

Subject: European Mine-Clearing Capabilities

Attached is a memorandum on the capability of several West European nations to support mine clearing operations in the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea. I hope you find the memorandum useful.

Attachment

14 August 1984



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Office of European Analysis

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Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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European Mine-Clearing Capabilities in the Red Sea

Summary

The Egyptian Government has formally requested US, British, French and Italian support for mine clearing operations in the Gulf of Suez and Red Sea. In addition, the Saudis have asked for assistance from France. Most West Europeans are eager to assist in the clearance operations.

- [redacted] and Embassy reporting, France has already dispatched mine countermeasures forces to the Red Sea which should begin to arrive later this week. Additional French forces were slated to leave France for Port Said on 13 August.
- The British mine countermeasures force currently operating in the Eastern Mediterranean is en route to Port Said.
- The Dutch would like to dispatch minehunters but so far have not received a request by Egypt; it would probably take several weeks for Dutch vessels to appear on the scene.
- Italy has agreed in principle to participate in the mineclearing effort and Greece will participate if asked by Egypt to do so. The Greeks may offer the use of naval facilities on Crete, some 500nm from Port Said. Ordnance, supply and repair facilities are located at Soudha Naval Base, and could be made available to multinational force.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Office of European Analysis.

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[redacted] comments may be addressed to [redacted] Questions and Issues Division, [redacted] Chief of the European

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-- West Germany will not dispatch ships to the area, but Bonn has suggested that its naval forces may perform tasks ordinarily executed by Allied naval units withdrawn for service in the Middle East. Turkey has made no statement on the availability of its forces.

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Of the Allied forces, the Dutch and French units are the most modern and capable. We believe British units are probably adequate for the task at hand, but London reportedly is unconvinced because its minesweepers and hunters lack the most up-to-date technology. All three navies have demonstrated proficiency in past mine warfare exercises. We believe the well-trained Italians would perform reasonably well despite the age of their fleet. The Greeks and Turks, however, would be hampered by inexperience and outdated equipment. The French, with support vessels and facilities available at Djibouti, will have the fewest problems with logistical support, but all of the West European forces probably will have to rely to some extent on US or Arab support to sustain operations.

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This memorandum, which reflects information received as of 13 August, examines the ability of West European nations to support the mine clearing effort. It addresses the types of units they are likely to send, the capabilities of those forces, and the problems they may encounter while operating at great distances from their home ports. Descriptions of various types of mines the force could encounter and countermeasures for each type are provided in the glossary.

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United Kingdom

A Royal Navy mine countermeasures force, including four TON-class minehunters/sweepers and a support ship, is currently en route from the Italian naval base at Taranto to the Gulf of Suez.

[Redacted]

A fifth minehunter/sweeper, now undergoing maintenance at Taranto, probably will be ready to sail within a week and will then join the British force. Royal Navy officers have begun informal discussions with US and Egyptian authorities, and the United Kingdom's forces will probably operate in the northern end of the

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Gulf of Suez near the Suez Canal.* We believe the forces out of Taranto are the only forces London is considering deploying. [redacted]

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At present, according to the US Embassy in London, the purpose of the British force is simply to conduct reconnaissance. A decision will be made later regarding further steps the force may take. [redacted] are concerned about the technical capabilities of their ships and do not wish to make promises they cannot fulfill. [redacted]

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The TON-class ships were built in the 1950s and converted to minehunters in the early 1960s. They are equipped with a precision navigation system and minehunting sonar, but lack a submersible mine disposal system, relying on diving teams instead. They also have a conventional mechanical minesweeping system, but probably lack magnetic and acoustic sweeping equipment. Minehunting operations are limited to a maximum depth of 50-55 meters. [redacted]

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The Royal Navy has extensive experience in mine clearance operations. United Kingdom mine warfare ships are well maintained; their crews are highly trained and have consistently performed well in NATO exercises. The TON-class ships are not equipped with the latest mine warfare technology, but we believe they are probably adequate for the task at hand, unless they encounter floating mines. [redacted]

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Logistical support for the British force will be a problem due to the lack of established UK naval support facilities in the region. The force's support vessel, a trawler-type off-shore oil support ship--the Oil Endeavor--chartered from the merchant fleet, has been equipped with a naval communication system. A mine warfare command staff and maintenance personnel are aboard. Nonetheless, the ship's ability to support mine clearance operations, especially for a prolonged period in a remote area such as the Red Sea, is probably limited. Additional logistic support--provisions, fuel, and other supplies and equipment--could possibly be provided by other Royal Navy forces deployed in the Indian Ocean/Red Sea area. Those forces are at their normal peacetime level: a guided missile destroyer, frigate and tanker. The two warships each carry a single Lynx light

*Some UK officers reportedly have expressed concern that the mines in the Red Sea may be of Italian manufacture, with glass-reinforced plastic cases that would make their detection difficult. [redacted]

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helicopter that if the ships are directed to the area, could be used for support tasks such as mine reconnaissance. The Royal Navy, however, will probably need to use Egyptian facilities for replenishment and maintenance. The United Kingdom is using C130s to provide some airlift support, but it is likely to look to the United States for additional resupply support. [redacted]

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France

[redacted]

Navy expects to be engaged in mine clearance operations in the Gulf of Suez at the end of the month. A French official reports that French maritime patrol aircraft based at Djibouti have been flying reconnaissance over the Bab el Mandeb in the south, but so far no aid has been requested by Djibouti. [redacted]

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[redacted]

is primarily a political gesture since the Navy believes there are no mines in the vicinity of Jidda. Nevertheless, the French force currently en route to Jidda includes two DOMPAIRE-class mine hunters and a diver support ship with a diving team on board. The repair ship Jules Verne, based at Djibouti, also has been dispatched to the area. On 13 August the mine countermeasures support ship Loire was to depart from Brest to join these forces. Paris will also send two ERIDAN-class minehunters to Port Said in response to Cairo's request for assistance. [redacted]

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The DOMPAIRE-class minehunter/sweepers bound for Jidda are US-built AGGRESSIVE-class ocean minesweepers delivered to France in the mid-1950s. The ships were converted to minehunters in the 1970s. They are equipped with a modern minehunting system that includes a sonar and data processing system as well as a remotely-controlled submersible for disposal operations. We believe the ships also have minesweeping capability with US-built mechanical, acoustic, and magnetic gear. [redacted]

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French forces en route to Jidda and those based in Djibouti could support mine clearing operations for a relatively short period. Dispatch of the Loire, however, [redacted]

[redacted]

The Loire, built in the mid-1960s, is designed to provide command and control, maintenance and logistics support for up to 15 minehunters/sweepers for a month. The ship supported the 1981-82

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deployment of French minesweepers to Djibouti, and [redacted] that experience may have led to modifications to the ship to improve support capabilities in areas such as the Red Sea. [redacted]

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Naval air assets in Djibouti include Atlantic maritime patrol aircraft and light helicopters. The replenishment ship Var--flagship of the Indian Ocean squadron--is in the vicinity of Djibouti and can carry a light helicopter. The Jules Verne can also carry helicopters. Other potential French forces for Red Sea operations include a guided missile destroyer, five frigates, and eight support ships in the Indian Ocean. [redacted]

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The ERIDAN-class ships slated to operate in the Gulf of Suez are capable, new ships designed to detect and destroy bottom and moored mines. They are equipped with precise navigation systems, minehunting sonar, mine-disposal submersibles and have some mechanical sweeping capability. ERIDAN-class ships can be outfitted to detect mines at depths of as much as 80 meters from a distance of more than 500 meters. [redacted]

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The French forces are modern and well maintained and their crews are well trained. According to the US Defense Attache, however, they are not readily equipped to deal with drifting mines because they lack air support. The French ships are also not designed for extended operations in the extreme climate of the Red Sea and will probably experience maintenance problems.

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[redacted]

Navy and Foreign Ministry officials have emphasized to US diplomats and officials that Paris intends to handle operations in the Red Sea/Suez area on a strictly bilateral basis. French support facilities at Djibouti are probably more than sufficient to support operations in the southern Red Sea by forces en route. However, the French would have difficulty operating in northern and southern portions of the Red Sea simultaneously without outside assistance. They may look to the United States to provide some support, especially a precision navigation system for minehunting and possibly long-range airlift. Paris probably would be willing to press the Djibouti government to allow Allied forces to use French facilities, but the French will wish to avoid a large, highly-visible US presence. [redacted]

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The Netherlands

The Dutch have offered two newly-commissioned ALKMAAR-class minehunters, which are sister ships to the French ERIDAN-class, and are awaiting an Egyptian reply. These vessels are equipped

with state-of-the-art minehunting systems, can locate the full range of mine types and have a limited mechanical minesweeping capability. We believe the Dutch are eager to advertise the capabilities of the ALKMAAR-class ships in an effort to promote sales to other nations. The Dutch Navy trains extensively in mine countermeasures and is proficient in such operations. The minehunters reportedly are being readied to sail, and their transit time to the Red Sea is estimated to be two weeks. 25X1

Greece

There has been no indication concerning what forces Athens might send to the Red Sea/Suez Gulf area. The Greek Navy has 14 minesweepers---9 MSC 924s and 5 ADJUTANT-class--stationed at the main naval base at Salamis. All are operational and have a limited sweeping capability against influence mines but virtually no minehunting capability. their crews are well trained but have no practical experience. The ships' capabilities are limited because of their age, and they could not operate beyond home waters without outside logistic support. It would take either type of minesweeper about three or four days to reach Port Said from Salamis. 25X1

Turkey

Turkey has made no formal statement on the availability of its forces. The Turkish Navy, however, has 26 minesweepers, most of which were built in the 1950s. At present 21 are operational, and some 17 of these currently are operating in the Bosphorus and Black Sea: nine ADJUTANT-class minesweepers, which carry sonar equipment giving them a limited minehunting capability against moored mines; and four VEGESACK-class and four CAPE-class minesweepers, which do not have a minehunting capability but can sweep mechanical and influence mines. The Turkish Navy also has four BAY-class minesweepers with capabilities similar to the VEGESACK-class. 25X1

The Turkish ADJUTANT-class ships would be of most use in the Red Sea operation, but it would take them about four days to reach Port Said. The BAY-class ships, while not as capable, could probably reach the area in about two days, but they are especially vulnerable to magnetic mines. Turkish mine countermeasures capabilities are limited because of the age of their equipment and because their ships cannot operate away from home waters without outside logistical support. 25X1

Italy

The Italian Government has publicly expressed its willingness to participate, although no specific forces have yet

[redacted]

been designated. [redacted] no special preparations were underway as of late last week. We believe Rome might also be willing to provide transit rights and overflight privileges for Allied forces taking part in the operation. [redacted]

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Italy has 22 operational mine warfare vessels. Eight of these--four minesweepers and four minehunters--could depart quickly. A ranking Italian official informed the US Defense Attache on 9 August that Italy's force would likely be drawn from modified ADJUTANT-class and HAM-class minehunters based in La Spezia. These could arrive in Port Said in approximately ten days. The HAM and ADJUTANT-class ships are equipped with acoustic, mechanical, and magnetic minehunting and sweeping gear. Italy's newest and most capable minehunters--the LERICI-class--- are still undergoing sea trials and are not ready for deployment. [redacted]

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We believe the Italian forces would perform reasonably well. The Navy trains in mine warfare and mine countermeasures, and its performance in past national exercises has been up to NATO standards. The ships are well handled and would be effective against acoustic or magnetic mines. Nonetheless, the ship are old, the crews have had limited seaborne resupply experience, and the force would be entirely dependent upon shore support for refueling. A lengthy mine-clearing operation would probably strain the Navy's capabilities. [redacted]

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Glossary

Mines

1. Contact. A mine with a fuzing device that explodes on contact with the hull of a ship.
2. Magnetic. A mine that explodes as the result of the magnetic disturbance (or influence) created in the water and on the sea bottom by a passing ship.
3. Acoustic Influence. A mine designed to explode when disturbed by the vibration created in the water by a passing ship and its propellers.
4. Pressure Influence. A mine designed to explode through a fuzing device that is sensitive to the change in water pressure caused by a passing ship.
5. Moored. Mines that are attached by a cable to an anchor on the sea bed. Moored mines float under the surface at a predetermined depth.
6. Bottom. Mines that are weighted so that they lay on the seabed.
7. Floating. Mines that are not anchored and are designed to float freely in the water.

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Mine Countermeasures.

1. Minehunting. Minehunter vessels are equipped to locate various types of mines and neutralize them by using divers or remotely-controlled submersibles. Minehunting requires extremely accurate navigation sensors and the use of high-definition, short-range sonar. [redacted]

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2. Minesweeping. Minesweeping vessels and helicopters use both mechanical and more sophisticated electronic equipment which is towed through the water to engage and detonate mines at a safe distance.

- Against Moored Mines. Mechanical sweeping is employed against moored mines. A long cable, to which mechanical or explosive cutters are attached, is towed through the water. Mine mooring cables are cut, and the mines are destroyed on the surface by gunfire.
- Against Bottom Mines. Bottom mines are cleared either by mechanical drag sweepers that are towed across the seabed or by electronic sweeping gear.
- Against Floating Mines. Floating mines are destroyed by gunfire when they are sighted.
- Against Magnetic and Acoustic Mines. Electronic sweeping gear is used against both magnetic and acoustic mines. Electronic devices that simulate ship noises or create a magnetic field are towed through the water by ship or helicopter.
- Against Pressure Mines. There is no effective method for neutralizing pressure influence mines. [redacted]

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