Japanese Owner of Tanker Contradicts Claims That Mines or Torpedoes Damaged His Ship

Yutaka Katada (shown), owner of the damaged Kokuka Courageous, said that his oil tanker could not have been struck by either mines or torpedoes, since the only damage was above the water-line.

Two different oil tankers were attacked Thursday in the Strait of Hormuz (the only water passage from the Persian Gulf to the Arabia Sea, which carries 20 percent of the world's crude oil through the narrow 21-mile channel), leading to charges by the United States government that the Iranian government had launched the attacks using mines — a charge flatly denied by Iran.

The damage to the two tankers — one owned by a Japanese company, the other owned by a Norwegian company — was *above* the water-line. As a mine would not be floating in air above the water-line, and any torpedo would also strike a target below the water-line, the cause of the damaged vessels was still disputed as of Friday.

The owners of the Norwegian oil tanker offered no public statement as to the cause of the damage to its vessel, but the owner of the Japanese tanker, *Kokuka Courageous*, specifically discounted the possibility that his ship was struck by either mines or torpedoes, noting the only damage was above the water-line.

Company President Yutaka Katada even said on Friday that reports that the *Kokuka Courageous* had been hit by a mine were "false."

His remarks contradicted the assertion of the U.S. military, which claimed the ship was attacked by Iranian forces, even publishing a video as proof, saying it shows Iranians in a small boat alongside the tanker removing an unexploded limpet mine from the *Kokua Courageous*. A limpet mine is magnetic and can be attached to the hull of a ship. The United States accused Iran of carrying out similar attacks last month, damaging four oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.

Katada cited his sailors in saying that the attacks, which happened at sunrise Thursday 25 miles from the Iranian coast, could have been bullets.

The sailors from both tankers were rescued.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo left no doubt that he is accusing Iran of a "blatant" attack on the two tankers. National Security Advisor John Bolton agreed, saying that Iran was "almost certainly" responsible for the attacks. Bolton asked, "Who else would you think is doing it?"

Not the Iranians, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, shot back on Friday, accusing the Trump Administration of pursuing an aggressive war of words against his country. Instead, the Iranian government retorted that the U.S. is pursuing an "economic war and terrorism against the Iranian people," charging that it is the "massive military presence in the region" that has been and continues to be the "main source of insecurity and instability in the wider Persian Gulf region."

The two oil tankers were clearly damaged by something and by someone. Pompeo said that his assertion that it was the Iranians was based on "intelligence." Of course, President Trump, of all people, should be somewhat skeptical of the U.S. "intelligence" community. After all, the U.S. intelligence community universally supported President George Bush's claims that Iraq had massive amounts of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Saddam Hussein, then Iraq's strong man, refused to give up his WMDs, even under threat of invasion by the U.S., and eventually this led to the Iraq War of 2003.

But, after very little in the way of WMDs were found in Iraq in the war's aftermath, several questions were raised, one of which was how could U.S. intelligence have been so wrong? Another question was why did Hussein not just let the U.S. and other countries come in and see for themselves that he had no WMDs? One theory is that he did not want his main enemy — the Iranians — to know that he did not have much of substance in the way of WMDs, as if they thought he had WMDs, it kept them at bay.

Of course, had Hussein remained in power, Iran is unlikely to pose any threat to anyone today.

Yet, Pompeo said he is depending on the "intelligence" community. For that matter, it was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that said in 1978 that the Shah of Iran was very secure in power — and would be for the next 20 years. The next year, the Shah was driven from power in the Iranian Revolution.

One must wonder, what would be the possible motivation of Iran to attack oil tankers, and by doing so, increasing the chances that the United States could strike at them militarily? While war between the U.S. and Iran would be no "walk in the park" for American forces, it is not a war that the Iranians would really want to fight.

Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia has openly encouraged the United States to attack their hated Shi'ite Muslim enemy: Iran. Israel certainly has no love for Iran, which has publicly called for Israel's extermination as a separate nation. All of this is not to say Iran is innocent of causing problems in the Middle East, or that the U.S. government is lying, or that Saudi Arabia or Israel had anything to do with the attacks, but rather to say that before American officials state that it is certain that the Iranians are the culprits, the United States should be saying little publicly. And the American public should retain a healthy dose of skepticism.

History records that is much easier to get into a war than to get out of one, and that the course of a war is rather unpredictable. After the Archduke of Austria was assassinated by a member of the Black Hand terrorist organization in 1914, few could have suspected it would lead to the First World War. French newspapers, for example, gave more coverage to a recent soccer match than the murder of the heir to the throne of far-away Austria — at least at first.

Two American wars — the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Vietnam War — began under similarly suspicious circumstances. The *U.S.S. Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor in 1898, resulting in a war between the U.S. and Spain, which then controlled Cuba. To this day, it is uncertain as to what

happened to the *Maine*, but it is almost universally agreed that the Spanish had nothing to do with it.

Then, an American ship was supposedly attacked by torpedoes fired by a North Vietnamese vessel. It is now conceded that the first "attack" may not have taken place at all, and the second attack was totally concocted. Yet, Congress gave President Lyndon Johnson authorization to use military force in Vietnam (the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution) as a result. Today, a wall on the Mall in Washington, D.C. lists the names of about 58,000 Americans who died in the ensuing American involvement in Vietnam.

With all of this history, Americans should be extremely skeptical of any rush to war in the Middle East over an alleged attack by an admittedly bad regime in Iran. In 1898, much of the American press at the time wanted war with Spain, with their inflammatory slogan of "Remember the Maine."

Today, we should also "Remember the Maine," so as to avoid an emotional rush to war — and also the notorious Gulf of Tonkin Resolution — before we unleash the dogs of war.

We should especially not trust the American "intelligence" community.

Photo of Yutaka Katana: AP Images

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