

Phantom jet riddle

AMERICAN officials are now almost sure that the Iranian warplane which appeared to threaten American aircraft over the Gulf a week ago did

not exist *writes Simon Hoggart.*

A US navy F-14 fighter fired two missiles at the apparent intruder. Last week, news of the incident heightened tension because it was, apparently, the first attempted direct Iranian attack on US forces since they began to operate in the Gulf. The incident has still not been officially confirmed in Washington.

Pentagon experts are now examining videotapes of the F-14's radar images. But they

think that the blip on the radar might have been caused by extraordinary atmospheric conditions over the Gulf. This led the pilot to think the 'phantom' plane was following and preparing to attack a slower P3 surveillance plane.

This explanation would clear up two mysteries: the way that the Iranian 'plane' appeared to ignore all the American pilot's warnings, and why it could not be seen with the naked eye even when the radar suggested that it ought to be easily seen.

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