

to the urgent needs of the battlefield. For example, under conditions in which the enemy's tanks had come to the vicinity of the bases, there was no longer an opportunity for discussion concerning whether a certain aircraft was fundamentally designed for tank-hunting or not. The enemy's advance had to be checked. Sometimes, by striking a few tanks, the rest of the tanks would retreat. If this task was not performed, the conditions in Khuzestan would have become exceedingly more difficult. This is the very thing that I refer to as innovative and indigenous thinking; that is, the battlefield creates a new need and the force must be able to find a solution at that very moment.

With these descriptions, is it correct that the Air Force, even though it was not in a great shape, played a considerable role in the war's initial days in preventing the enemy's advance?

Without any exaggeration, the Air Force in the war's initial days and months possessed an extremely important and vital role. At that juncture, the only vehicle that could, with rapid reaction, reach the area and act against the enemy's advance, was the Air Force's fighter jets. Our infantry and ground forces needed time for organization, movement, and reaching the engagement area. The popular forces also had to be organized from various points of the country and reach the front, but a warplane could, in a short period, reach the battlefield and inflict a strike upon the enemy. For this reason, the Air Force entered action from the very initial hours and performed extremely heavy missions.

At some bases, the conditions had reached a point where, in order to prevent equipment from falling into enemy hands, an order for the relocation or even destruction of some equipment would be issued. At Dezful Base, like many others, a number of pilots and personnel swore that they would remain and defend the base until the last person. This spirit, at the war's commencement and especially the war's initial three months, was exceedingly prominent and effective.

One of the characteristics of the Sacred Defense was the indigenization and creative utilization of existing equipment. How did this take shape?

We, during the very war era, were charged with the design and testing of many plans for which, under normal conditions, perhaps years of time would have been necessary. For example, upon some aircraft, we tested designs that provided the possibility of carrying and utilizing bombs in different methods. That specific task required precise calculations: speed, altitude, distance, the aircraft's power, the method of releasing the bomb, and the possibility of the aircraft's return had to be examined. Martyr Babaei also played a role in this domain. We tested and evaluated these methods in order to see what capability the aircraft possesses and to what extent it can be utilized.

Many of these creativities were utilized during the war and some methods also, despite testing and evaluation, did not find operational opportunity with the war's end, but the results and experiences of those days endured. This is one of the important lessons of the Sacred Defense; that we were not merely consumers of equipment and attempted,



under difficult conditions, to also develop the technology and knowledge we needed.

You pointed out that F-14 fighter jets played an important role in aerial defense. What was the reason that they were not utilized in bombardment and the execution of operations in the enemy's soil?

Every aircraft has been designed for a specific mission. One of the important characteristics of the F-14 is its powerful radar, which provides the possibility of identifying targets at great distance. Therefore, the F-14 possessed special importance for aerial defense and confrontation with the enemy's fighter jets. In a mission, the F-4 can very well perform the offensive and bombardment mission and let the F-14 bear the duty of protecting the sky and confronting the enemy's aircraft. This division of mission is performed based upon the capabilities of each aircraft.

If we proceed from the Sacred Defense to today's wars, does the experience of the eight-year imposed war still possess applicability for us today?

Certainly. The technology of war has changed a lot, of course. Today, satellites, AWACS, advanced drones, reconnaissance systems, modern radars, and artificial intelligence have found a role in war, but alongside technology, there exists another extremely important factor and that is the will, initiative, and motivation of the forces and the people.

Iran's geography is also an important factor of our power in war. Iran is a vast country and its geographical position, especially in the Persian Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, possesses extremely great importance. We must recognize these capacities precisely, plan for them, and uti-

lize them. In new wars, one can no longer look at the battlefield merely with a traditional view. One must simultaneously see technology, geography, information, human force, and media.

What is the role of media war and the war of narratives in new wars, in your opinion?

Today, war is not only the war of aircraft and missiles. Media war and the war of narratives also exist. It is possible that a real event occurs, but if its narrative is not transferred correctly, a different image is shaped in public opinion. Media can provide the empathy and support of the people. During the Sacred Defense era, the Iranians had an extremely important role. Our people, even under bombardment and missile barrages, did not leave the country and did not retreat. This same spirit, alongside military capability, caused the country to be able to resist against heavy pressure. Therefore, today also we must both recognize technology and understand the importance of public opinion, media, and narrative.

In the recent war of the United States and the Zionist regime against Iran, we also witnessed the extensive utilization of advanced military technologies. From the perspective of a pilot, what was the difference between this war and the Iraqi-imposed war of the 1980s?

Today, the level of technology has risen exceedingly, but the experience of the Sacred Defense has shown that technology alone is not decisive. In war, organization, initiative, recognition of geography, recognition of the enemy's capabilities, and the ability to utilize existing facilities also possess great importance. In the Sacred Defense, many initiatives

took shape due to the battlefield's need. In new wars also, this same spirit must be preserved. We must take a lesson from every day of war and adapt ourselves to new conditions.

In the recent war, similar to the Sacred Defense era, we witnessed special aerial operations against some of America's military bases in the region by the Iranian Air Force. From an operational perspective, how important and significant do you consider these operations?

We, due to security issues, cannot speak concerning all the details of these operations. But the essence of the matter is that we know an attack on America's military bases, especially important operational and command bases, is not a simple mission. For example, Al-Udeid Base in Qatar is one of America's important bases in the region and possesses an aerial command and control role. This base possesses radar equipment, command and control systems, and advanced facilities. Therefore, the execution of such a mission and our fighter jets' return are, from an operational standpoint, important matters. When a pilot enters such a mission, he also knows there's a probability of not returning. In the Air Force, this reality has always been recognized among us pilots that the flight suit is our burial shroud.

Some American officials, during the recent war, claimed that they had completely destroyed Iran's Air Force. How should such a claim be evaluated?

If a country and its military equipment are bombarded many times, it does not mean that the aerial capability of that country has been completely obliterated.



↑ Iraqi crew of a BMP armored personnel carrier advancing in Iran in 1980 (at left) abandon their vehicle in haste at the sound of the roaring engines of two Iranian F-4E Phantoms. Iranian Phantoms (at right) were also reported to be flying just meters above ground level to fire their 20mm cannon at Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles. kavehfarrokhi.com

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← Iranian troops celebrate atop an Iraqi tank of the 12th armored division that has been blown upside down as a result of aerial bombardment by Iranian F-4 and F-5 combat aircraft. shahed.isaar.ir



It is possible that a base's runway is damaged or that facilities and hangars are attacked, but the runway is repaired again. In war, repair and reconstruction are also a portion of defensive capability.

Furthermore, defensive power is not only aircraft. Air defense, the navy, drones, communications, reconnaissance systems, and command are all a portion of military power. In the Sacred Defense also, it happened many times that the enemy attempted to weaken our forces, but our armed forces found a new method to confront it. This same spirit of initiative and creativity still exists in the country today.

In your statements, you emphasized Iran's geography many times. What role does this geography possess in the country's defensive power?

Iran's geography is itself an important component of power. From Chabahar to Bandar Abbas, Bushehr, Qeshm, and other areas, extremely important capacities are at the country's disposal. The Strait of Hormuz also possesses extremely great importance from a strategic standpoint. We must recognize these capacities and plan for them.

In the Sacred Defense also, Iran's territorial vastness was an important factor. The enemy bombarded various regions of the country, but the expanse of Iran's territory, alongside the people's resistance and the armed forces' performance, did not permit that, with a few aerial attacks, Iraq could shatter our nation's will.

During the Sacred Defense era, we were not engaged in war with only one country. Similar to today, the enemy assailed us with the support of many countries, but ultimately, they did not succeed. What do you consider the secret of our combatants' victory in confronting the enemy and its supporters?

At that time, from the very commencement of the war, some regional countries positioned themselves alongside Iraq's Ba'athist regime. Saudi Arabia played an important role in financial support while countries such as Kuwait and the Emirates also backed Iraq. Of course, Syria was an exception to this rule.

Therefore, when we speak about the eight years of Sacred Defense, one must consider that Iran was not faced with only Iraq's army; a large portion of the regional countries were behind Saddam's forces and provided them with financial and equipment assistance. However, the culture and spirit of sacrifice and faith in Iran, the belief and conviction of our people and combatants, alongside the preservation of unity and cohesion, have been the secret of our victory during the Sacred Defense era as well as the recent war.

Given all these experiences, what is the most important lesson that we must take from the Sacred Defense today?

We must take a lesson from every single day of the eight-year war. Today, technology has become quite advanced. Drones, satellites, artificial intelligence, radar systems, and new equipment have entered the field and have altered the shape of war. Therefore, we must not imagine that today's war is the same as the war of the past. But one principle remains constant: we must learn, progress, take initiative, and recognize our own capabilities and the enemy's. The Sacred Defense was a great university. We must