

Retired Colonel: 'We Are Conducting Military Operations Inside Iran Right Now. The Evidence Is Overwhelming.'

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Just now on CNN, Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner (Ret.) said, "We are conducting military operations inside Iran right now. The evidence is overwhelming."

Gardiner, who taught at the U.S. Army's National War College, has [previously suggested](#) that U.S. forces were already on the ground in Iran. Today he added several additional new points:

- 1) The House Committee on Emerging Threats recently called on State and Defense Department officials to testify on whether U.S. forces were in Iran. The officials didn't come to the hearing.
- 2) "We have learned from [Time magazine](#) today that some U.S. naval forces had been alerted for deployment. That is a major step."
- 3) "The plan has gone to the White House. That's not normal planning. When the plan goes to the White House, that means we've gone to a different state."

Watch it:

<http://thinkprogress.org/2006/09/18/gardiner-iran/>

Read transcript:

Col. Sam Gardiner on CNN, 9/18/06

BLITZER: How likely is the U.S. strike against Iran? And would it lead to all-out war? Joining us now is retired U.S. Air Force colonel Sam Gardiner. He has taught strategy and military operations at the National War College, the Air War College, and the Naval War College. Colonel thanks very much for coming in. He just prepared a paper for the Century Foundation entitled \"Considering the U.S. Military Option For Iran.\" You speak to a lot of people plugged in. What is your bottom line? How close in your opinion is the Bush Administration to giving that go ahead.

GARDINER: It's been given. In fact, we've probably been executing military operations inside Iran for at least 18 months. The evidence is overwhelming

BLITZER: Wait. Wait. Let me press you.

GARDINER: Sure.

BLITZER: When you say it's been given. The president says he wants diplomacy to work to convince the Iranian government to stop enriching uranium, not go forward. "I would tell the Iranian people that we have no desire for conflict." He told David Ignatius of the Washington Post the other day. So what does that mean, the order has been given?

GARDINER: We are conducting military operations inside Iran right now. The evidence is overwhelming. From both the Iranians, Americans, and from congressional sources.

BLITZER: What is "military operation?" Define that.

GARDINER: Sure. They probably have had two objectives going back 18 months. The first was to gather intelligence. Where is the Iranian nuclear program? The second has been to prepare dissident groups for phase two which will be the strike, which will come as the next phase, I think.

BLITZER: Preparing intelligence, that's understandable using all sorts of means. They want to know what the Iranians are up to in terms of their nuclear program. But are you suggesting that U.S. military forces, special operations forces, or others are on the ground right now in Iran.

GARDINER: Yes, sir. Certainly. Absolutely clear the evidence is overwhelming from lots of sources, and, again, most of them you can read in the public. Seymore Hersch has done good work on it. There are lots of other people who have done that. I have talked to Iranians. I asked an Iranian ambassador to the IAEA, what's this I hear about Americans being there? He said to me, well, we've captured some people who worked with them. We've confirmed that they're there.

BLITZER: Yeah, but, you know, these guys — the Iranians, you can't necessarily believe what they're saying. They could arrest some dissidents in Iran and say these are American spies. They do that all the time.

GARDINER: Sure. Sure. The House Committee on Emerging Threats tried to have a hearing some weeks ago in which they asked the Department of State and Defense to come and answer this question because it's serious enough to be answered without congressional approval, and they didn't come to the hearing. There are sources that I have talked to on the Hill who believe that that's true and that it's being done without congressional oversight.

BLITZER: Look, I was once a Pentagon correspondent many years ago, and in those days and in these days, as Jamie McIntire just reported, and as you well know from your time in active duty in the Pentagon, in the U.S. military, these guys are planning contingency operations for almost everything. If Canada goes to war against the United States, they have a contingency plan.

GARDINER: Okay, two differences. Number one, we have learned from TIME Magazine today that some U.S. naval forces had been alerted for deployment. That is a major step. That's first. Second thing is the sources suggest the plan that's not in the Pentagon. The plan has

gone to the White House. That's not normal planning. When the plan goes to the White House, that means we've gone to a different state.

BLITZER: You think it's possible there is a little psychological warfare being played on Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to rattle him. To spread the word. To put out this kind of information. To get him nervous, perhaps a little bit more agreeable to the diplomatic option.

GARDINER: It's possible. It's also possible that this path was selected a long time ago. You recall that even before Gulf II that a time when the president said we have no plan. I have no plan on my desk. In the summer of 2002 we began bombing Iraq. Operation Southern Focus, without congressional approval, without the U.N. sanctions, we went ahead and began bombing.

BLITZER: The argument at that time is if there were violations of the no-fly zone, U.S. war planes were flying in the north and the south and there were rockets or anti-aircraft fire going up, they could take those out.

GARDINER: Yes, but it was a campaign to begin the war before the war began. You know, I would suggest the evidence is there.

BLITZER: You see a similar pattern right now.

GARDINER: Exactly.

BLITZER: We're going to follow this closely. Colonel Sam Gardener, thank you very much. We look forward to reading your report that the Century Foundation is putting out as well.

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