

Veteran pilot talks about fate of three comrades who struck US base

What made Al Udeid one of most intricate aerial missions?



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The destiny of the three Iranian pilots who participated in the March 2 operation of retaliating against the Al Udeid American air base in Qatar, even after the passage of several months, remains shrouded in obscurity; an obscurity that has acquired novel dimensions consequent to the discordant stances of Iran and Qatar. While Iranian authorities have recently asserted that the three pilots are alive in captivity, Qatar has repudiated this assertion and claims ignorance concerning their fate. In the meantime, the martyrdom of Brigadier General Majid Kazemi has been confirmed, and the remains of this distinguished pilot have been repatriated; however, the status of the other three pilots is indeterminate.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of experts, the operation of March 2, 2026, constituted, from a technical and military standpoint, an intricate and exceptionally perilous mission, an operation wherein Iranian combat aircraft, penetrating multiple defensive layers, infiltrated the Al Udeid base and successfully inflicted damage upon this consequential American installation.

To scrutinize the diverse dimensions of this aerial operation and also to conduct a technical assessment of the various probabilities concerning the fate of the pilots, Iran Daily engaged in an exclusive dialogue with Brigadier General Hossein Khalili, a veteran of the Air Force and a pilot who participated in numerous operations during the eight-year Sacred Defense period (Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s); the full transcript of which you shall read below:

Hossein Khalili



IRAN DAILY: In light of the divergent narratives advanced concerning the operation of March 2, 2026, and the destiny of the three Iranian pilots, if we wish to examine this affair from the perspective of a pilot and with a technical and military lens, what is your evaluation of this operation?

KHALILI: To analyze this operation, we must initially attend to the type of aircraft, the target, and the conditions in which the pilots were situated. The Sukhoi Su-34 aircraft is a semi-strategic fighter-bomber and ranks among the heaviest interceptor aircraft globally. This aircraft, in terms of both its physical dimensions and weight, as well as the quantity of ordnance it can carry, possesses considerable capability for such missions.

Consequently, the selection of this aircraft for an assault upon a significant and strategic target, such as the Al Udeid base, is militarily comprehensible because the aircraft can transport a substantial volume of munitions.

To what extent was the operation, in terms of the design and the planning for the execution of an aerial operation, distinguished?

Apparently, the execution of the operation had been scheduled for March 1; however, its implementation was postponed by one day due to particular circumstances. In such aerial missions, the selection of the route customarily has tremendous importance. Fundamentally, a pilot endeavors to approach the target via a trajectory that minimizes the probability of detection. In this instance as well, it appears the route was chosen such that the aircraft would enter the vicinity of the Al Udeid base from a direction toward which the adversary's anti-aircraft defenses were not primarily oriented. For example, if the adversary anticipates an assault from a specific axis, it is natural that it would concentrate its radar and defensive systems more heavily along that same axis. Therefore, altering the angle of entry and approaching from an unanticipated direction can contribute to the mission's success.

Thus, could one assert that the initial success of the operation was largely contingent upon the surprise of the defenses?

That is correct. Surprise constitutes one of the critical factors for the success of any military operation. On this basis, the aircraft entered Qatari territory, advanced somewhat into the depth of the area, then adjusted their trajectory to reach the target and maneuvered from the southern sector toward their objectives at the Al Udeid base. This method resulted in the defenses having a diminished window for effective reaction because, from a defensive standpoint,



● wallpaperflare.com

the adversary anticipated the attack would originate from the north of the base, and the deployment and targeting of defensive systems had been concentrated in that area; however, our operation planners and pilots, through an astute maneuver, assaulted the base from the southern sector. This action also possessed another advantage: if our fighters had targeted the base from the northern sector, during their exit and alteration of course and heading back toward Iran, the adversary's defenses would have enjoyed a greater opportunity

to target our fighters; but when the bombardment was executed from the southern sector, our fighters had a direct trajectory for their return. Nevertheless, a crucial point exists; the moment the bombardment is executed, the element of surprise effectively dissipates. From that instant onward, all systems within the area become cognizant of the presence of the attacking aircraft, and the return mission becomes considerably more difficult. Up to this point, that segment of the mission which had been planned for the base's bombardment

was accomplished successfully. Another factor that rendered this operation more intricate was that one day prior to this operation, two of our F-5s, flying at low altitude and penetrating advanced American aerial defense systems, inflicted severe damage upon the infrastructure of a United States Air Force base in Kuwait and, having successfully executed the aerial assault, landed in Bushehr. Naturally, when an operation has been conducted in the region the preceding day, the alertness level of opposing forces increases, and the repetition of an operation within a short interval can elevate the probability of detection and identification. And this matter concurrently increased the risk of executing the operation at the Al Udeid base.

Therefore, could one assert that the more hazardous segment of the mission was perhaps subsequent to the execution of the bombardment and during the return?

Precisely. As long as you are approaching, you endeavor to remain undetected; but after releasing the bombs, you can no longer remain concealed. The region's radars, defensive systems, aerial patrol aircraft, and even naval vessels can enter the process of identification and interdiction.

Furthermore, Al Udeid air base is not a conventional installation. It is a major American base and, naturally, possesses multiple defensive layers. There, a variety of defensive and radar

The compiled and edited photo shows the three Iranian pilots who successfully struck the American Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar and whose fate remains unknown. From left to right, allegedly: Javad Salehi, Omran Behroushian and Abdolmajid Dashtian.

● rouydad24.ir



Another factor that rendered this operation more intricate was that one day prior to this operation, two of our F-5s, flying at low altitude and penetrating advanced American aerial defense systems, inflicted severe damage upon the infrastructure of a United States Air Force base in Kuwait and, having successfully executed the aerial assault, landed in Bushehr. Naturally, when an operation has been conducted in the region the preceding day, the alertness level of opposing forces increases, and the repetition of an operation within a short interval can elevate the probability of detection and identification.