

UK: Tory government positions itself as most loyal US ally against Iran

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Britain intends to send special forces to the Gulf of Oman. Their stated mission is to protect UK warships amid rising tensions between the US and Iran. But politically their role will be to help consolidate the Conservative government's position as the premier ally of the Trump administration, which is considered essential amid the escalating crisis over Britain's exiting the European Union.

One hundred Royal Marines will be deployed within weeks, where they will join naval ships operating from a new UK naval base in Bahrain.

The plan was reported by the *Sunday Times*, which wrote, "Military sources said that 100 marines from 42 Commando, based near Plymouth, will form a rapid reaction force, Special Purpose Task Group 19." The *Times* cited Defence Minister Tobias Ellwood telling Sky's "Ridge on Sunday": "We have a substantial presence in the Middle East that looks after our interests there ... We will be working with the United States to make sure this area is safe and to make sure that we actually deescalate the tensions there. But I don't think Iran should be under any doubt [about] that fact that we will be determined to protect our assets and our interests in the region."

The Royal Marines will operate from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Ship Cardigan Bay, using speedboats and helicopters. The *Times* lists the Royal Navy's other ships in the region as HMS Montrose, a Type 23 frigate, and four minesweepers in the Gulf.

In May, two Special Boat Service teams joined UK-registered oil tankers transiting in the Persian Gulf south through the Strait of Hormuz, tasked with monitoring Iranian naval gunboats operating through the Strait of Hormuz and into the Gulf of Oman.

The deployment follows the UK foreign office (FCO) positioning London as only the second capital after the US to state that it was "almost certain" in its own

assessment that "a branch of the Iranian military ... attacked the two tankers on 13 June."

"No other state or non-state actor could plausibly have been responsible," it added.

Foreign Secretary and Tory leadership contender Jeremy Hunt said the attacks built on "a pattern of destabilising Iranian behaviour and pose a serious danger to the region."

"We call on Iran urgently to cease all forms of destabilising activity," he added, also joining with the US in blaming Iran for attacks last month on four oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.

This contrasts with near universal scepticism expressed towards the US assertion that grainy footage showed Iranian forces removing a limpet mine from one of the two stricken oil tankers, with Trump declaring, "I guess one of the mines didn't explode and it's probably got essentially Iran written all over it."

The UK's professions of loyalty morphed into a concerted attack on Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, after he tweeted Saturday, "Britain should act to ease tensions in the Gulf, not fuel a military escalation that began with US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement."

"Without credible evidence about the tanker attacks, the government's rhetoric will only increase the threat of war."

Speaking on the BBC's "Andrew Marr Show," Hunt said Corbyn's comments showed Labour was "in the grip of virulent anti-Americanism ... For Jeremy Corbyn it's all America's fault. And this is the same man by the way who refused to condemn [Russian President Vladimir] Putin after the Salisbury Novichok attacks."

Other Tory leadership contenders joined the fray, with frontrunner and former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson stating that Corbyn's statements "set new records for bad judgment by seeming to take the side against our number-

one ally, the United States of America, in favour of the Iran Revolutionary Guard of Tehran.”

Michael Gove said Corbyn “is not fit to be trusted with our national security,” while Home Secretary Sajid Javid said, “Never mind whether he’s qualified to be PM of our great country—based on his past associations alone, Corbyn wouldn’t even qualify for a Home Office building pass.”

The venom directed against Corbyn’s tweet reflects firstly a response to the fact that the pro-Trump position of the government doesn’t have anything like majority support even within the ruling class—where fears over the economic impact of Brexit mix with concern that Washington’s war drive is cutting across British imperialist interests in Europe, the Gulf and regarding trade with China.

Concern over following the US lead is naturally expressed by the liberal press, such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, but the *Financial Times* wrote of how “Trump’s ‘maximum pressure’ Iran strategy stokes war fears.”

It listed numerous critics of Trump’s policy from thinktanks and former defence and security personnel as a means of assembling its own case against military confrontation with Iran.

Those cited included Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group; William Burns, head of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who served as deputy secretary of state during the Obama administration; Suzanne Maloney, an Iran expert at the Brookings Institution; and William Fallon, a retired admiral who headed US Central Command during the Bush administration, who complained that Trump has no strategy for dealing with Iran.

The newspaper also quotes Anthony Zinni, another former head of Central Command, who recently served as an envoy for the Trump administration and says, “When I took over Central Command, my biggest worry was that the IRGC navy would bump our ships ... It just takes one US navy captain to say that’s too much of a threat and to open up and it escalates from there.”

More striking still is the publication by the ferociously pro-Tory *Spectator* of an article by Melanie McDonagh, declaring, “Jeremy Corbyn’s right about Iran, isn’t he?” and denouncing Hunt. There is “no credible evidence so far that Iran definitely carried out the attacks,” she wrote. “The notion that we should always believe that the US is right in its intelligence judgments is downright alarming, and only forgivable for individuals who are too young to

remember those grainy black and white photos that Colin Powell (remember him?) used to justify claims of Saddam’s WMD [weapons of mass destruction] programme, and hence the war against Iraq.”

Secondly, references to Iraq point to another unstated fear in ruling circles—the unleashing of popular antiwar sentiment in the working class at a time of an acute crisis of rule for the British bourgeoisie and deep social antagonisms produced by a decade of austerity measures.

However, anyone who believes that Corbyn will give leadership to such a movement is mistaken. He speaks as always, regarding an antiwar stance, as an “honest individual.”

Former *Daily Telegraph* political commentator Peter Osborne describes his as a “brave and lonely stand.” This is a political fraud. Corbyn is “lonely” only because he heads a parliamentary party that is pro-war to its boots and he is too politically cowardly to oppose his own warmongering MPs by mobilising Labour’s membership and appealing more broadly to the working class.

After Corbyn made his tweet, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry, while dutifully referencing the “dreadful mistake” of the Iraq war and urging caution, told the BBC’s “Today” programme, “I listened very carefully to what Jeremy Hunt said yesterday and he said that we will make our own independent assessment for that, we have processes for doing that and that absolutely has to be right.”

She continued, “There may be an argument that the Iranians might take the view that if the West is going to block their sales of oil, then they will disrupt our oil sales. I understand that, I understand the arguments and as I’ve said three or four times now, so long as there is independent evidence of that, then we need to move on.”



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