms announcing 362 projects valued at \$36 billion. This represented a notable increase in capital investment, with more than double the figures from the previous year.

These companies are heavily concentrated in the Persian Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman – as well as Israel. The occupation state is a particularly accessible destination for US investment in the region, with US FDI (equities) into Israel alone reaching [\\$42.5 billion](#) in 2022. This investment is focused mainly on manufacturing, information services, and professional, scientific, and technical services.

### **Closure of the Strait of Hormuz**

The possibility of Iran closing the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, is a recurring concern whenever tensions with the Islamic Republic rise. This strait is a crucial shipping route, handling [nearly 30 percent](#) of the world's oil trade.

It connects the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean, from Iran to the north, and the UAE and Oman to the south. The danger of this corridor during times of tension lies in its shallow depth, which leaves passing ships vulnerable to mines. Its proximity to the Iranian mainland also makes ships susceptible to attacks by coastal missiles or interception by patrol boats and helicopters.

The closure of the strait would have immediate effects on global energy prices. In the first quarter of 2024, tankers shipped [nearly 15.5 million barrels](#) per day of crude and condensate from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, and Iran through the strait. The strait is also a critical liquefied natural gas (LNG) corridor, with more than a fifth of the world's supply, mostly from Qatar, passing through during the same period.

### **Americans will pay the price**

As noted previously by [The Cradle](#), a World Bank study indicated that any tension in the region would directly impact energy prices, with the rate of increase varying according to the level of tension. This issue is particularly significant now, as US polls show that most voters prioritize the domestic economy.

For instance, a February [Pew](#) survey found that 73 percent of voters consider strengthening the economy a top priority. Consequently, Iran has the potential to influence American voter sentiment indirectly by affecting energy prices through actions involving the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

The likelihood of a regional war is becoming increasingly tangible due to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's persistent aggressive policies in Gaza and the broader region. This potential multi-front conflict could reach unprecedented levels, especially considering Iran's perception that its very existence as an Islamic Republic is at stake.

In such a scenario, Tehran and other members of the Resistance Axis would likely deploy all available resources and strategies to defend their collective interests. And if US military forces or facilities become directly engaged, US interests – both military and economic – will be at the heart of the confrontation.

Deploying more US troops and assets into the region at such a critical juncture only broadens American target banks for the Axis.

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