

UK joins international maritime security mission in the Gulf

The United Kingdom has reaffirmed its commitment to freedom of navigation and safe passage through the Gulf by playing a leading role in a new international maritime security mission, announced today. The mission will see the Royal Navy working alongside the US navy to assure the security of merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

Events in the Gulf over the last four months, including attacks on four tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and the illegal seizure of the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero, have seen the threat to commercial shipping rise. The Strait of Hormuz is the busiest narrow shipping passage in the world and a vital transit zone with 20% of the world's oil passing through it every year.

Following constructive discussions at an international conference in Bahrain last week (31st July), the UK has agreed to join an international mission which will largely draw on assets already in the region to increase inter-state maritime cooperation. The UK has also offered to lead one of the mission's Maritime Task Groups.

While exact operational details are being determined, the mission is intended to improve coordination between different countries' militaries and commercial shipping. Both the UK and US are committed to working with allies and partners to encourage others to join and broaden the response to this truly international problem.

The UK has dedicated to doing all it can do defend freedom of navigation, which is crucial for the global trading system and world economy. This new coordinated effort will bolster the work the UK has already being undertaking to this end, including through HMS Duncan and HMS Montrose accompanying UK-flagged ships. At the same time, the Government remains committed to working with Iran to reduce the current tensions and to the Iranian nuclear deal as the best means of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK is determined to ensure her shipping is protected from unlawful threats and for that reason we have today joined the new maritime security mission in the Gulf.

Upholding international maritime law and freedom of passage is in all our interests. We are seeing, across our seas and oceans, too many incidents that seek to challenge such freedoms. The UK is proud to be partnering with other members of the international community to uphold the rules based approach. The deployment of

Royal Navy assets is a sign of our commitment to our UK flagged vessels and we look forward to working alongside the US and others to find an international solution to the problems in the Strait of Hormuz.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

It is vital to secure the freedom for all international shipping to navigate the Strait of Hormuz without delay, given the increased threat. This deployment will reinforce security and provide reassurance for shipping. Our aim is to build the broadest international support to uphold freedom of navigation in the region, as protected under international law.

Our approach to Iran hasn't changed. We remain committed to working with Iran and our international partners to de-escalate the situation and maintain the nuclear deal.