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President Masoud Pezeshkian (3rd L, back row) poses for a photo during a ceremony to honor benefactors who built schools across Iran, in Tehran on January 26, 2026.

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US military drill in Middle East, part of strategy to avoid direct conflict with Iran

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE



Mohsen Farkhani

The US Air Force has announced it is gearing up for a multi-day military exercise across the Middle East. The drill is set to kick off in Qatar with the participation of Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states and will run for 11 days. In recent weeks, the US has also significantly beefed up its military presence in the region. This exercise comes amid escalating tensions between the US and Iran, raising the specter of renewed conflict. Should military hostilities erupt, regional countries would inevitably be caught in the crossfire, making the GCC's in-

volvement a point of considerable interest. Mohsen Farkhani, an international affairs expert, told Iran Daily that the US is unlikely to seek direct conflict with Tehran and that the increased military build-up in the region is a way to pile on psychological pressure and facilitate the re-entry of Israel into conflict with Iran.

IRAN DAILY: How do you assess the US Air Force's exercise at this juncture? Is this drill merely a military maneuver, or are there other objectives at play?

FARKHANI: The joint exercise between the US and GCC member states, taking place amid rising tensions between Iran and the United States, cannot be simply written off as a routine military exercise between allied nations. The timing itself contradicts such an assessment. According to the

US 2025 National Security Strategy, and considering the Trump administration's return to the Monroe Doctrine (emphasizing a focus on national interests within the Western Hemisphere and distancing itself from past alliances) and the expectation that allies will shoulder the costs of their own security in line with the Nixon Doctrine, this joint exercise is significant in two respects.

Firstly, the US is attempting to pass the buck of security costs onto its allies in the Persian Gulf through arms and logistical support, thereby distancing itself from a full-scale war with Iran due to domestic challenges within the US. Secondly, the United States is unlikely to pursue direct conflict with Iran, and the escalation and increase of US military weaponry in the region is a means of ramping up psychological pressure and facilitating the re-entry of Israel into the continuation of war with Iran and

violating the ceasefire [in June]. On this basis, a game is being played, consisting of several simultaneous scenarios. One: The US is projecting a full-fledged commitment to its allies in the GCC, having already reaped billions of dollars from the leaders of these countries, to support them in times of security crises. However, at the same time, it is waking them up to its disinterest in direct involvement in Middle Eastern wars. The fact that 70 different scenarios will be practiced over the 11-day duration of the exercise suggests an effort to avoid direct involvement and to provide only arms and training support, which aligns with the Nixon Doctrine.

Two: Given the deployment of diverse military weaponry in the region, the likelihood of war is considered highly probable, but seems somewhat far-fetched during the joint exercise.

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