

British troops in Iraq deployed to Iranian border

Julie Hyland
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Britain's *Independent* reported Wednesday that UK troops stationed in Iraq have been deployed to the Iranian border.

According to the exclusive by Kim Sengupta in Baghdad, the move, which is said to involve some 350 soldiers, "has come at the request of the Americans."

Brigadier James Bashall, commander of 1 Mechanised Brigade, based at Basra, said, "We have been asked to help at the Iranian border to stop the flow of weapons and I am willing to do so. We know the points of entry and I am sure we can do what needs to be done. The US forces are, as we know, engaged in the 'surge' and the border is of particular concern to them."

The report continued, "For the British military the move to the border is a change of policy. They had stopped patrols along the long border at Maysan despite US concerns at the time that the area would become a conduit for weapons into Iraq."

Later, the *Daily Mail* reported that a "Ministry of Defence spokesman in London confirmed British forces were working with Iraqi border protection forces. British forces were also involved in patrolling the waterways, he said."

Sengupta's account said that the US request was in response to "elements close to the Iranian regime [who] have stepped up supplies of weapons to Shia militias in recent weeks in preparation for attacks inside Iraq."

The reference to "elements close to the Iranian regime" is so vague as to be almost meaningless. Yet as the *Independent* makes plain, it is enough for the US, with British support, to take measures that could escalate into a military confrontation with Tehran.

As Sengupta points out, the British deployment is part of a "high-risk strategy which could lead to clashes with Iranian-backed Shia militias or even Iranian forces

and also leaves open the possibility of Iranian retaliation in the form of attacks against British forces at the Basra air base or inciting violence to draw them back into Basra city. Relations between the two countries are already fraught after the Iranian Revolutionary Guards seized a British naval party in the Gulf earlier this year."

No evidence is presented to back up claims of Iranian involvement in the insurgency against the US-led occupation. One can only conclude that the more pertinent element in terms of US and British actions are the political calculations of the occupying forces themselves.

The *Independent's* report came just after General David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, the US ambassador to Iraq, gave a series of reports before a joint session of the Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, and separate sessions of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees

Billed as an objective assessment of the Bush administration's "surge" policy in Iraq, their testimony was a de facto defence of the US-led war of aggression and invasion of Iraq, and insisted that there would be no scaling down of American troops for the foreseeable future.

Amongst the most significant of the statements made by Petraeus and Crocker was their targeting of Tehran. Petraeus spoke of Iran conducting a "proxy war" in Iraq, in which Crocker said Tehran was "providing lethal capabilities to the enemies of the Iraqi state."

The *Independent* noted that just after his testimony before the congressional panel on Monday, Petraeus had "strongly implied that it would soon be necessary to obtain authorisation to take action against Iran within

its own borders, rather than just inside Iraq.”

In an interview with *Fox News*, Petraeus accused Tehran of supporting elements in Iraq that “have carried out violent acts against our forces, Iraqi forces, and innocent civilians. The attacks using these special improvised explosive devices that are particularly lethal against armoured vehicles, attacks with rockets provided by Iran on the international zone on civilians and on our forces, and so forth.”

“So Iran’s role in Iraq is very destructive,” he added.

In the same interview Crocker stated, “Iran’s role [in Iraq] is harmful. There are no two ways about it. They are supporting radical militias. They are supplying the explosively formed projectiles that target our troops as well as Iraqis. And they are playing a destabilizing role.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in its report on the testimony of Petraeus and Crocker, “The gathering threat of a US military attack on Iran was the subtext of the hearing. It was underscored by a report Monday in the *Wall Street Journal* that the US is planning to build its first military base near Iraq’s border with Iran, slated to be operative by November of this year, as well as fortified checkpoints on major roads leading to Baghdad from Iran.”

Petraeus’s plan to withdraw one army brigade of some 4,000 troops from Iraq by the end of this year was undoubtedly a major factor in “accelerated planning for a military attack on Iran.”

The US military base is to be located four miles from Iran’s border and will house at least 200 troops. It is hoped to be fully operational by November. There are also plans to build fortified checkpoints on the major roads between Iran and Baghdad.

An event that received little publicity is the agreement by Georgia to send an additional 1,200 troops to Iraq, making it the third largest force after the US and the UK. The troops will also be involved in patrolling the border between Iran and Iraq, the first time Georgian forces have assumed a frontline role.

At the end of August, Dr. Dan Plesch and Martin Butcher, two British security analysts, released an 80-page study detailing US preparations for a military assault on Iran.

“The US has made military preparations to destroy Iran’s [weapons of mass destruction], nuclear energy, regime, armed forces, state apparatus and economic

infrastructure within days, if not hours, of President George W. Bush giving the order,” it stated.

“US bombers and long-range missiles are ready today to destroy 10,000 targets within Iran in a few hours. US ground, air and marine forces already in the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan can devastate Iranian forces, the regime and the state at short notice.”

At the weekend the *Sunday Telegraph* reported that the US and Iran had established “listening” posts to monitor each other’s activity. The *Telegraph* cited US sources claiming that the Iranian spy post, built “on the foundations of a crane platform sunk during the Iran-Iraq war, is equipped with radar, cameras and forward facing infra-red devices to track the movement of coalition naval forces and commercial shipping in the northern Arabian Gulf.

“Commanders fear that one of the main purposes of the Iranian operation is to enable the Revolutionary Guard to intercept more coalition vessels moving through the disputed waters near the mouth of the Shatt al Arab waterway south of the Iraqi city of Basra.

“But the US military believes the listening post could also be used to help Iranian forces target commercial shipping in response to any US air strikes on its nuclear facilities.

“Such operations would form part of their threat to launch guerrilla or asymmetric attacks on western interests if Iran is attacked.”

The newspaper quoted British naval personnel as stating that “tensions between the Americans and the Iranians have soared.”

They continued, “Up to March, when our sailors were captured by the Iranians, coalition patrols concentrated on protecting Iraq’s oil export terminals from Al Qaeda suicide bombers.

“Now watching the Iranians is our top priority. We don’t want to be taken by surprise again and we need to ... know what they are doing in case things kick off if the Yanks bomb the Iranian nuclear sites.”



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