

ROYAL NAVY SHIP HELPING TO EVACUATE BRITONS FROM LIBYA

A Royal Navy survey ship is evacuating Britons from Libya amid worsening violence in the country, the BBC understands.

People are being taken to **HMS Enterprise** as it awaits offshore. The Foreign Office previously urged British people to leave the country immediately and is temporarily closing its embassy in the Libyan capital.

The MoD said the government was helping to "provide assisted departure for a number of UK nationals". Some 108 people have registered to leave on board the ship. Not all of those registered are British - they are said to include two Irish citizens and one German - and they are not thought to be diplomats.

The **Enterprise** is expected to set off for Malta - once everyone arrives on board.



HMS ENTERPRISE H 88 Photo : Capt. Lawrence Dalli ©

Its departure is not considered a rescue mission as there are still commercial means to leave Libya. The country has been gripped by instability and a power struggle among rival groups since the overthrow of former leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Fighting between rival militias - one established by the outgoing parliament and one controlled by the defence ministry - has spread northwards in the capital in recent days.

Royal Navy **Echo Class** Hydrographic Ship **HMS ENTERPRISE H 88** entering Grand Harbour, Malta on Friday 18th July, 2014 coming from Gibraltar. More than 200 people have been killed in Tripoli and the eastern city of Benghazi in the past two **weeks**.

The British embassy in Tripoli is to suspend its operations on Monday, after which the remaining staff are to leave.

It is relocating to neighbouring Tunisia for the time being.

BBC political correspondent Chris Mason said: "I'm told the number of British nationals in the country is not huge - it is in the hundreds, rather than the thousands.

Commercial routes to leave the country are still open. "The Foreign Office has already announced that it will suspend the operations of its embassy in Tripoli after fighting in the capital intensified, including near the embassy building itself." But I'm told staff at the embassy are yet to leave - as they have been supervising the evacuation of those Britons who want to leave." British ambassador to Libya Michael Aron has described the situation as "very sad" and said staff would return to the embassy "as soon as security allows".

British ambassador Michael Aron said the decision to leave had been taken "reluctantly" It is thought there are between 100 and 300 Britons still in Libya. In a statement, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) said: "As the FCO has made clear, the UK Government will provide assisted departure for a number of UK nationals before suspending consular operations on Monday. "For operational reasons we will not discuss further details including whether, and in what ways, the MoD could support these efforts." The Foreign Office has said a limited number of commercial flights are still leaving Libya but warned flight schedules could change without notice.

On Wednesday, British Airways suspended flights to and from Tripoli up to and including 5 August because of the security situation at the country's main international airport. Land routes also remain open but the Foreign Office said "the security situation can change very quickly".

Source : BBC