

US Navy claims to turn away boats in Persian Gulf, Iran denies reports of confrontation

Raising tensions in the Persian Gulf

By [Global Research](#)

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A US patrol boat fired a warning flare to repel three approaching speed boats in the Gulf, the Navy said Friday, where Iranian vessels have in the past played cat-and-mouse with passing US warships.

The USS Typhoon, a Coast Guard patrol boat, was heading from the central to the northern Gulf when it was approached late Thursday by the high-speed boats, said Lieutenant Nathan Christensen, a spokesman for the US Fifth Fleet.

He said the boats were of “unidentified origin,” but Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Navy operate in the northern Gulf, and there have been previous confrontations with US warships passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

“Typhoon issued the standard query to the incoming small boards via bridge-to-bridge,” Christensen said by telephone from Bahrain.

“Upon receiving no response, Typhoon activated a flare. Small boats stopped and Typhoon continued on its way.”

CNN television reported that the boats were Iranian and engaged in a “mild” and “taunting” confrontation with a US warship in the Gulf late Thursday.

However, a source in the navy of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards denied Friday there had been any “confrontation” with US ships, according to Iran’s Al-Alam Arabic television.

“The source denied any kind of confrontation between Iranian high speed vessels and US ships,” the state-run satellite channel said.

It quoted the source as saying: “In the past two days, the identification was carried out according to the routine and the two US ships were allowed to continue along their path.”

In January, tensions between the United States and Iran escalated after Iranian speed boats swarmed around three US warships transiting the Strait.

Iran described that incident as a routine event of identification while US officials said the Iranian vessels had behaved in a threatening manner.

The latest incident comes after the United States stepped up its accusations that Iran was

stoking violence on another front, in Iraq.

President George W. Bush on Thursday lumped Iran with the Al-Qaeda terrorist group as “two of the greatest threats to America in this new century” and said both hoped for a US defeat in Iraq.

He accuses Tehran of backing Iraqi militias hostile to US forces and in his speech defending the war there, warned he would not hesitate to use force if the Islamic republic targets US interests in Iraq.

Iran “has a choice to make,” either to live in peace with its neighbor or “continue to arm and train and fund illegal militant groups, which are terrorizing the Iraqi people and turning them against Iran,” Bush said.

“If Iran makes the right choice, America will encourage a peaceful relationship between Iran and Iraq. Iran makes the wrong choice, America will act to protect our interests, and our troops, and our Iraqi partners.”

However, US ambassador to Baghdad Ryan Crocker appeared to play this down in a briefing Friday, stressing: “No one is talking about war with Iran.”

General David Petraeus, the US commander in Iraq, also blamed Iran this week for an outbreak of fighting in Basra and Baghdad, charging that the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard was providing funds, training, arms, ammunition to so-called “special groups.”

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Friday that it was “inconceivable” that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad was not aware of the support.

Gates told reporters “there is some sense of an increased level of supply of weapons and support to these groups. But whether it’s a dramatic increase over recent weeks, I just don’t know.”

Washington also accuses Tehran of seeking nuclear weapons, and the official Iranian news agency, IRNA, reported Friday that Iran has started operating hundreds of new uranium-enriching centrifuges at its main nuclear plant.

Tehran says its nuclear program is solely aimed at generating energy, although its refusal to suspend the process has been punished with three sets of UN Security Council sanctions and US pressure on its banking system.

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