

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 20 July 2019 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a factual update on an incident in the Strait of Hormuz on Friday 19 July.

On 19 July at approximately 4 p.m. United Kingdom time, the British-flagged tanker *Stena Impero* was boarded by Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz. The vessel was surrounded by four vessels and a helicopter before she was boarded. Stena Bulk, the Swedish company that owns the tanker, has released a public statement confirming that there are 23 seafarers on board, made up of Indian, Russian, Latvian and Filipino nationals. There have been no reported injuries.

The vessel's owners have confirmed that the *Stena Impero* was in full compliance with all navigation and international regulations, with her Automatic Identification System (AIS) switched on and publicly available and verifiable.

The United Kingdom authorities confirm that Iranian forces approached the *Stena Impero* in the western bound traffic lane within Omani territorial waters. The ship was exercising the lawful right of transit passage in an international strait as provided for under international law. International law requires that the right of transit passage shall not be impeded, and therefore the Iranian action constitutes illegal interference.

Iran has claimed that the British tanker tried to enter the Strait of Hormuz through the exit route, while not responding to messages or warnings, with her AIS turned off. This is not the case, as set out above. The Iranian Director General of the Ports and Maritime Organization of Hormozgan Province, Allahmorad Afifipour, has claimed that the tanker was detained due to a collision with an Iranian fishing boat. There is no evidence of this. Even if it had occurred, the ship's location within Omani territorial waters means that Iran would not have been permitted to intercept the *Stena Impero*.

On 19 July, there was also a further incident involving the Liberian-flagged but British-managed tanker *Mesdar*, which was boarded by Iranian forces but later released.

Following these incidents, on 19 July, the Department for Transport, as competent authority for British shipping, raised its International Ship and Port Facility Security Code level on the Strait of Hormuz to level 3 with immediate effect.



The Department requested all British flagged ships to avoid the Strait of Hormuz for an interim period until further notice.

Current tensions are extremely concerning, and our priority is to de-escalate. We do not seek confrontation with Iran. But it is unacceptable and highly escalatory to threaten shipping going about its legitimate business through internationally recognized transit corridors. The impediment to the right to transit passage and seizure of the *Stena Impero* is contrary to international law. We call on Iran to release the *Stena Impero*, and are working to resolve the situation through diplomatic means.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Jonathan Allen

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