

What Really Happened To The 10 Sailors

January 17, 2016

A story by Liberty Unyielding

January 12, 2016

Where it happened



The story I heard on Fox News about 4:25 PM EST — breaking at that time — sounded more plausible. Here's what I wrote in response to a query in the comments section from regular reader jgets:

It sounds like it's real. Fox is talking as if the sailors were on (probable) RHIBs conducting VBSS in the northern Persian Gulf, and "drifted" into Iranian waters. Fox says they're being held on Farsi Island. Tiny, totally militarized blip in the NPG. If the story is at least halfway accurate, they probably got near Farsi (around which Iran calculates a territorial waters area) in the execution of their mission. Whether they actually strayed into Iranian waters is another question.

Now I've seen the first written news story on it, however, and the assertions being made about the incident are very weird. Here's what AP says:

The crew of two small Navy craft are being held by Iran, but American officials have received assurances from Tehran that the crew and vessels will be returned safely and promptly. Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook told The Associated Press that the boats were moving between Kuwait and Bahrain when the U.S. lost contact with them. ...U.S. officials said that the incident happened near Farsi Island, situated in the middle of the Persian Gulf. They say it stemmed from some type of mechanical trouble with one of the boats, causing them to run aground. The troops were picked up by Iran.

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Now, the weirdness of “small Navy craft” out in the Gulf “moving between Kuwait and Bahrain” is probably explained by the boats being some of the new Mark VI patrol boats. In a restricted open-seas area like the Persian Gulf, it’s reasonable to expect boats as small as the Mk VIs to transit such a distance without a “mother” ship.

But if these boats were really doing what the White House says they were doing, they had to go substantially off course to “run aground” on (or near?) Farsi Island. The corridor depicted on the map shows a rough area between the territorial waters of Saudi Arabia and Iran (Farsi Island) where the boats would presumably have been in transit. To be “picked up by Iran,” they’d have to have been on or near Iranian territory. But in that part of the Gulf, there’s only Farsi Island that meets that description. It’s not like they could have run aground on some other rock claimed by Iran and then been taken to Farsi Island. They had to be a good 20 nautical miles off course to be that close to Farsi Island, something that “drifting” while out of communications doesn’t really explain. (The time factor is wrong: the Navy in Manama wouldn’t ignore it that long if comms had been lost. There would have been a helicopter out there pronto.) In addition to which, it makes zero sense for “some type of mechanical trouble with one of the boats” to cause “them” — both boats? — to run aground.

This story doesn’t hang together, as it stands right now. More later if it comes in. Meanwhile, Fox’s updates indicate the White House is “working on” getting the sailors and boats back.

***UPDATE*:** *NYT’s* story is here. It gives the same basic narrative as the AP story, but adds another non-credible detail:

It was unclear how contact with the boats had been lost, and Navy officials in Washington said they were trying to determine what had happened. One official said the two vessels had failed to make a scheduled rendezvous with a larger ship to refuel.

Again, the implied passivity here, as if the Navy authorities sat around waiting to see what might turn up after they lost contact with both boats, makes no sense. If these boats operate on their own (i.e., performing coastal patrols), they presumably participate in the real-time tactical “link” in which Fifth Fleet tracks all U.S. and most coalition assets in the Gulf. If they dropped out of the link and couldn’t be raised by voice (either VHF or HF should have been readily available), the Navy wouldn’t be sitting around with its thumb up its rear end waiting for Iran to explain what happened to the boats. The Navy’d send patrol assets to go out looking for them.

Failure to make a scheduled rendezvous wouldn’t be the first indication the Navy had that there was something wrong. This tale just doesn’t sound like a story the Navy would tell about its assets. (A possible exception would be if special forces — i.e., SEALs — were using the boats for something, and the Navy was conveying a cover story. That seems pretty far-fetched, given the overall disjointedness of this whole business.)

***UPDATE 2*:** Readers will have heard by now that the crew and boats have been released. This release was strangely quick to happen, which I think everyone except Obama’s most committed supporters recognizes.

But I also want to append an excerpt from a comment posted on Facebook earlier today by a former Navy SEAL, which expresses the same sentiments I have about this incident, but much more bluntly. He had extensive experience with operating riverine craft of the type that were seized (CB90 patrol boats, we now know. See NaCly Dog’s

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link in the comments section).

The claim by Iran that the USN boats “strayed into Iranian waters” is complete bulls***.

For an open-water transit between nations, the course is studied and planned in advance by the leaders of the Riverine Squadron, with specific attention given to staying wide and clear of any hostile nation’s claimed territorial waters. The boats are given a complete mechanical check before departure, and they have sufficient fuel to accomplish their mission plus extra. If, for some unexplainable and rare circumstance one boat broke down, the other would tow it, that’s why two boats go on these trips and not one! It’s called “self-rescue” and it’s SOP.

This entire situation is in my area of expertise. I can state with complete confidence that both Iran and our own State Department are lying. The “strayed into Iranian waters” story being put out by Iran and our groveling and appeasing State Dept. is utter and complete BS from one end to the other. The boats did not enter Iranian waters. They were overtaken in international waters by Iranian patrol boats that were so superior in both speed and firepower that it became a “hands up!” situation, with automatic cannons in the 40mm to 76mm range pointed at them point-blank. Surrender, hands up, or be blown out of the water. I assume that the Iranians had an English speaker on a loudspeaker to make the demand. This takedown was no accident or coincidence, it was a planned slap across America’s face.

Regarding where the boats were throughout the incident, the Iranians have conveniently seized the GPS boxes, so we’ll never have direct proof available to the American public. You’d think the White House and State would come up with a story that actually hung together. Another note: the boat type confirms my original opinion that we wouldn’t have sent “small Navy craft” out to make a trek from Kuwait to Bahrain on their own (i.e., with any substantial portion of the transit accomplished out of sight of a bigger ship). The idea of that trip was conceivable — if still troubling for us old-school sailors — for the new Mk VI, which is outfitted to operate more independently, and which the Navy has reportedly been operating more independently in the Persian Gulf. But now that we know the boats were CB90s, the alleged transit itself is back to not making sense. Even for SEALs. Courting unnecessary risks is just not a practice of the military — and there’s nothing that could have made the risk courted by such a transit necessary.

I’m not saying the transit itself didn’t happen, somewhat as implied. (The narrative about mechanical failure and drifting into Iranian TTW is another question.) I’m asking why such a transit happened. I can’t see anyone in the chain of command thinking it was a good idea. For one very important thing, there’s not a sailor alive, if he’s been in the Gulf, who doesn’t know that IRGCN fast boats zoom around in the northern Persian Gulf every day, operating from Farsi Island. In a period of Iranian naval adventurism and heightened tensions, why expose two lone Navy small boats to that — a situation in which they could quickly be overwhelmed?

The blindingly rapid “resolution” of this incident — very much out of character for Iran — only raises more questions. The whole thing is off.