

Iranian War Games: Exercises, Tests, and Drills or Preparation and Mobilization for War?

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Geographic Scope of Iranian War Games

War games and military exercises are now well underway within Iran and its territory. The Iranian Armed Forces—the Regular Armed Forces and the Revolutionary Guards Corps—began the first stage of massive nationwide war games along border areas of the province of Sistan and Baluchistan [1] in the southeast of Iran bordering the Gulf of Oman, Pakistan, and NATO garrisoned Afghanistan to the east on Saturday, August 19, 2006. These war games that are underway are to unfold and intensify over a five week period and possibly even last longer, meaning they will continue till the end of September and possibly overlap into October, 2006. It is worth noting that the Iranian war games are taking place within the window of time that has been predicted by analysts for the initiation of an American or of an American-led attack against Iran.

Although the momentous war games are planned to take place in fourteen of the total thirty provinces of Iran—most of which are border provinces and simultaneously sensitive and geo-strategically vital positions bordering, some of the most volatile places in the world, adjacent to Anglo-American occupied Iraq, the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus (Armenia and the Republic of Azarbaijan), the Caspian Sea, Turkey, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan—there have been conflicting reports about the initial stage(s) of the multi-dimensional war games. Chinese sources maintain that the initial stages of the multi-phased Iranian war games have already started in the “northeastern, northwestern, western and southern parts of Iran,” [2] meaning all the border provinces adjacent to U.S., American-led Coalition, and NATO forces—including Turkey, a NATO member and strategic Israeli ally—while Iranian and other Middle Eastern sources maintain that the first stages of the war games have been predominately inaugurated in southeast Iran.

Brigadier-General Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani, the deputy commander of the Iranian Army or Land Branch of the Regular Forces, has specifically accented at a press conference that ‘the war games will take place in the provinces of West Azarbaijan, East Azarbaijan, the Khorasans³, Kurdistan, and the province of Sistan and Baluchestan’ [4]—all of these are Iranian border provinces that would be frontlines in any possible war between Iran and the United States and have been experiencing disturbing episodes of terrorist attacks, kidnappings, violence, and recent instability [5]—which Iran has held both the United States, Britain, and Israel responsible for.

Timing of War Games: The link between Iranian maneuvers and important Dates for the Iranian Nuclear Energy Program

The war games are code-named “Blow of Zolfaqar” after the legendary sword of Imam Ali Al-Talib, which is a historical symbol of power and courage for Iranians. The military manoeuvres are also being held at a time when pilgrims will also be gathering in neighbouring Iraq, where emotions will be running high, to mark the martyrdom of one of Ali’s descendents, Musa Al-Kadhim, but what is more considerable is that these war games and military manoeuvres come during an anticipated moment in international relations when tensions are high and nearing a pivotal point or possible climax in the Middle East between Iran and the United States. The Iranian war games are significant in themselves in demonstrating Iranian determination for consolidating Iran’s international status, but are even more momentous in light of the recent Israeli attacks—which have been reported to be the diagrammed template for a broader assault on Iran by Seymour Hersh [6]—on Lebanon, the candid refusal of Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program, [7] and the nearing of a United Nations Security Council deadline which Iran has rejected as internationally illegal and baseless. It must also be noted that neither the United States nor Israel have ruled out any possibility of resorting to aggression against Iran or attempting to exercise any military attacks and aerial assaults on Iran in regards to the Iranian Nuclear Energy Program and the Iranian refusal to back down from Iran’s legitimate rights to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

It is also being reported that the latest anti-aircraft or air defence systems are being tested by the Iranian military in preparation of any possible aerial attacks or threats against Iran or Iranian installations—Israel’s name has been already mentioned as a candidate in regards to the Israeli defeat in Lebanon. [8] In fact, according to *Fars News Agency*, the Commanding Officer of the Land Branch (Army) of the Regular Forces, Brigadier-General Mohammad Hassan Dadras has asserted that the Iranian military has managed to raise the defensive capabilities of its various forces to such a high level that no air force is capable of ‘offensively confronting’ the Iranian military within Iran or the ‘geographic extent adjacent to Iranian borders.’ Brigadier-General Dadras also showcased the capabilities of Iran’s missile force and units [9] in addition to saying that Iranian missile units will become more operational as the war games progress in their phases. [10]

During the second phase of the unfolding military exercises the Iranian military test-fired surface-to-surface missiles from Kashan in coordination with other military movements. [11] It must be noted that Kashan is a city which is strategically located in a central position where it can provide air defence(s) for both Iranian nuclear facilities/installations and the Iranian capital. The city is probably part of a central air defence grid in note of its location in the western central Iranian province of Isfahan, near the skirt of the Zagros Mountains, in close proximity to the various nuclear energy complexes¹²—including the Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility—in Isfahan, Natanz, Arak, and south of the Iranian capital and metropolis nerve centre, Tehran.

The last time Iran held war games of such a calibre was after Iran declared that Iranian scientists and engineers had successfully enriched uranium and Iran had joined the nuclear technology club, in late April 2006, during which the Iranian military televised and tested a stealth hybrid flying boat, a radar-evading missile with multiple warheads, a rocket-torpedo and a deadly anti-ship missile that cannot be jammed. The April 2006 war games in the waters of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman directed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and held in coordination with the Iranian Regular Forces marked yet another tense period of turbulence in the building tensions between Iran and the United States and their tussle over the Iranian Nuclear Energy Program and, even more importantly, the broader

scheme of the ultimate course of the development and strategic direction of the Middle East.

Is Iran Gearing up for an Attack?

Senior Iranian officials in the government and the Iranian defence establishment have repeatedly rejected any probability of American military strikes against Iran and ruled out any such attempts as foolish or suicidal in conjunction with Iranian military manoeuvres and strategy, but have simultaneously asserted that Iran is fully confident and prepared to defend itself against any military aggression directed against its territory, installations, and sovereignty. According to IRNA, the official news agency of Iran, “various units of air-support army Chinook helicopters, unmanned planes, parachutists, electronic war units and special forces are participating in the manoeuvre,” and “commandos, parachutists, mobile shoulder-firing units, electronic war forces and rapid reaction units enjoying high combat capability will demonstrate their readiness [to combat any possible attacks] during the [Blow of Zolfaqar] war games.” [13]

Iranian Regular Force commander Brigadier General Kiumars Heydari has acted as a media liaisons officer and spokesmen for the Iranian war games. Brigadier General Heydari has asserted that the “main objective of this exercise is to adopt new tactics and use new equipment able to cope with possible threats” and that Iran has “been vigilant to what has happened in the world [i.e., the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, the continued occupation of Afghanistan] and we [the Iranian military] have invested in both modern tactics and equipment.” [14]

Participating in the war games, so far, from the Iranian Regular Forces—which are a under a separate command structure from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards [15]—are twelve land (army) divisions along with the Iranian Air Force, Iranian Naval Forces, and Iranian Missile units, which are all involved as complimentary mechanisms of the military exercise(s), which were initiated in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan. [16]

Iran has been very conscious for a long time of the hostile American-led forces encircling Iran and on its borders in the occupied territories of its neighbours, Iraq and Afghanistan, and stationed in bases in other Iranian neighbours. It has also reported that the Interior Ministry of Iran also has simultaneously planned to boost border security and all border patrols under the premise of combating smuggling and narcotics trafficking. [17] Military manoeuvres and war games can be multi-faceted and could easily serve many purposes such as being masked military mobilization and formation for an expected attack under the pretext of training and testing. It seems that the materialization of an escalating level of alert and defensive mobilization of the Iranian Armed Forces is taking place as an inevitable and anticipated showdown over the fate of the Iranian Nuclear Energy Program is drawing nearer and with it are coupled the fates of Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, the Persian Gulf, the direction of Central Asia, the strategic balance in the Caucasus, and so much more...

NOTES

1. “Zolfaqar war games underway in southeastern Iran,” Mehr News Agency, August 19, 2006: <<http://www.mehrnews.ir/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=368965>>.
2. “Roundup: Iran launches large-scale military exercise,” *People’s Daily*, August 19, 2006:

<http://english.people.com.cn/200608/19/eng20060819_294919.html>.

3. There are three provinces named Khorasans; North Khorasan, South Khorasan, and Razavi Khorasan. All Khorasans were all once part of one province, Khorasan, which was historically the largest province of Iran. Khorasan was divided into 3 provinces in September, 2004.

4. "Iran Army to launch War Games," *Payvand*, August 17, 2006: <<http://www.payvand.com/news/06/aug/1188.html>>.

5. Explosions in Khuzestan, British and U.S. troops operating in Iran, Jundallah (a mysterious new group) attacks on Iranian troops and security in Baluchistan, ethnic incitement, terrorism, etc.; "Iran Seizes UK vessels and crew," BBC News, June 21, 2004: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3826179.stm>; "Iran accuses UK of bombing link," BBC News, January 23, 2004: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4646864.stm>; "U.S. Marines Probe Tension's Among Iran's Minorities," Global Policy Forum (originally from the *Financial Times*), February 23, 2006: <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/intervention/iran/general/2006/0224marinesiran.htm>>; British troops (SAS) have also been arrested in Basra, Iraq dressed as Arabs carrying explosives, see the following: <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=AKL20050930&articleId=1024>>

6. Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's interests in Israel's war," *New Yorker*, August 21, 2006 (posted before the aforesaid date): <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060821fa_fact>.

7. "Asefi: Enrichment suspensions not on Iran's agenda," IRNA, August 20, 2006: <<http://www.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-22/0608203110121410.htm>>.

8. "Iran ready for Israeli action after Lebanon war: Army," Reuters (India), August 19, 2006: <http://in.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=worldNews&storyID=2006-08-19T234909Z_01_NOOTR_RTRJONC_0_India-264185-1.xml&archived=False>

9. Fars News Agency, August 20, 2006

"Surface-to-Surface Missiles Launched"

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8505290333>

10. "No Air Force capable of confronting Iranian Army," Fars News Agency, August 19, 2006: <<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8505280544>>.

11. "Iran test Tactical Missiles during War Games," IranMania, April 20, 2006: <<http://www.iranmania.com/News/ArticleView/Default.asp?NewsCode=45153&NewsKind=Curent%20Affairs>>.

12. Op. cit.

13. Op. cit.

14. Op. cit.

15. Op. cit.

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