Beat: Miscellaneous

Israel says seizes Gaza-bound rocket shipment from Iran

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USPA News - The Israeli navy on Wednesday seized a civilian cargo ship in the Red Sea, near the coast of Sudan, that was allegedly carrying Iranian-supplied rockets made in Syria and intended for Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military said. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon said Israeli naval Special Forces intercepted the vessel on early Wednesday when it was approximately 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) off the Israeli coast. He said the vessel contained weapons of "strategic significance," including rockets, but emphasized they did not reach their destination.

"The IDF and Israeli intelligence`s interception of the vessel successfully prevented the smuggling of these weapons whose ultimate purpose was to target Israeli civilians and disrupt life in Israel," Yaalon said. "This Iranian attempt to transfer weapons to the Gaza Strip is additional evidence that Gaza is a terrorist entity under Iranian auspices preparing to strike deep into Israel." The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said the Panama-flagged civilian cargo vessel was carrying dozens of M-302 surface-to-surface missiles which are capable of reaching any point in Israel, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, from the Gaza Strip. Those weapons would have significantly enhanced the firepower of Palestinian weapons. The IDF said it first became aware of the shipment several months ago when Israeli intelligence saw it leaving Damascus International Airport in Syria. They were then flown to the Iranian capital of Tehran before being disguised among regular cargo and sent to the port of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran. "[The weapons shipment is then] loaded on a civilian vessel, the KLOS-C. The ship`s crew is unknowingly delivering weapons to terrorists," the IDF spokesman said in a reconstruction of events. He said it was then shipped to Umm Qasr in Iraq in an attempt to hide the Iranian connection. "This delayed the ship for five more days. The ship is then headed to Port Sudan but is stopped before reaching its destination. Israeli naval forces intercept the vessel and prevent the weapons from reaching the Gaza Strip," the IDF spokesman said, adding that, after reaching Port Sudan, the weapons were supposed to be smuggled by land through the Sinai Peninsula and into the Gaza Strip. But Gaza Interior Ministry spokesman Islam Shahwan refuted Israel`s accusations and encouraged journalists to avoid "being tricked by the Israeli narrative about capturing a ship carrying weapons to Gaza," the Palestinian Ma?an news agency reported. Iran`s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) also rejected the reports, calling them "completely untrue." The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had held a series of security consultations before approving Wednesday`s operation. He later praised the service members involved in the action, calling it a "perfect operation." "At a time when it is talking to the major powers, Iran smiles and says all sorts of nice things, [while] the same Iran is sending deadly weapons to terrorist organizations and is doing so via a ramified network of secret operations in order to send rockets, missiles and other deadly weapons that will be used to harm innocent citizens," Netanyahu said. "This is the true Iran and this state cannot possess nuclear weapons." U.S. officials said they had been aware of the Israeli operation and coordinated on the issue. "The United States and Israel have had routine communications about this issue through intelligence and military channels, as well as through our national security advisors," said U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird expressed his concern over the seizure of Iranian weapons and called on Iran to end its alleged "blatant support" of terrorists. "The new Iranian administration continues to bankroll and arm terrorists even as it fails to deliver basic goods and services to its own citizens," he said. "This incident is an important reminder that the threat posed by Iran to the region is multi-pronged and has not been diminished by the Rouhani regime`s charm offensive." The last major conflict between Israel and Hamas, known as Operation Pillar of Defense, was fought in November 2012, when an Israeli offensive set off eight days of fierce cross-border fighting. At least 174 Palestinians and 6 Israelis were killed while hundreds more were injured until an Egyptian-brokered truce was reached with Palestinian militants. Since November 2012, the region has remained relatively peaceful, but militant rocket attacks on Israel and Israeli airstrikes on Gaza occur regularly.

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