

Leading the Multinational Fleet in the Persian Gulf in 2003

Task Force 151: A Significant Boost to the Iraq War

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In 2003, Admiral Ken Summers (who commanded Canada's ships in the 1991 Gulf War) confirmed that they

"are providing direct support to the war on terrorism...and indirect support to the war on Iraq, in that they are escorting through the Strait of Hormuz any allied ship that needs to get in or out of the gulf."¹

Canadian commander, Commodore Roger Girouard, reported directly to U.S. Vice-Admiral Timothy Keating; who is the head of the U.S. 5th Fleet (fighting the Iraq war) and top naval officer in the war on terrorism.²

The Canadian naval task group did not and could not clearly separate the roles between terrorism and the war in Iraq. Indeed, the Canadian government really had no control over, nor could they establish definitive operational rules of engagement to separate those two responsibilities.... If Ottawa passed along an order that, for practical operational and tactical reasons, was subsequently ignored in favour of maintaining a commitment to Canada's multilateral obligations, that speaks volumes about the capacity of defence officials to affect operational policy.

The fact that the Canadian navy followed previously established rules of engagement for tracking and arresting suspected terrorists, derived from a list that included Iraqi officials provided by the U.S. military, implies that the Canadian government had a lot less authority and influence than it implied in statements about the distinction between Canadian and U.S. operations—



Navy Commodore Roger Girouard, was the Commander of Task Force 151—the multinational fleet that protected and serviced U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf during the 2003 Iraq war.

In this DND photo Cmdr. Girouard poses on the bridge of Task Force 151's lead ship—a multi-billion dollar Canadian Destroyer, the HMCS Iroquois—in June 2003.

there really was no distinction at all...

Canadian ships provided a significant boost to the war effort. Canada deployed the destroyer HMCS Iroquois to lead Task Force 151 (TF-151), made up of about twenty ships from six countries.

"Canada has dramatically increased its naval responsibilities in the Persian Gulf as the U.S. prepares for war against Iraq."

Globe and Mail,
February 11, 2003.

Canada contributed four frigates to TF-151, in addition to the Iroquois.³ While the ships were operating as part of Operation Apollo,⁴ Defence Minister John McCallum stated that the ships might be 'double-hatted' to offer support in a war against Iraq.⁴ Irrespective of any 'double-hatting,' Canada's ships contributed to the coalition war effort.

The area of operations for the ships of TF-151 was redefined when Canada took control. The ships had been tasked to protect allied vessels and interdict terrorists in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz. They had not operated in the Persian Gulf. When Canada took over, the area of operations was expanded to cover virtually the whole Persian Gulf, up to the 29th parallel, the southernmost point in Ku-

wait.⁶

The [Canadian] ships...were in a position to lend direct assistance to coalition forces in transit to or engaged in operations against Iraq. Indeed, Commodore Roger Girouard, the Canadian who took control of TF-151, was charged with protecting all allied warships except carriers and their escorts operating in the Strait of Hormuz and south of Kuwait in the Persian Gulf.⁷

References

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4. Sheldon Alberts, 'Ships May Enter War by Back Door,' *National Post*, March 13, 2003.
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Source: *Smoke and Mirrors*, 2004. U.of T. Press, pp.207-208 and 234-235.