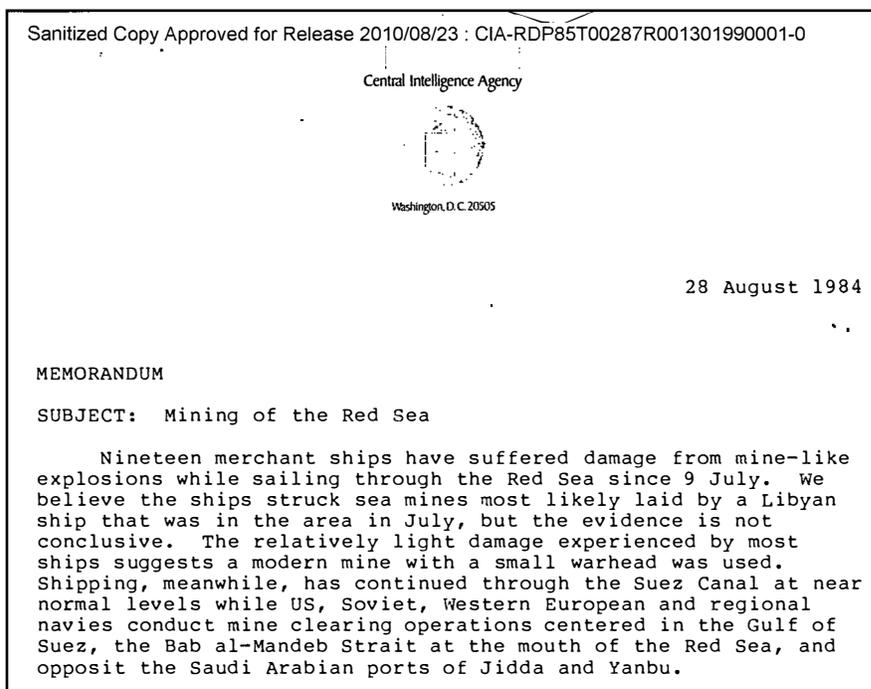


## Revisiting the 1984 Naval Mining of the Red Sea: Intelligence Challenges and Lessons

*Richard A. Mobley*

---



The above clip of the opening of a CIA memorandum summarizes what was known late in August 1984 of the rash of reported instances of ships suffering mine damage in the Red Sea during July and August. Classified Secret//Noform when it was published, it and other documents from CIA records were declassified and released in 2010. The British released similar documentation in 2016.

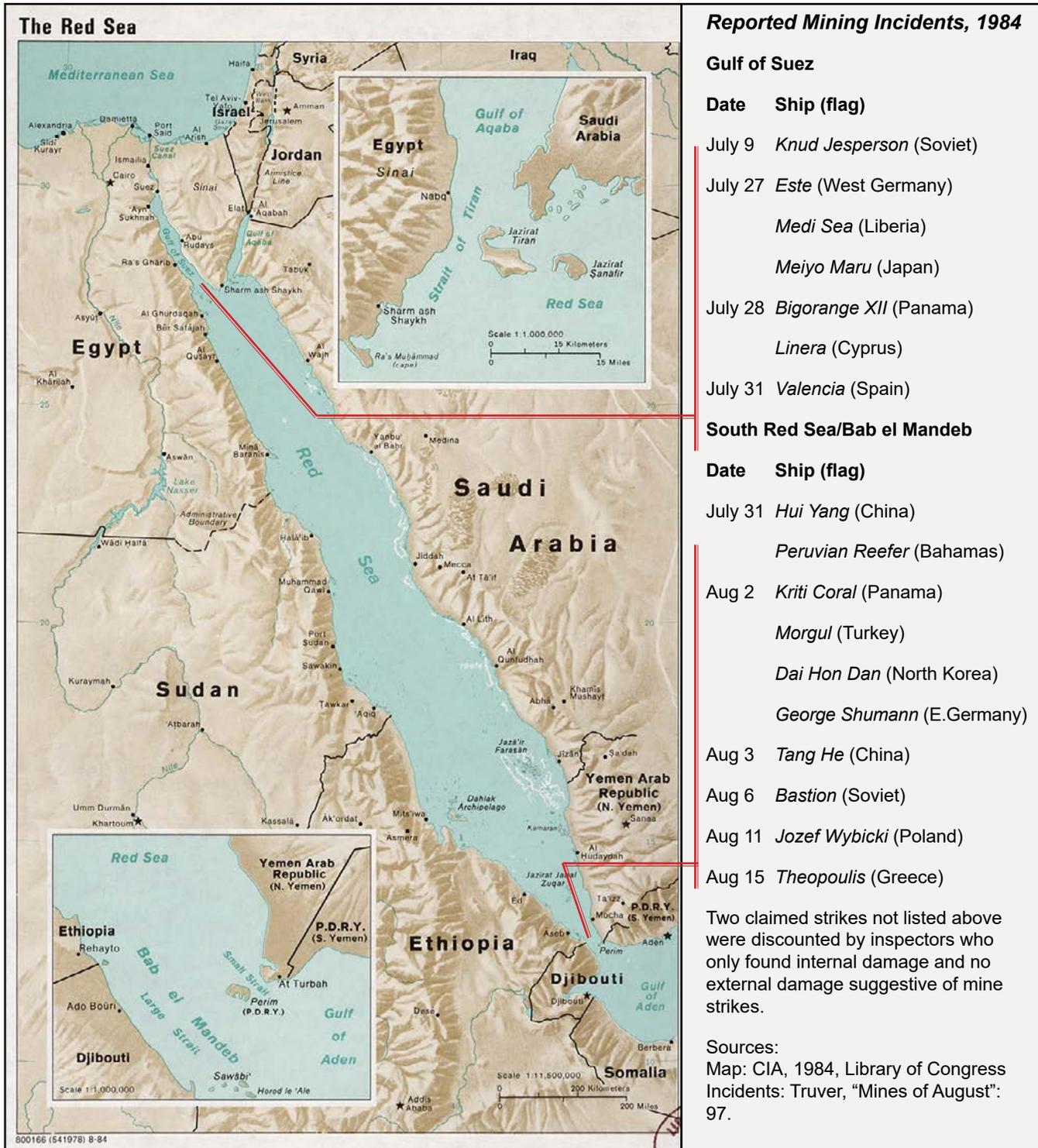
British and US intelligence analysts faced significant challenges in assessing the causes, actors, and weapons involved in the apparent mining of nearly 20 ships transiting the Red Sea in July and August 1984. The episode was the subject of considerable media coverage and speculation at the time and soon after.<sup>1</sup> The best public treatment of the episode appeared in a May 1985 article in the *US Naval Institute Proceedings*.

However, formerly classified archival documents released by CIA and the British government since 2010 permit a reexamination of the episode as a case study for military intelligence analysts. The documents highlight the intelligence gaps and numerous uncertainties analysts faced in trying to establish that sea mines were indeed responsible for the reported incidents; the challenges associated in identifying the culprit or culprits; and the

difficulty in determining the source and type, or types, of mines that may have damaged the merchant ships traversing possibly the busiest shipping channel in the world. Finally, the released material offers tradecraft lessons for analysts who might face a similar challenge, given the potential that US adversaries might turn to offensive mine warfare to disrupt shipping channels and deny access to strategically important areas.

---

The views, opinions, and findings of the author expressed in this article should not be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations or representing the official positions of any component of the United States government. © Richard A. Mobley, June 2022.



## ***The Events***

At least 17 merchant ships passing through the Red Sea were damaged by explosions attributed to naval mines between July 9 and August 15, 1984 (see facing page).<sup>2</sup> The strike reported on July 9 in the northern Red Sea damaged a Soviet-flagged merchant ship, the *Knud Jespersen*. The next strike occurred 18 days later, a time period that would figure in later resolution of the mystery.

US allies in the region—Egypt and Saudi Arabia—sought international mine countermeasures (MCM) support in early August 1984, an urgent request given the volume of traffic in the Red Sea (estimated to be between 1,800 and 2,000 ships per month), the importance of Suez Canal revenues to Egypt, and Saudi concerns about the safety of pilgrims traveling to and from Mecca by sea in August and September for the annual gathering of Islamic worshipers to participate in the Hajj. The international community responded by deploying 26 ships from six countries to conduct MCM operations throughout the Red Sea for several weeks starting that August.<sup>3</sup> Despite extensive minehunting and minesweeping under problematic conditions, the minehunters by mid-September had found only one mine of a type that might have been involved in the mining, a previously unknown, apparently export version of a single, large, relatively advanced and recently produced Soviet mine.<sup>4</sup>

## ***Untangling the Mystery***

### ***Who laid the mines?***

Initially with only one claim of responsibility—improbably by the terrorist group Islamic

Jihad—untangling the mystery forced analysts to deal with circumstantial evidence in addressing questions made more difficult to answer by the delay in engaging the intelligence communities and military establishments in London and Washington in analyzing maritime activity that had occurred well before collection assets could be focused on the problem. One key breakthrough—the Royal Navy’s discovery on September 12 of the aforementioned mine (dubbed Type 995 because of an apparent serial number etched on its surface)—occurred only after weeks of intelligence reporting and speculation on the subject.

The declassified documents show that in August, analysts in London and Washington considered at least four candidates for the mining. They quickly ruled out two: Islamic Jihad and the Soviet Union. Islamic Jihad, an entity associated with Iranian and militant Shia interests, telephoned international news services in late July to claim that it had laid 190 mines in the Red Sea. CIA’s August 28 summation of the situation noted that several Middle East terrorist groups associated with Iran had used “Islamic Jihad” as a cover name and, as did UK analysts, discounted the claim, judging that the scope and sophistication of the mining operation went well beyond the capabilities of terrorist organizations operating without “extensive state assistance.”<sup>5, 6</sup>

Analysts discounted Moscow—even after discovery of the Type 995 mine—because the mines threatened Soviet trade, had already damaged two Soviet ships, led to an unwelcome increase of Western naval presence in the region, and forced the Soviet Navy to conduct its own

countermeasures for several weeks in the southern approaches to the Red Sea.<sup>7</sup> Separately, in an October 16, 1984, letter, a UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office official flatly told British author Louis FitzGibbon, “We have no reason to believe that the Russians were responsible for laying the mine.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***Focus turned to Iran and Libya.***

Analysts instead devoted their attention to Iran and Libya. Iranian media initially praised the Islamic Jihad on August 7, claiming “the arrogant powers were helpless.”<sup>9</sup> Top Iranian leaders, however, emphatically reversed this position the same day. Ayatollah Khomeini, Prime Minister Mousavi, and Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani publicly denied Iranian involvement in the mining.<sup>10</sup> UK diplomatic reporting from Tehran also relayed the Iranian denials.<sup>11</sup>

Discussion of Iran’s role in the mining was contentious, however. The UK’s Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) initially drafted an assessment in mid-August stressing the Iranian culpability theme, but coordinators within the Ministry of Defence pushed for a more balanced approach that strengthened the case against Libya while reducing the focus on Tehran. The comments noted that the major flaw in the JIC’s draft was its inference that Iran was the most likely culprit. The reviewer urged the drafter to back away from that judgment, arguing that other countries blamed Libya; Iran’s leaders had emphatically denied their role, and mining was against Tehran’s self interest; and, what’s more, a Libyan-flagged ship had acted strangely in the Red Sea.<sup>12</sup>

CIA’s August 28 analysis concurred in its dismissal of the case

against Tehran, noting that Iran was the “canal’s fourth-ranking user in terms of imports and exports.” The CIA’s analysts, too, made a circumstantial case against Libya, which made “minimal use” of the canal. CIA analysts concluded that public statements by Iran’s leaders suggested they “were concerned about the adverse impact a closure of the Suez Canal would have on the Iranian economy.”<sup>13</sup>

US analysts may have had reporting on Libyan mining plans, though the formerly classified documents show no indication of any such reporting. The August 28 memorandum cited only the “circumstantial” evidence that focused analysis on the behavior of a Libyan-flagged ship. However, on August 6, the UK naval attaché in Cairo reported that the US defense attaché had information that mining, using 110 or 150 mines, had been discussed in Libya in late May 1984.<sup>14</sup> In 2012, historian David Crist wrote in his book on Iranian-US relations that “communications intercepts soon revealed [Qadhafi’s] culpability” in the mining. That claim seems improbable in light of the contents of the released CIA documents.<sup>15</sup>

**What motives might Libya have had?**

With respect to Libyan aims, the CIA memorandum argued that Qadhafi’s motives for mining the Red Sea stemmed from his ambitions and feuds with others in the Arab world and with Israel and the United States. It observed that “Qadhafi may be making good on threats made last June against Arab regimes who fail to unite against Israel and the United States,” and he wanted to “seize the initiative in regional affairs from moderate Arab regimes, and the mining would be a way to emphasize

**Why Libya?**

Although mining the Red Sea—which Qadhafi denied responsibility for—seems strange in retrospect, the episode was consistent with a pattern during the time of Libya’s bombings, coup attempts, and conventional attacks. A lengthy chronology of such acts was included in the Special National Intelligence Estimate in March 1985. Examples of Libyan misbehavior cited in the estimate<sup>1</sup>:

February 1983	Libyan-sponsored coup attempted in Sudan
July 1983	Libya invaded Chad for the second time
August 1983	Libya provided material support to coup leaders in Upper Volta
January 1984	Libyan bomb damaged French hotel in Kinshasa, Zaire
March 1984	Libyan TU-22 bomber struck Omdurman, Sudan
March 1984	Four bombs exploded in London and Manchester near the homes of Libyan exiles or businesses frequented by them
May 1984	A number of British subjects in Libya arrested on trumped-up charges
May 1984	Norwegian merchant ship seized in Tripoli and crew accused of spying
July 1984	Two Libyan students murdered in Athens in a crime reminiscent of Libyan killings of anti-Qadhafi students in 1980–81
September 1984	Libyan-sponsored coup plotters arrested in Bangladesh.

1. Scott Truver, “The Mines of August: An International Whodunit,” *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, May 1985 and Director of Central Intelligence, SNIE, *Libya’s Qadhafi: Challenge to US and Western Interests*, March 1985, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/CIA-RDP08S02113R000100310001-4.pdf>.

to Arab moderates the consequences of close relations with Washington.” The memo also asserted that Qadhafi might have viewed mining as a way to “embarrass Egypt’s President Mubarak by highlighting Cairo’s dependence for security on the United States and Western Europe.”<sup>16</sup>

**The Case Against the Ghat**

The Libyan-flagged ship that aroused suspicion was the RO/RO (roll-on/roll-off) ship *Ghat*. The

extensive documentation Suez Canal officials required from each shipment provided the strongest direct evidence—cited in US and UK documents on the subject—of the *Ghat*’s and Libya’s responsibility. Foremost of these were the *Ghat*’s changing crew lists. Also providing strong circumstantial evidence are the few location/time points known along the *Ghat*’s south- and northbound voyages.

Egyptian authorities had come to the conclusion that Libya was

responsible by August 17, when Egyptian Defense Minister Abu Ghazala in meeting with a US congressional delegation on August 19 said he was “in a position to say it is Libya [who is responsible for laying the mines]. . . . Since two days ago, 100 percent sure.” He based his judgment on the “timing of *Ghat*’s passage through the area and that Libyan military officers had been substituted for regular crew members prior to that passage.” Ghazala also claimed to “have information” that the mines used came from Italy.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Changes made in *Ghat*’s crew.**

As a commercial merchant ship, the *Ghat* was not subordinated to the Libyan Navy but, equipped with a stern vehicle ramp, the RO/RO was an ideal minelayer. According to the August 28 CIA summary, which reflected access to the *Ghat*’s crew list, the composition of the ship’s crew was adjusted at least twice for the special mission. Most notably, CIA analysts concluded that the Libyan Navy’s chief frogman was on the *Ghat* when it passed through the Suez Canal three days before the first reported explosion on July 9. “We speculate that he supervised the mining,” the memorandum said. It made the following additional points:

- Another man joining the crew was Hani J. Wanis, the name of a known Libyan naval officer.
- When the *Ghat* was seized—on other violations—in Marseilles in August after it returned to the Mediterranean Sea, CIA sources reported that the entire crew was replaced. The changeover suggested that Libya was “concerned about possible security leaks if

French officials were to question the crew.”<sup>18</sup>

#### ***The Ghat’s unusual Red Sea operations.***

The *Ghat*’s probable track could have put it in position to lay mines. A UK Ministry of Defence memo dated September 12 concluded that the *Ghat*’s “dates of passage fit well with the earliest mining incidents at both ends of the Red Sea.”<sup>19</sup> The *Ghat*’s declared cargo was “agricultural machinery” to be delivered to Assab, Ethiopia—the *Ghat*’s only port call. In fact, it delivered 950 tons of military materiel, mostly ammunition and small arms. It was scheduled to arrive in mid-July, according to UK diplomatic sources.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, other than Assab, there are few datapoints revealing the ship’s actual locations during its two transits through the Red Sea south of the Suez Canal.

As noted above, the duration of the *Ghat*’s trip from Libya to Ethiopia was suspicious. The voyage lasted 15 days—seven days longer than a typical merchant ship would take to traverse that distance.<sup>21</sup> Only three days sailing time was typically required for a RO/RO to steam from Suez to Assab, according to the UK Defence Intelligence Staff.<sup>22</sup>

Consideration of a Libyan mine warfare planner’s likely planning precepts would suggest an explanation. To make the most of a single shipload of mines, important priorities would have been stealth, speed of delivery, focus on mining choke points, and measures to make sure no explosions took place before the *Ghat* was able to get back to the Mediterranean.

The requirement for stealth depended on confidence that any inspection on entry into the Suez Canal

would not lead to discovery that the ship’s cargo manifest was false. With respect to speed, mines would have to be quickly and stealthily laid since secrecy was paramount and accuracy was secondary. Parts of the voyage absolutely had to be clandestine.

The cargo apparently did go undetected, and the ship’s minelaying efforts were unseen, but the *Ghat* did not carry out its operations quickly enough to avoid suspicion, although it succeeded in distributing its full load in key choke points. Possibly the need to set timers to arm the magnetic/acoustic bottom influence mines—eventually determined to be the type laid—most likely slowed the process. Still, the *Ghat* completed its return, northbound transit of the Suez Canal and avoided Egyptian seizure of the ship as a suspect. Indeed, once the series of incidents occurred, the Egyptians did seize or escort suspect ships.

The *Ghat* could have laid mines on both north and southbound runs to reduce time spent laying mines going in either direction. The first explosion, three days after its southbound passage, suggested the RO/RO laid mines on the southbound run out of the Suez Canal. According to UK Defence Intelligence Staff analysis, the *Ghat* also would have been positioned to lay mines on the northbound run in the Gulf of Suez, approximately nine days before most of the mine strikes started occurring there on July 27. The timer on the surviving Type 995 mine had been set to arm the mine in just under nine days, suggesting the timing and positioning would have coincided with the mine strikes nine days after the *Ghat* passed through the area.<sup>23</sup>

### Notional Timeline of Ghat Minelaying Operation

The few known locations of *Ghat's* track are in bold-face type. Estimated locations/activities (in italics) are based on the ship's known capabilities.

<b>6 July</b>	<b>Southbound transit through Suez Canal<sup>1</sup></b>
<i>7 July</i>	<i>Placed mines near the traffic separation scheme south of Suez</i>
<i>9 July</i>	<i>First (single) mine strike in northern Red Sea</i>
<i>11 July</i>	<i>Mined Bab al Mandeb</i>
<b>12–13 July</b>	<b>In port at Assab, Ethiopia<sup>2</sup></b>
<i>17 July</i>	<i>Possibly in Assab<sup>3</sup></i>
<i>19 July</i>	<i>Mined northern Red Sea</i>
<b>22 July</b>	<b>Northbound transit through Suez Canal<sup>4</sup></b>
<b>23 July</b>	<b>Returned to Libya<sup>5</sup></b>
<i>27 July</i>	<i>First of a cluster of mine strikes in northern Red Sea</i>

1. Loose minute from UK Defence Intelligence Staff to internal distribution, "Gulf of Suez/Red Sea-Mines," October 16, 1984, (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.

2. Ibid.

3. UK Embassy Addis Ababa to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Mines in the Gulf of Suez and Red Sea," August 9, 1984 (FCO 31/4166), TNA.

4. Loose minute from UK Defence Intelligence Staff to internal distribution, "Gulf of Suez/Red Sea-Mines," October 16, 1984, (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.

5. Chris O'Flaherty, "Red Sea-Mines of August," posted on Vernon Link (Vernonlink. UK/Red-Sea).

Assab is only a few hours steaming time from the Bab al Mandeb, so the *Ghat* readily could have laid the mines in the strait before or after the port call without disrupting its return transit schedule to Libya.

After the Red Sea voyage, the *Ghat* sailed to Marseilles for repairs but was seized because of an unrelated legal issue. An inspection of the *Ghat's* aft ramp revealed that it probably had been damaged by waves, presumably because it had been lowered while at sea. Truver concluded, "It now seemed a simple matter to roll the mines down the ramp and into

the water, no special apparatus being necessary."<sup>24</sup>

#### *What type of mines were laid? And how many?*

Identifying the type, number, and location of mines the *Ghat's* crew laid was problematic for the IC and contributed to knowledge gaps that forced MCM ships to conduct slow, methodical minehunting operations. Although the allies eventually benefited from detection and exploitation of the Type 995, the extent, location, and composition of minefields were largely unknown.

Answering questions about such minefields would be complicated because Qadhafi could seed them with several different types of mines. The CIA wrote in 1984 that Tripoli had a variety of moored and bottom types, detonated by acoustic, magnetic, or contact devices. It elaborated: "Some of these include delayed activation, making them particularly difficult to sweep. Some of the mines can be planted in waters as deep as 290 meters. Libya's largest mines can sink a ship."<sup>25</sup>

In recapping the mining in late August, the CIA judged that the relatively light damage to most ships "suggests a modern mine with a small warhead was used."<sup>26</sup> Several factors led UK and US analysts to consistently judge throughout August that Libya had laid modern bottom-influence mines with relatively small 100-kg warheads. Given the number of mining incidents and the number of units eventually searching for them, analysts would have presumed that older tethered floating mines (relatively easily seen) would have been readily detected, unlike influence mines resting on the bottom and partially covered with mud. Their cases could comprise materials more difficult for minehunting sonars to detect. The influence mines could embody features that would complicate MCM, such as delayed arming, ship counters that would delay activation, and sterilization software that would simply turn the mine off after a certain number of days.

CIA analysts initially focused on the possibility that an Italian-made bottom-influence mine, the Manta, was the weapon used. Acknowledging that Libya had a variety of sea mines, CIA in late August

would not rule out that Libya had acquired the Manta—a mine Libya had had “a strong interest” in obtaining.<sup>27</sup> The Manta had a warhead of about 100 kg and could function in waters up to 40 meters deep, characteristics matching the light-to-moderate damage ships had received from the explosions in the Red Sea. The Manta’s nonmetallic construction would make it difficult to detect, even with the advanced minehunting sonars aboard the UK, French, and Italian ships, according to CIA assessments.<sup>28,29</sup>

CIA also raised a second but less likely possibility in an assessment produced on August 21: Qadhafi might be using Libyan-produced mines or low-quality mines from another Third World country. Perhaps envisioning the simple, moored contact mines in the Iranian and Iraqi arsenals, the analysts judged that the devices would be unsophisticated and a larger number would be required to achieve the same number of hits, “thus increasing the chance that one or more would have been recovered or at least detected by now.”<sup>30</sup>

That same month, however, the UK and the US ICs also received warnings that Libya was laying Soviet-built mines. Lt. Col. Viatcheslav Kondrachov, the Soviet assistant military attaché to Jordan, told his British counterpart on August 10 that Qadhafi was laying Soviet mines provided to Libya in the mid-1960s. He added that the Soviets were furious with the Libyans because the action implicated Moscow in an area where it did not wish to become involved, and Soviet merchant ships had been among the casualties.<sup>31</sup>

The colonel’s admission was in part borne out when HMS *Gavington* on September 12 discovered the partially buried, sea-growth-free, torpedo-shaped mine in 42 meters of water on the western edge of the southbound traffic separation scheme exiting Suez.<sup>32</sup> The British and CIA designated the mine as the Type 995 and concluded from its serial numbers that it had been manufactured in 1981. British explosives and ordnance disposal experts beached the mine, cut it in two, and sent the section containing its electronic components to the UK. The large section containing the explosives was steamed out and sent to the Admiralty Research Establishment (ARE) Portland in the UK for exploitation, according to the Royal Navy’s after-action report for the operation.<sup>33</sup>

CIA provided a thumbnail sketch of this mine. The Type 995 had a warhead sufficiently large to damage a supertanker beyond repair. It had several features to defeat MCM operations, would be easy to lay, and difficult to defend against.<sup>34</sup> This was a far more destructive mine than the naval staffs and intelligence analysts had been expecting during their searches over the preceding month.

The UK’s Defence Intelligence Staff wrote in October that the mine was a combined magnetic/acoustic bottom influence mine with a warhead containing 750 kg of RDX/TNT—a finding “not consistent with previous estimates for the Suez incidents of a 100-kg charge.”<sup>35</sup> Preliminary tripartite exploitation of the mine was completed by ARE Portland on October 15 and revealed the following:

- The Type 995 was designed for torpedo delivery but examination of the mine itself would not answer the question of how it was delivered.<sup>36</sup>
- The mine “was not considered to embody their (Soviet) most advanced technology,” a judgment that accounts for some reporting stating that it was an export variant.<sup>37</sup> The exploitation team judged that it was possibly the simplest of a range of related Soviet bottom influence mines.<sup>38</sup>
- The Type 995’s activation clock was set to 8 days, 19 hours, but it failed to start due to an electric fault probably resulting from a manufacturing defect.<sup>39</sup> Activation could have been delayed up to three weeks.<sup>40</sup>
- The mine’s ship counter was set to zero with the implication that the first valid target would trigger the mine.<sup>41</sup>
- The Royal Navy mine clearance commander subsequently wrote that the mine’s sensor sensitivity could account for why no ships were sunk despite the warhead’s large size.<sup>42</sup> The mine exploded too soon and too far away to be effective.

Concerning the number of mines laid, analysts lacked information to confidently determine the size and composition of the minefields, and no estimates of a number have been released in the documents available for this paper. Judging from the one report cited by the British, the number might have been relatively small—perhaps only 110 mines—to be spread between the northern and southern entrances to the Red Sea.

Writing long after the event, Scott Truver concluded in 2016 that the composition of the minefield might have been problematic. Observing that Libya had hundreds of mines, Truver noted that Libya had acquired at least 16 Type 995s from East Germany.<sup>43</sup> If that is the case and the Libyan plan did include sowing more than 100 mines in the Red Sea, the minefields would have comprised other mines that simply went undetected, given the challenges of minehunting and the possibility that the mines malfunctioned, self-sterilized shortly after being laid, or were improperly laid.

### ***Qadhafi's Motive***

The circumstances of the mining may lead us to surmise that Qadhafi was trying to create a propaganda effect and that an extensive mining campaign had taken place over a large area. By mining in highly trafficked choke points, fewer mines would be needed. The effect could be enhanced by increasing the sensitivity of each mine's target detection device, causing the mines to explode at greater distances from approaching ships. In effect, each highly sensitive mine posed a threat to a wider area than a mine with lower sensitivity—but at a cost. Because the mines exploded farther from the ships they detected, the damage they caused was less severe. In his article, Truver noted that the majority of explosions were in fact well away from the ships, and most observers decided that “very sensitive” settings had been selected.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Lessons for the Future***

The Red Sea mining episode raises issues that analysts could face again, particularly given the stealthy nature of limited, targeted offensive mining and potential US deficiencies in MCM. A few conclusions follow about the challenges of identifying the actor, the mines being laid, and the importance of intelligence cooperation in MCM.

#### ***Determining responsibility.***

As this instance showed, identification of responsibility was difficult and based largely on circumstantial evidence and speculation about potential motives. For a time, analysts wavered between Libya and Iran, eventually discounting Iran on the basis of an analysis of its self-interest in Red Sea shipping.<sup>45</sup> How much more difficult this challenge would be if a coalition of bad actors were to cooperate in a mine campaign against the United States and its allies.

Iran probably did cooperate with Libya in mine warfare after the *Ghat* episode. At least once, the Iranian embassy in Libya arranged for an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officer to travel there to talk with the Libyan commander who executed the Red Sea mining operation, according to the Crist account of the Red Sea mining.<sup>46</sup> In September 1987, a Libyan cargo plane left Tripoli for Tehran, carrying nine Soviet-made naval mines, according to CIA reporting, which indicated that Libya had then provided Iran with Type 995s.<sup>47</sup>

#### ***Avoiding technical and tactical surprises.***

Although the personalized, mercurial approaches to national security strategy of leaders like Qadhafi would challenge any intelligence analyst in

predicting a leader's next moves, a US or allied red cell, fusing expertise in deep mine warfare to that of country experts, might have increased operator understanding of the courses of action an adversary might employ and the composition and location of potential minefields under given sets of circumstances. The US Navy mine warfare community, with the support of the IC, used such red cells successfully and repeatedly in the mid-1990s.<sup>48</sup>

#### ***Better procedures to identify mines likely to be employed.***

The CIA made the case that Libya might have laid Manta anti-invasion mines given Libya's interest in acquiring this mine, its availability on world markets, and apparently the relatively small size of the explosive component. The IC apparently did not address in any detail the larger, Soviet mines reportedly existing in Libya's arsenal because the mine explosions seemed relatively small, particularly compared to the damage that would have been expected from a large Soviet sea mine. Wrong or not, these conclusions would be more useful had the IC shared the reasoning and confidence levels for these judgments and perhaps considered an alternative hypothesis, such as the case that Libya was more interested in creating the illusion of an extensive mining campaign than actually sinking ships.

Discovery of the Type 995 set the stage for a multinational exploitation effort that almost certainly would have improved NATO's capability to conduct MCM operations against Soviet (and now Libyan) naval mines. A rigorous effort over several months against any sophisticated naval mine would provide MCM operators with a more reliable understanding of

mine functioning and composition. The process would also lead to better procedures to render safe a detected mine and more refined understanding of the functioning and sensitivity of the mine's target detection device, reliability, and counter-countermeasures devices, etc. In other words, the rigorous multinational effort undertaken by ARE Portland and other organizations against the Type 995 would have given NATO forces the technical insight they need to more effectively counter such mines in a future conflict.

*Mixed successes sharing intelligence.*

The United States and the UK were well aware of each other's thinking on the mine threat. Sharing among attachés and in the national level intelligence production effort and mine exploitation effort almost certainly strengthened their responses to Qadhafi's gambit.

At the tactical level among all participants in the MCM effort, however, the Royal Navy was concerned that sharing tactical intelligence was inadequate. A UK briefing summarizing the Red Sea operation stated

that there was a "considerable delay" before other nations found out about the Royal Navy's acquisition of the Soviet-made mine.<sup>49</sup> The briefing stated that coordination in the Red Sea was "less than ideal." It summarized the concern by saying, "The inability to exchange mine intelligence could have had greater repercussions had a greater threat been realized. Clearly it is essential to have a rapid and free exchange of this type of information for ship and personnel safety reasons as well as to optimize detection and sweeping methods."



Author: Richard A. Mobley was a career naval intelligence officer before completing a second career as a military analyst in CIA's Directorate for Analysis. He was the staff intelligence officer in the US Navy's Mine Warfare Command in the mid-1990s. He has contributed four other articles to *Studies in Intelligence*.

**Endnotes**



1. See Dr. Scott Truver, "The Mines of August: An International Whodunit," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* Vol. 111/5/987 (May 1985): 95–117. Truver has a PhD in maritime policy studies and has published frequently on the subject since this article.
2. CIA, Memorandum, "Mining of the Red Sea," August 28, 1984, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00287r001301990001-0> and Truver, "The Mines of August."
3. Truver, "The Mines of August"
4. *Ibid.*, 109. The British minehunter HMS *Gavington* located the mine and brought it to shallow waters to be disarmed. It proved to be a "type not recorded in Jane's even."
5. CIA, "Mining of the Red Sea," 3.
6. Attachment to loose minute prepared by Middle East Department in response to a Parliamentary Query, "PQ 9950," 16 October (FCO 8/5420) The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA). Unless otherwise stated, UK archival material cited in the paper is available only in hard copy.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Malcom Rifkind (FCO), untitled letter to Louis FitzGibbon, October 16, 1984 (FCO 31/4166), TNA.
9. Truver, "The Mines of August."
10. *Ibid.* and CIA, "Mining of the Red Sea," 3.
11. Message from UK Embassy Tehran to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Mines in the Gulf of Suez and Red Sea," August 8, 1984 (FCO 3/4166), TNA.
12. Memo from Middle East Department to PUSD, "JIC (84) 33 Draft "Red Sea Mines Responsibility," August 15, 1984 (FCO 8/5417) TNA.
13. CIA, "Mining of the Red Sea," 3.
14. Message from UK naval attaché Cairo to MODUK, "Mines in Red Sea and Gulf of Suez," August 6, 1984 (FCO 31/4166), TNA. The released US documents provide no insight into that report.
15. David Crist, *The Twilight War* (Penguin Press, 2012), 235–36.
16. CIA, "Mining of the Red Sea," 2–3.

17. AMEMBASSY Cairo 25526 to SECSTATE and others, 211604Z Aug 84, "CODEL Solarz Meeting with Defense Minister," August 21, 1984 (originally classified Secret), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90b01370r000801070040-2>.
18. CIA, "Mining of the Red Sea," 2.
19. Memo from MED to MODUK distribution, "Mines in the Red Sea," September 10, 1984 (FCO 31/4166), TNA.
20. UK Embassy Addis Ababa to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Mines in the Gulf of Suez and Red Sea," 9 August 1984 (FCO 31/4166), TNA.
21. Chris O'Flaherty, "Red Sea-Mines of August," posted on Vernon Link (Vernonlink.UK/Red-Sea).
22. Loose minute from UK Defence Intelligence Staff to internal distribution, "Gulf of Suez/Red Sea-Mines," October 16, 1984, (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
23. Loose minute from UK Defence Intelligence Staff for internal distribution, "Gulf of Suez Mine," October 19, 1984 (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
24. Truver, "The Mines of August."
25. CIA Research Paper, "The Libyan Military Threat to the United States in the Mediterranean," October 1984, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00314r000300040004-2>.
26. CIA memorandum, "Mining of the Red Sea."
27. CIA, National Intelligence Daily, "Mine-Clearing Update," August 21, 1984, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp87t00970r000400020078-2>.
28. Ibid.
29. CIA memorandum, "Mining of the Red Sea."
30. CIA National Intelligence Daily, "Mine-Clearing Update," August 21, 1984.
31. Message from UK Embassy Amman to MODUK, "Mines in the Red Sea," August 11, 1984 (FCO 8/5417), TNA.
32. O'Flaherty, "Red Sea-Mines of August."
33. Post-deployment report from Third Mine Countermeasures Squadron to Captain, Mine Countermeasures, "Operation Harling-Report of Proceedings," December 14, 1984 (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
34. CIA, Talking points for DDCI, "Update on Situation in Persian Gulf," September 17, 1987, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp89b00224r000501750002-7>.
35. Loose minute from DCts to MODUK distribution, "Operation Harling-Mine Exploitation," October 22, 1984 (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
36. Ibid.
37. Loose minute from DS11 for distribution to MOD, DIS, and FCO, "PQ 9950," October 16, 1984 (FCO 8/5420), TNA.
38. Message, Initial mine exploitation report from ARE Portland, 24 October (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
39. Loose minute from DCts to MODUK distribution, "Operation Harling-Mine Exploitation," October 22, 1984.
40. Message, Initial mine exploitation report from ARE Portland, October 24, 1984 (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
41. Ibid.
42. Post-deployment report from Third Mine Countermeasures Squadron to Captain, Mine Countermeasures, "Operation Harling-Report of Proceedings," December 14, 1984 (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.
43. Scott Truver, "Writing U.S. Naval Operational History, 1980-2010: U.S. Navy MCM in Terrorism and War," accessed on Naval History and Heritage website ([history.navy.mil](http://history.navy.mil)) on November 22, 2021.
44. Truver, "The Mines of August."
45. UK Cabinet, "Conclusions of a Meeting Held on Tuesday, 13 September 1984," (CAB 128/79/7), accessed online on November 22, 2021 (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>), TNA.
46. Crist, *The Twilight War*, 235-36.
47. CIA talking points for DDCI, "Update on Situation in Persian Gulf," September 17, 1987.
48. The author participated in several such exercises.
49. Briefing script, "Mine Clearance in the Gulf of Suez-Op Harling," undated (DEFE 24/3162), TNA.

