

Kingdom Vision Special Report

Editor: Orlando Mostert

www.kingdomvision.co.za

27 March 2026

Special Report Gulf War Part 3:

IRAN'S LONG SIEGE

Strategy, Doctrine, and the Reordering of the Gulf

A Strategic Assessment of Iran's Military Posture Four Weeks into the Gulf War — March 2026

For the Christian evangelical community committed to a vision of a miraculous divine intervention on behalf of Israel I prepare this military, economic and political assessment to prepare our community for a possible alternate ending to this tragic story.

Executive Summary

Four weeks into the Gulf War, Iran's military doctrine has resolved into coherent strategic shape. What appeared in the conflict's opening days to be a series of reactive strikes across multiple theatres is, on closer examination, a carefully orchestrated siege operation — one that draws as much from the annals of ancient warfare as from the playbook of twenty-first century asymmetric conflict.

Tehran's approach is neither frenzied nor improvisational. It is methodical. Iran is pursuing a four-tier attritional strategy designed not to win a single decisive battle, but to erode the collective will, economic resilience, and political cohesion of its identified adversaries: the United States, Israel, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar.

The first tier targets Israel with sustained hypersonic and cruise missile barrages, designed to exhaust and degrade the Iron Dome and Arrow missile defence architecture and systematically dismantle critical civilian and military infrastructure.

The second tier applies relentless pressure to American bases and logistics hubs across the GCC, with the explicit goal of making the region ungovernable for US forces and precipitating a political withdrawal from the Gulf theatre.

The third tier deploys an unceasing drone campaign against GCC civilian and economic targets, engineered to trigger a mass exodus of the foreign workers on whom Gulf economies entirely depend.

The fourth tier enveloping all three tiers is Iran's strategic masterstroke: the seizure of effective control over the Strait of Hormuz, transforming the world's most critical maritime chokepoint into an instrument of international economic leverage and a sovereign source of reconstruction revenue.

This report argues that this strategy is coherent, historically grounded, and — absent a fundamental transformation in the Western and GCC response — likely to succeed in its principal objective: the strategic eviction of the United States from the Middle East and the reordering of the regional security architecture around Iranian primacy.

1. The Ancient Art of the Siege : Historic Doctrine Applied to Modern War

The siege is among the oldest and most reliable instruments of warfare. From Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year investment of Tyre to the Roman encirclement of Carthage, from the medieval reduction of Constantinople to the Viet Cong's prolonged attrition of American resolve in Indochina, the siege has consistently delivered strategic outcomes that direct battle could not. Its logic is simple and brutal: you do not need to defeat your enemy in the field if you can make the field uninhabitable.

Iran's military strategists — operating within the intellectual tradition of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and informed by decades of study of asymmetric conflict — have long understood that Iran cannot match the United States or Israel in a conventional force-on-force engagement. Tehran's air force is antiquated. Its navy, though capable of harassment operations in littoral waters, cannot challenge American carrier battle groups on the open ocean. Its ground forces, formidable within their operational context, cannot project power beyond the immediate neighbourhood.

What Iran possesses in abundance are patience, strategic depth, a hardened domestic population accustomed to privation, and an increasingly sophisticated arsenal of stand-off weapons: ballistic missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles, cruise missiles, and an almost inexhaustible supply of low-cost loitering munitions and explosive drones. These are precisely the instruments of siege warfare translated into the language of modern technology.

2. Tier One - The Destruction of Israel's Shield

The Theory of Missile Saturation

Israel's air defence architecture is, by any objective measure, the most sophisticated and layered in the world. The Iron Dome system, designed to intercept short-range rockets and artillery shells, operates in conjunction with the David's Sling medium-range battery and the Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems engineered specifically to defeat ballistic missiles at high altitude, including in the exo-atmospheric phase of flight. For two decades, this multi-layered shield has been the bedrock of Israeli strategic confidence: the assurance that even in the face of mass missile attack, the Israeli state and its population could be protected with acceptable casualty rates.

Iran's first-tier strategy is systematically designed to invalidate this assurance. The logic is economic as much as military. Each Iron Dome interceptor costs approximately \$50,000 to \$100,000. Each Arrow interceptor costs in excess of \$2 million to \$3 million at the high end of operational estimates. The Iranian drones and Shahed-series loitering munitions that can be manufactured for as little as \$20,000 to \$50,000 each, and the Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar ballistic missiles that cost hundreds of thousands rather than millions, create an exchange-rate differential that systematically favours the attacker in a sustained campaign.

Within the first four weeks of conflict, Iranian and proxy forces — Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi movement in Yemen, and IRGC-affiliated militias in Iraq and Syria — have launched coordinated multi-axis attacks designed precisely to exploit this asymmetry. By compelling Israel's air defence batteries to engage across multiple simultaneous approach vectors, Iran is engineering the depletion of Israel's interceptor magazines faster than resupply from the United States can replenish them.

Hypersonic Missiles: Defeating the Shield Architecturally

The introduction of Iranian hypersonic glide vehicles into the operational mix introduces a qualitatively different challenge. Iran publicly unveiled the Fattah hypersonic ballistic missile in 2023, claiming speeds in excess of Mach 13 and a terminal manoeuvrability profile designed specifically to defeat existing exo-atmospheric intercept systems. Whether Tehran's technical claims are fully verified, partial evidence suggests the system represents a genuine advance over previous Iranian ballistic missile capabilities.

Hypersonic weapons present three compounding challenges for missile defence. Their speed severely compresses the decision timeline available to defence systems, reducing the engagement window from minutes to seconds. Their manoeuvrability in the glide phase defeats systems designed to predict and intercept ballistic trajectories. And their operating altitude — between the ceiling of lower-tier systems and the floor of exo-atmospheric interceptors — creates a genuine gap in the defensive envelope that existing Israeli systems were not architected to close.

Iran's strategy is therefore to use conventional ballistic and cruise missiles to exhaust interceptor stocks, while deploying hypersonic assets against the highest-value fixed targets: command and control facilities, radar stations, air force bases, and port infrastructure. The combination is designed not merely to cause damage but to erode the psychological certainty on which Israeli strategic deterrence depends.

Targeting Infrastructure: The Economy of Destruction

The strikes of the first four weeks have not been random. Intelligence assessments of the targeting pattern indicate a deliberate campaign against Israel's critical national infrastructure. Power generation facilities, desalination plants — upon which Israel depends for a significant proportion of its fresh water supply — telecommunications hubs, and port facilities at Haifa and Ashdod have

all been struck or targeted. The disruption to normal civilian life is already substantial and is accumulating in ways that the Israeli government is finding increasingly difficult to manage politically.

The economic dimension of this infrastructure campaign should not be underestimated. Israel's economy is sophisticated, technology-led, and deeply integrated into global supply chains. The disruption of port operations alone has material consequences for import-dependent sectors. More significantly, the sustained uncertainty generated by daily missile and drone alerts imposes productivity losses, insurance premium increases, foreign investment hesitancy, and a general elevation of the economic risk premium associated with operating in Israel that compound over time into significant structural damage.

Target Category	Estimated Strikes (Wk 1-4)	Strategic Effect
Air Defence Radar	18-24	Blind spots in coverage arc
Power Infrastructure	12-16	Rolling blackouts, civilian pressure
Port Facilities	8-10	Import/export disruption, insurance spike
Military Airbases	20-28	Sortie rate reduction, dispersal cost
Desalination Plants	4-6	Water security pressure
Command & Control	10-14	Response latency, morale impact

3 Tier Two : Expelling America from the Gulf

The Bases Under Pressure

The United States military presence in the Gulf Cooperation Council states represents one of the most substantial forward deployments in the history of American power projection. Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar — the largest US military installation in the Middle East — hosts the Combined Air Operations Centre that coordinates all American and coalition air activity across the region. The Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain. Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and various facilities in the UAE collectively house tens of thousands of US military personnel, their logistics infrastructure, intelligence apparatus, and pre-positioned materiel.

This physical presence has historically functioned as the spine of American deterrence in the Gulf. It is now functioning, under Iran's second-tier strategy, as a liability. The bases are fixed, known, and — as Iranian missile and drone attacks have demonstrated in Iraq and Syria over preceding years — vulnerable to mass salvo attack that overwhelms point defence systems through sheer volume of inbound ordnance.

Iran's second-tier objective is not necessarily to destroy these bases outright. It is to make them operationally untenable: to impose sufficient risk on personnel, aircraft, and equipment that the United States faces an escalating political and military cost for maintaining the forward presence. Each successful strike that kills American servicemen or destroys American equipment generates domestic political pressure in Washington that accumulates over the weeks and months of a sustained campaign.

The Political Economy of American Presence

The American political system has demonstrated, across the post-Cold War era, a consistent pattern of behaviour: it tolerates sustained military commitment in foreign theatres so long as the cost — measured in lives, treasure, and domestic political capital — remains below a threshold that activates the powerful isolationist instinct embedded in American political culture. Vietnam demonstrated this threshold most viscerally. The managed retreats from Somalia, the eventual withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and the broader arc of post-2001 interventionism all confirm the pattern.

Iran's strategic planners are not naive about the power of the United States. They are, however, sophisticated readers of American political history and deeply familiar with the domestic political dynamics that constrain American strategic patience. The calculation in Tehran is not that Iran can defeat America militarily. It is that Iran can make the cost of American presence in the Gulf exceed the threshold of American political tolerance, particularly at a moment when US domestic politics is convulsed by competing priorities, fiscal constraint, and a growing isolationist constituency of both right and left.

The military attacks on American bases serve this political function directly. But they are complemented by an information operation — conducted through proxy media channels, diplomatic pressure on GCC host governments, and the deliberate stoking of Gulf public opinion — designed to generate political pressure within the GCC states themselves for the withdrawal of American forces. If the host governments begin to calculate that American presence is generating more danger than it provides protection, the political dynamics of basing agreements shift dramatically in Iran's favour.

Impact on GCC Military Posture

The consequences for GCC military capacity of a degraded American presence would be severe. Saudi Arabia's own air force, while equipped with advanced Western platforms, lacks the integrated command structure, the intelligence architecture, and the trained personnel density to sustain high-tempo air operations independently. The UAE has invested heavily in defence modernisation over the past decade and its F-16 and Rafale fleets represent genuine combat capability, but they too depend on American ISR support and logistics sustainment for sustained operational effectiveness.

Kuwait and Bahrain are structurally dependent on American security guarantees to a degree that renders them strategically exposed without US backstopping. Qatar, despite its complex relationship with the other GCC states, similarly depends on Al Udeid's

continued operation as a deterrent. The withdrawal of effective American military engagement from the region would not merely reduce GCC defensive capacity at the margin. It would fundamentally alter the strategic calculus for all Gulf states in ways that inevitably advantage Iranian regional primacy.

4, Tier Three : The Drone War Against Gulf Economies

The Foreign Worker Architecture

The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council states rest on a human architecture that is almost entirely foreign-built. In the United Arab Emirates, expatriates constitute approximately 88 to 89 percent of the total population. In Qatar, the figure approaches 85 percent. In Kuwait, it exceeds 70 percent. In Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 has not materially altered the fundamental dependency on an estimated ten to twelve million foreign workers who perform the labour, technical, and professional functions on which the Saudi economy operates.

This demographic structure, which represents a deliberate policy choice made possible by hydrocarbon wealth and entrenched by decades of rentier economic logic, is also a profound strategic vulnerability. The foreign workers who build the UAE's towers, staff its hospitals, fly its airlines, run its ports, and maintain its utilities are not citizens. They have no civic obligation to remain in a zone of active conflict. They have families, they have options, and they have governments — in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Egypt, and across Southeast Asia — that will respond to public pressure and repatriate their nationals when the security calculus deteriorates sufficiently.

Iran's third-tier strategy is targeted with precision at this vulnerability. The sustained drone campaign against GCC civilian and economic infrastructure — airports, industrial zones, logistics hubs, luxury commercial districts — is designed not primarily to destroy physical assets but to generate the perception of insecurity among the foreign worker population and, critically, among their governments and employers.

The Dubai Effect: Banking, Finance, and the Expatriate Exodus

Dubai presents the most acute case study of this vulnerability and the most significant potential casualty of its exploitation. The emirate's economy has been constructed over four decades as the Middle East's premier hub for international finance, trade, logistics, and professional services. It is home to the regional headquarters of hundreds of multinational corporations, to one of the world's busiest airports, to a massive free-zone ecosystem, and to a financial centre — the DIFC — that has successfully positioned itself as the primary gateway between global capital markets and the Gulf region.

All of this economic architecture depends on the confidence of mobile, highly skilled, internationally competitive professional talent willing to base themselves in Dubai rather than in Singapore, London, or New York. That confidence is not unconditional. It is calibrated to assessments of political stability, personal security, and the long-term viability of the emirate as a place to build a career and a life. A sustained drone campaign — even one that causes limited physical damage — has the potential to corrode this confidence in ways that are initially invisible in economic statistics but ultimately devastating in their cumulative effect.

The banking sector is particularly sensitive to geopolitical risk elevation. When Moody’s, Fitch, and S&P began adjusting their Gulf sovereign and bank ratings outlooks within the first weeks of the conflict, the immediate consequence was an elevation of borrowing costs for GCC sovereigns and corporates. More significantly, the cost of political risk insurance for commercial operations in the Gulf surged, and several major international banks quietly began reviewing their regional exposure limits and stress-testing their Gulf loan books against conflict-extension scenarios.

Economic Sector	Short-Term Impact	6-Month Scenario (Continued Conflict)
Aviation & Tourism	Sharp visitor decline, capacity cuts	Hub status questioned; airline exodus risk
Banking & Finance	Risk premium rise, credit tightening	Capital outflows, DIFC relocation discussions
Real Estate	Transaction volume falls 30-40%	Expatriate exodus drives vacancy rates up
Logistics & Trade	Insurance surcharges, route diversions	Port volumes fall; Singapore rerouting
Hospitality & Retail	Occupancy collapse in affected zones	Mass layoffs accelerate foreign worker exit

The Cascade Effect: When Workers Leave

The economic modelling of a large-scale foreign worker exodus from the Gulf states produces results that are non-linear in their severity. The departure of the first tranche — perhaps five to ten percent of the expatriate workforce — creates visible service disruptions that confirm the fears of those considering departure, accelerating the next tranche. The departure of skilled professionals from financial and technical sectors removes institutional knowledge that cannot be rapidly replaced. The departure of blue-collar construction and services workers halts projects and degrades service quality in ways that are immediately visible to the remaining population.

The remittance flows that sustain this system in reverse — the money GCC workers send home to India, Pakistan, and the Philippines — collapse as the workers leave, creating political instability in the source countries that complicates the diplomatic management of the crisis. The Gulf states' governments face the impossible arithmetic of maintaining the labour supply for their economies while the security environment drives the labour supply to vote with its feet.

This is the genius, if one can use the word without moral approbation, of Iran's third-tier strategy. It does not require Iran to destroy Dubai. It requires only that Iran make Dubai feel destroyed — to generate sufficient uncertainty that the economic ecosystem of mobile talent and international capital that sustains the emirate's extraordinary prosperity begins to fragment under its own centrifugal dynamics.

5. The Fourth Tier - The Strait of Hormuz....The Choke Hold

Geography as Strategy

The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between the Iranian mainland and the Musandam Peninsula of Oman, is without question the most consequential maritime chokepoint on earth. At its narrowest point it measures approximately 21 nautical miles across, with two navigable lanes of traffic each only two miles wide. Through this 39-kilometre throat passes approximately twenty percent of all globally traded oil — the equivalent of seventeen to eighteen million barrels per day at peak flow — along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas from Qatar's vast North Field, the world's single largest natural gas reservoir.

The disruption of Hormuz passage is not a marginal risk factor for the global economy. It is a systemic threat capable of triggering energy price spikes of a magnitude that would plunge the global economy into recession within weeks. For Japan, South Korea, China, and India, which collectively import over sixty percent of their oil through the strait, a closure is not an inconvenience. It is an existential crisis for industrial production, transport infrastructure, and domestic heating and power generation.

Iran has understood this leverage for decades. What has changed in the current conflict is Tehran's apparent willingness to operationalise it as a sustained instrument of coercive strategy rather than merely as a deterrent threat held in reserve. The combination of IRGC Navy fast-boat swarms, submarine-laid minefields, shore-based anti-ship missile batteries, and the threat of hypersonic anti-ship missiles against which no current naval vessel has a proven defence transforms Iranian control of Hormuz from a theoretical claim into a practical operational reality.

The Shipping Toll: Revenue and Leverage Combined

Iranian naval and IRGC maritime units have, within the first four weeks of conflict, moved to assert a degree of effective control over Hormuz passage that amounts, in practice, to a de facto toll regime. Commercial vessels transiting the strait have been boarded, inspected, delayed, and in several documented cases diverted to Iranian ports on grounds of alleged sanctions violations or flag-state non-compliance. The practical effect is the imposition of a passage cost — in time, insurance premiums, and the risk premium built into freight rates — that functions as a tax on global trade.

The financial dimension of this control is not trivial. Even a modest transit levy applied to the seventeen to eighteen million barrels per day that pass through the strait represents an extraordinary revenue flow. At a notional figure of one dollar per barrel — modest by any commercial standard — this generates revenues of the order of six billion dollars per year, a sum that, while smaller than Iran's pre-sanctions oil export revenues, is sufficient to make a material contribution to the reconstruction and resupply costs of a sustained military campaign. More aggressively priced, the revenues could fund Iran's reconstruction on a substantial scale.

International Pressure: The Multilateral Dimension

The genius of the Hormuz strategy from Iran's perspective is that its victims are not primarily its adversaries. The United States, which has achieved energy independence through its shale revolution, is relatively insulated from direct impact. Israel imports limited volumes of oil through Hormuz. The GCC states are oil exporters for whom a supply disruption is a revenue event, not an economic emergency.

The parties who suffer most from Hormuz disruption are precisely those whose political and economic leverage over Washington is most significant: China, Japan, South Korea, India, and the European economies that depend on Gulf energy exports. The strategic logic is elegant: by threatening the energy security of states that are not party to the conflict, Iran generates international pressure on the United States to seek a settlement, to rein in Israel, and to withdraw from a military posture whose continuation is costing the global economy an unbearable price.

China's position is particularly significant. Beijing imports over forty percent of its oil through Hormuz and has enormous economic and political stakes in Gulf stability. Chinese diplomatic pressure on Washington to de-escalate, applied through bilateral channels and through the UN Security Council, represents a form of indirect leverage that Iran's Hormuz control generates without requiring Tehran to negotiate directly with Beijing. The threat is self-executing: disrupt Hormuz, and the international community's most powerful economic actors become involuntary advocates for ending the conflict on terms that Iran can accept.

Country / Bloc	Hormuz Oil Dependency	Annual Economic Exposure
China	~43% of oil imports	\$220bn+ energy trade
Japan	~83% of oil imports	\$130bn energy trade
South Korea	~72% of oil imports	\$90bn energy trade
India	~60% of oil imports	\$80bn energy trade
European Union	~25% of oil imports	\$110bn energy trade
Global Economy	~20% of all traded oil	\$1.2 trillion annual exposure

6 Why the Strategy Will Ultimately Succeed

The Arithmetic of Attrition

The core claim of this analysis — that Iran’s siege strategy will ultimately succeed — requires careful qualification and honest acknowledgement of its contingency. Success, in the Iranian strategic conception, does not mean the military defeat of the United States or Israel. It means the achievement of a political outcome in which American forces withdraw from the Gulf, Israeli military action in Gaza and Lebanon is constrained by diplomatic settlement, and Iran is recognised as the dominant regional power with the right to determine the security architecture of the Middle East. This is a political objective that does not require military victory. It requires only that the costs of continued resistance exceed the political threshold of Iran’s adversaries.

The arithmetic strongly favours Iran on this dimension. The United States has spent, by conservative estimate, over eight trillion dollars on its post-9/11 Middle Eastern military engagements, at the cost of thousands of American lives, and has failed to achieve durable strategic outcomes in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria. American domestic political tolerance for continued open-ended military commitment in the region is at a historic low. The political coalition that would be required to sustain a long-term military campaign to defeat Iran — involving ground operations, sustained air campaign, and potentially nuclear risk management — does not exist in Washington and shows no sign of forming.

The Isolation of Israel

Israel’s long-term strategic position in this conflict is precarious in ways that the current military balance obscures. Israel’s strategic depth is limited: it is a small state whose entire northern, eastern, and southern peripheries are within range of Iranian-supplied proxy forces. Its economy, for all its technological dynamism, is heavily dependent on export markets that are subject to political pressure, on foreign direct investment that is

highly sensitive to security risk, and on the continued goodwill of a United States whose own political calculus is shifting.

The sustained missile campaign against Israeli infrastructure, maintained over weeks and months, will impose economic costs that are genuinely difficult to absorb. The Iron Dome and Arrow systems can be replenished, but at a fiscal cost that adds to Israel's already elevated wartime deficit. The disruption to normal civilian life — the nightly alarms, the shelter protocols, the disruption to schooling and economic activity — accumulates into social and psychological damage that political leadership must manage.

More fundamentally, Israel's international isolation is deepening. The Global South — representing over five billion people and a rapidly growing share of global economic output — has largely framed the conflict in terms of Palestinian rights and Israeli military excess. The diplomatic coalition that supported Israel through the 2023-2024 Gaza conflict has frayed. European governments face intense domestic political pressure. The BRICS bloc, led by China and Russia, has explicitly positioned itself against the American-Israeli position. The UN General Assembly has passed multiple resolutions condemning Israeli military operations. This is not, in itself, militarily decisive. But it shapes the political environment within which strategic decisions are made, and it constrains the room for manoeuvre available to Israel's leadership.

The GCC States: Neutrality as Survival

For the GCC states, the trajectory of the conflict is generating an increasingly uncomfortable reckoning with the limits of their dependence on American security guarantees. The attacks on their bases and civilian infrastructure have demonstrated that American protection is not seamless. The drone campaign is demonstrating that their economic model is vulnerable to sustained harassment in ways that their defence budgets cannot fully address. The Hormuz constraint is demonstrating that Iran has leverage over their primary export route that the Americans cannot neutralise without a level of military commitment that Washington is not prepared to make.

The likely outcome, in the medium term, is a GCC drift toward accommodation with Iran. This is not ideologically comfortable for Gulf leaderships that have invested heavily in the narrative of Iranian threat. It is, however, strategically rational. Saudi Arabia's 2023 normalisation agreement with Iran, brokered by China, represents a precursor of this logic. The current conflict will intensify the pressure toward a similar accommodation on security questions — a tacit acknowledgement of Iranian regional primacy in exchange for Iranian restraint in attacks on Gulf economic infrastructure.

The American Retreat: Historical Inevitability?

The history of American military engagement in the Greater Middle East since 2001 is a chronicle of escalating commitment, inadequate political strategy, and eventual managed retreat. Afghanistan consumed twenty years and ended in a chaotic withdrawal that left the Taliban in control of Kabul. Iraq absorbed trillions of dollars, produced a government

in Baghdad more aligned with Tehran than Washington, and left the United States with a residual presence that Iranian-backed militia forces have consistently attacked without decisive American retaliation. Syria consumed American political energy without producing American strategic outcomes.

The structural dynamics that produced these retreats have not changed. American public opinion is not supportive of open-ended military commitment in the region. The fiscal arithmetic of American defence spending is increasingly constrained by domestic political pressures and the competing demands of the Indo-Pacific theatre, which American strategic doctrine has explicitly identified as the priority theatre for the coming decade. The argument for maintaining a large-scale American military presence in the Gulf — an argument once supported by the logic of oil dependency — has been weakened by American energy independence and is not being adequately replaced by alternative strategic rationale that resonates with American domestic politics.

Iran's siege strategy is calibrated precisely to accelerate these structural dynamics. By making the continued American presence in the Gulf expensive, dangerous, and politically contested at home, Tehran is applying pressure to a structure that was already under stress. The question is not whether America will eventually reduce its Gulf presence. It is whether the reduction will be managed or precipitous — and whether Iran's strategy will be sufficient to determine the timing.

7 The Reordering of the World Order

A Post-American Gulf

The strategic end-state that Iran's siege strategy aims to produce is a Gulf region in which American military presence is reduced to a minimal residual footprint or eliminated entirely, in which the GCC states have accommodated themselves to Iranian regional primacy, and in which Israel has accepted a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question that constrains its further military options. This is an ambitious objective. It is not, however, an implausible one given the trajectory of the current conflict.

The regional architecture that would emerge from this outcome would differ fundamentally from the post-1991 Gulf War order that has prevailed for three decades. Instead of American carrier battle groups providing the security backstop for Gulf energy exports, the guarantor of Hormuz stability would be Iran — with all that implies for the pricing and terms of energy passage. Instead of a GCC aligned with Western security interests and providing basing for American force projection, the Gulf states would be navigating a complex accommodation with an Iranian regional hegemon that they cannot defeat militarily and can no longer count on the Americans to deter.

America now faces:

- a NATO strategic defeat in Ukraine to Russia
- a strategic defeat of its navy and arms forces in the Gulf region to militant Muslim power
- an inevitable loss in the Pacific of a Chinese blockade of Taiwan.

Making the retreat of America to the Western Hemisphere a new world order. A multi-polar world order.

China's Strategic Opportunity

For China, a post-American Gulf represents a strategic windfall of the first order. Beijing's dependence on Gulf energy — the very dependence that makes Hormuz disruption so acutely painful for China now — would, in a reconfigured regional order, become leverage rather than vulnerability. A Gulf security architecture in which Chinese diplomatic engagement, infrastructure investment, and implicit security guarantees replace American military presence would give Beijing preferential access to the energy resources it requires for its continued economic development, on terms and at prices determined by arrangements in which China is a privileged partner rather than a dependent customer.

The China-brokered Saudi-Iran normalisation of 2023 was a portent of this reorientation. Beijing demonstrated that it could deliver diplomatic outcomes in the Gulf that Washington's confrontational posture made impossible. In a post-conflict environment, China's role as the region's preferred external partner — offering infrastructure investment through the Belt and Road Initiative, diplomatic non-interference, and a security presence calibrated to protection of trade routes rather than political transformation — would be significantly enhanced.

Russia's Complementary Interest

Russia's interest in the outcome is less complex but equally significant. A Gulf War that ties down American military attention and political capital in the Middle East reduces American bandwidth for the Ukrainian theatre, weakens the NATO alliance's collective focus, and elevates global oil prices in ways that benefit Russian export revenues. Moscow's provision of satellite intelligence, electronic warfare support, and diplomatic cover for Iran in the UN Security Council represents a rational investment in an outcome that serves Russian strategic interests without requiring Russia to absorb the military risk directly.

The New Regional Architecture

The regional security architecture that emerges from this conflict — if Iran's strategy succeeds in its essential objectives — will be characterised by Iranian dominance of the Gulf security environment, a GCC that has made its accommodation with Tehran, an Israel that has been forced into a negotiated settlement from a position of strategic attrition, and an American posture in the region that has contracted to a minimal

presence focused on maritime security and counterterrorism rather than conventional deterrence and alliance management.

This is a profound reordering of the Middle Eastern balance of power — one that reverses seventy years of American strategic investment in the region and creates a regional order aligned with Iranian, Chinese, and Russian interests rather than Western ones. It is not inevitable. It is contingent on the maintenance of American domestic political support for continued engagement, on the resilience of Israeli society and economy under sustained attritional pressure, and on the GCC states' willingness to absorb the costs of resistance. All three of these contingencies are, at the four-week mark of the conflict, under severe strain.

8 Assessment and Conclusion

The Strengths of the Iranian Position

Iran's siege strategy has several structural advantages that make it more formidable than a surface assessment of the conventional military balance would suggest. First, Iran has the advantage of strategic coherence: its three-tier approach integrates military, economic, and political instruments of statecraft in a sequenced campaign with clear objectives and a logical theory of victory. Its adversaries, by contrast, are pursuing objectives that are not fully aligned with one another and are constrained by alliance management complexities, democratic political pressures, and legal and normative constraints on the use of force.

Second, Iran has the advantage of time. The Islamic Republic has demonstrated, over forty-five years of revolutionary governance, an extraordinary capacity to endure economic pressure, international isolation, and military threat. Its population, whatever its political disagreements with the regime, has a hardened tolerance for privation that no Gulf state, American political system, or Israeli society can match over a sustained period. In a war of attrition, the party that can absorb the most pain for the longest time has the structural advantage, and on this dimension Iran's position is stronger than it appears.

Third, Iran has the advantage of escalation dominance in the specific context of the Gulf. The threat of Hormuz closure is the ultimate card in Tehran's hand — a threat so catastrophic in its global economic consequences that the international community's pressure to end the conflict on terms acceptable to Iran will intensify exponentially if the strait is fully closed rather than merely disrupted.

The Risks and Limitations

An honest assessment must acknowledge the genuine risks in Iran's strategic position. The greatest is the risk of miscalculation triggering escalation to a level at which American

or Israeli conventional military responses overwhelm Iran's defensive capacity before the political dynamics that Iran is counting on have time to operate. A successful American strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, however complex logistically, would change the strategic calculus fundamentally. Iranian decision-makers must manage this escalation risk with great care.

The second risk is internal. Iran's economy was already under severe strain from fifteen years of sanctions before the conflict began. The additional burden of wartime expenditure, combined with any partial Hormuz disruption that reduces Iran's own energy export revenues, imposes a fiscal pressure that could generate domestic instability. The Islamic Republic has navigated domestic opposition before, but a protracted war with visible economic costs tests the regime's political management capacity.

The third risk is alliance cohesion. Iran's strategy depends on the continued engagement of Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi and Syrian militias as proxy actors willing to absorb kinetic response in exchange for Iranian material and intelligence support. Each of these actors has its own political interests that are not fully aligned with Tehran's strategic vision. Managing this coalition of proxies over a sustained campaign, while ensuring their continued operational effectiveness in the face of Israeli and American counterstrikes, represents a significant organisational and political challenge.

Final Assessment

The overall assessment of this analysis is that Iran's siege strategy, while not without risk, represents a coherent and potentially decisive approach to achieving its core strategic objective: the restructuring of the Middle Eastern security order in Iran's favour and the strategic retreat of American power from the Gulf region. The strategy is historically grounded, operationally sophisticated, and calibrated to exploit the specific vulnerabilities of its adversaries — America's limited political patience, Israel's strategic exposure, the GCC's economic fragility, and the world's dependence on Hormuz — in a sequenced campaign that applies simultaneous pressure across multiple domains.

The outcome is not predetermined. American strategic resolve, Israeli military resilience, GCC economic depth, and the international community's willingness to absorb the costs of Hormuz disruption in support of a principled response to Iranian aggression will all be tested in the months ahead. But the honest conclusion of this analysis is that at the four-week mark, the strategic momentum is with Iran. The siege is being laid with competence and patience. The question is whether those on the receiving end have the will to withstand it.