

PERSIAN GULF
WAR

JENNINGS: There was a significant escalation in the Persian Gulf war today. Saudi Arabian jets guided by and refueled by U.S. Air Force planes shot down two jets approaching the Saudi coast. As our Pentagon correspondent John McWethy reports, American officials believe the two that were shot down were from Iran.

MCWETHY: An American AWACS early warning planes monitored several F-4 fighters taking off from Iran's Bushehr air base earlier today. The Iranian F-4s then headed across the Persian Gulf. Americans aboard the AWACS plane told the Saudi Air Force that Iran's fighters were coming and provided location, heading and airspeed. The Saudis did the rest, including making a firm decision to attack. U.S. officials claim that Saudi F-15s tracked the Iranian planes and shot down two of them near an island claimed by the Saudis in the middle of the gulf. American sources say Saudi pilots never actually saw what they were shooting at, but fired their Sidewinder missiles from beyond visual range. After the two Iranian planes were shot down, Iran scrambled nearly a dozen other combat aircraft. Saudi Arabia then did the same. According to an Arab diplomatic source, before opposing aircraft got within range Iran ordered its planes home. U.S. intelligence sources are not sure if the Iranian F-4s were trying to attack a tanker, a land target or were simply probing Saudi air defenses. In Washington, Saudi ambassador Prince Bandar. BANDAR\BIN\SULTAN : Saudi Arabia does not wish to be dragged into the war in the gulf. However, we will continue to defend our territorial integrity.

MCWETHY: Today's incident in the gulf comes just as the U.S. are putting new AWACS early warning planes into Saudi Arabia. The four there now are being replaced with planes that can not only monitor aircraft, but also, for the first time, ships at sea. This will give the U.S. and the Saudis a complete picture of everything moving, above the gulf and on its surface, thus providing an even closer scrutiny of the widening war. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.