

Britain's propaganda war against Iran

Navy Personnel Sell their Story to British Media

By [Global Research](#)

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The British Defense Secretary's decision to allow the 15 sailors and marines who were freed by Iran last week to sell their stories to the media triggered accusations that the government is using the navy crew as pawns in a propaganda war against the Islamic Republic.

Only two sailors have so far sold their stories. Faye Turney, the only woman among the British navy personnel, has given exclusive interviews to Britain's leading tabloid newspaper and to a television show, earning what one newspaper said was £100,000.

In the interviews, Turney claimed that the Iranians asked how she felt about dying for her country and warned her that she may never see her daughter again.

Arthur Batchelor, the youngest of the group, also sold his story, saying he "cried like a baby" in his cell after he was blindfolded, handcuffed and taunted by his Iranian guards.

Turney and Batchelor have been accused of behaving like "reality TV stars" for selling their stories, but the strongest condemnation was directed at the Ministry of Defense, which said it had waved rules barring such sales "as a result of exceptional media interest."

"I am appalled that the Ministry of Defense is encouraging them to profit from a military disaster," Colonel Bob Stewart, former British commander of UN forces in Bosnia, told the Sunday Times. "Some of them are acting like reality TV stars."

Major General Sir Patrick Cordingly, a senior commander during the 1991 Gulf War, also said that Turney and Batchelor will regret the selling of the stories, and "realize it was not such a good idea to cash in."

"I hope they give all the money to charity," he told the BBC.

According to the Ministry of Defense, the decision was taken by the Royal Navy in consultation with the MoD. But the Labour party will be unable to avoid responsibility after officials privately admitted that it involved ministers "at the highest level" - code for Defense Secretary Des Browne.

No 10 also said that Prime Minister Tony Blair was informed.

Defense experts and former commanders said the decision brought dishonor on the British military and accused the Defense Ministry of using the sailors and marines in a propaganda war - a tactic that British officials accused Iran of using during the sailors' detention when

some of them were shown on TV confessing to illegally entering Iranian waters – something the UK disputes.

William Hague, foreign affairs spokesman of the opposition Conservatives, said his party will question the Defense Ministry’s decision when parliament reopens on April 16. Michael Heseltine, a former Conservative defense minister, also called for an inquiry.

The MoD had failed to realize that “we are going to lose steadily respect for our Armed Forces” if personnel could quickly sell their stories, Hague said, adding: “There are people who have lost their loved ones in Afghanistan and Iraq, but they’re not writing their stories.”

Relatives of servicemen killed in Iraq also joined military figures and Opposition politicians to denounce the decision.

Mike Aston, who lost his son in Iraq in 2003, said he was “absolutely amazed”.

“I think to actually sell (my) story it would besmirch my son’s memory. I really think this whole thing has been shameful and this just compounds it by going for the money.”

Max Clifford, Britain’s best-known celebrity agent, said the MoD had encouraged the British servicemen to sell their stories, which he claimed could earn a total of at least £250,000.

“The MoD almost insisted on it,” he said. “It is all a propaganda war. They hope that the accounts in the newspapers will convince the British public that we are right.”

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