Both Sides Must Stop This Mad Confrontation, Now

No agreed maritime boundary between Iraq and Iran

By Craig Murray
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There is no agreed maritime boundary between Iraq and Iran in the Persian Gulf. Until the current mad propaganda exercise of the last week, nobody would have found that in the least a controversial statement.

Let me quote, for example, from that well known far left source *Stars and Stripes* magazine, October 24 2006.

'Bumping into the Iranians can't be helped in the northern Persian Gulf, where the lines between Iraqi and Iranian territorial water are blurred, officials said.

> "No maritime border has been agreed upon by the two countries," Lockwood said.'

That is Royal Australian Navy Commodore Peter Lockwood. He is the Commander of the Combined Task Force in the Northern Persian Gulf.

I might even know something about it myself, having been Head of the Maritime Section of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 1989 to 1992, and having been personally responsible in the Embargo Surveillance Centre for getting individual real time clearance for the Royal Navy to board specific vessels in these waters.

As I feared, Blair adopted the stupid and confrontational approach of publishing maps ignoring the boundary dispute, thus claiming a very blurred situation is crystal clear and the Iranians totally in the wrong. This has in turn notched the Iranians up another twist in their own spiral of intransigence and stupidity.

Both the British and the Iranian governments are milking this for maximum propaganda value and playing to their respective galleries. Neither has any real care at all for either the British captives or the thousands who could die in Iran and Basra if this gets out of hand.

Tony Blair's contempt for Middle Eastern lives has already been adequately demonstrated in Iraq and Lebanon. His lack of genuine concern for British servicemen demonstrated by his steadfast refusal to meet even one parent of a dead British serviceman or woman, killed in the wars he created. He is confronting an Iranian leadership with an equal lust for glory and lack of human concern.

It is essential now for both sides to back down. No solution is possible if either side

continues to insist that the other is completely in the wrong and they are completely in the right. And the first step towards finding a peaceful way out, is to acknowledge the self-evident truth that maritime boundaries are disputed and problematic in this area.

Both sides can therefore accept that the other acted in good faith with regard to their view of where the boundary was. They can also accept that boats move about and all the coordinates given by either party were also in good faith. The captives should be immediately released and, to international acclamation, Iran and Iraq, which now are good neighbours, should appoint a joint panel of judges to arbitrate a maritime boundary and settle this boundary dispute.

That is the way out. For the British to insist on their little red border line, or the Iranians on their GPS coordinates, plainly indicates a greater desire to score propaganda points in the run up to a war in which a lot of people will die, than to resolve the dispute and free the captives. The international community needs to put heavy pressure on both Britain and Iran to stop this mad confrontation.

The British people must break out of the jingoism created by their laudable concern for their servicemen and woman, and realise that this is just a small part of the madness of our policy of continual war in the Middle East. That is what we have to stop.

As Britain's outspoken Ambassador to the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan, Craig Murray helped expose vicious human rights abuses by the US-funded regime of Islam Karimov. He is now a prominent critic of Western policy in the region.

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