

officials say is backing Shiite militias in Iraq.' (NYT, 1 May, as above) The same man said to have negotiated the end of the Basra fighting!

#### DISPUTED WATERS: BRITISH LIES UNRAVEL

On another front, there are new revelations about Britain-Iran relations. On 23 March 2007, 15 British sailors and Marines were captured by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the waters of the northern Gulf; they were eventually released unconditionally. British Defence Secretary Des Browne stated unequivocally in Parliament on 19 June (among other occasions) that: 'There is no doubt that HMS Cornwall was operating in Iraqi waters and that the incident itself took place in Iraqi waters.'

On 17 April, *The Times* published excerpts from two Ministry of Defence (MOD) documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act which showed that according to the MOD itself: the 15 British sailors and Marines were in waters that are **not internationally agreed as Iraqi**; the US and UK **unilaterally** drew a dividing line between Iraqi and Iranian waters—**without informing Iran where it was**; and that Iranian Revolutionary Guard vessels were **crossing this invisible line three times a week** at the time of the incident.

Declassified MOD report to the Chief of the Defence Staff titled: 'Why the incident occurred' (13 April 2007): 'Since the outset of the Iraq-Iran War there has been **no formal ratified TTW [territorial waters] agreement in force between Iraq and Iran** . . . In the absence of any formal agreement, the coalition tactical demarcation (the Op Line) is used as a **notional TTW boundary**. It is a **US NAVCENT [US Naval Forces Central Command] construct** based on an extension of the Algiers accord demarcation line beyond the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab [waterway] into the NAG [northern Arabian Gulf]. While it may be **assumed** that the Iranians must be aware of some form of operational boundary, the **exact coordinates to the Op Line have not been published to Iran.**" (*Times*, 17 April, p.4 <[tinyurl.com/3ebhyz](http://tinyurl.com/3ebhyz)>)

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# THREATS AND LIES

## IRAN UPDATE: US MILITARY THREATS CONTINUE AS BRITISH 'SEIZED SAILORS' LIES UNRAVEL

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### US ESCALATES GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY

On 30 April, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates denied that the arrival of a second US aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf represented an escalation of the US-Iran confrontation, describing it instead as a 'reminder' to Iran. (*Guardian*, 1 May, p.19) Lt. Gen. Carter Ham, Director of Operations at the Pentagon, said it was not a message directed solely at Iran: 'It's a message to all nations that the United States possesses the capability and the will to operate global[ly].' (Reuters, 30 April <<http://tinyurl.com/645rgm>>)

As well as providing additional airpower for strikes and reconnaissance, Gen. Ham said the brief overlap between the outgoing and incoming carriers 'allows us, also, to demonstrate to our friends and allies in the region a commitment to security in the region.' (*Washington Post*, 1 May, p.A04 <<http://tinyurl.com/3fq1vg>>)

The Chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael G. Mullen told the *Washington Post* (same article) that 'Iran is not going away... We need to be strong and really in the deterrent mode, to not be very predictable' regarding Iran. He claimed that Iran was supplying weapons, training and financing to insurgents not only in Iraq but also in Afghanistan.

According to CBS News, a major US television news programme, 'the Pentagon ordered military commanders to develop new options for attacking Iran': 'Targets would include everything from the plants where weapons are made to the headquarters of the organization known as the Quds Force which [allegedly] directs operations in Iraq.' (29 April <[tinyurl.com/6jh4q8](http://tinyurl.com/6jh4q8)>)



## IRAQ-IRAN—THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP?

The same CBS report stated: 'Later this week Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is expected to confront the Iranians with evidence of their meddling and demand a halt.' There are a number of problems with this gambit, and this way of reporting it, not the least of which is that Maliki has just relied on Iranian assistance in bringing to an end his disastrous assault on Basra, Iraq's second city.

Relations between Iraq and Iran are at something of an all-time high. At the beginning of March, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was welcomed to Baghdad by Maliki himself: 'He announced a \$1 billion low-interest loan to help reconstruct Iraq, and he was welcomed with a red-carpet ceremony, a marching band and much fanfare.' Abbas Bayati, a Shiite legislator close to Maliki, said: 'The Iranian role in Iraq, this role is seen by the majority of the people as being a positive one.' (*Washington Post*, 3 March p.A01 <[tinyurl.com/3mptmb](http://tinyurl.com/3mptmb)>)

'Ahmadinejad also took a dig at President George W. Bush, who typically travels into Iraq unannounced and often visits military bases. The Iranian's trip was known well in advance, and he traveled through the streets of Baghdad, though under heavy guard. "We have nothing to hide from the people of Iran and Iraq," he said. "All those who come on stealth visits, we should ask them why they visit this country in a stealth manner." ' (Associated Press, 3 March <[tinyurl.com/4g3ku7](http://tinyurl.com/4g3ku7)>)

Then in April, when the Iraqi government's assault on Muqtada al-Sadr's forces in Basra ran into the ground despite the Prime Minister declaring that he was in 'a fight to the end', Tehran played a crucial role in rescuing Maliki. According to the BBC account, 'a delegation from the United Iraqi Alliance, the parliamentary bloc that supports Mr Maliki, flew to Tehran', and enlisted the Iranian leadership's help in bringing the fighting to an end. 'The Iranian leadership, according to the source, then brought Moqtada Sadr to Tehran. There, late on Saturday night, he crafted the statement that would order his Mehdi Army militiamen off the streets, the source said.' The BBC comments: 'In this version of events, the Iraqi prime minister retains the ability to deny entering talks with Moqtada Sadr. In effect, it appears to have been done for him, with Iranian influence brought to bear.'

A different version of events appears in the *Asia Times*: 'The deal was brokered after negotiations in the holy city of Qom in Iran involving the

two Shi'ite factions—the Da'wa Party and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC)—which have been locked in conflict with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in southern Iraq. It appears that one of the most shadowy figures of the Iranian security establishment, General Qassem Suleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) personally mediated in the intra-Iraqi Shi'ite negotiations. Suleimani is in charge of the IRGC's operations abroad. US military commanders routinely blame the Quds for all their woes in Iraq. The fact that the representatives of Da'wa and SIIC secretly traveled to Qom under the very nose of American and British intelligence and sought Quds mediation to broker a deal conveys a huge political message.' (Former Indian diplomat MK Bhadrakumar, *Asia Times*, 3 April <[tinyurl.com/3d5ttg](http://tinyurl.com/3d5ttg)>)

However the deal was achieved, the result was that, on the one hand, Al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia withdrew from the streets of Basra undefeated, holding onto all their weapons, defying Maliki's demand for them to give up their medium and heavy weapons; and, on the other, Iran had saved the honour of the Maliki coalition and government.

## IRAQ-IRAN—MALIKI THE TRIGGER MAN?

Given Iranian sponsorship of two of the key components of the Iraqi government, expecting Maliki to confront Iran over its alleged support for Iraqi militias publicly is a very ambitious US goal. Enormous pressure has been put on the Prime Minister nonetheless: 'The United States is said to have been planning for weeks to conduct a briefing in Baghdad to present new evidence of Iranian involvement. But it has held off to give Iraqi officials a chance to present their concerns directly to Iranian officials.' (*New York Times*, 1 May <[tinyurl.com/48d7qm](http://tinyurl.com/48d7qm)>)

Under the gun, Maliki sent a delegation on 1 May to discuss the US allegations with Tehran. 'An Iraqi official said the delegation included two of Mr. Maliki's long-time political allies and a powerful member of another Shiite political party that backs him. All of them have ties to Iran. The official said the group would raise the issue of the Iranian arms shipments that have been found and other indications that Tehran is meddling in Iraq's internal affairs. The delegation is expected to visit influential ayatollahs in Qom and to go to Tehran. One Iraqi official said he expected the group to meet with Brig. Gen. Qassen Suleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, a paramilitary group that American