

Canada Captured and Handed over Iraqis to U.S. Forces

By Kelly Toughill, Director, School of Journalism, University of King's College, Halifax.

Canadian sailors are actively hunting Iraqis at sea on behalf of the U.S., even though Canada has refused to join the war.

A U.S. official confirmed that the duty of Canadian ships deployed in a two-year-old coalition against terrorism includes screening travellers in the Persian Gulf for Iraqi military officials and government leaders.

"Anyone connected with the Iraqi regime is on the list," U.S. Air Force Lt.-Col. Martin Compton said yesterday [April 1, 2003].

The media relations officer at Central Command in Tampa explained that Canadian sailors who board ships in the Persian Gulf run passengers' identities through a U.S.-controlled database that includes Al Qaeda terrorists and Iraqi officials.

If any are found, they are to be turned over to U.S. authorities.

That contradicts a specific promise Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made that Canadian ships committed to the war on terrorism wouldn't be drawn into the war in Iraq.

"The only authorization they have is to work on the problem of Afghanistan and terrorism," Chrétien said March 18 when asked about the role of Canadian frigates now patrolling the Persian Gulf. "They are not authorized to work on the problem of Iraq."

Canada's decision to stay out of the conflict is not as simple as it seemed. Canada was one of the first countries to join the war on terrorism after September 11 and has three ships patrolling the Persian Gulf. Joining the frigates HMCS Montreal and Winnipeg is the destroyer HMCS Iroquois.

The Winnipeg and Montreal are about to head home, while the frigates HMCS Fredericton and Regina are en route to the region to replace them. (See p.7 for more on these warships.)

The Iroquois will take over from the Montreal as the centre of operations for Cdre. Roger Girouard, who is overseeing a multinational task force of about 12 ships from the U.S, UK,

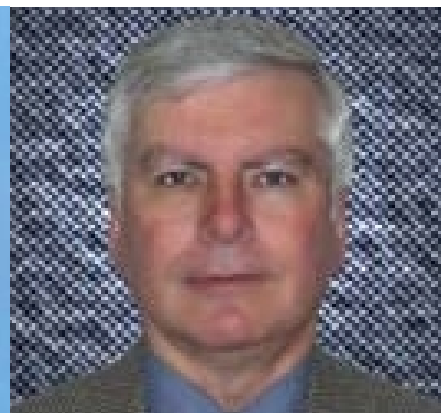
"Canadian sailors are actively hunting Iraqis at sea on behalf of the U.S."

Kelly Toughill, journalist



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Dan Middlemiss, Dalhousie University



Canadian sailors boarded hundreds of ships in the Persian Gulf taking aside "anyone who looks suspicious." Suspects' names and photos were "transmitted to a central [U.S.] database" of alleged terrorists and Iraqi officials. "If they have a hit, those people are turned over to our coalition partners," said Canadian Army Maj. Richard Saint-Louis. Some were sent to a U.S. prison in Bagram, Afghanistan, where some detainees had been tortured to death.

France, Italy and other nations.

A key role of the Canadian ships is to monitor small boats that pass through the busy waters and look for terrorists trying to escape Afghanistan or Pakistan. Canadian sailors have boarded hundreds of vessels.

When they board, they sort through passengers and take aside anyone who looks suspicious. Pictures of suspects are transmitted to a central database to determine if they are wanted.

"If they have a hit, then those people are turned over to our coalition partners," said Canadian Army Maj. Richard Saint-Louis, stationed at U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida.

Neither Maj. Saint-Louis nor Compton had statistics on how many suspected terrorists were discovered by Canadians. It is known that Canadians turned over two suspects to U.S. authorities last July. They were taken to Bagram air base in Afghanistan, where the U.S. runs a detention centre.

Maj. Saint-Louis said Canadian forces have no control over or specific knowledge about who is included in the U.S. database, or how that country determines who should be arrested.

"We just don't know," he said yesterday. "You would have to ask the Americans about that."

Compton said the database also includes Iraqi war criminals and anyone the U.S. thinks should be arrested in connection with the war in Iraq.

When asked if Canadian sailors, would be expected to detain Ali Hassan al-Majid, a notorious Iraqi general sought by U.S. forces, Compton said of course. "If you consider the regime, his name is second or third or fourth."

Dan Middlemiss, who teaches defence and foreign policy at Dalhousie University, said Canada's role in the Persian Gulf is inconsistent with its neutrality, but also not surprising. "We are in the war anyway, that's the reality," Middlemiss said. "Canada is playing an almost identical role to the one it played in the first Gulf war." Middlemiss pointed out that Canadian ships are patrolling most of the Persian Gulf, almost to the border of Kuwait.

Source: "Canadians help U.S. hunt in Gulf," *Toronto Star*, April 2, 2003. www.iraqwararchive.org/data/apr02/canada/star01.pdf