

## The Lion Has No Teeth

A Lion was strolling through the open woodland when he came upon a herd of Zebra. Puffing up his chest he roared "I'm the king of the jungle". The Zebra immediately scattered in fright. A little further on the lion happened upon a group of Monkeys. "I'm the king of the jungle" he roared and the Monkeys immediately headed for the trees. This flexing of the lion's superior status occurred several times during his meanderings and then along sauntered a Bull Elephant. "I'm the king of the jungle" the Lion roared. The Elephant casually reached forward, picked the Lion up, threw him onto the ground, stamped all over him and then kicked him to one side before resuming his stroll through the countryside. After picking himself up and while dusting himself down, the Lion realised that the other animals were looking at him with a rather questioning gaze. "Well" said the Lion "he just didn't know, did he?!"

It would appear from recent events in the Strait of Hormuz that the Iranian government do not believe that the UK is a king of any kind. Previous incidents such as the taking of 15 Royal Navy (RN) personnel operating from HMS Cornwall on 23rd March 2007 and before that, on 21st June 2004, the capture of 8 RN personnel and their two (RIB) patrol craft, on the Shatt al Arab waterway, reinforce the view that the British Lion really is toothless!

The taking of the British flagged tanker Stena Spiro was of course an easy hit for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The lone British Frigate was too far away to intervene and the merchant vessel was helpless in the face of armed men abseiling aboard from a helicopter hovering above her deck in what was in fact a state sponsored act of piracy. In recent years however the commercial sector have shown how to deter acts of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, which had become common, by embarking on their vessels, for the passage through the affected area, armed response teams. Yes there has been an enhanced naval presence in the area but the real deterrent for the pirate is the knowledge that as he climbs over the side of the ship, he will be looking down the barrel of a gun, held in the hands of a man just itching to use it.

The RN may now lack the frigates and destroyers required to patrol the Strait of Hormuz in any strength but they do have the vessels and personnel required to deter the sort of attack that took the Stena Spiro and before her the attempted taking of the British Heritage. A ship placed at either end of the strait, each containing an enlarged company of Royal Marines and the helicopters required to put groups of them onto British vessels approaching the area and then extracting them once those vessels have passed through the danger zone, will ensure that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard are aware that a future action against a UK registered vessel will not be so easy. The RN already has one eminently suitable unit in theatre in the form of RFA Cardigan Bay. RFA Wave Knight is due to arrive in a week or so and she also has the helicopter handling facilities and accommodation required to become what in effect will be a gate guardian. The parties put aboard the transiting vessels will of course have to be suitably armed with shoulder launched missiles that can destroy helicopters and small boats, heavy machine guns as well as their personal weapons and with robust rules of engagement that will allow them to shoot any person trying to force a boarding and fire at any craft, be it boat or aircraft that acts in a hostile manner. Video footage of all engagements can be taken to verify the justice of the action when the inevitable claims of foul play follow an engagement. However, the overriding quality that is required to make this work is the political will to use the capability. The military capability is worth nothing if our political masters do not have the courage to use it.

If nothing is done soon to show that this country does have some teeth together with the strength and the will to use them, all of the other governments in the region will realise that the British Lion is in fact a Lamb.

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