

systems exist, and in addition, aerial patrol coverage is also a consideration. American and Qatari aircraft can be present in the region. On the other hand, American naval vessels stationed in the area themselves possess radar systems and aerial coverage. In preceding years, when we flew in Iran's southern areas, even under conditions where the presence of American naval vessels was not as extensive as it is today, we observed that they could detect an aircraft from a considerable distance. Therefore, for an Iranian aircraft to be able to enter such a region, bombard the target, and then undertake the return trajectory was, operationally, an exceedingly complex undertaking.

One of the points noted concerning this operation was the extremely low-altitude flight of our fighters. What significance did this factor possess?

Low-altitude flight constitutes one of the methods employed to reduce the probability of radar detection. Extremely low-altitude flight (25 to 50 meters above the water's surface) or even in proximity to the ground, which not every pilot can accomplish, was also selected to evade radar detection and to complicate interception by missiles because, by flying at low altitude, the margin of error for missiles increases. However, a pilot at extremely low altitude must navigate with extraordinary precision, and the slightest error can precipitate fatal consequences. Therefore, the selection of low altitude demonstrates that the pilots endeavored to diminish the probability of early detection to the greatest feasible extent.

This operation naturally revives the memory of the flight of the martyr Abbas Doran over Baghdad on July 21, 1982, and his penetration of one of the densest Iraqi defensive networks, which, despite the mission's success, ultimately resulted in his martyrdom; what is your opinion?

Correct. From one perspective, one could even state that this operation involved extraordinarily risky conditions and, in certain aspects, could be even more perilous than the operation of martyr Doran during the Iraqi-imposed war because the existence of the multi-layered defensive network of the American Al Udeid base, the more advanced nature of the radar systems, anti-aircraft artillery, radar-guided surface-to-air missiles, continuous aerial patrols, and the presence of American naval vessels at a distance of 15 to 20 miles rendered the conditions for penetration into the operational area and its execution extremely challenging.

If we wish to speak candidly and from a pilot's viewpoint, such a mission cannot be regarded as an everyday mission. A pilot knows that upon entering such a region, he confronts an assemblage of threats, ranging from defensive systems to adversary fighters and radar and naval coverage.



Martyred Majid Kazemi, one of the four Iranian pilots who conducted a successful operation against the American Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar and the only one whose martyrdom has been confirmed so far, poses for a photo. ● NOURNEWS

With this calculation, did the pilots accept this mission knowing that, in all probability, no return was possible?

The pilots, with complete cognizance that the probability of return was only 10% and that they effectively considered their death largely inevitable, embarked upon this mission. Nonetheless, they knew the mission had to be executed; that is the very characteristic that also existed in the great operations of the Sacred Defense period, wherein pilots, despite deeming the probability of martyrdom extremely high, still accepted the mission. And this constitutes the distinction between our combatants and pilots and the forces of the adversary. That which we designate as the culture of martyrdom is precisely this: that our combatant possesses no fear of confronting the enemy despite the inequality of equipment and the equations of warfare.

Given that the pilots have not returned yet but the attack upon the Al Udeid base was successfully executed, should this operation be considered an operational success?

If an aircraft can enter an area with such a level of protection, strike the target, and accomplish its mission, then from a military perspective, this segment of the operation is considered successful. It is natural that in a combat operation, you also incorporate into your calculations the risk of losing the aircraft and crew. But in return, you may be able to inflict dam-

age upon the adversary and execute the assigned mission, just as our pilots inflicted substantial damage upon the American Al Udeid base in Qatar.

One of the significant ambiguities concerns the fate of the three pilots about whom conflicting narratives have been put forward. From a technical standpoint, does the possibility of their survival and captivity exist?

Here, we must distinguish between definitive information and the analysis of probabilities. If the aircraft was downed and the pilots were able to eject, then from a technical standpoint, the possibility of survival and captivity exists. It is possible he landed in the region and was apprehended by forces present there. Consequently, given the presence of American forces at the Al Udeid base, the probability that the pilots were apprehended by American forces is not ruled out. Of course, this is an analysis, and for it to become definitive news, it requires credible information and official confirmation. It is even possible that if such an event occurred, the opposing side, for various reasons, might not announce the matter, particularly under conditions where the possibility of continued hostilities exists.

Of course, concerning the martyrdom of two of the pilots in those same days, narratives were disseminated; subsequently, however, the martyrdom of Brigadier General Majid Kazemi was officially confirmed, and the remains of this martyr were repatriated. In your opinion, to what extent are those earlier narratives reliable?

In such incidents, the information from the initial days is customarily incomplete. It is possible that, initially, based on preliminary evidence,

it might be surmised that two of the crew were martyred, and later, with the discovery of the aircraft's wreckage or new information, the details become clearer.

Regarding this incident as well, if the remains of one of the pilots have been found, this matter does not, in and of itself, signify that the status of all crew members has been clarified. Concerning the other individual or individuals, independent evidence must exist. Therefore, one cannot assert with certainty that all have been martyred or that the remaining are alive. Both probabilities must, from a technical standpoint, be examined until definitive information is clarified.

What is Qatar's role in this matter? If the operation occurred within Qatari territory, does the Qatari government necessarily possess knowledge of the pilots' fate?

The matter is somewhat complex. Iran has announced that the operation's target was the American base in Qatar and that, in reality, the engagement was with the United States, not Qatar. Therefore, Qatar might dissociate its direct responsibility from this incident.

If we assume one of the pilots has been taken captive, why might this matter not be announced?

In wartime conditions, information concerning prisoners of war and military personnel can be a matter of security. The opposing side might have various reasons for not announcing it. Moreover, if the two sides remain engaged, the matter of prisoners could subsequently arise in negotiations or prisoner exchanges. However, I emphasize that this is merely a probability, and to offer a definitive opinion on the pilots' fate, one must await official and verifiable information.

Finally, if you were to elucidate the importance of this operation from your own perspective, how would you describe it?

In my view, this operation should be considered within the framework of the greatest operations of Iran's Air Force. The matter is not merely about several aircraft going and bombing a target. You enter a region, with aircraft, that is under multi-layered radar, defensive, aerial, and naval coverage, and you know that subsequent to the mission's execution, the probability of return is extremely low. From this perspective, this operation, in terms of the degree of risk and the fearlessness of the pilots, ranks among the greatest aerial operations in the history of the country. Perhaps the most significant point is precisely this: that the pilots accepted the mission with full knowledge of the extraordinarily great dangers. When a pilot knows the probability of return is extremely low but still flies, this is not merely a military mission; rather, it demonstrates the magnitude of his commitment to the execution of the mission.



An undated aerial satellite view of the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar before the Iran war ● US ARMY



A satellite view of the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar following Iran's retaliatory operation in March ● THE NEW YORK TIMES



A US pilot, whose fighter jet was among the three that were mistakenly shot down by Kuwaiti forces during the Iran war, is being threatened by a pipe-wielding local after he survived the crash. ● X