European-led Gulf force on way

- Hunt told Parliament that the protection force "will not be part of the US maximum pressure policy on Iran
- Islamic Revolutionary **Guard Corps seized the** Stena Impero on Friday
- Iran impounded the tanker after claiming it failed to respond to distress calls and turned off its transponder after hitting a fishing boat
- Britain has said there was no evidence of a collision and said the vessel was in Omani waters, with its transponder switched on

Iranian authorities have said the crew of the British-flagged tanker -18 Indians, including the captain, three Russians, a Latvian and a Filipino -- are all in good health

London, United Kingdom

ritain on Monday said it was planning a European-led protection force for shipping in the Gulf after Iranian authorities seized a British-flagged tanker in a dramatic escalation of tensions in the muz.

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt condemned Iran's ac- an Iranian tanker off its overseas tions as "state piracy" while territory of Gibraltar on suspiat the same time emphasising cion of breaching EU sanctions that Britain did not want con-

"We will seek to establish this mission as quickly as possible," Hunt said, adding that a second warship that Britain has sent to the region would arrive by July

In a ramping up of tensions, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized the Stena Im pero on Friday in the Gulf's strategic Strait of Hor-



An image grab taken from a broadcast by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) shows crew members of the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero, after it was seized by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps



against Syria against a backdrop

of brinkmanship between Wash-

ington and

On Mon-

Tehran.

We will seek to establish this mission as quickly as possible. A second warship that Britain has sent to the region would arrive by July 29.

FOREIGN SECRETARY JEREMY HUNT

day, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said his coun-The move came two weeks after British authorities seized try is not seeking confrontation with Britain in a message directed at its likely incoming leader

Boris Johnson. "It is very important for Boris Johnson as he enters 10 Downing Street to understand that tion." Iran does not seek confrontation, that Iran wants normal relations based on mutual respect," Zarif told reporters during a visit to Nicaragua.

He also accused Britain "of to what it called indicadoing the bidding for the

Trump administration".

Hunt told Parliament that the policy on Iran because we remain committed to preserving the Iran nuclear agreement".

The United States pulled out of the nuclear deal last year.

Protection measures

Iran impounded the tanker after claiming it failed to respond to distress calls and turned off tar incident, which provoked fishing boat.

However, Britain has said in Omani waters, with its transponder switched on.

The EU has already expressed its "deep concern" at the move and on Monday German Foreign don't want any further escala-

There have been a number of attacks on tankers in the Strait of Hormuz since May, when the United States boosted its military presence in response tions of a

"credible threat" from Iran.

The British government had protectionforce"will not be part warned its ships to avoid the hours after a court in the tiny of the US maximum pressure shipping channel, a chokepoint British territory of Gibraltar exfor about a third of the world's sea-borne oil.

Hunt said the volume of shipping made it impossible to protect every vessel individually.

London about why the governprotecting ships after the Gibral-

The stand-off comes at a there was no evidence of a col-sensitive time for Britain, with calating tensions between Tehlision and said the vessel was Prime Minister Theresa May ran and Washington, which have over her failure to deliver Brexit. the middle.

Release Gibraltar ship

Iranian authorities have said Minister Heiko Maas said: "We the crew of the British-flagged tanker -- 18 Indians, including clear programme in exchange the captain, three Russians, a for sanctions relief.

Latvian and a Filipino -are all in good health.

Impero depends on an alive. investigation into its al-

they added.

The incident on Friday began tended by 30 days the detention of the Iranian-chartered tanker, Grace 1, which was seized on July 4.

"To all the countries that are Questions are being asked in calling on Iran to release the tanker, we ask them to tell Britment was not more proactive in ainthe same thing," the Iranian spokesman said on Monday.

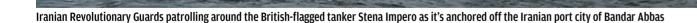
Hunt has said Britain wants its transponder after hitting a fury and a threat of retaliation sufficient guarantees that the oil was not bound for Syria.

The incidents come amid esstepping down on Wednesday left European nations caught in In May 2018, President Don-

ald Trump withdrew the United States from the landmark 2015 deal that put curbs on Iran's nu-Britain, France and Germany

were also signatories and have The fate of the Stena been trying to keep the deal

The US administration reimleged breach of in- posed tough sanctions on Iran, ternational which has retaliated by increasmaritime ing its enrichment of uranium beyond limits set in the nuclear accord. Last month, Trump called off air strikes against Iran at the last minute after Tehran downed a US drone.



British-Iranian woman transferred back to Tehran prison

London. United Kingdom

Aiailed in Tehran since 2016

kept chained and under heavy She was then allowed to see "I wasn't allowed to leave the leasing her on health grounds. guard for six days which she says her mother and five-year-old room, as I was chained to the

British-Iranian mother her husband Richard Ratcliffe. day, Ratcliffe added.

The 40-year-old detainee, has been returned to prison after who is serving a five-year term I survived," Zaghari-Ratcliffe being held in the mental ward for sedition, was returned to said, in comments relayed by her last three years doggedly cam- the Health Commission to final- years for allegedly trying to topof a public hospital for nearly a Tehran's notorious Evin prison husband in a lengthy statement paigning for his wife's release, ly rule that Nazanin is not fit to ple the Iranian government. week, her husband said Monday. -- used to hold political prison- detailing her detention in the said he hoped Iranian medical stay in prison and can be granted Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was ers -- on Saturday, he said.

left her "broken", according to daughter Gabriella the following bed. It was proper torture.

"I am all right, broken, but prison," she added. psychiatric ward.

"I am relieved I am back to

Ratcliffe, who has spent the officials might now consider re- unconditional release."

"The whole experience was in April 2016 as she was leav- arm, she denies all charges.

deeply traumatising," he said ing Iran after taking their then of her transfer to the mental unit.

"Her lawyer will be pressing

22-month-old daughter to visit her family.

She was sentenced to five

A project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Zaghari-Ratcliffe was arrested the media group's philanthropic