

Getting on Base: Israel is the Solution to Vulnerability of U.S. Bases in the Gulf

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Sometimes one can do something right for the wrong reason.

It was strategic folly for the United States to commit to Iran in the Memorandum of Understanding “to remove its forces from the proximity of” Iran following a “final Deal,” but it is imperative for the United States to pull military assets from some at-risk bases near Iran. Repositioning them to Israel would strengthen U.S. force posture and boost American leverage and freedom of action against Iran.

Recent reports indicate that Iranian strikes significantly damaged the main U.S. naval base in the Middle East. So, too, numerous other bases around the Persian Gulf. The U.S. Combined Air Operations Center at al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar was hit, as were numerous aircraft at other nearby bases.

This vulnerability should not have come as a surprise. In 2024, our colleague, the former commander of U.S. Central Command, General Frank McKenzie, warned in a [report for our organization](#) that “in a war with Iran ...our current basing structure is poorly postured.” For U.S. forces clustered around the Persian Gulf, “it takes but five minutes or less for missiles launched from Iran to reach their bases.”

The costs of such proximity are clear. The lives of 13 American servicemembers lost. Billions of dollars in damage to equipment and infrastructure. And the ever-present threat of Iranian missiles and drones that disrupted U.S. operations. One American airman told one of us that Americans at al-Udeid had to “bug out,” leave the base and sleep in their cars multiple times in the middle of the desert to avoid getting hit.

Another fundamental operational challenge: many Gulf governments often don’t permit the United States to use their bases when most needed. Fearing Iranian retaliation, many Gulf Arab countries did not allow American planes to fly offensive strikes from their bases.

Fortunately, an alternative exists: Ovda Air Force Base in southern Israel. According to three retired U.S. Air Forces generals who [inspected the base](#) for our organization in 2025, “built to U.S. specifications and shielded by Israel’s world-class defenses, the airbase can readily support our evolving needs.”

Ovda offers freedom of action, strategic location, and defensibility. It’s close to Iran North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean, offering greater operational reach than other regional bases. Nearby Eilat port allows for the base to be easily and regularly resupplied.

As we found when one of us visited this week, Ovda is already serving U.S. needs. Originally built by the United States in the 1980s as part of the Camp David peace accords, it has the runways, hardened shelters, fueling, munitions, maintenance, and command-and-control infrastructure to allow some 6,000 U.S. personnel and 240 U.S. aircraft to use it during Operation Epic Fury.

Almost half of that number, some 2,800 airmen of the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing, were able to arrive at the base and set up operations in just 10 days. Additional units from every U.S. service—Army, Marines, Navy, Space Force—and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) also used the base. Whatever infrastructure did not exist before the war, the Israeli Air Force was able to build out within days.

Israel also allowed U.S. forces complete freedom to undertake whatever operations were needed. From Ovda, 12 F-22s, 24 F-15Es, 10 F-35Cs, 6 EA-18s, and numerous other aircraft flew more than 4,300 sorties during the war.

And the base did not sustain a single hit from Iran. The Patriot battery deployed there never fired a single interceptor. JSOC's counter-drone system was never used either. That is partially due to Ovda being far away from both Iran and any Israeli civilian population centers, Tehran's preferred target. But if Iranian, or Houthi, missiles do get close, Israeli theater-level air defenses are able to protect U.S. planes and troops.

Further, by making its presence at Ovda permanent, the United States could undo the strategic damage wrought by allowing Iran to dictate its withdrawal in the MOU. In discussions, senior Israeli military leaders indicated to us they are enthusiastic to host U.S. forces permanently.

Shifting the center of gravity of U.S. force posture to Israel from the Persian Gulf would demonstrate that the United States is not leaving the region, that it is deepening its partnership with the Israeli military with which it flew wing-to-wing in Operation Epic Fury, and that U.S. and Israeli warplanes will easily detect and neutralize any Iranian attempt to rebuild its nuclear program, missile factories, or air defenses.

Leaving Persian Gulf bases because Iran demanded it signals weakness, but redeploying to Israel rebuilds strength.