



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 19, 2012

Persian Gulf Tensions: U.S. Naval Vessel Fires on Fishing Boat, Killing One

Survivors of gunfire from a U.S. Navy vessel that killed one and wounded three others on a fishing boat off the coast of the United Arab Emirates have disputed claims that the crew had ignored warnings to stay away from the American ship, Reuters [reported](#).

“We had no warning at all from the ship. We were speeding up to try and go around them and then suddenly we got fired at,” one of the wounded, Muthu Muniraj, told Reuters, speaking from a hospital after both legs had been punctured by rounds from the Navy’s .50 caliber gun in the July 16 shooting. “We know warning signs and sounds and there were none; it was very sudden,” said Muniraj, one of four Indian nationals struck by the gunfire. “My friend was killed; he’s gone. I don’t understand what happened.” Two United Arab Emirates nationals on board with the Indians when the shooting occurred were uninjured. An Emirati official said the incident occurred in Jabel Ali, a frequent docking point for American vessels about 30 miles southwest of Dubai, Outlook India.com [reported](#). A Navy spokesman said the fishing boat was about 10 miles from the port and approaching the USNS *Rappahannock* (pictured, number 204) a replenishment oiler used to refuel other ships, when the ship’s crew issued warnings to stay away.



“The U.S. crew repeatedly attempted to warn the vessel’s operators to turn away from their deliberate approach, said Lieutenant Greg Raelson, a spokesman with the Navy’s Bahrain-based 5th fleet. “When those efforts failed to deter the approaching vessel, the security team on the *Rappahannock* fired rounds from a .50-caliber machine gun.” Navy ships, Raelson said, “have an inherent right to self-defense against lethal threats.”

U.S. crews have had increased apprehension of approaching vessels since al-Qaeda suicide bombers in 2000 rammed a boat loaded with explosives into the side of the USS *Cole* in the port of Aden in Yemen, killing 17 U.S. sailors. ABC News quoted an unnamed Navy official who said Iranian boats sometimes harass U.S. ships in the region, but hastened to add that the boat in Monday’s incident was not Iranian.



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“I can’t emphasize enough that this has nothing to do with Iran,” the official said.

U.S. warships moved into the area after Iran threatened it would close the Strait of Hormuz, through which 40 percent of the world’s oil exports flow, if the United States and the European Union follow through on threats of increased economic sanctions over Iran’s nuclear program. The United States has repeatedly warned that it will take whatever action is necessary, including military strikes, to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Iran insists it is developing nuclear power for peaceful uses, as allowed under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, a nuclear power that did not sign the treaty, has warned that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an “existential threat” to the Jewish nation, citing Iranian support for Arab terrorists groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas and anti-Israel statements made by Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The *Washington Post’s* David Ignatius, without citing a source, wrote in a February 2 column this year that U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta expected an Israeli military strike on Iran in the spring of this year. Panetta would neither confirm nor deny that [prediction](#).

“No, I’m just not commenting,” he told the Associated Press at the time. “What I think, and what I view, I consider that to be an area that belongs to me and nobody else.”

That same day, Israel’s Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned that military action may be needed before it is “too late” to prevent Iran from completing development of nuclear weapons.

“Many experts in the world believe that refraining from action will necessarily mean dealing with a nuclearized Iran,” Barak told the annual gathering of the nation’s security officials in Herzliya. “Those who say ‘later’ may find that later is too late,” he said.

Not all of Israel’s political and military establishment share that view, however. At a conference at Hebrew University in Jerusalem last May, Meir Dagan, former head of the nation’s intelligence service, Mossad, [called](#) the idea of an Israeli Air Force attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities “the stupidest thing I have ever heard.” Yuval Diskin, head of Israel internal security force, Shin Bet, and former Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi have also spoken out against Israeli plans to strike Iran’s nuclear programs, according to the [Times of Israel](#).

U.S. intelligence agencies have maintained that while Iran’s nuclear program is approaching a potential for the making of nuclear bombs, there is still no evidence that Iran has made that decision. A National Intelligence Estimate in 2007 concluded that Tehran abandoned its nuclear weapons program in 2003, a finding affirmed by a 2010 NIE report of 16 U.S. intelligence agencies.

“They are certainly moving on that path, but we don’t believe they have actually made the decision to go ahead with a nuclear weapon,” Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said at a [hearing](#) of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in January of this year.

In March, President Obama [told](#) a cheering crowd at a conference of the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee, “I do not have a policy of containment. I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”

On July 16, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was in [Jerusalem](#), declaring that the United States and Israel are “on the same page” regarding Iran. “It’s absolutely fair to say that we are on the same page at this moment, trying to figure our way forward to have the maximum impact on affecting the decisions that Iran makes,” Clinton said at a press conference in the ancient capital. Obama’s National Security Advisor Tom Donilon preceded Clinton’s visit by a few days, the AP reported, and Defense Secretary



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Leon Panetta is expected in Israel soon. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, who has called for “crippling sanctions” on Iran, is expected to visit this week.

Meanwhile, U.S. warships continue to patrol the waters near the Strait of Hormuz, while Iran takes military measures of its own. “They have increased the number of submarines ... they increased the number of fast attack craft,” Vice Admiral Mark Fox, commander of U.S. naval forces in the region, told the AP. “Some of the small boats have been outfitted with a large warhead that could be used as a suicide explosive device. The Iranians have a large mine inventory.”



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