

# USADI Dispatch

A publication of the U.S. Alliance for Democratic Iran

Volume 1, No. 34

Thursday, June 24, 2004

## USADI Commentary

### Mullahs' Diplomacy: Once a bully, always a bully

It can reasonably be argued that the seizure of eight British servicemen by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in the Shatt-al-Arab waterway Monday has striking similarities with the clerical regime taking 52 Americans hostage in 1979. Parading them on TV blindfolded, forcing them to "apologize" and to say they "understand Islam better" certainly ring a familiar tone. It also seems that Tehran is trying to reap domestic and diplomatic political benefit as it did in 1979.

There is, however, a big difference. In 1979, the mullahs' were on the ascendance and the hostage situation helped them consolidate power faster. They purged the liberal wing of the post-revolution government and cracked down on the democratic opposition by calling them pro-American.

In 2004, however, the theocratic regime is isolated at home as never before and faces the rising opposition of majority of Iranians, led by students and women. It is also scorned internationally for its dismal human rights record, support of terrorism, secret nuclear weapons program, and the campaign to push Iraq toward a Khomeini-style Islamic republic.

The rising presence of past and present commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in the political centers of power underscored the need to confront domestic dissent and international pressure by making the ruling apparatus unipolar. By relying on the most terrorist figures of the regime, the mullahs believe they could suppress the disillusioned citizens more efficiently, advance their nuclear weapons program, and expand their campaign in Iraq.

There are many indications Tehran is not at all happy with the way its campaign in Iraq is going. The first clue came in the aftermath of new interim government of Iraq taking office early June. Iran's leaders had nothing but scorn for the new regime, calling it an "American lackey."

The fact that the images of the British sailors were first shown in Iran's Arabic-language Al-Alam TV, which broadcasts into Iraq, is significant. Tehran was trying to send a message to the Coalition forces that it was still a big player.

Since Iran's diplomacy is essentially based on bullying and using terror and blackmail, it resorts to now very familiar rogue ways of advancing its political objectives. Earlier in June, it mobilized battalions of suicide bombers for Iraq and this week it fomented a diplomatic stand off over British servicemen.

The London Arabic-language daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat reported today that the real reason for the detention of the sailors was to swap them with about 40 suicide bomber volunteers dispatched from Iran to Iraq but apprehended at a border crossing by the Ukrainian forces and later on handed over to the British forces.

This episode, no matter how and when it is resolved, makes one thing clear: Bullying has been and remains the mullahs' method of diplomacy and dialogue.

It is therefore imperative to respond with utmost firmness to the mullahs' latest mischief and not let them get away with it. Displaying weakness at this very crucial juncture has dire consequences for stability and democracy in Iraq and it will send the wrong message to Iran's ruling tyrants.

### The Real Reason behind Seizure of the British Navy Vessels

A source close to the [Iranian] Revolutionary Guards told *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* of the real reasons and factors in the apprehension of the three British Navy vessels and the arrest of the sailors by Iranian Coast Guard patrol forces on Monday [June 21, 2004]. He indicated that the British Army command in Iraq had understood the message sent them by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards command by their capture of the ships."

According to the source, the content of the message was very simple: 'Release our comrades, whom you are holding, and we will release your soldiers.' The source clarified that the detention of 40 volunteers for suicide operations by the Ukrainian forces acting in Iraq was of great concern to the Revolutionary Guards command, because they [the 40] constituted the first group of volunteers participating in the Organization for the Commemoration of the Shahids, which was established recently by Revolutionary Guards Commander Col. Dhu al-Qadr.

*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* was informed that one of the senior leaders of the Revolutionary Guards, who had formerly held the post of head of the Committee for Iran-Ukraine Military Cooperation, had gone to Kiev for talks regarding the Iranian detainees. However, it turned out that the Ukrainian units had already handed the volunteers for suicide operations over to British forces acting in southern Iraq.

"Despite contacts between the Iranian and British military committees at the borders and daily contact between them in small conflict resolution - [such that] this has become routine since the British forces entered southern Iraq - the British command has so far refused to acknowledge that it is holding 40 Iranian volunteers in one of its detention camps. According to the Iranian source, this caused the Revolutionary Guards leadership to seek a semi-military solution to bring its men back from Iraq."

*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), June 23, 2004*

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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**New York Post**  
**June 23, 2004**  
**Iranian Gambit**

The seizure of eight British servicemen by Iran's Revolutionary Guards isn't about a border violation. It's meant to test the Coalition in Iraq, punish Britain for criticizing Tehran's nuclear quest — and recharge domestic support for Iran's hardliners.

Those eight hostages are pawns in a great strategic game for stakes far beyond the minor scale of the incident itself. Iran's hardliners are gambling. If the West — with London in the lead this time — fails to call their bluff, our weakness will virtually guarantee future conflict in the Persian Gulf.

Grabbing those British sailors and marines from three patrol boats they were delivering to Iraqi border guards wasn't an Iranian reaction to poor navigation. The seizure appears to have been planned and blessed by hardline leaders. It's a repertoire play, an attempt by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps — now a sprawling empire of repression — to recreate its greatest success on the world stage, the seizure of American embassy personnel a quarter-century ago.

... This is a test of the Coalition's will to respond to provocations. It's a strategic probe disguised as a tactical incident. The Iranian intelligence services — intertwined with the Revolutionary Guards — scrutinize developments in Iraq, Europe and the United States (while supporting international terrorists and Iraqi insurgents). And they've drawn dangerous conclusions.

The Iranians know that Tony Blair's government is in political trouble. They're convinced the Brits will be unable to take a firm stand over the hostages. Tehran's hardliners believe they've identified Britain as a new weak link in the alliance.

Third, the incident is a punishment, specifically for the Brits, but also intended as a warning to other European states which, after gushing about Iran's cooperation on nuclear matters, belatedly realized that Tehran is bent on building nuclear bombs. The French and Germans are paying for their treachery and cowardice on the eve of Saddam's downfall by being dismissed as impotent. ...

This seemingly minor event may be a historic turning point — although we might not realize it for years. With our short memories, we forget how many of history's most brutal conflicts began with minor naval incidents. Seizing or striking isolated vessels has long been a means of testing a potential opponent's will. The Iranian hardliners are playing an age-old hand.

Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Guards are really holding two separate groups of hostages: Eight British servicemen. And the entire population of Iran. Now they hope to make the Coalition a political hostage. Let's hope Tony Blair gets this one right.

*Excerpts from an article by Ralph Peters, a regular Post contributor.*

**Voice of America**  
**Jun 23, 2004**

**US House Committee to Examine Iran's Nuclear Ambition**

**Capitol Hill** - A committee of the House of Representatives holds a hearing later Wednesday on the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. The hearing also comes amid renewed concern by some lawmakers about what they call Iranian interference in efforts to stabilize Iraq. The House subcommittee on the Middle East will hear from John Bolton, the State Department's top official for arms control. In previous appearances on Capitol Hill, he has testified about Iranian cooperation, or lack of it, with international efforts to monitor its nuclear program.

Also appearing will be Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Along with Iranian nuclear efforts, and proliferation concerns, some members of Congress are concerned about what they call Iranian efforts to stir up trouble in Iraq, as the U.S. coalition provisional authority prepares to hand over sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government on July 1.

One such lawmaker is Congressman Curt Weldon, a Pennsylvania Republican. He raised the issue with Bush administration officials during recent hearings on Capitol Hill:

"In my opinion, the bulk of what we are seeing in terms of unrest in Iraq, is being carried out both by Iranians, by those groups being supported by Iran's money, and by those organizations that are determined not to have Iraq be a stable nation," says Mr. Weldon.

Mr. Weldon says Iran, under its current leadership, sees the development of a free Iraq as a long-term threat, and says the Iranian government continues what he calls a crash program (intensified or rapid) to develop a nuclear weapon.

The House hearing on Iran and proliferation comes two days after Secretary of State Colin Powell said the Bush administration might reconsider pushing for United Nations sanctions against Tehran if it fails to fully disclose its nuclear activities.

Iran has maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and has denied allegations by the United States and others that it is trying to develop a nuclear weapon.