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WARNING: TOPIC: DOMESTIC POLITICAL, INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL,
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 SERIAL:SER2016011363341520

BODY

COUNTRY: AUSTRALIA, IRAN, MARSHALL ISLANDS, SAUDI
 ARABIA

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SUBJ: (U) AUSTRALIA: IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS RELEASE 10 US sailors detained after straying into territorial wate...

SOURCE: Sydney ABC Online in English 1812 GMT 13

Jan 16 (U)

TEXT:

[INTERNET]

[OSC Transcribed Text]

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[Computer selected and disseminated without OSE editorial intervention] Analysis & Opinion

AUTHOR: PUBDATE: January 14, 2016 04:12:51

(Australia ABC News) - Related Story: Iran dismisses talk of prompt release of US sailors as 'speculation'

Map: Iran, Islamic Republic Of

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps have released 10 American sailors after investigations showed their patrol boats had entered Iranian waters unintentionally.

"It was determined that the detained American Marines did not enter Iranian waters intentionally," state television quoted a Guards statement as saying.

"Following their apology, they have been released to international waters in the Gulf."

The announcement was soon followed by publication of the first images of the detained sailors - nine men and a woman - who were pictured sitting in a room on Persian rugs.

Still images of the two boats were also shown by state television.

The US military said there were no indications that the sailors were harmed while in Iranian custody.

Their release came soon after the commander of the Guards' naval force, Admiral Ali Fadavi, said he was awaiting a final order to set the US sailors free.

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Photo: The type of US Navy riverine command boat apprehended by Iran after allegedly straying into its territorial waters. (AFP: Zane Ecklun/US Navy handout)

The incident in the Gulf came just days away from the expected final implementation of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers led by the US, an accord that will see sanctions on the Islamic republic lifted.

Mr Fadavi said Iran had concluded that "this trespassing was not hostile or for spying purposes" and that the sailors had been in Iranian territory "due to a broken navigation system".

US officials had earlier said one or both of the boats had suffered mechanical problems and been taken to Farsi Island, which lies roughly midway between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards often take a tough approach to perceived and real territorial violations in what it considers the Persian Gulf.

Relations with Washington were strained by US claims last month that Iran fired missiles close to a US aircraft carrier in the Gulf.

Last year, Iranian patrol boats seized the Maersk Tigris, a cargo ship sailing under the Marshall Islands flag, which meant it was under US protection.

Photo: The US military says the Navy sailors were not harmed while in Iranian custody. (Supplied: IRIB News)

AFP

[Description of Source: Sydney ABC Online in English -- Website of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation; URL: <http://www.abc.net.au/>]

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