



By: TA | AP Insight

Seizing Kharg Island may not end Iran war



President Donald Trump is threatening to deploy **ground troops** to seize critical oil infrastructure on Iran's **Kharg Island**, a military gambit that experts say would risk American lives and could still fail to end the war.

If Trump wants to hobble Iran's oil industry for **leverage in negotiations**, a better option might be setting up a blockade at sea against ships that have filled up at Kharg Island's oil terminals, the experts said.

The island — located on the other side of the Persian Gulf from U.S. bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia — is the **beating heart** of Iran's oil industry, through which 90% of its exports pass. It is important because Iran's coastline is mostly too shallow for tanker ships to dock.

“Putting people on the ground might be the most psychologically compelling way of striking a blow at Iran,” said Michael Eisenstadt, a former U.S. military analyst who now directs the Military and Security Studies Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

“On the other hand, you're putting your own troops at jeopardy,” said Eisenstadt, a retired Army reserve officer who served in Iraq. “It's not far from the mainland. So they can potentially rain a lot of destruction on the island, if they're willing to inflict damage on their own infrastructure.”

Seizing Kharg Island could escalate the conflict, said Danny Citrinowicz, an Iran expert at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

He said Iran and its proxies — including Yemen's **Houthi rebels** — could intensify their retaliation, including by laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz or striking targets with drones across the Arabian Peninsula, from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea.

Commodities researchers and investment banks warn **major retaliation** could have lasting implications for energy prices and the **global economy**.

“It will be hard to take. It will be hard to hold,” Citrinowicz said of Kharg Island. “And it might damage the economy, but not in a way that will force the Iranians to capitulate.”

Trump says ‘maybe we take Kharg Island'

Trump is under growing pressure to end the monthlong conflict with Iran, which has attacked U.S. bases and allies in the region.

Iran also has largely closed the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow chokepoint through which 20% of the world's oil normally flows, causing fuel prices to soar and other economic tumult.

Trump said in a social media post Monday that “great progress is being made” in talks with Iran to end military operations.

But he said that if a deal is not reached “shortly” and the strait is not immediately reopened, the U.S. would obliterate power plants, oil wells, Kharg Island and possibly even **desalination plants**.

Trump has raised the idea of American forces seizing Kharg Island.

Maybe we take Kharg Island, maybe we don't. We have a lot of options - Donald Trump

“Maybe we take Kharg Island, maybe we don't. We have a lot of options,” Trump told the Financial Times. “It would also mean we had to be there (on Kharg Island) for a while.”

Asked about Iranian defenses there, he said: “I don't think they have any defense. We could take it very easily.”

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that ground troops would not be needed to achieve the Trump administration's goals.

He did not repeat that assertion Monday after being asked about plans for U.S. ground

troops, saying “the president has several options at his disposal” but diplomacy is Trump’s preference.

“Now, they are making threats about controlling the Hormuz Strait in perpetuity, creating a tolling system and the like,” Rubio told ABC’s “Good Morning America.” “That’s not going to be allowed to happen. And the president has a number of options available to him, if he so chooses, to prevent that from happening.”

US has hit targets on the island crucial to Iran

The U.S. has already struck various targets on the island, including air defenses, a radar site, the airport and a hovercraft base, according to satellite analysis by the Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute’s Critical Threats Project.

Petras Katinas, an energy researcher at the Royal United Services Institute, said disrupting Kharg Island would not completely halt oil exports as Iran has other small ports. But it would reduce the oil revenue flowing to Iran’s government, “forcing flows through a much smaller, costlier and less efficient export system,” he said.

Tehran has too much at stake to surrender over a single asset, no matter how economically significant - Danny Citrinowicz

However, Tehran has too much at stake to surrender over a single asset, no matter how economically significant, said Citrinowicz, the Iran expert at Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies.

While occupying Kharg might offer Washington some leverage in any negotiations, he said the notion that control of the island could be traded for Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium was far-fetched.

“It’s in no way a decisive blow,” Citrinowicz said.

US troops face risk from Iran's mainland if they tried to seize Kharg Island

A **U.S. Navy ship** carrying about 2,500 Marines recently arrived in the Middle East, while at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division are expected soon. Another 2,500 Marines are being deployed from California.

The Trump administration has not said what all those troops will be doing, but the 82nd Airborne is trained to parachute into hostile or contested territory to secure key territory and airfields.



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One of the reasons American troops would be vulnerable on Kharg Island is its close proximity – about 33 kilometers (21 miles) – to the Iranian mainland, from which missiles, drones and artillery could be fired.

Despite continued U.S. and Israeli strikes, the Islamic Republic is still attacking targets across the region, including a Saudi air base hundreds of miles away where more than two dozen **American troops were injured** last week.

Even with American ships and planes providing support, there would still be a relatively short window of time to shoot down every drone or missile launched from the

mainland at the island, Eisenstadt said.

“The coast tends to be mountainous, so the drones can come in through mountain passes where it’s hard for our radar to pick up,” he said. “And we don’t have the warning time.”

Eisenstadt says a sea blockade against ships carrying Iranian oil would be a safer strategy and achieve the same goal of controlling most of Iran's oil industry.

“Throw up a quarantine that seeks to seize Iranian oil shipments that are exiting the Gulf,” agreed Clayton Seigle, an energy security expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It could be done at a distance “outside the range of the lion’s share of Iran’s weapon systems.”

Seigle argued against destroying Kharg Island's oil infrastructure, which Trump also suggested.

“We were supposed to be coming to the rescue of the people that had been rising up and protesting for a better future,” Seigle said. “So to cripple Iran’s revenue-generating potential for many years to come would definitely not work in that direction.”