



Media Release

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U.S. Central Command Statement on Events Surrounding Iranian Detainment of 10 U.S. Navy Sailors on Jan. 12-13, 2016

TAMPA, Fla. – The following preliminary timeline of the events surrounding the Iranian detainment of 10 U.S. Navy Sailors from January 12-13, 2016, is based upon multiple operational reports received by U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) in the first 24-48 hours after the incident. A Navy command investigation initiated on Jan. 14, will provide a more complete accounting of events.

On Jan. 12, two NAVCENT Riverine Command Boat (RCB) crews were tasked with the mission of relocating two RCBs from Kuwait to Bahrain, with a planned refueling en route alongside the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Monomoy. The two RCBs were traveling together since they train and deploy in two-boat elements. They departed Kuwait at 9:23 a.m. (GMT). The planned transit path for the mission was down the middle of the Gulf and not through the territorial waters of any country other than Kuwait and Bahrain.

The two RCBs were scheduled to conduct an underway refueling with the USCGC Monomoy in international waters at approximately 2 p.m. (GMT). At approximately 2:10 p.m. (GMT) NAVCENT received a report that the RCBs were being queried by Iranians. At approximately 2:29 p.m. (GMT) NAVCENT was advised of degraded communications with the RCBs. At 2:45 p.m. (GMT) NAVCENT was notified of a total loss of communications with the RCBs. Immediately, NAVCENT initiated an intensive search and rescue operation using both air and naval assets including aircraft from USS Harry S. Truman and the U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Coast Guard, U.K. Royal Navy and U.S. Navy surface vessels. At the time of the incident, two carrier strike groups were operating nearby. USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group was 45 miles southeast of Farsi Island and Charles de Gaulle carrier strike group was 40 miles north of Farsi Island. NAVCENT attempted to contact Iranian military units operating near Farsi Island by broadcasting information regarding their search and rescue effort over marine radio, and separately notified Iranian coast guard units via telephone about the search for their personnel. At 6:15 p.m. (GMT), U.S. Navy cruiser USS Anzio received a communication from the Iranians that the RCB Sailors were in Iranian custody and were “safe and healthy.”

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NAVCENT's initial operational reports showed that while in transit from Kuwait to Bahrain the RCBs deviated from their planned course on their way to the refueling. The command investigation will determine what caused the change in course and why the RCBs entered into Iranian territorial waters in the vicinity of Farsi Island.

At some point one RCB had indications of a mechanical issue in a diesel engine which caused the crews to stop the RCBs and begin troubleshooting. As the RCBs travel together, the second RCB also stopped. This stop occurred in Iranian territorial waters, although it's not clear the crew was aware of their exact location. While the RCBs were stopped and the crew was attempting to evaluate the mechanical issue, Iranian boats approached the vessels.

Based upon initial operational reports, the first boats on scene were two small craft with armed personnel on board. Soon after, two more Iranian military vessels arrived on scene also with armed personnel on board.

Initial operational reports indicate there was a verbal exchange between the Sailors and the Iranians but no exchange of gun fire. Armed Iranian military personnel then boarded the RCBs, while other Iranian personnel aboard the Iranian vessels conducted armed over-watch of the boats with mounted machine guns. At gunpoint, the RCBs were escorted to a small port facility on Farsi Island where the U.S. Sailors disembarked and were detained for approximately 15 hours. At this point there are no indications that the Sailors were physically harmed during their detainment. The Navy command investigation will focus on the Sailors' treatment while in Iranian custody, including any interrogation by Iranian personnel. All indications are that the RCB crews were detained by Iranian military personnel operating from Farsi Island.

The Sailors departed Farsi Island at 8:43 a.m. (GMT) Jan. 13, aboard the two RCBs. The Sailors were later transferred ashore by U.S. Navy aircraft from the cruiser USS Anzio and the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman. Other Sailors took charge of the RCBs and continued transiting toward Bahrain, the boats' original destination. The RCBs arrived in Bahrain at 10:38 p.m. (GMT) Jan. 13.

A post-recovery inventory of the boats found that all weapons, ammunition and communication gear are accounted for minus two SIM cards that appear to have been removed from two handheld satellite phones.

The Sailors are in good health and continue to go through the reintegration process. The Navy command investigation continues and more details will be provided when it is completed.