

Air Strike

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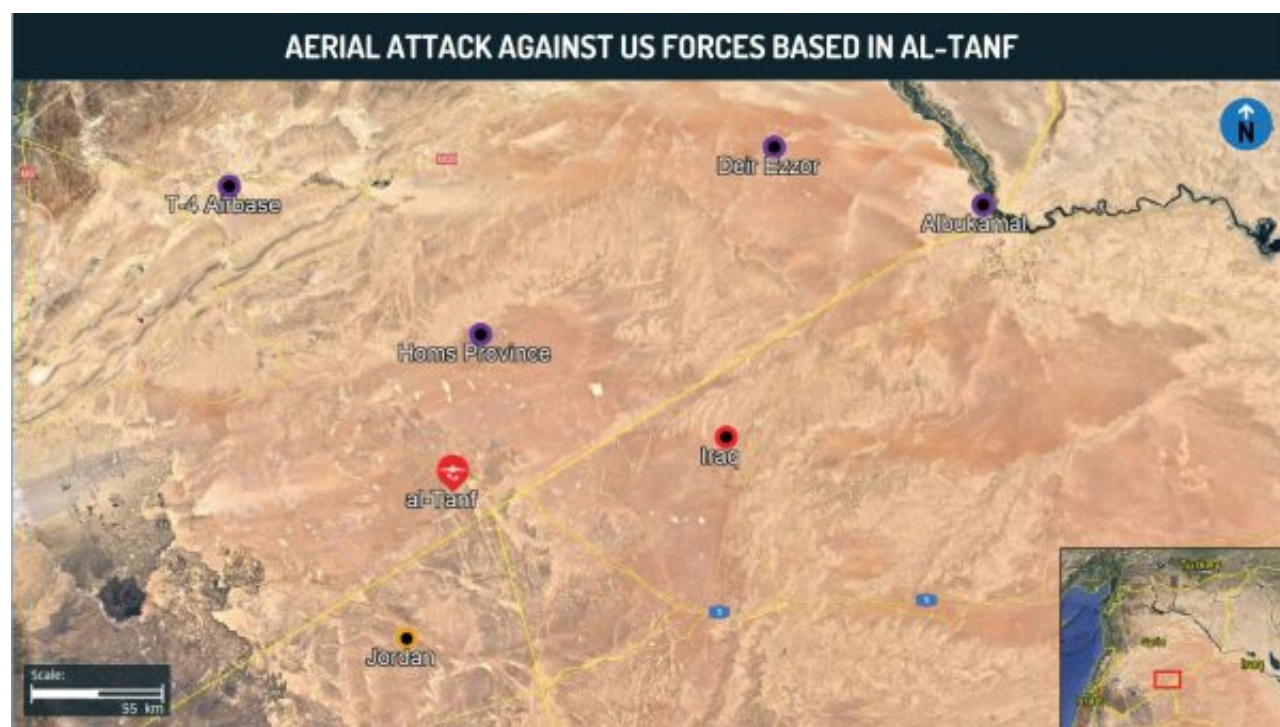
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Syria Alert (UPDATE): Aerial attack against US forces based in al-Tanf reported during night hours of October 20; may prompt US retaliation over coming hours

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Please be advised:

- Reports quoting US Central Command (CENTCOM) officials indicate that a “deliberate and coordinated attack” involving unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other means, targeted the US troops at the US base located in Homs Province’s al-Tanf area.
- No casualties were reported in the incident, as per the time of writing.
- A CENTCOM spokesperson, Capt. Bill Urban, reportedly stated that “we maintain the inherent right of self-defense and will respond at a time and place of our choosing,” in response to the incident.
- The US base in al-Tanf houses approximately 200 US personnel, in addition to a British force. A US-backed Syrian faction, Jaysh Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT) is also based in the area.



Assessments & Forecast:

1. Direct aerial attacks against US bases in Syria are overall rare, albeit they have been recorded on a more frequent basis in Deir Ezzor's environs in recent months. Furthermore, no attacks have been reported against the US base in al-Tanf, which lies at the strategic tripartite border area between Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, for at least several years. The incident follows several airstrikes on October 8 and October 13-14 that targeted sites in Homs Province's, including the T-4 (Tiyas) airbase, which resulted in casualties among the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). Syrian reports indicated that these airstrikes were conducted by aircraft from al-Tanf's airspace, and pro-Iran media outlets claimed that at least one of the strikes was a joint American-Israeli operation. These outlets also reported that "Syria's Allies Operations Room" [representing pro-Iran factions in Syria] has vowed following the October 13-14 airstrikes, to respond to these attacks. In this context, the current attack at al-Tanf likely forms a retaliation by Iran-backed factions against the previous strikes. This suggests that Iran-backed factions are willing to orchestrate attacks in response to airstrikes in Syria that are attributed to Israel and the US. It also points to the potential that US bases in Syria could be targeted for strikes conducted independently by Israel.
2. The fact that UAVs were reportedly used in the current attack highlights the [growing capability](#) by Iran-backed factions to acquire and use such devices, a trend that is constantly being bolstered with direct assistance by Tehran. The use of such devices has been recorded on a more frequent basis in Iraq, but US airstrikes on [June 27](#) indicated that Iran-backed factions are also building UAV capabilities within Syria, particularly in Deir Ezzor's Albukamal border area, where Iran-backed factions are heavily entrenched. As such, given the location of al-Tanf, the latest attack could have emanated both from Syrian and Iraqi territory. While there were no casualties reported in the attack, that the UAVs landed within the US base points to the elevated risk that the use of such devices poses.
3. **FORECAST:** The CENTCOM official's statement that the US will "respond at a time and place of our choosing" serves as an indication that US forces are not willing to hastily launch retaliation operations in response to the attack. With that said, such a deliberate attack against a US base, particularly the strategic base at al-Tanf will likely push Washington to resort to such action, potentially after it concludes its investigation. A US military response is more likely to occur in the desert areas of Deir Ezzor, particularly near the Albukamal border area with Iraq, where Iran-backed factions are based. Tensions between the US and Iran-backed factions in Syria will be elevated over the coming days.

Recommendations:

1. Avoid nonessential travel to Damascus at this time while maintaining heightened vigilance and adhering to standard security precautions regarding the threat of militant attacks and potential airstrikes. In addition, it is advised to avoid all travel to the vicinity of military installations due to the potential for Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrikes.
2. Avoid all travel to the border areas with Iraq due to the entrenchment of Islamic State (IS) militants and Iran-backed Shiite militias in the region as well as the persistent risk of US-led Coalition and IAF airstrikes.