

TAL SHIAR



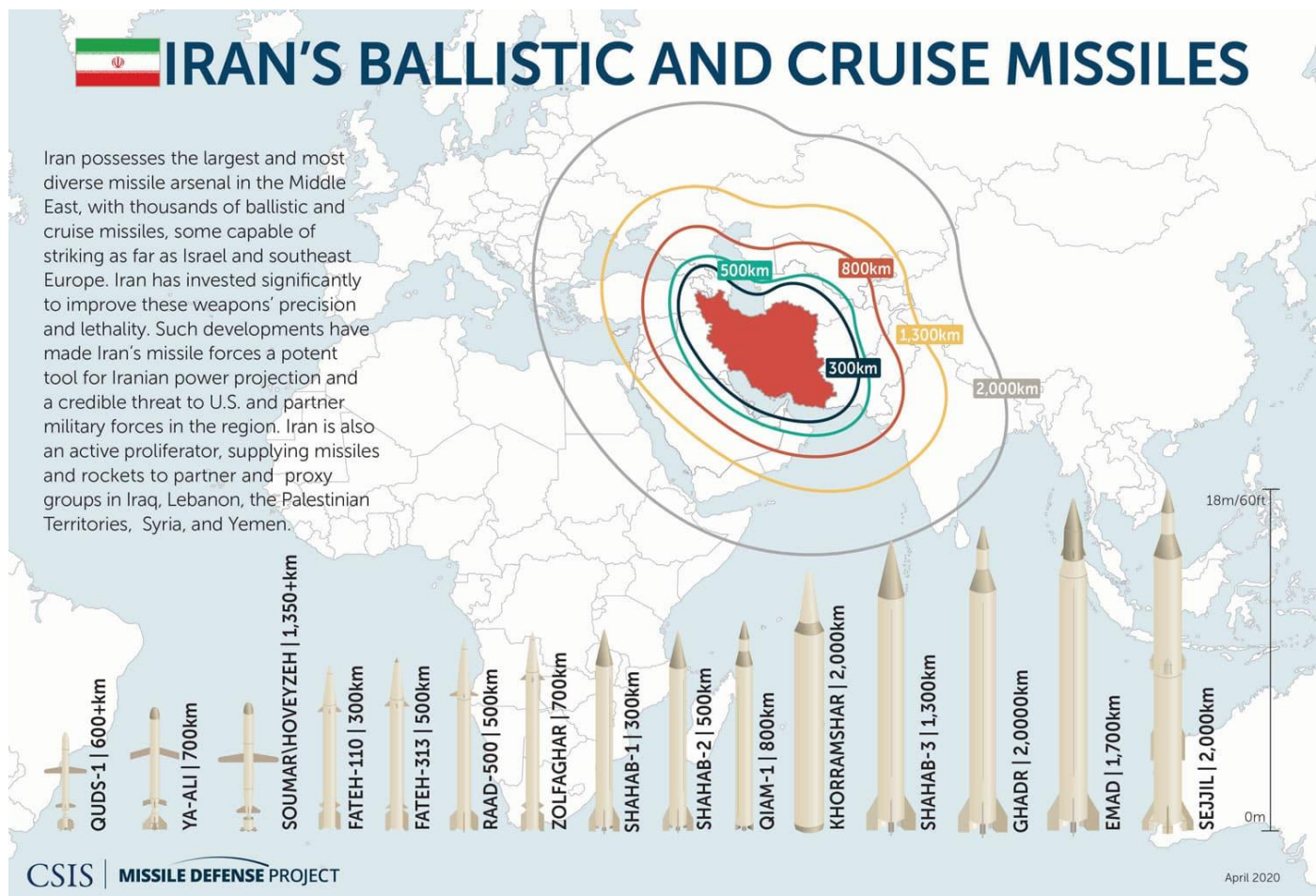
DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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IRGC To Retaliate Outside Iran If President Trump Pursues Regime Change

Prepared by Tal Shiar Directorate of Intelligence, 21 January 2026

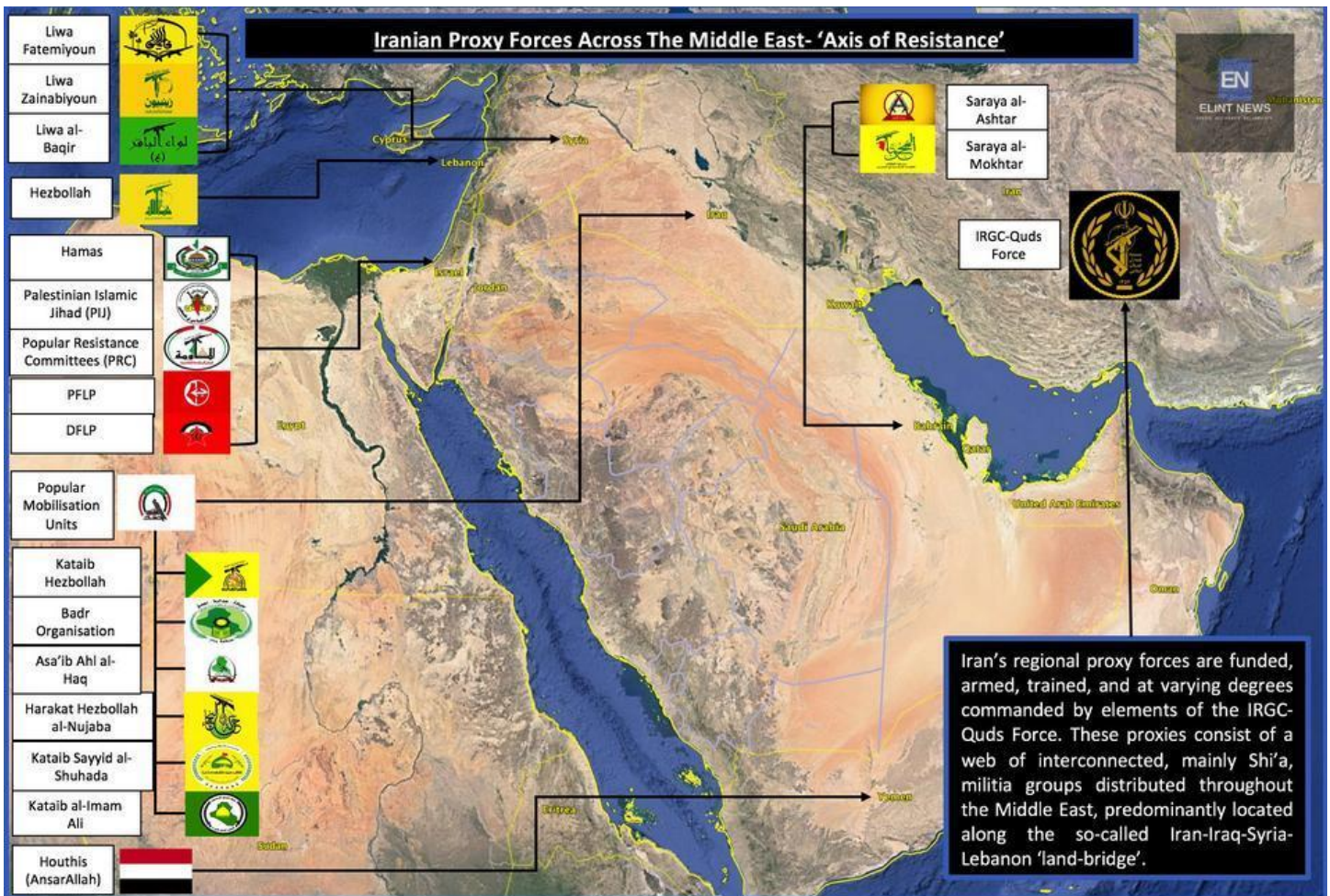
Should President Trump pursue regime change through military operations, Iran's IRGC will conduct multiple retaliation attacks outside the country to impose costs, erode U.S. will with the purpose of securing a ceasefire deal that preserves the regime. This could manifest as asymmetric attacks designed to exploit U.S. vulnerabilities, escalate regionally, thereby prolonging its survival amid internal unrest. Such actions risk drawing the U.S. into a protracted conflict with significant implications for global energy security, allied stability, and U.S. personnel in the Middle East.



- **Missile Barrages:** IRGC commanders have explicitly warned of missile barrages against U.S. bases in Iraq, Syria, Qatar, and other Gulf states if strikes occur, leveraging Iran's arsenal of over 3,000 ballistic

missiles to overwhelm defenses and inflict casualties. This mirrors threats during the 2025 Israel-Iran conflict, where IRGC underground sites were placed on high alert for retaliation.

- **Proxy Forces:** Militias under IRGC Quds Force command, including Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq and Houthis in Yemen, could intensify attacks on U.S. forces and shipping lanes, as evidenced by recent threats from Iraqi groups to "pay a double price" for any U.S. intervention. This would aim to stretch U.S. resources and deter escalation.
- **Straits of Hormuz (SoH):** Tehran has repeatedly signaled intent to close the SoH, disrupting 20% of global oil flows, in response to regime-threatening actions. This could spike energy prices and lead to global economic disruption as well as provoke expanded naval confrontations in the Gulf of Arabia. If fully closed, price of oil could climb to \$120-\$130 USD a barrel from its current average price of \$65.



Broader Retaliation Vectors and Escalatory Options

Should initial U.S. actions fail to achieve regime collapse, the IRGC would likely expand operations to include cyber disruptions, targeted assassinations, and global terrorism, capitalizing on its weakened but resilient networks post-2025 strikes. This phase could aim to erode U.S. political will, impose economic pain, and force negotiations on Tehran's terms, while framing the conflict as existential to consolidate internal power.

- **Cyberattacks:** IRGC linked cyber-hackers will target U.S.'s critical infrastructure, such as power grids or financial systems which represent a low-risk escalation tool; these hackers have previously targeted U.S. entities, and officials note this as a probable response over kinetic strikes to avoid full-scale war.
- **Sleeper Cells:** Activation of sleeper cells or direct threats against U.S. leaders, as seen in IRGC media broadcasts depicting assassination attempts on President Trump or other senior U.S. officials, could extend retaliation beyond the region, heightening homeland security risks. Iranian state media has amplified such messaging amid protest suppression.
- **Regional Attacks:** Proxy or Missile attacks on Israel along with coordinated attacks on Gulf allies particularly their energy infrastructure, to broaden the conflict and divide U.S. allies; IRGC has vowed joint retaliation with proxies if leadership is targeted. Purpose would be to impose enough casualties/damage where regional allies would pressure U.S. to end military operations.

Conclusion

Based on IRGC's demonstrated capabilities and historical responses, U.S.-initiated regime change efforts would likely trigger a calibrated escalation, starting asymmetrically to test resolve before risking all-out war. This could inadvertently strengthen the regime through nationalist backlash, prolong instability, and incur high costs without guaranteeing collapse, underscoring the need for multilateral containment strategies over unilateral intervention.



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

Special Operations Forces focused on counter-terrorism missions in the CENTCOM theater. Additional roles included rotations to CIA Headquarters as the military analyst for the DNI Middle East Task Force and served as the Syria Country Director for Office of Secretary of Defense Policy (OSDP). He was recognized with Joint Civilian Commendation/Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal(x3), the Secretary of Defense GWOT Medal, DoD Expeditionary Award and the OSD Excellence Award.

