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Why crash may be G

Navies from 40 nations, 6,500 sailors and explosive-sniffing LIONS: International forces descend on Middle East for massive naval mine removal training

- The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise is the largest exercise of its kind worldwide
- The forces all come together with the goal of protecting international trade and commerce shipping lanes
- 38 ships, 19 underwater vehicles and some 100 explosive disposal divers are working from the northern Red Sea to the northern Red Sea

By JOSH GARDNER FOR MAILONLINE

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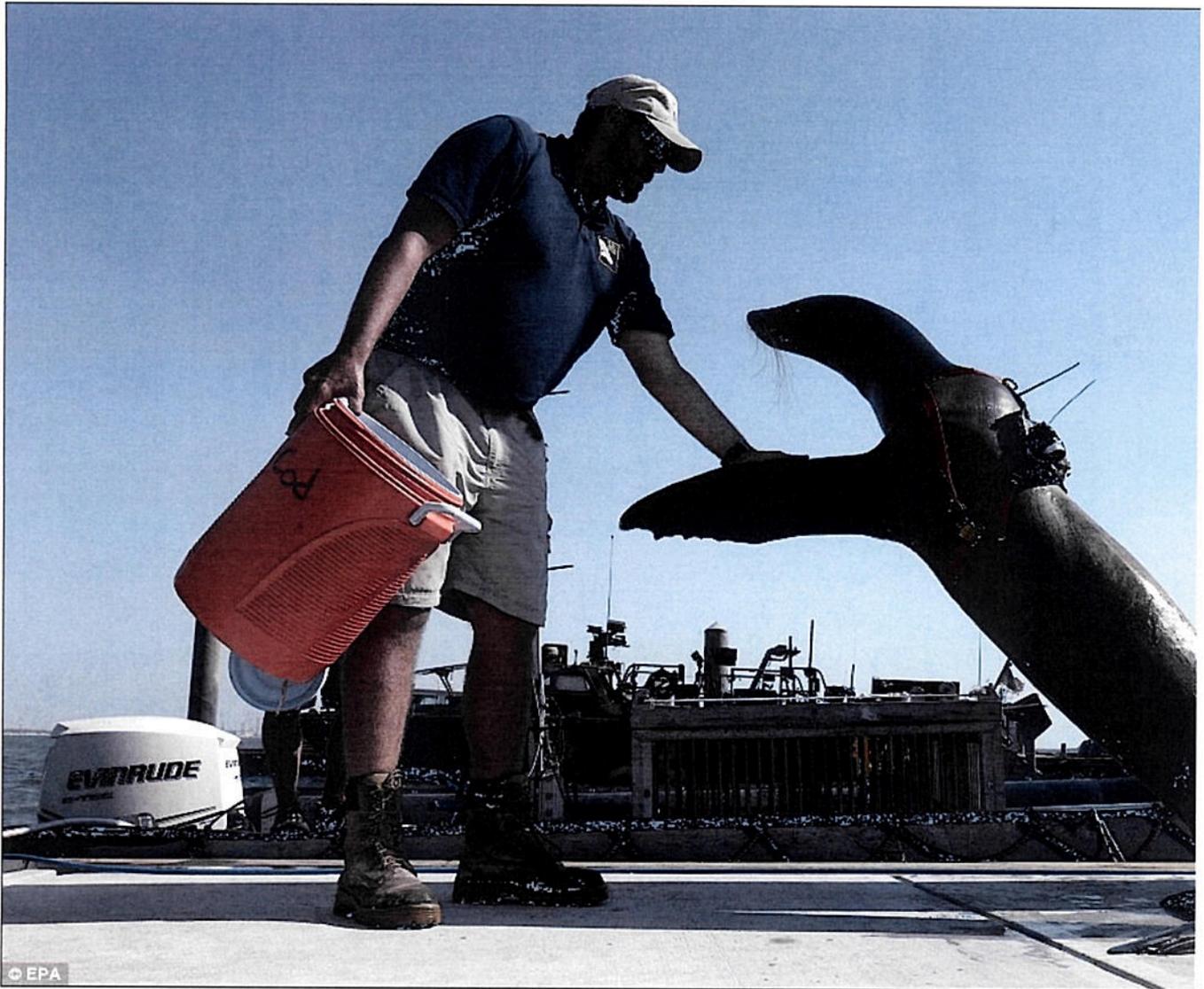
A massive multi-national exercise in anti-naval mine training descended on coastlines across the Middle East last week and, in addition to 6,500 sailors from over 40 world navies, some explosives-sniffing California sea lions showed up to show off their skills.

The International Mine Countermeasures Exercise or IMCMEX, the largest exercise of its kind, exists to help preserve the safety of the shipping lanes and the global commerce they make possible.

The sea lions equipped with lasers and sonar were deployed for the first time ever to detect and remove objects, as well as secure hard-to-reach underwater areas.



Salute: A US Navy Marine Mammal Program (NMMP) California sea lion named Jack salutes his handler in Bahrain, where he's world's largest ever maritime exercise focused on protecting the world's shipping lanes



© EPA

Job well done: Here, a sea lion named Codi--equipped with a laser guidance system--shakes hands with his handler near the B Manama



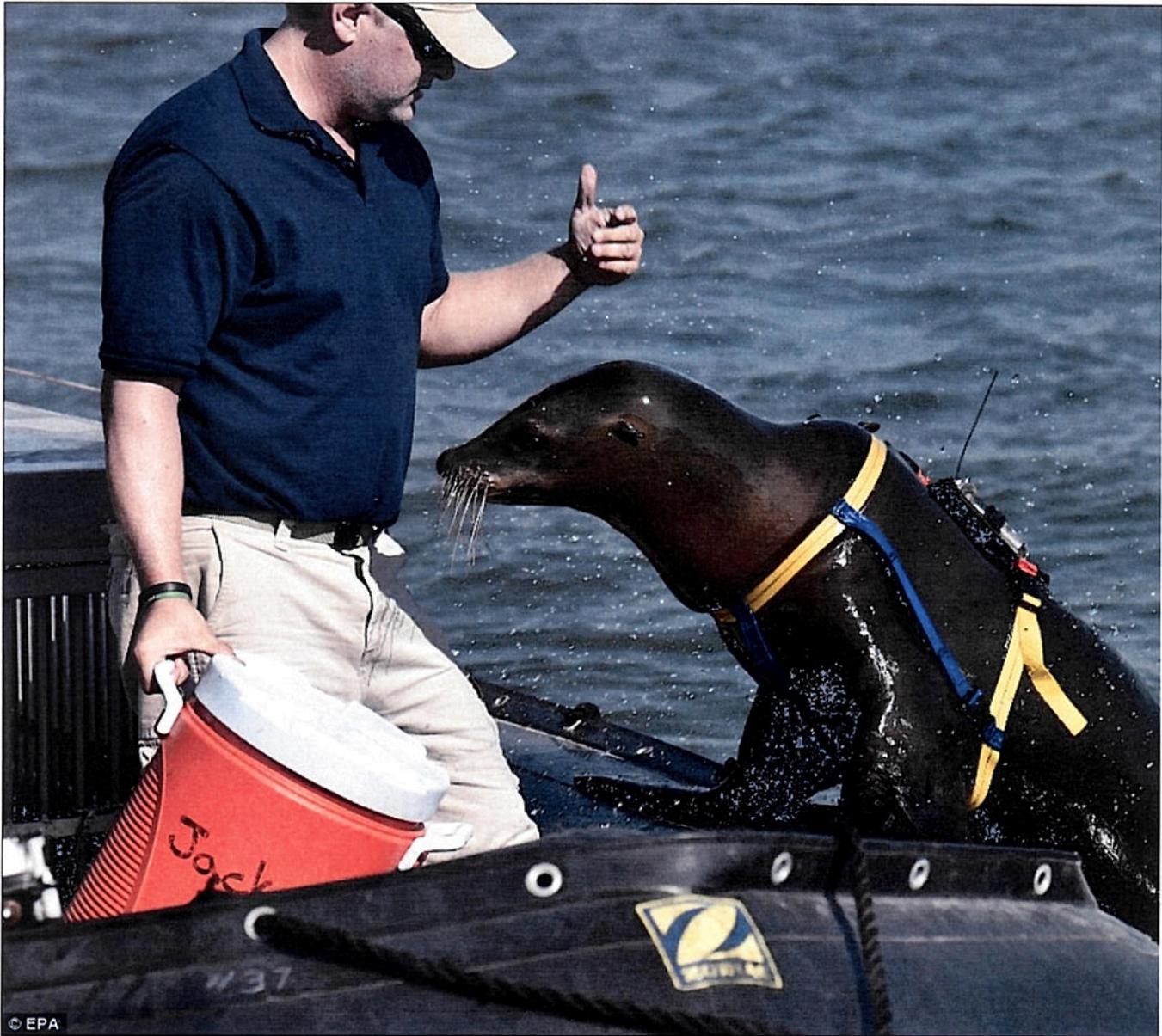
Making a splash: A sea lion with laser and sonar devices attached to its back jumps into a boat during a media demonstration International Mine Countermeasures Exercise

A total of 44 nations from six continents with more than 6,500 personnel are taking part in IMCMEX. They've gathered from the north to the southern Red Sea.

The marine mammal program is several decades old. Dolphins and sea lions were used during the Vietnam War and Operation Iraqi Freedom. None of the animals were harmed in the anti-terrorist work and they never have to carry live mines.

Instead, they find the devices and place markers on them before Navy divers retrieve and defuse the devices.

In addition to the impressive sea lions, this year's exercises include aerial vehicles capable of detecting and destroying mines below the surface. The new Airborne Laser Mine Detection System (ALMDS) 'is a sensor system designed to detect, classify and localize floating and bottom mines' according to the **official blog** of the U.S. Navy.



© EPA

Don't do the diffusing: The sea lions identify and tags naval mines in order for them to be defused by Navy divers



Unique talents: Sea lions equipped with lasers and sonar are deployed for the first time to detect and remove objects, as well as underwater areas which are hard to reach, according to officials



Not just sea lions; The drill is the world's largest naval exercise with 44 countries from six continents taking part in it with more sailors from the participating navies taking part in the drills which have been broadened to include maritime security operations and maritime infrastructure



Thar she blows: The at-sea portion of the exercises, which began this week following a 3-day symposium in Bahrain, has 38 ships, 19 unmanned underwater vehicles, and some 100 divers included from all participating nations

According to Vice Admiral John Miller of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet,

The at-sea portion of the exercises, which began this week following a 3-day symposium in Bahrain, has 38 ships, 19 unmanned underwater vehicles and some 100 divers included from all participating nations.

'This year's IMCMEX is significantly more complex than previous editions of this exercise, with more ships, more nations and more S an international force training to protect the world's sea-lanes,' said Vice Admiral Miller.

Miller emphasized the importance of the area for international commerce.

'Nearly 20 percent of the world's oil transits through the Strait of Hormuz every day. Imagine the impact on the global economy if such a flow were restricted because of restricted sea-lanes. This region is clearly important to the whole world,' he said.



© U.S. Navy

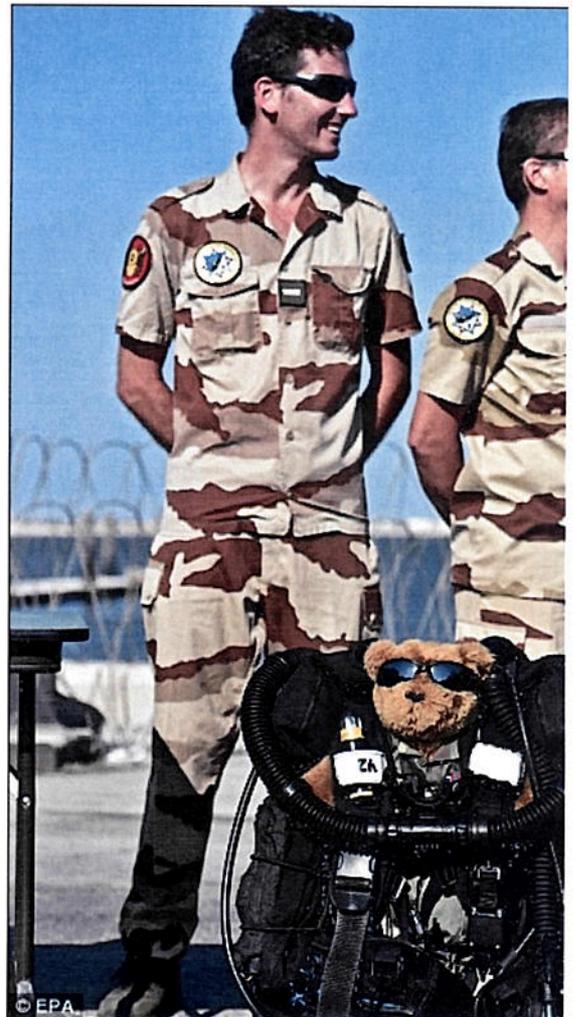
Forty-four nations: Divers from the U.S. Navy and Jordan conduct a search dive as part of the International Mine Countermeas



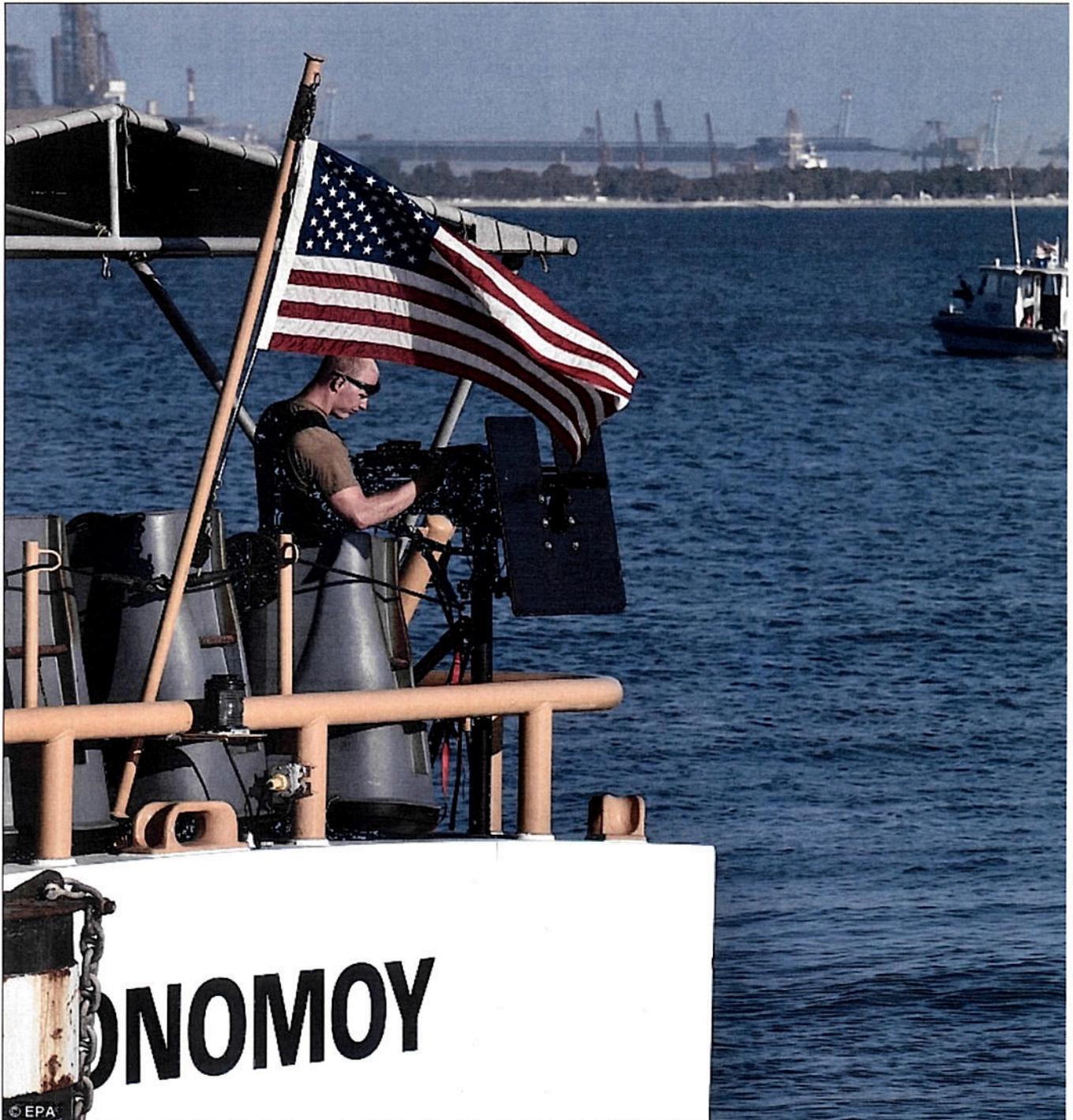
In this Friday, Oct. 31, 2014 photo provided by the U.S. Navy, the guided-missile destroyer USS Sterett, third from front, participated in an international exercise, involving British and U.S. mine-countermeasure vessels in the Persian Gulf. The guided-missile destroyer is part of operations targeting Islamic State group militants in Iraq and Syria



Drills: United Arab Emirates Navy sailors drill with US Coast Guard sailors in the Bahraini capital Manama, Bahrain Sunday



At right, the mascot 'Teddy' of the French Navy Explosives and Ordnance Disposal (EOD) divers seen inside the dive gear at the US Navy 5th Fleet in Bahrain. At left, US Navy patrol boats seen moored at the pier of the US Navy 5th Fleet in Bahrain



Watching the exercises: A US Coast Guard sailor on board the USCGC Monomoy cutter maintains the ship gun while moored at Navy 5th Fleet

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