

U.S. offered to scare Iran during sailors' dispute

By [Global Research](#)

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(AFP) A U.S. warplane launching from the flight deck of a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Gulf

The United States offered to carry out aggressive air patrols over Iran's Revolutionary Guards bases after Tehran detained the British navy crew last month.

Citing unidentified diplomatic sources, The Guardian newspaper reported that Pentagon officials offered a series of military options to scare Iran during the sailors' dispute, but Britain told them to stay out of the affair and tone down armed forces activity in the Persian Gulf.

One of the U.S. options involved combat aircraft patrolling over Iranian bases to show the Iranians how serious the detention of the Britons was, the newspaper said.

Iran arrested the 15 British sailors and marines in the Persian Gulf on March 23 for illegally entering its waters, but London said that they were operating in Iraqi waters at the time of the arrest. Tehran released the navy crew last Wednesday as a "gift" to Britain.

Four days after the arrest of the Britons, the U.S. Navy said it launched its largest demonstration of force in the Persian Gulf since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The naval exercises were led by two navy aircraft carrier strike groups which the U.S. deployed in the Gulf region, backed by more than 100 American warplanes that carried out simulated attack maneuvers off the coast of Iran.

At Britain's request, the two carrier groups, totaling 40 ships plus aircraft, changed their exercises to make them appear less confrontational, The Guardian said. London also asked Washington to tone down its rhetoric against Tehran, the newspaper added.

British, Iraqi and Iranian officials agreed that the arrest of the Royal Navy sailors and marines wasn't planned by Tehran, a British source closely involved in the sailors' dispute told The Guardian. "My best guess is that this was a local incident which became an international incident," he said.

A top Iranian official close to the Revolutionary Guards also said: "If this had been between Iranian and American soldiers it could have been the beginning of an accidental war."

The source insisted that the British sailors illegally entered Iranian waters three times in three months leading up to the arrest, which was decided upon by a regional commander.

Some analysts believe that the U.S. is now trying to provoke Iran into an action Washington could use as an excuse for an attack, a move they warn could be “disastrous” for the whole region.

The fact that there are now two U.S. excuses for a strike against Iran – the nuclear program and Washington’s allegations that Tehran is interfering in Iraqi affairs – stirs speculation that the U.S. is planning to attack the Islamic Republic, they say.

Iran denies sailors’ torture claims A top aide to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denied that the British navy crew had been mistreated during their detention, saying they made such claims under pressure from their commanders.

The 15 British naval personnel, some of whom appeared on Iranian state TV confessing that they had trespassed into Iranian waters, said after their release that they were stripped, blindfolded and handcuffed as part of “psychological” intimidation by the Iranians to obtain information and confessions.

But Ali Akbar Javanfekr, top press spokesman for Ahmadinejad said: “The mistreatment of the sailors is a lie.”

“The British authorities should know that they cannot keep hiding the truth from the British people,” he added.

Javanfekr also dismissed U.S. claims that Tehran had taken the sailors as hostages.

“American leaders have accused Iran of hostage taking with regards to the British sailors, when the United States is the biggest hostage taker,” he said, in reference to the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

— AJP and agencies

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