



DEBKAfile
We Start Where the Media Stop | Est. 2000

US Gulf units may not fire on Iranian military without White House say-so

DEBKAfile *Exclusive Report* April 29, 2010, 7:42 PM (GMT+02:00)

Tags: [USS Eisenhower](#) >> [Iranian spy plane](#) >> [Persian Gulf](#) >>



USS Eisenhower carrier

The US Fifth Fleet and US aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower in the Gulf of Oman were not allowed to shoot at an Iranian Fokker F27 aircraft which on April 21 hovered for 20 minutes 900 meters over the carrier and no more than 250 meters away, even though they saw its flight crew gathering intelligence on the Eisenhower and its warship escorts.

DEBKA-Net-Weekly's military sources report that the US Persian Gulf command went public on the incident on April 28, a whole week later, only after Gulf military circles, amazed at the American naval and air units' passivity in the face of hostile surveillance, threatened to break the story to local media.

This striking restraint indicates that the US Gulf and Arabian fleets are under orders to take no action - certainly not to open fire - against Iranian naval or air units, with first obtaining permission directly from Washington.

Military, naval and aviation sources told **DEBKA-Net-Weekly** that the Iranian spy plane was 10 second away from flying directly over the Eisenhower and could easily have been shot down.

To try and explain this incident away, US naval sources Wednesday, April 28, claimed the Iranian plane was unarmed and its encounter with the US carrier was not of a threatening nature, although irregular.

Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations, tried to play down the importance of the incident by saying: "The Iranians (pilots) were not provocative or threatening. As long as they are professional and not threatening or reckless, it's international space."

But officials of the Gulf emirate navies think otherwise. They say it was the first time that an Iranian spy plane ventured so close to an American aircraft carrier and the US non-response will encourage Tehran to go for bolder and more provocative actions.

Of late, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, especially Oman and the United Arab Emirates, have become extra-sensitive of late to the raised US response threshold to threatening moves by Iran, after witnessing the sinking of a South Korean warship and the handling of the case by Washington.

The South Korean Cheonan, a 1,200-ton corvette, was sunk on March 26, apparently by a

Copyright 2000-2010 DEBKAfile. All Rights Reserved. [Terms and Conditions](#).