

British map in Iran crisis ‘inaccurate’

By [Global Research](#)

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July 22, 2007 03:49am A BRITISH map of the northern Gulf where Iran seized 15 naval personnel in March was not as accurate as it should have been and Britain was fortunate Iran did not contest it, a review into the crisis said.

The parliamentary report also said Britain’s Foreign Office should name the person who let two sailors sell their stories to the media, a decision widely criticised for handing a propaganda coup to Britain’s enemies and embarrassing serving troops.

The report by the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) said the Foreign Office’s overall approach could not be faulted, but it said efforts should have been made to contact key Iranian negotiator Ali Larijani sooner.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards seized 15 British personnel in the northern Gulf in March sparking a 13-day standoff that ended when Iran’s President freed them, a day after Larijani spoke to a senior adviser to then Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Mr Larijani, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, is regarded as a pragmatist more amenable to exploring a bargain with the West than hardliner President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Britain first applied to speak to Mr Larijani seven days into the crisis.

Britain insists the personnel were in Iraqi territorial waters on a UN-backed mission when they were seized.

Iran says the British sailors had strayed into its territory.

A British Ministry of Defence map published during the crisis showed a territorial water boundary extending from the Shatt al-Arab waterway that separates Iran and Iraq out to sea.

However experts say no maritime boundary between the two countries has been agreed and the line was based on a 1975 land boundary that could have shifted over time if the centre of the waterway had moved due to natural causes.

“We conclude that there is evidence to suggest that the map of the Shatt al-Arab waterway provided by the Government was less clear than it ought to have been,” the report said.

“The Government was fortunate that it was not in Iran’s interests to contest the accuracy of the map.”

‘Uncertainties’

Britain and Iran provided different coordinates for the location of the capture.

The report did not make a definitive conclusion on the accuracy of the map or whether the sailors were in Iraqi or Iranian waters.

It quoted Martin Pratt, director of research at the International Boundaries Research Unit at Durham University, as saying that if the British coordinates were correct, it was difficult to see how Iran's claim could be legitimate.

"Nevertheless, there are sufficient uncertainties over boundary definition in the area to make it inadvisable to state categorically that the vessel was in Iraqi waters," he was quoted as saying.

He said the map was "certainly an oversimplification" and could be regarded as "deliberately misleading".

The Foreign Office said it was pleased the report praised its overall approach.

It was considering some recommendations and leaving others for the Ministry of Defence to address.

The Ministry of Defence also said it would study the report.

Compiled by members of parliament, the report said it was "wholly unsatisfactory" that a previous report into the affair had been unable to say who was responsible for authorising payment for the stories of the personnel after they were freed.

"We recommend ... the (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) set out who specifically took the decision to authorise the naval personnel to sell their stories to the media," it said.

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