

# Red Flag Exercise

Exercise Red Flag is an aerial combat training exercise of the US armed forces. The exercise is held once annually and each exercise lasts for 2 weeks.

This article will give details about Exercise Red Flag within the context of the IAS exam.

## Origins of Red Flag operation

The performance of the U.S. Airforce was believed to be abysmal during the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1973, in comparison to the previous conflicts fought. Special areas of concern were of air-to-air combat.

There were several factors responsible for this:

1. Lack of realistic training in Air Combat Manoeuvres (ACM)
2. A belief that the latest technology had made 'Beyond Visual Range' missile engagements (BVR) obsolete.
3. Over-emphasis on flying safety

An analysis by the US Air Forces - dubbed Project Red Baron II - showed that a pilot's chances of survival in combat increased after ten combat missions had been completed. This led to the creations of the Red Flag exercises in 1975 which gave pilots and weapons system officers the chance to fly simulated combat missions which were as close to reality as possible, that too in an environment where their performance could be measured. The program also offered training in avoiding Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM).

At the time, the pilots were trained in air combat doctrines of the Soviet Union and other adversaries of the United States as a simulation of what the USAF would face. The first exercise of the Red Flag was conducted in November 1975.

### Structure of the Red Flag Exercises

In a typical red flag exercise, there are two sets of teams - Blue and Red. Blue are friendlies while the Reds are the hostile forces.

Blue Forces are made up of units from the Air Combat Command (ACC), Air Mobility Command (AMC), Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC), Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) among others

Red Forces are composed of the 57th Wing's 57th Adversary Tactics Group (57 ATG), flying F-16s from the 64th Aggressor Squadron (64 AGRS) and F-15s from the 65th Aggressor Squadron (65 AGRS) that provide a realistic combat experience through the emulation of the opposition's tactics.

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A key element of Red Flag operations is the Red Flag Measurement and Debriefing System (RFMDS). RFMDS is a computer hardware and software network that provides real-time monitoring, post-mission reconstruction of manoeuvres and tactics, participant pairings, and integration of range targets and simulated threats. Blue Force commanders objectively assess mission effectiveness and validate lessons learned from data provided by the RFMDS.

In a 12-month period, more than 500 aircraft fly more than 20,000 sorties, while training more than 5,000 aircrews and 14,000 support and maintenance personnel.

Frequently Asked Questions related to Red Flag Exercise

### **Who are the other nations that participate in the Red Flag Exercise?**

Only countries that have friendly relations with the United States are allowed to participate in this exercise. They include Israel, United Arab Emirates Canada, United Kingdom etc. India has been a participant in 2008 and 2016

### **Where are the Red Flag Exercises held?**

Four exercises are held at the Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada while the additional four exercises are held in Alaska.

### **What is a similar exercise conducted by the United States Navy?**

The U.S. Navy operates a similar large-force training exercise known as Air Wing Fallon at NAS Fallon and the Fallon Range Training Complex in northern Nevada.