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Mohamad Hasan Sweidan

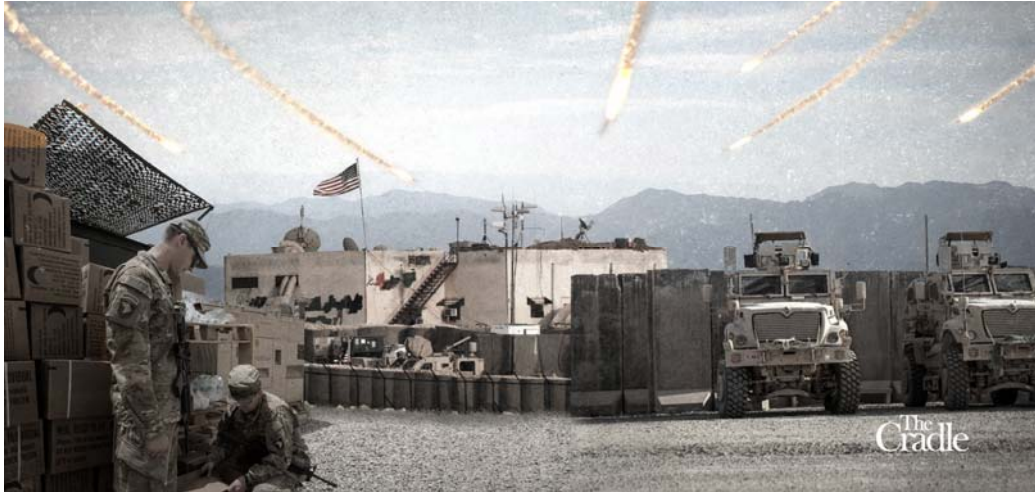
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Mohamad Hasan Sweidan

Will US military assets in West Asia become Iran's next target?

With growing US involvement in the escalating war in West Asia and Iran's expanding missile and cyber capabilities, could Washington's military, economy, and security be at stake?



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

Last month, Frank McKenzie, a retired US Marine Corps general, emphasized in a [report](#) published by the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA): “The

nature of the threat in the Middle East has changed significantly since US bases were first placed, many decades ago. The core threat – now more than ever – is Iran.”

Washington understands that its regional allies may not remain neutral if tensions escalate due to the aggressive policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Therefore, it is crucial to monitor which American assets might become targets for Tehran in any possible confrontation. Washington’s influence in West Asia spans a network of military, economic, political, and media interests, all of which are potentially at risk.

Changing times, evolving threats

The role of US military bases has evolved significantly over time. Originally intended to counter Soviet influence, the bases gained renewed importance after the fall of the Shah of Iran and the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

These bases remained central to US defense strategy, particularly in preventing the Soviets from gaining a foothold in the Persian Gulf. The geographic distribution of US bases in the region was specifically designed to confront the Soviet Union, concentrating on strategic locations. However, following the Soviet Union’s collapse and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq, American strategic priorities in West Asia shifted dramatically.

As McKenzie [points out](#): “Our bases in the region, the Middle East are largely where they are as a legacy of past conflicts ... However, things have changed and the priorities that informed the placement of those bases.”

The focus of US military presence moved away from deterring the Soviet Union to countering the growing influence of Iran and its regional allies in the Axis of Resistance. According to various official US documents, the principal objective of these bases in the post-Soviet era has been to deter the Islamic Republic.

This shift is clearly reflected in the Biden administration’s [National Security Strategy](#) released in 2022, which states that “In the Middle East, we have worked to enhance deterrence toward Iran, de-escalate regional conflicts, deepen integration among a diverse set of partners in the region, and bolster energy stability.”

This marks a notable transformation in US strategy, indicating that Tehran has become a primary concern for US military planners.

Targeting US bases in the region

Iran’s proximity makes US bases across the region vulnerable targets in any future conflict. These bases are no longer safeguarded from threats originating far away, such as the Soviet Union, but rather are potentially exposed to Tehran’s expanding [missile and drone capabilities](#).

For instance, Iran's ability to strike US interests in the region has grown alongside its development of advanced weaponry, and this includes [targeting](#) key US military installations. The JINSA report identifies several possible sites.

The previously targeted [Ain al-Asad](#) Air Base in Iraq's Anbar province is a prime example. This base provides extensive logistical support, training facilities, and hosting up to 5,000 US troops. The base gained particular attention after Iran directly targeted it in retaliation for the US assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in 2020. The targeting of this base by Iran highlights the very real threat Tehran poses to American assets in the region.

Naval support activity in Bahrain, home to the US Fifth Fleet, is another critical asset that would likely be a target in the event of an Iranian escalation. The Fifth Fleet operates across a vast area that includes the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf, and Indian Ocean, covering key shipping lanes such as the Suez Canal and Strait of Hormuz.

This naval presence is a cornerstone of US influence in West Asia, playing a pivotal role in protecting global trade routes and energy sources, and countering threats like terrorism and piracy.

Under normal circumstances, the Fifth Fleet consists [of more than 20 warships](#), including submarines and destroyers assembled around an aircraft carrier, and in a ready-made amphibious group of ships, cargo planes, combat helicopters and various support units. The fleet has about 15,000 personnel on ships, in addition to 1,000 on land.

In addition to these, Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, southeast of Riyadh, has also been an important center for US military operations since the first Gulf War. Although US forces briefly left the base in 2003, they [returned in 2019](#), reaffirming its strategic importance in the face of growing tensions with Iran.

Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the [largest US base in West Asia](#), serves as a major forward operations base and joint air operations center, hosting around 10,000 US troops. Similarly, Al-Dhafra Air Base in the UAE has a significant US military presence, housing [over 3,800 troops](#) and [more than 60 aircraft](#), including Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance planes and advanced fighter jets like the F-22. Since 2003, Al-Udeid has been the main base of US Central Command (CENTCOM). It also plays a crucial role in surveillance and intelligence operations across Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Iranian missiles and drones

If Iran decides to escalate, it has a vast and increasingly sophisticated arsenal of missiles and drones that could be used to target US bases and interests. The [Sejjil missile](#), for example, is a medium-range solid-fuel ballistic missile capable of carrying a 700-kilogram payload up to

2,000 kilometers, putting these bases well within reach. Similarly, the Khaybar missile, a fourth-generation ballistic missile, is capable of striking targets up to 2,000 kilometers away with even greater payload capacity.

Other notable missiles in Iran’s arsenal include the [Shahab-3](#), a liquid-fueled medium-range missile of up to 2,000 kilometers. Based on the North Korean Nodong-1 missile, it is primarily effective against large targets (such as military airfields), but Iran has used Chinese guidance technology in subsequent developments to significantly improve strike accuracy.

Then there is the Emad missile, Iran’s first precision-guided ballistic missile with a range of 1,800 kilometers. These weapons, combined with newer systems such as the Haj Qassem and the [Qadr series](#), including QD-110 missiles, pose a significant threat to US military

installations throughout West Asia. The Haj Qassem missile is the new generation of the Fateh-110 missile and can penetrate missile defense systems. It is designed to maneuver and hit targets without detection, with a mass of seven tons, a length of 11 meters, and a top speed of Mach12.

Iran's Ballistic & Cruise Missiles				Iran's Drones			
Name	In service	Range (km)	Warhead (kg)	Name	In service	Range (km)	Warhead (kg)
Shahab-1	1985-2016	300	1,000 kg	Ababil-T	1999	150	30 kg
Shahab-2	1990-2016	500	700 kg	Ababil-III	2010	100	-
Fateh-110B	2002	300	500 kg	Shahed-129	2012	1,700	150 kg
Shahab-3	2003	2,000	1,200 kg	Yasir	2013	200	-
Ghadr	2007	2,000	750 kg	Raad-85	2013	100	-
Sejil	2008	2,000	700	Karrar-1	2014	1,000	500 kg
Qiam-1	2010	800	750	Mohajer-6	2017	200	40 kg
Soumar (cruise missile)	2012	2,500	750	Oghab	2017	2,000	-
Ya-Ali	2015	700	350	Mobin	2018	450	120 kg
Emad	2015	1,800	750	Fotros	2020	2,000	-
Fateh-313	2015	500	380	Arash-2	2020	2000	150kg
Khorramshahr	2017	2,000	1,800	Kaman-12	2020	1,000	100 kg
Zolfaghar	2017	700	600	Meraj	2020	1000	5 kg
Hoveyzeh (cruise missile)	2019	1,350	-	Shahed-123	2020	750	-
Dezful	2019	1,000	600	Kaman-22	2021	3,000	300 kg
Raad-500	2020	500	-	Shahed-131	2022	900	15 kg
Haj Qasem	2020	1,400	500	Shahed-136	2022	2,200	40-90 kg
Kheibar Shekan	2022	1,450	500	Shahed-171	2023	1,500	-
Fattah-1	2022	1,400	450	Shahed-191	2023	450	50 kg
Paveh (cruise missile)	2023	1,650	-				
Kheibar	2023	2000	1500				

Sources: missilerfnet.csl.org, missileerfnet.org, & Multiple Iranian sources

Non-military options

Iran’s capabilities extend beyond missile strikes, as it also can disrupt vital shipping routes such as the [Strait of Hormuz](#). Around 30 percent of the world’s oil passes through this narrow waterway, making it a highly strategic zone.

If Iran were to close or threaten the strait, the impact on global energy markets would be immense, disrupting the flow of oil and affecting economies far beyond West Asia. Such a

move would not only harm the global economy but also severely affect US interests, as many American companies are deeply involved in the region.

In 2023, US companies announced 362 projects in West Asia worth \$36 billion, a significant increase over previous years. These projects, heavily concentrated in the Persian Gulf states, especially in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, represent a considerable portion of US foreign direct investment in the region. Any disruption to these investments, particularly in the event of conflict with Iran, could result in substantial economic losses for the US.

Beyond military and economic interests, US embassies and diplomatic missions in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain are vulnerable to attacks by Iran's allies. Tehran's influence in these countries, coupled with its capacity to mobilize allied resistance factions, could result in significant damage to Washington's diplomatic efforts. These embassies or "[CIA dens](#)" serve as vital centers for US political influence, making them high-value targets in the event of a broader conflict with Iran.

In the digital realm, Iran's [growing cyber capabilities](#) represent another serious threat to the US and its allies. Tehran has been accused of launching cyberattacks on US banks and critical infrastructure in the past, and these capabilities have only grown more sophisticated over time. Cyberattacks can disrupt vital services, steal sensitive data, and cause significant economic damage, making them a key element of Iran's broader strategy against US interests.

The supply chains of US tech companies, which are heavily reliant on raw materials and components from the region, could also be targeted. Disruptions in the Persian Gulf could delay shipments, causing economic harm to major corporations such as Apple and Intel, whose production lines are intricately linked to global supply chains. This, in turn, would have ripple effects throughout the US economy.

It is increasingly evident that Washington's interests in West Asia – whether military, economic, or political – are under significant threat.

The evolving nature of these risks, compounded by Iran's growing missile and cyber capabilities, necessitates constant vigilance and protection of US assets in the region. Hence, [Washington and Tel Aviv](#) must carefully assess any threats or actions against Iran to avoid political blunders and strategic setbacks.

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