



Commanding a Warship

BEYOND
THE
PODIUM
ENRICHMENT SERIES

With
Rear Admiral (Retired)
Simon Hardern

The Joys ... Challenges ... and Honour





Commanding a Warship



Introduction to the Role



A Commanding Officer leads a warship through peace and conflict, ensuring operational readiness and decisive action when called for

They must possess unrivaled expertise in ship operations, advocate for crew welfare and champion continuous learning

Their role demands principled decision-making, ethical conduct and mastery of combat and vessel systems to maximise performance and safety





The Joy of Command



In Words

To be a Captain is to be a King/Queen in a world where the laws of the land are replaced by the laws of the sea

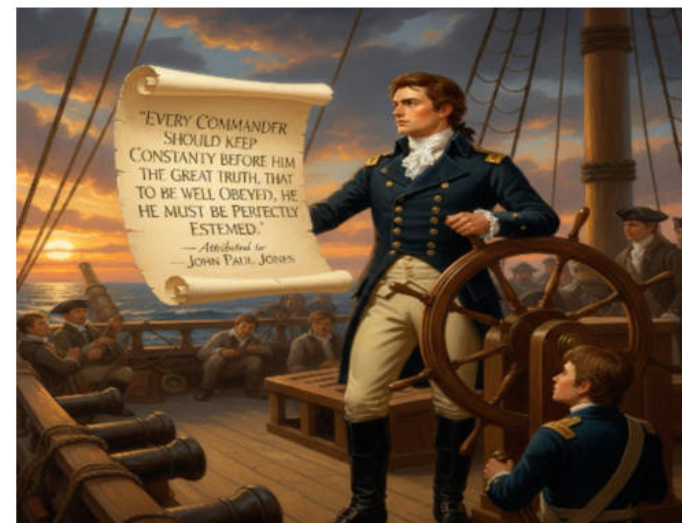


The Captain's joy is not found in the ease of the voyage, but in the silence of the Bridge at night, knowing that his crew sleeps soundly because he is awake

Admiral Arleigh Burke USN
Chief of Naval Operations, 1955-1961

It is by no means enough that an officer of the Navy should be a capable mariner. He must be that, of course, but also a great deal more. Every commander should keep constantly before him the great truth, that to be well obeyed he must be perfectly esteemed

Attributed to John Paul Jones
Often called the Father of the US Navy (and developing its Fighting Spirit)





The Joy of Command



HMS WALNEY - Mine Hunter Aged 30





**In Command -
It Does Not Get Better Than This**



**HMS KENT - A Different Beast
Aged 34**





What Does a Commanding Officer Do?



Can be Difficult to Explain



Lead in all Conditions

Guiding the ship through both peace and conflict



Have Unrivaled Ship Expertise

Possessing intimate knowledge of the vessel to maximise performance



Be Master of Crew and Fighting Capability

Keeping the ship and crew safe but, as important, fight the ship against all threats



Cultivate Growth and Knowledge

Championing continuous learning of Ship's Company



Be Visible

A calm, consistent presence builds trust long before any words are spoken



Uphold Integrity and Demonstrate Duty

Making principled decisions and demonstrating unwavering commitment to the mission







Ship's Specifications



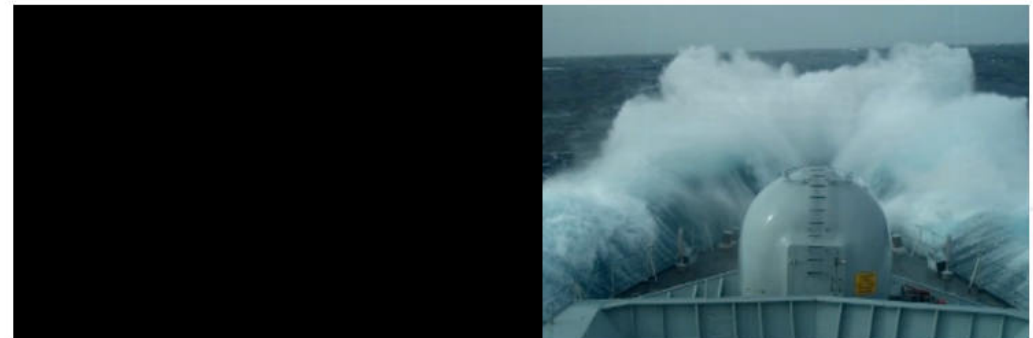
Big ... but Small Compared to the CA



Propulsion: Combined Diesel Electric and Gas Turbine (19 MW/26,000 BHP)
(CA 55 MW/75,000 BHP)

Speed: Declared top speed - 30 kts (c35 mph)(CA 22 kts/c26 mph)

Displacement: 6,000 tonnes (CA 130,800 tonnes)





Ship's Specifications



Ship Silhouette Comparisons



HMS Kent | Length: 133m

Celebrity Apex | Length: 306m

HMS Queen Elizabeth | Length: 280m



Ship's Specifications



Size for Context





Ship's Armament



Multi-Purpose

(1) 4.5" Long Range Gun



(1) Helicopter



(2) Torpedo
Launch
Systems



Towed
Array



(2) 30 mm Close Range
Automated Canons



(8) Harpoon
Anti-Ship Missiles



(32) Sea Wolf
Anti-Air Missiles





Class History



Design Philosophy

Guardians of the North Atlantic Hunting Soviet Submarines



Primarily a general-purpose vessels designed to excel in the vital role of anti-submarine warfare, particularly to patrol the Greenland-Iceland-Faeroes-Norway gap, specifically to track and hunt Russian nuclear submarines



Sustained Deployment Capability

Engineered for extended missions, capable of operating independently for 60 days or more



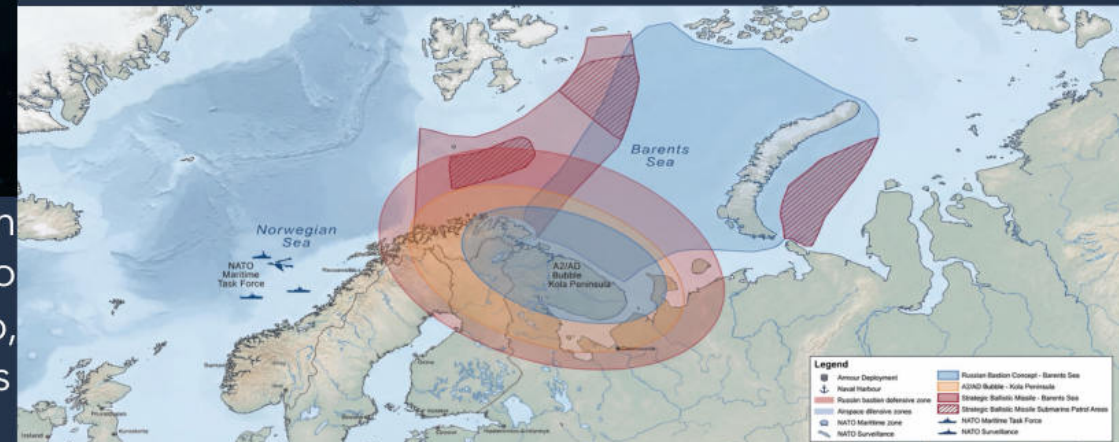
Focused Anti-Submarine Capability

Sensors and weapons focused on countering the submarine threat but with anti-air defence and anti-surface attack capabilities



Cost-Effective Manning

Employ a small Ship's Company, leveraging contractor support for enhanced operation efficiency





Ship's Company

Small

Total - 175

- 15 Officers

(in addition to Padre and Doctor for Deployment)

- 47 Senior Rates

- 110 Junior Rates

- 3 Civilians (2 Laundry Men/Canteen-Shop Manager)

(CA has c2,900 Guests

CA 1,300 Crew)





Six Ship Departments



Helping the Commanding Officer



Executive

Second-in-Command and Regulating Staff. Oversees the vessel's overall mission and daily operations as well as short, medium and long-term programme planning



Warfare

Mans the ship's offensive and defensive combat systems



Marine Engineering

Ensures the peak performance of propulsion and critical machinery



Weapon Engineering

Maintains the sophisticated weapons and sensors technology



Logistics

Guarantees all the stores, supplies, and catering meet needs



Medical

Ensures the health and wellbeing of Ship's Company





Each Person is Important

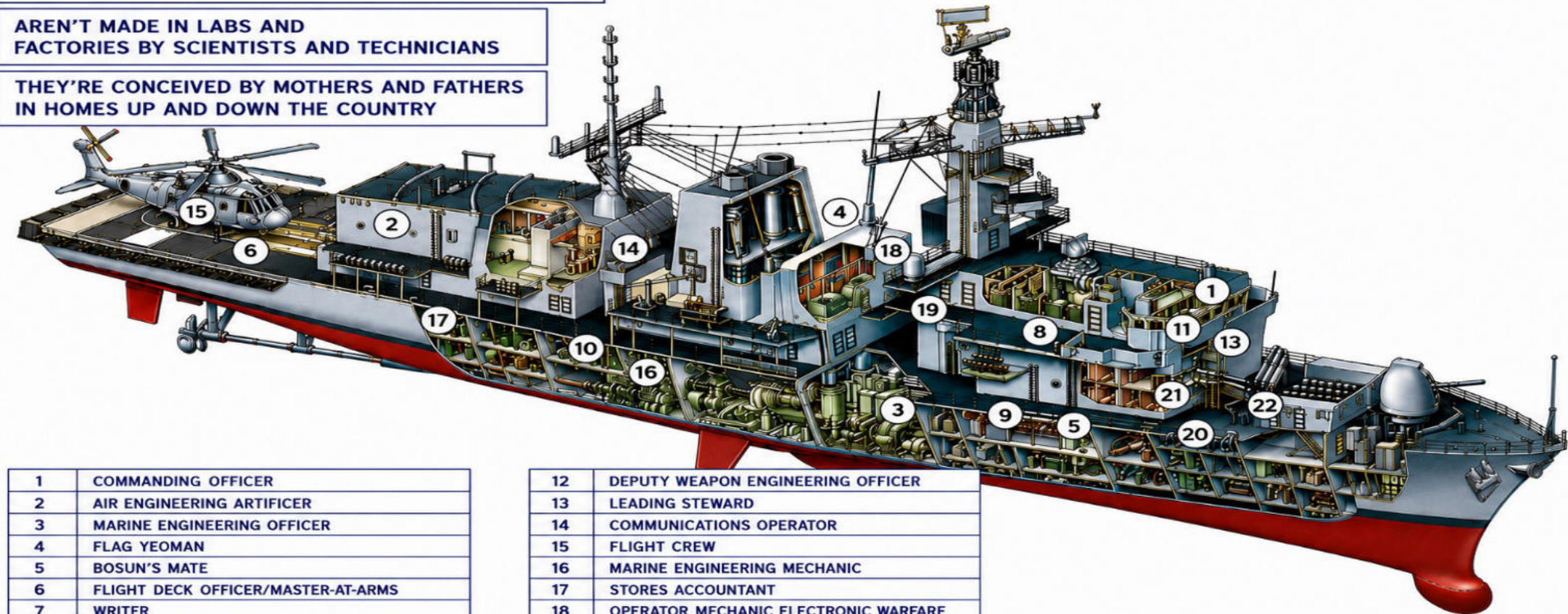


'The Team Works'

VITAL COMPONENTS OF THE TYPE 23 FRIGATE

AREN'T MADE IN LABS AND
FACORIES BY SCIENTISTS AND TECHNICIANS

THEY'RE CONCEIVED BY MOTHERS AND FATHERS
IN HOMES UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY



1	COMMANDING OFFICER
2	AIR ENGINEERING ARTIFICER
3	MARINE ENGINEERING OFFICER
4	FLAG YEOMAN
5	BOSUN'S MATE
6	FLIGHT DECK OFFICER/MASTER-AT-ARMS
7	WRITER
8	OPERATIONS OFFICER
9	OPERATIONS ROOM MANAGER
10	MARINE ENGINEERING ARTIFICER
11	OFFICER OF THE WATCH

12	DEPUTY WEAPON ENGINEERING OFFICER
13	LEADING STEWARD
14	COMMUNICATIONS OPERATOR
15	FLIGHT CREW
16	MARINE ENGINEERING MECHANIC
17	STORES ACCOUNTANT
18	OPERATOR MECHANIC ELECTRONIC WARFARE
19	WEAPON ENGINEERING MECHANIC
20	OFFICER UNDER TRAINING
21	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
22	OPERATOR MECHANIC ABOVE WATER



ROYAL NAVY

T H E T E A M W O R K S





Command and Control



Action Station - The Ops Room ... Where it All Happens





Command and Control



A Difficult Concept made Simpler





Command and Control



Weapons Free - Command Approved Hard Power

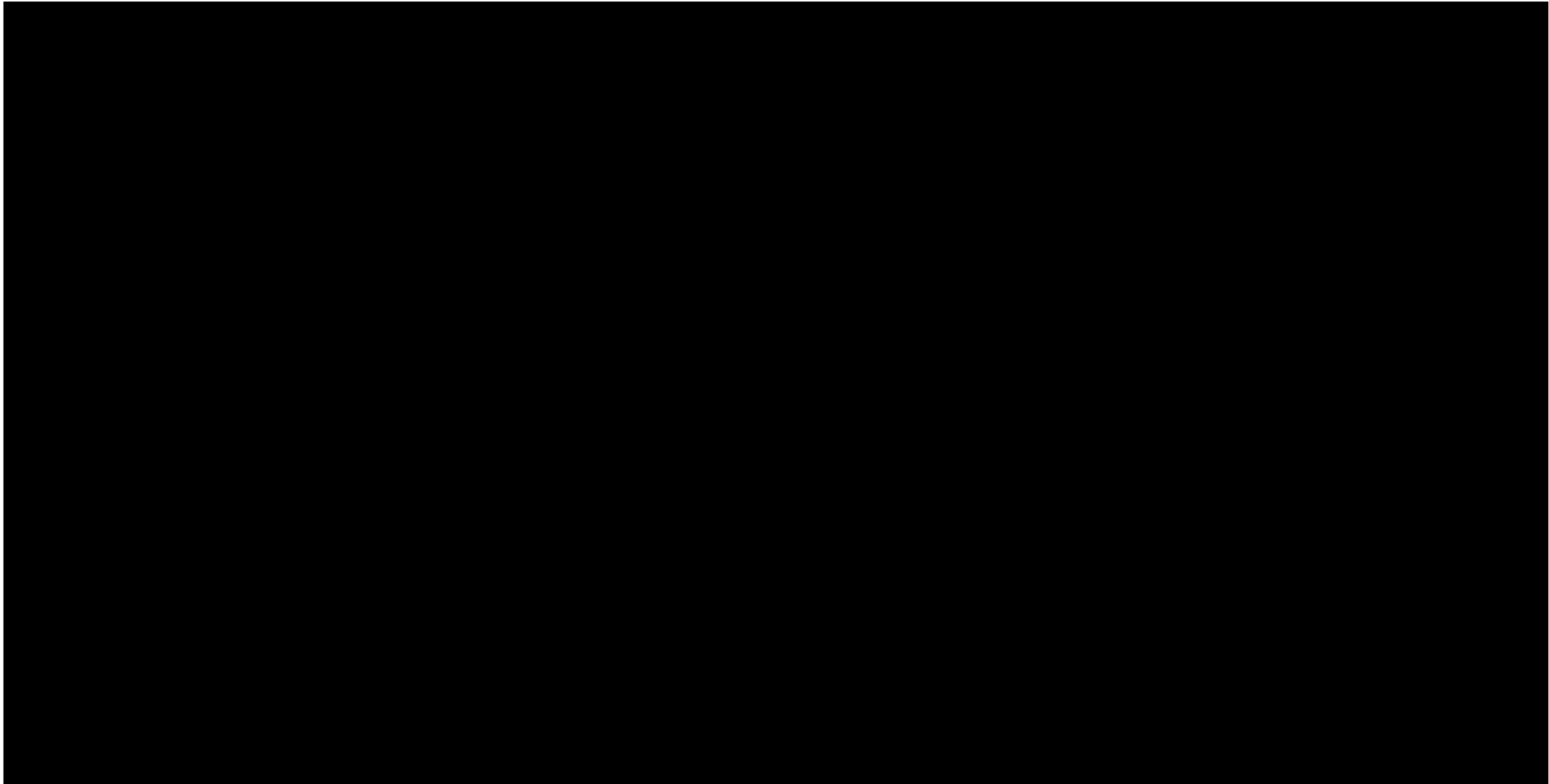




Pre-Deployment Training - Train as You Mean to Fight



Flag Officer Sea Training - Off Plymouth





The Art of Command Fight, Move, Float



Try to Make it Look Easy





Now Ready for Operations



Our Tasks and Employment

Conducting Reconnaissance and Targeting or 'Maritime Interdiction'





Op ENDURING FREEDOM



The Joint Operations Area





Op ENDURING FREEDOM



Defence Diplomacy - 'Soft' Power



Courtesy port visits and information exchange with national and local government authorities - hosting receptions/dinners



Military assistance and aid to civil powers in the event of natural disasters (hurricanes, other natural disasters, charity support. etc)



Training for and with foreign military units to help improve operational capabilities and develop interoperability



Multi-national foreign navy planned exercises to fly the flag and deepen interoperability

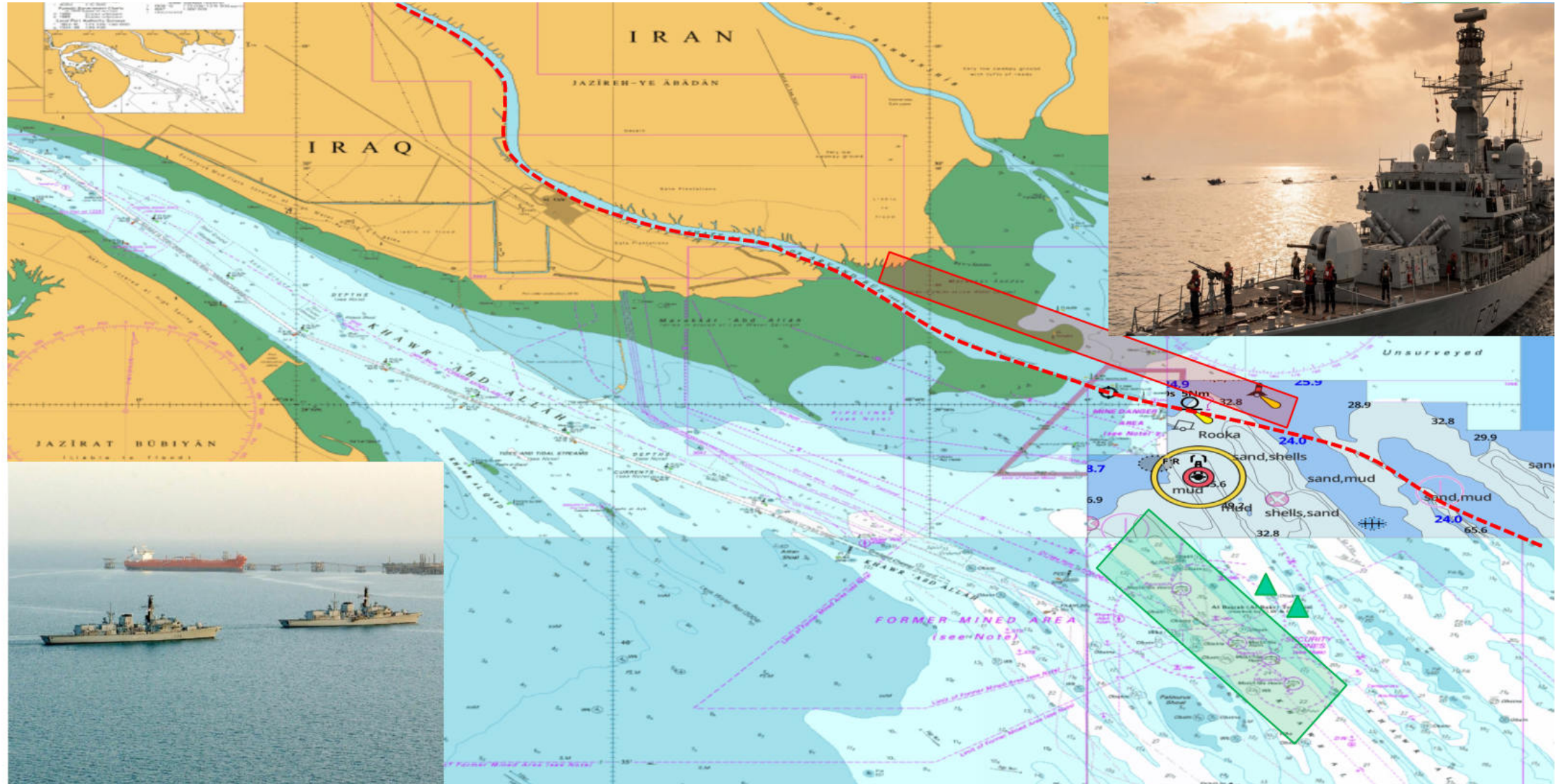




Operational Capability



Protecting Iraqi Oil Terminals





Operational Capability



Illegal Cargo Seizure





Operational Capability



Support to the CIA





Operational Capability



Strait of Hormuz Transit

The Chokepoint

21 miles wide at its narrowest. Shipping lanes just 2 miles wide in each direction. ~21 million barrels of oil per day (20% of global supply) and 20% of global LNG exports normally transit the strait

Current Situation (August 2026)

Following the start of Op EPIC FURY (28 Feb), IRGC declared the Strait closed and threatened all vessels. Tanker traffic dropped from 153 transits/day to near zero and now about 50-75. Multiple vessels struck by drones/projectiles. Ship insurance had been withdrawn; Strait declared a high-risk zone with crew right of refusal

Electronic Warfare

Thousands of vessels hit by GPS interference within 24 hrs of escalation. Iran using coordinated jamming/spoofing as area denial alongside kinetic drone strikes

Threat Picture

- IRGC fast attack craft, drones, and coastal ASMs
- GPS jamming/spoofing from Bandar Abbas
- VHF warnings to all transiting vessels
- Selective enforcement (Chinese, Indian and some other vessels have been given passage)

CO Considerations

- Passage cannot be legally suspended, but de facto closure is in effect (while Iran has signed UNCLOS, it has not ratified the treaty. However, the right of free navigation through international straits is universally upheld as customary international law)
- Coordinate movement with Military Authorities
- Eastbound: transit close to Omani territorial waters
- Elevated readiness essential
- Prepare for GPS denial

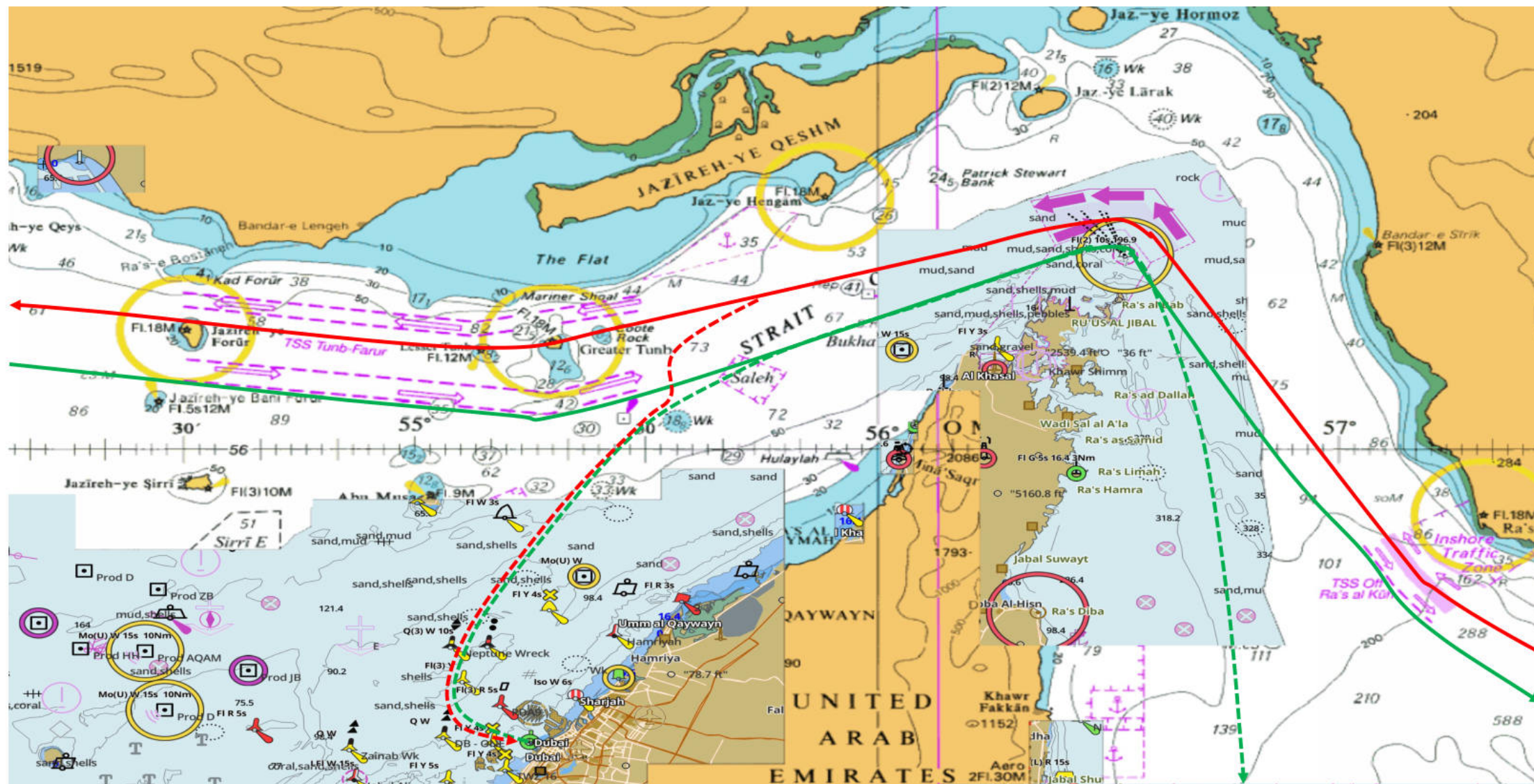




Strait of Hormuz Transit



Navigational Safe Passage

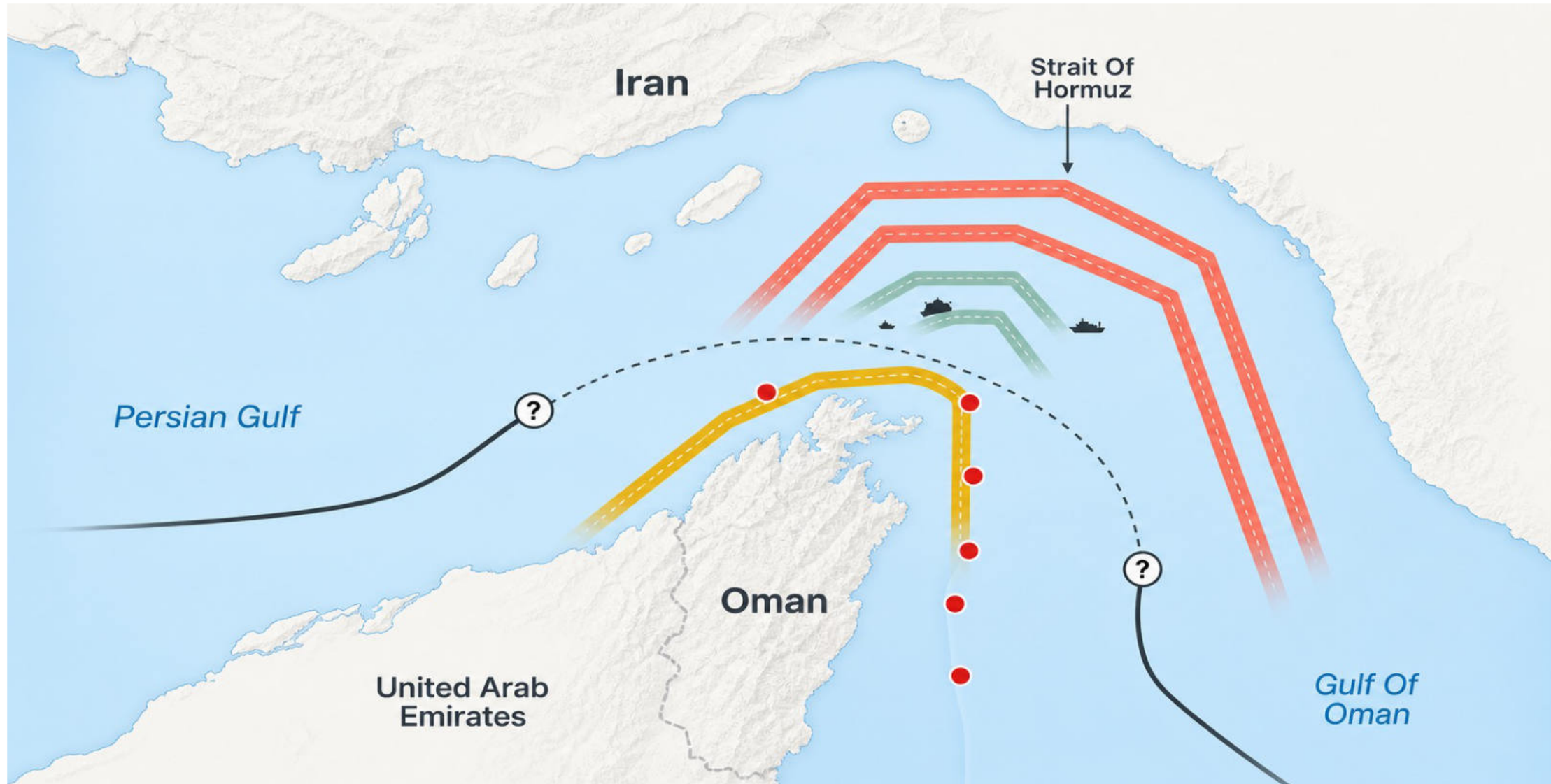




Strait of Hormuz Transit



Current Situation





Strait of Hormuz Transit



The Situation Then



Up to 6,000 Mines



Up to 23 North Korean Mini-Submarines



Up to 5,000 Boghammers/Speedboats





Strait of Hormuz Transit



Possible Future Situation





Operational Capability



Replenishment at Sea



Replenishment at sea is a vital capability for the Royal Navy. It allows ships to stay at sea for extended periods without needing to return to port. This is essential for maintaining operational readiness and projecting power around the world





Operational Capability



Replenishment at Sea - Problems



Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG 64) prepares to steam alongside Supply-class fast combat support ship USNS Supply (T-AOE 6) and San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS Fort Lauderdale (LPD 28), in the Caribbean Sea, Jan. 29, 2026. U.S. Navy Photo

Navy Collision During Replenishment Draws Attention to Complex At-Sea Operations

Mike Schuler

Total Views: 64

February 12, 2026

The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Truxtun (DDG-103) and the fast combat support ship USNS Supply (T-AOE-6) collided during a replenishment-at-sea operation in the Caribbean on Tuesday afternoon, according to U.S. Southern Command.

Two personnel sustained minor injuries and are reported to be in stable condition. Both vessels were able to continue sailing following the incident, which remains under investigation.

The collision occurred just over a week after Truxtun departed Naval Station Norfolk on February 3 for a scheduled deployment. The destroyer carries a crew of roughly 300 sailors, along with 26 embarked air wing personnel assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 50, known as the "Valkyries."





RMS Queen Elizabeth 2

**Falklands War -
1982**

SS Canberra





Operational Capability



Staying Strong and Motivated

Providing Entertainment Facilities

Entertainment and recreational options such as social events and leisure facilities help reduce stress and foster camaraderie during long deployments



Promoting Crew Wellbeing

Physical and mental health are prioritised through support systems, health services and community-building activities to maintain morale onboard



Mitigating Command Loneliness

The command role involves significant isolation and pressure, requiring resilience and support from both crew and leadership to manage effectively





Op ENDURING FREEDOM



Idyllic Ports of Call





Operational Capability



Rest and Recreation







Life at Sea



My Cabin - Modest but Comfortable

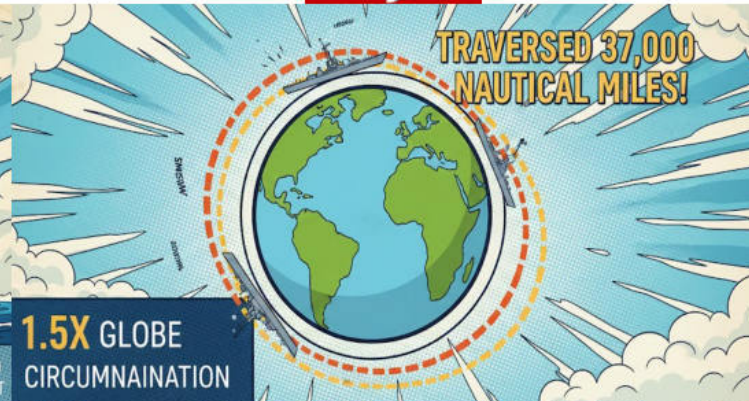




Op ENDURING FREEDOM



Deployment Facts and Figures





Command



The Lessons I Learned

Presence Creates Stability

A CO's visibility - on the Bridge, around the ship, at key moments - anchors the organisation. Calm, consistent presence builds trust long before any words are spoken



Act Early, Not Perfectly

Command rarely allows perfect information. Early, well-reasoned decisions prevent small risks becoming major problems. Timeliness beats precision



Relationships are a Force Multiplier

Strong links with seniors, peers, supporting agencies and the Ship's Company unlock options, ease friction and help navigate crises. Command is relational, not just positional





Command



The Lessons I Learned

Standards Need Clarity and Consistency

Clear expectations, direct feedback and follow-through maintain discipline and performance. Asking once is leadership; asking twice signals drift



Balance 'Fight' and 'Fun'

Morale is a capability. Moments of humour, celebration and downtime keep the team resilient. A happy ship fights far better than a tired one



Delegate, but Verify

Empower officers and senior rates with real responsibility, but remain engaged. Trust builds confidence; oversight builds safety





Leadership



The Sum is Greater than the Parts

Leadership:
Presence, Clarity, Decisiveness, Humanity

Strive for bigger ears and a smaller mouth!





Memorable Encounters



Keeps Life Interesting

Royalty Visits and Ceremonial Occasions

Command included prestigious encounters with royalty, highlighting naval tradition and boosting crew morale through ceremonial events



Encounters with Marine Wildlife

Unique moments such as whale shark sightings inspired awe and reminded the crew of the vast ocean environment they protect



Interactions with Other Nations' Ships

Daily operations involved cooperation and friendly rivalry with allied and foreign navies, enhancing professionalism and maritime security





Encounters



Royal Visit





Encounters



Ceremonial in Alexandria





Encounters



Whale Shark Collision





It Happens a Lot!





The Arctic Region - Geopolitics, Strategy and Challenges

Thu 3 Sep at 0900

With
Rear Admiral (Retired) Simon Hardern



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War in the Fjords

Norway - The Coldest Naval Battlefield in World War 2

Fri 4 Sep at 0900

With
Rear Admiral (Retired) Simon Hardern



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Naval Traditions and Etiquette

Bridging the gap between warships and cruise ships

With
Rear Admiral (Retired) Simon Hardern

Sun 6 Sep at 0900



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