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## 'Tupperware navy' to protect Gulf oil route

IAN BRUCE, Defence Correspondent

October 26 2006

Two of the Navy's smallest but most sophisticated and expensive warships are preparing to leave their Clyde base at Faslane for a two-year deployment to the Persian Gulf. HMS Ramsey and HMS Blyth, specialist mine-hunters whose glass-reinforced plastic hulls have earned them the nickname of the Tupperware navy, are due to sail to their new operational training area early next month.

The unspoken reason for the posting is to allow crews to learn how to counter the potential threat of Iranian sea mines along the West's strategic oil routes in the region. Over the period of the deployment, crews on the Royal Navy's eight-strong mine-hunting flotilla will learn how to deal with the detection challenges posed by the warm-water layers of the Gulf.

The Navy role will be vital in safeguarding passage for tankers in the narrow sea lanes around the Straits of Hormuz if Tehran decided to disrupt supplies in response to international sanctions over its nuclear programme.

The Sandown-class ships were designed to operate where metal-hulled vessels would be vulnerable to magnetic and acoustic mines.

Rear-Admiral Philip Wilcocks, the senior naval officer in Scotland, said: "The Sandowns are among the most capable ships in the world."

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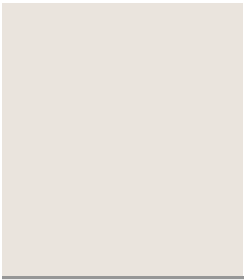
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