

US proceeding with plan for coalition to counter Iran threats

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff says he hopes other nations will soon sign up to join the effort to protect commercial traffic in Persian Gulf area



Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford testifies during a House Appropriations subcommittee on budget hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, May 1, 2019. (Jacquelyn Martin/AP)

FORT MYER, Virginia (AP) — The United States will move ahead with plans to build a coalition of nations to monitor and deter Iranian threats against commercial shipping in the Persian Gulf area and in a heavily trafficked waterway between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff said Tuesday.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford said the Pentagon has developed a specific plan, and that he believes it will be clear within a couple of weeks which nations are willing to join the effort.

Mark Esper, the acting secretary of defense, raised the issue last month with allied officials at NATO headquarters, but no nations were ready to commit to participating. Esper said at the time that the plans would have to be further refined.

Dunford said he discussed the matter Tuesday with Esper and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and that plans are coming together.



An Iranian Revolutionary Guard speedboat maneuvers in the Persian Gulf while an oil tanker is seen in the background, July 2, 2012. (Vahid Salemi/AP)

“We’re getting ready now to move out,” Dunford told a small group of reporters at Fort Myer, Virginia. “We have a pretty clear concept of what we want to do.”

He suggested that the project could begin with a small coalition.

“This will be scalable. So, with a small number of contributors, we can have a small mission and we’ll expand that as the number of nations that are willing to participate identify themselves,” he said.

He said the US military’s main role would be to provide “maritime domain awareness” – intelligence and surveillance information – to the ships of coalition

partners that would conduct patrols in vulnerable waterways like the Strait of Hormuz, which separates the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman, as well as the Bab el Mandeb, a heavily trafficked strait between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.

Any escorting of commercial ships would be done by military ships sailing under the flag of the commercial vessel, he said.

The initiative was triggered last month by Trump administration concerns that Iran was behind recent attacks on commercial ships in the Persian Gulf region.

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