

# Iranian Aircraft Carriers in the Gulf of Mexico: It Can't Happen Here

SATIRE

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## **Exclusive: New Iranian Commando Team Operating Near U.S.**

(Tehran, FNA) The Fars News Agency has confirmed with the Republican Guard's North American Operations Command that a new elite Iranian commando team is operating in the U.S.-Mexican border region. The primary day-to-day mission of the team, known as the Joint Special Operations Gulf of Mexico Task Force, or JSOG-MTF, is to mentor Mexican military units in the border areas in their war with the deadly drug cartels. The task force provides "highly trained personnel that excel in uncertain environments," Maj. Amir Arastoo, a spokesman for Republican Guard special operations forces in North America, tells Fars, and "seeks to confront irregular threats..."

The unit began its existence in mid-2009 — around the time that Washington rejected the Iranian leadership's wish for a new diplomatic dialogue. But whatever the task force does about the United States — or might do in the future — is a sensitive subject with the Republican Guard. "It would be inappropriate to discuss operational plans regarding any particular nation," Arastoo says about the U.S.

Okay, so I made that up. Sue me. But first admit that, a line or two in, you knew it was fiction. After all, despite the talk about American decline, we are still on a one-way imperial planet. Yes, there is a new U.S. special operations team known as Joint Special Operations Task Force-Gulf Cooperation Council, or JSOTF-GCC, at work near Iran and, [according to Wired magazine's Danger Room blog](#), we really don't quite know what it's tasked with doing (other than helping train the forces of such allies as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia).

And yes, the quotes are perfectly real, just out of the mouth of a U.S. "spokesman for special-operations forces in the Mideast," not a representative of Iran's Republican Guard. And yes, most Americans, if they were to read about the existence of the new special ops team, wouldn't think it strange that U.S. forces were edging up to (if not across) the Iranian border, not when our "safety" was at stake.

Reverse the story, though, and it immediately becomes a malign, if unimaginable, fairy tale. Of course, no Iranian elite forces will ever operate along the U.S. border. Not in this world. Washington wouldn't live with it and it remains the military giant of giants on this planet. By comparison, Iran is, in [military terms](#), a [minor power](#).

Any Iranian forces on the Mexican border would represent a crossing of one of those "red

lines” that U.S. officials are [always talking about](#) and so an international abomination to be dealt with severely. More than that, their presence would undoubtedly be treated as an act of war. It would make screaming headlines here. The Republican candidates for the presidency would go wild. You know the rest. Think about the reaction when Attorney General Eric Holder announced that an Iranian-American used-car salesman from Texas [had contacted](#) a Mexican drug cartel as part of a bizarre plot supposedly hatched by senior members of the elite Iranian Quds Force to [assassinate](#) the Saudi ambassador in a Washington restaurant and possibly bomb the Saudi and Israeli embassies as well.

Though [doubts](#) were soon raised about the likelihood of such an Iranian plot, the outrage in the U.S. was palpable. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton insisted that it “crosses a line that Iran needs to be held to account for.” The *Wall Street Journal* [labeled](#) it “arguably an act of war,” [as did](#) Congressman Peter King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee. Speaker of the House John Boehner [termed](#) it “a very serious breach of international behavior,” while House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers swore that it [crossed](#) “a very dangerous threshold” and called for “unprecedented” action by the Obama administration.

On the other hand, no one here would claim that a U.S. special operations team edging up to the Iranian border was anything out of the ordinary or that it potentially crossed any lines, red or otherwise, or was a step beyond what the international community accepts. In fact, the news, such as it was, caused no headlines in the press, no comments on editorial pages, nothing. After all, everyone knows that Iranians would be the equivalent of fish out of water in Mexico, but that Americans are at home away from home in the Persian Gulf (as in most other places on Earth).

### **The Iranian “War” Against America**

Nonetheless, just for the heck of it, let’s suspend the laws of political and military gravity and pile up a few more fairy-tale-ish details.

Imagine that, in late 2007, Iran’s ruling mullahs and their military advisors had [decided to upgrade](#) already significant covert activities against Washington, including cross-border operations, and so launched an intensification of its secret campaign to “destabilize” the country’s leadership — call it a covert war if you will — funded by hundreds of millions of dollars of oil money; that they (or their allies) [supported](#) armed oppositional groups hostile to Washington; that they [flew](#) advanced robot drones on surveillance missions in the country’s airspace; that they imposed ever escalating sanctions, which over the years caused [increased suffering](#) among the American people, in order to force Washington to dismantle its nuclear arsenal and give up the nuclear program (military and peaceful) that it had been pursuing since 1943; that they and an ally developed and [launched a computer worm](#) meant to destroy American centrifuges and introduced sabotaged parts into its nuclear supply chain; that they encouraged American nuclear scientists [to defect](#); that one of their allies launched an assassination program against American nuclear scientists and engineers, [killing five](#) of them on the streets of American cities; that they launched a [global campaign](#) to force the world not to buy key American products, including Hollywood movies, iPhones, iPods, and iPads, and [weaponry](#) of any sort by essentially embargoing American banking transactions.

Imagine as well that an embattled American president [declared](#) the Gulf of Mexico to be off-limits to Iranian aircraft carriers and threatened any entering its waters with dire consequences. In response, the Iranians promptly [sent their aircraft carrier](#), the *Mossadegh*, and its battle group of accompanying ships directly into Gulf waters not far from Florida and then [stationed](#) a second carrier, the *Khomeini*, and its task force in the nearby Caribbean as support. (Okay, the Iranians don't have aircraft carriers, but just for a moment, suspend disbelief.)

And keep in mind that, in this outlandish scenario, all of the above would only be what we knew about or suspected. You would have to assume that there were also still-unknown aspects to their in-the-shadows campaign of regime change against Washington.

☒ Now, pinned to Iran, that list looks absurd. Were such things to have happened (even in a far more limited fashion), they would have been seen across the American political spectrum as an abomination (and rightly so), a morass of illegal, illegitimate, and immoral acts and programs that would have to be opposed at all costs. As you also know perfectly well, it *is* a description of just what we do know or suspect that the U.S. has done, alone or in concert with its ally Israel, or what, in the case of the assassination operations against nuclear scientists (and possibly an [explosion](#) that [destroyed](#) much of an Iranian missile base, killing a major general and 16 others), Israel has evidently done on its own, but possibly with the covert agreement of Washington.

And yet you can search the mainstream news far and wide without seeing words like “illegal,” “illegitimate,” or “immoral” or even “a very serious breach of international behavior” applied to them, though you can certainly find [sunny reports](#) on our potential power to loose destruction in the region, the sorts of articles that, if they were in the state-controlled Iranian press, we would consider propaganda.

While the other three presidential candidates were baying for Iranian blood at a recent Republican debate, it was left to Ron Paul, the ultimate outsider, to [point out](#) the obvious: that the latest round of oil sanctions being imposed by Washington and just agreed to by the European Union, meant to prohibit the sale of Iranian oil on the international market, was essentially an “[act of war](#),” and that it preceded recent Iranian threats (an unlikely prospect, by the way) to close the [Strait of Hormuz](#), through which much of the planet's oil flows.

And keep in mind, the covert war against Iran is ostensibly aimed at a nuclear weapon that does not exist, that the country's leaders claim they are not building, that the best work of the American intelligence community in [2007 and 2010](#) indicated was not yet on the horizon. (At the moment, at worst, the Iranians are believed to be working toward “[possible breakout capacity](#)” — that is, the ability to relatively “quickly” build a nuclear weapon, if the decision were made.) As for nuclear weapons, we have [5,113](#) warheads that we don't doubt are necessary for our safety and the safety of the planet. These are weapons that we implicitly trust ourselves to have, even though the United States remains the only country ever to use nuclear weapons, obliterating two Japanese cities at the cost of [perhaps 200,000](#) civilian deaths. Similarly, we have no doubt that the world is safe with Israel possessing up to [200 nuclear weapons](#), a near civilization-destroying ([undeclared](#)) arsenal. But it is our conviction that an Iranian bomb, [even one](#), would end life as we know it.

Added to that fear is the oft-cited fact that Iran is run by a mullahtariat that [oppresses](#) any opposition. That, however, only puts it in league with U.S. allies in the region like Bahrain,

whose monarchy has [shot down](#), beaten up, and jailed its opposition, and the Saudis, who have fiercely [repressed](#) their own dissidents. Nor, in terms of harm to its people, is Iran faintly in a league with past U.S. allies like General Augusto Pinochet of Chile, who launched a U.S.-backed military coup against a democratically elected government on September 11, 1973, [killing more](#) than died in the 9/11 attacks of 2001, or the Indonesian autocrat Suharto on whom the deaths of [at least half a million](#) of his people are usually pinned.

## Washington At Home in the World

Here, then, is a little necessary context for the latest round of Iran-mania in the U.S.: Washington has declared the world its oyster and garrisons the planet in a historically unique way — without direct colonies but with approximately [1,000 bases](#) worldwide (not including those in [war zones](#) or ones the Pentagon prefers [not to acknowledge](#)). That we do so, unique as it may be in the records of empire, strikes us as anything but odd and so is little discussed here. One of the reasons is simple enough. What's called our "safety" and "security" has been made a planetary issue. It is, in fact, the planetary standard for action, though one only we (or our closest allies) can invoke. Others are held to far more limiting rules of behavior.

As a result, a U.S. president can now send drones and special operations forces just about anywhere to kill just about anyone he designates as a threat to our security. Since we are everywhere, and everywhere at home, and everywhere have "interests," we may indeed be threatened anywhere. Wherever we've settled in — and in the Persian Gulf, as an example, we're [deeply entrenched](#) — new "red lines" have been created that others are prohibited from crossing. No one, after all, can infringe on our safety.

In support of our interests — which, speaking truthfully, are also the interests of oil — we could covertly overthrow an Iranian government in 1953 ([starting](#) the whole train of events that led to this crisis moment in the Persian Gulf), and we can again work to overthrow an Iranian government in 2012. The only issue seriously discussed in this country is: How exactly can we do it, or can we do it at all (without causing ourselves irreparably greater harm)? Effectiveness, not legality or morality, is the only measurement. Few in our world (and who else matters?) question our right to do so, though obviously the right of any other state to do something similar to us or one of our allies, or to retaliate or even to threaten to retaliate, should we do so, is considered shocking and beyond all norms, beyond every red line when it comes to how nations (except us) should behave.

This mindset, and the acts that have gone with it, have blown what is, at worst, a modest-sized global problem up into an existential threat, a life-and-death matter. Iran as a global monster now nearly fills what screen-space there is for foreign enemies in the present American moment. Yet, despite its enormous energy reserves, it is a shaky regional power, ruled by a faction-ridden set of fundamentalists (but not madmen), the most hardline of whom seem at the moment ascendant (in no small part due to American and Israeli policies). The country has a relatively modest military budget, and no recent history of invading other states. It has been under intense pressure of every sort for years now and the strains are showing. The kind of pressure the U.S. and its allies have been exerting creates the basis for madness — or for terrible miscalculation followed by inevitable tragedy.

In an election year in the U.S., little of this is apparent. The Republicans, Ron Paul aside, have made Iran the *entrée du jour* on the American (and Israeli) security menu, a situation

that couldn't be more absurdly out of proportion or more dangerous. In fact, when it comes to "American security," our fundamentalists are off on another rampage with the Obama administration following behind.

Just as a small exercise to restore some sense of proportion, stop for a moment the next time you hear of American or Israeli plans for the further destabilization of Iran and think: what would we do if the Iranians were planning something similar for us?

It's one small way to begin, individually, to imagine a planet on which everyone might experience some sense of security. And here's the oddest thing, given the [blowback](#) that [could come](#) from a blowup in the Persian Gulf, it might even make us all safer.

*Tom Engelhardt, co-founder of the American Empire Project and the author of [The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's](#) as well as [The End of Victory Culture](#), runs the Nation Institute's [TomDispatch.com](#). His latest book, [The United States of Fear](#) (Haymarket Books), has just been published. To listen to Timothy MacBain's latest Tomcast audio interview in which Engelhardt discusses reversal scenarios on a one-way planet, click [here](#), or download it to your iPod [here](#).*

[**Note:** The initial "Iranian" news article in this piece was taken, with a few small changes, from "New U.S. Commando Team Operating Near Iran," a [post](#) by the intrepid Spencer Ackerman of *Wired's* [Danger Room](#) blog, an important place to keep up on all things military. Let me offer a bow as well to [Antiwar.com](#), Juan Cole's [Informed Comment](#), and Paul Woodward's the [War in Context](#). I don't know what I'd do without them when it comes to keeping up.]

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