

**Headquarters (Multi National Division) South East
British Forces Post Office 641**

PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE

Telephone 00870 600 322 756

00870763 665 814

Mobile: 00965 9113350

Email: picbasrah@defencemediaops.co.uk

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COALITION FORCES DEAL MAJOR BLOW TO OIL SMUGGLERS

Coalition forces operating in southern Iraq have seized a 1,100 oil tanker in the Arabian Gulf.

The ship – the *Navstar* - has docked today in the port of Umm Qasr, and the crew are now under arrest by Iraqi authorities.

On Friday night (August 8) HMS *Sutherland* sent a team of Royal Marines to board the MV *Navstar I*. This followed three previous boardings of the vessel in international waters in the northern Arabian Gulf.

The *Navstar* had been under surveillance for several days and had been seen receiving small fuel barges alongside on many occasions. This boarding was the result of a co-ordinated Coalition effort and by 10.30 pm on Friday, the *Sutherland*'s team had secured the vessel and arrested the crew with the intention to detain them for further investigation.

A Coalition Forces spokesman said: "This is a significant find which demonstrates the effectiveness of our ability to detect and deal with oil smuggling. We have activities taking place across Iraq, on land and at sea, which are proving effective week after week."

The ship was initially handed over to a US Navy crew from the USS *Rodney M Davies*. The ship was ordered to sail to Umm Qasr and docked there this morning (August 11).

The crew are now being handed over to the Iraqi authorities who will arrest and detain them for further investigation. If convicted, the ship will be forfeited and the crew will serve a lengthy term in prison. The oil will be returned to the people of Iraq.

This haul sends a significant message to the people of Iraq that it is a priority of the coalition forces to deter and catch oil smugglers.

The government has run smuggling operations since 1991

Facts about the ship *Navstar*

- Iraq suffers loss of 2,000 – 2,500 tonnes of oil per day
- Value of this seizure is \$200,000, gaining profit \$36,000
- 1,100 tonnes of oil equals 1m litres or 200,000 tanks of petrol
- Market value of the haul up to \$320,000
- In context, average wage of Iraqi worker is \$2-4 a day
- This haul is equivalent to 80 road tankers

Lt Cdr Richard Walters
PIC Basrah