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US/Israel Prepare to Seize of Iranian-Controlled Gulf Islands for Long-Term Leverage

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US/Israel leadership is likely contemplating seizing Iranian islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb to deliver decisive long-term leverage over the Strait of Hormuz. Their seizures would deny Iran its primary forward chokepoint, securing global energy transit routes, and creating a durable bargaining chip in any end-of-war negotiations. These small but strategically vital islands, seized by Iran in 1971 and long claimed by the UAE, sit at the narrow entrance to the strait; control of them enables Tehran to project missiles, conduct surveillance, and interdict shipping. US/Israeli seizure would flip this dynamic, allowing sustained monitoring, defensive basing, and pressure on Iran's economy without deeper mainland commitment—directly addressing Tehran's current disruption of 20% of global oil flows

- The islands host Iranian garrisons, missile batteries (including Khordad-15 air-defense and anti-ship systems), and surveillance assets, functioning as “unsinkable aircraft carriers” for interdiction. Pentagon contingency planning explicitly includes their capture as a “final blow” option to reopen the strait and reduce oil prices.
- Seizure is operationally feasible via combined airborne/amphibious assault using elements of two Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs, ~4,000 Marines total) plus 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers, supported by carrier-based strike aircraft, attack helicopters, and V-22 Ospreys for rapid insertion. An occupation force of 1,800–2,000 troops would be required to hold them long-term and prevent Iranian recapture.
- Long-term leverage accrues from permanent radar/monitoring posts that secure shipping lanes, deter Iranian fast-boat or mine threats, and provide negotiable real estate returnable in exchange for Iranian concessions on nuclear or regional proxies. This would be less resource-intensive than mainland operations while directly countering Tehran's asymmetric strategy.





Iranian Reaction to Loss of the Islands

Tehran would respond with immediate asymmetric escalation, threats against regional partners, and sustained harassment from the mainland to reclaim symbolic sovereignty and impose costs on US/Israeli forces. Losing these “stationary aircraft carriers” would be framed domestically as an existential humiliation, triggering a mix of conventional remnants and proxy warfare designed to prolong the conflict rather than achieve decisive reversal.

- Iran’s military has already signaled that any aggression originating from UAE territory against Abu Musa or Greater Tunb would trigger “heavy and crushing strikes” on Ras al-Khaimah; IRGC statements explicitly warn of direct retaliation against Gulf partners facilitating US/Israeli operations.
- Expect intensified missile and drone barrages from Iranian mainland coastal launchers, renewed mine-laying in alternative Gulf sectors, and proxy activation (Houthis, Hezbollah) targeting shipping or US assets; Tehran’s degraded naval surface fleet would be replaced by swarming small boats and coastal anti-ship ballistic missiles.
- Domestically, the regime would rally nationalism around the islands as historic Persian territory, potentially using any US casualties for propaganda leverage or prisoner swaps; however, analysts assess Iran lacks the conventional capacity for successful counter-invasion and would instead seek to bleed occupying forces through attrition.

Conclusion

Seizing and holding Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb offers high-leverage, lower-footprint control of the Strait of Hormuz with manageable force requirements (primarily 2 MEUs plus supporting air/naval assets and a modest occupation garrison). Iran's reaction—escalatory but asymmetric—would increase short-term risks to shipping and Gulf partners but is unlikely to reverse the territorial loss given Tehran's degraded capabilities. Success hinges on rapid consolidation, robust air/missile defense, and integration into broader diplomatic efforts to trade the islands for Iranian concessions.



Tal Shiar was founded by Nadeem Iqbal, a national security expert who served over 16 years as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense from 2006-2022. His career began as a counter-insurgency analyst on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (2006–2013), followed by 9 years as a military analyst in the Syria Branch (2013–2022). He deployed five times in support of combat operations (3× Afghanistan, 2× Iraq), including two rotations with

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