

# JOIN A MILITARY EXERCISE AND WIN A DRONE!

William Arkin catalogs the 19 countries participating in the “largest US exercise in the Middle East” this month.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) now says that the exercise is “the largest annual exercise in the Central Command area of operations,” supplanting Bright Star, the exercise series previously conducted in Egypt. I guess the masters of war planning have a lot of faith in the stability and resilience of the Jordanian government, come to think of it, just like they did about Egypt.

Eager Lion, which most press reports refer to as including 17 participants, actually includes 19 participants, according to CENTCOM. They include Australia, Bahrain, Brunei, Egypt, France, Italy, Iraq, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Spain, Romania, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States. The exercise is touted as “building relationships,” but the 19 nations weren’t named until May 15th: I suppose it’s more like a furtive affair than a relationship. It’s interesting to note that Turkey, previously reported as participating, evidently is not; and that Iraq is there.

Like Arkin, I’m struck by the addition of Iraq and the apparent withdrawal of Turkey from the exercise.

Particularly given this news:

Iraq is buying unmanned drones from the United States to help protect its

southern oil platforms as the OPEC nation ramps up production after the withdrawal of the last American troops, U.S. and Iraqi officials said on Monday.

[snip]

Iraq's 40,000-strong energy police stepped up protection to deter attacks it expected from Sunni Islamist armed groups linked to al-Qaeda. But officials long complained they were poorly equipped for the task of protecting the vital sector.

As noted, the ostensible threat these drones are targeting are Sunni insurgents. Given the current regime in Iraq and the Shia population in the south, where these drones will be used, that makes sense.

But I wonder whether it doesn't represent a shift away from Iran. Iraq has been rather disinterested in playing the former colony, not only kicking us out but also siding with Iran last year on oil targets. But if it is participating in a military exercise targeting (even though DOD is pretending it is not) Iran, and then gets drones, it sure seems like it has changed its mind about playing client state to Iran, either.

Maybe someone has been reading about what has happened to Iran's client state in Libya and what is in process of happening in Syria.