

News story: Royal Navy leads international efforts to seize drugs worth £400M

The UK and France commanded a multinational naval task force which has scored eight drugs busts over the period, seizing 1.75 tonnes of narcotics worth nearly £400m, including 265kg of heroin and 455kg of hashish worth £65m by the Royal Navy Type 23 frigate, HMS Monmouth.

Since April, British, French, US and Australian warships in Combined Task Force 150 (CTF150) took part in Operation Southern Surge to counter narcotics trafficking, which funds terrorism in the region, scoring eight drugs busts.

The naval task force polices more than three million square miles of sea in order to track down vessels smuggling drugs and weapons, as well as providing reassurance to ships using the international waters. The multinational coalition is also focused on deterring and denying maritime terrorist activity in the region, which includes some of the world's most vital trade routes such as the Suez Canal and Bab Al Mandeb Strait. The headquarters of CTF150 has been made up of 24 British and French sailors and commanded by French Rear Admiral Olivier Lebas.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

The success of this joint task force with our French allies is a demonstration of Britain's firm commitment to global maritime security and our ability to work with European allies to tackle the threat from drug smuggling.

The money made from these nefarious criminal activities fund the terrorists who threaten us at home and abroad. As we leave the EU we will continue to work alongside our allies to tackle smuggling in the region and maintain the free flow of shipping.

Deputy Commander Combined Task Force 150, Royal Navy Captain Paul Pitcher, said:

The deployment of a combined French-UK staff has successfully demonstrated French-UK naval integration in an operational maritime environment. The ships under our command have enjoyed considerable success in seizing illegal drugs at sea, as well as providing naval presence to reassure the shipping community in and around the strategic chokepoint of the Bab Al Mandeb Strait.

The Franco-British team has been directing operations since April after taking over from the Canadian Navy, and has just passed on command to the Pakistan Navy. Navies from the Combined Maritime Forces, a coalition of 31 nations, take it in turns to lead the task force either from a command ship or the headquarters in Bahrain.

The Combined Task Force joint command is the latest in a series of shared commitments undertaken by the UK and France, demonstrating the enduring closeness of the two nations' defence relationship.

Earlier this year, around 60 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel joined a French naval deployment to the Indian Ocean and Far East, while British and French forces routinely operate together as allies in the Global Coalition and NATO. This year, France is also contributing to the ongoing UK-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence deployment to Estonia.