



By: TA | AP Insight

Britain's navy prepares to clear mines in the Strait of Hormuz



Aboard the RFA Lyme Bay docked off the coast of Gibraltar, hundreds of British sailors are waiting to be deployed for a mine-clearing mission to the Strait of Hormuz that is still in doubt.

U.S. President Donald Trump has lashed out at allies for not doing more to support the United States' war effort in Iran, whose **chokehold on the strait** has crippled international shipping and sent energy prices soaring.

In March, Trump told NATO allies to **“go get your own oil”** and secure the strait themselves.

On the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, in the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar, the U.K.'s Royal Navy is preparing to do that — but only once a **peace agreement** is reached.

Trump said Saturday that a deal with Iran has been **“largely negotiated”** after calls with Israel and other allies in the region, but it still needs finalizing.

Britain's Armed Forces Minister Al Carns took a small group of reporters to visit the RFA Lyme Bay as it prepares for a possible international operation, led by the U.K. and France, to secure the strait.

As Carns spoke, the amphibious landing vessel, docked at the gateway to the Mediterranean, was being loaded with ammunition and mine-hunting sea drones equipped with sonar.

With a crew of several hundred sailors, the RFA Lyme Bay will soon depart Gibraltar to link up with the U.K. destroyer HMS Dragon and allied ships for air support before sailing through the Suez Canal to the Persian Gulf.

“Which other country can pull together 40 nations and come up with a solution to deal with a complex problem that we couldn't predict because we weren't involved?” asked Carns, responding to a question from The Associated Press about what Trump wants from his British ally.

After the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Feb. 28, Tehran retaliated by effectively closing

the strait, a key waterway for the region's oil, natural gas and fertilizer, causing global economic pain.

The U.K. in particular has drawn the ire of Trump, who has described **Britain's navy as “toys”** and Prime Minister Keir Starmer as “not Winston Churchill.”

At least 6,000 ships have been blocked from passing through the strait since the conflict began, Carns said.

There could be a range of threats from Iran's mines

Iran could have a “huge” variety of mines throughout strait, said Cmdr. Gemma Britton, who is in charge of the Royal Navy's Mine and Threat Exploitation Group.

Mines could be rocket-propelled, cabled or sit on the seabed and be triggered by sound, movement or light.

AP was shown autonomous systems that can scan the seabed and the water with sonar in about half the time it takes for a crewed vessel to enter and map potential dangers.

The sea drones equipped with sonar produce a picture of objects under the water, from fishing traps to pipelines. The picture is used to identify mines that can be explored with advanced acoustic systems and cameras, Britton said.

Some of the systems on the RFA Lyme Bay can be loaded onto a smaller vessel that can be launched and piloted autonomously from the ship, which acts as a mother ship, waiting outside any potential minefield, Britton said. That reduces the number of people needed to enter, she said.

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Once a mine has been located, a diver with explosives normally places a charge on the mine before swimming away to detonate it.

But RFA Lyme Bay is trialing a remotely operated vehicle that dives and drops a charge by a mine before setting it off, Britton said.

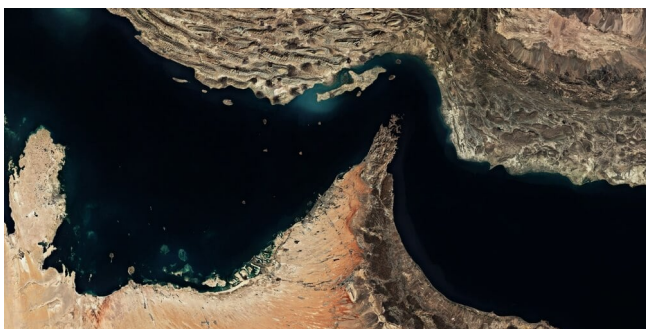
The priority, she said, will be to clear a transit lane in the strait to allow around 700 ships to leave.

A lane flowing in the opposite direction will then be cleared, allowing ships to enter, she said, but added that clearing the entire strait could take months or years.

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It's still not clear if any **mines are in the strait** – or if the U.K. and its allies will be deploying to remove them.

A U.S. official speaking on condition on anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters told the AP that the U.S. has not found or destroyed any mines in the strait, nor have any ships been damaged.



Commercial traffic has quietly continued to flow, though at a much lower volume than before the conflict - Strait of Hormuz

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When asked by the AP if the British effort was partly for show, to curry favor with the U.S., Carns said he was sure some mines had been blown up or floated away but that assurance is

not good enough for commercial insurance companies. He said those companies need “absolute certainty” to get vessels traveling through the strait again.

“That’s what this capability will provide,” he said.

The international effort to secure the strait would happen only once hostilities are over.

“Final aspects and details of the Deal are currently being discussed, and will be announced shortly,” Trump said Saturday on social media, with no details on timing.

This is not the first time in recent weeks that a deal has been described as close.

“We don’t know when the Americans, Iranians and Israelis are going to come up with a suitable solution,” Carns said.

In the meantime, the RFA Lyme Bay and its crew will be waiting and will be “really, really ready,” Carns said.