

Iranian gunboats seize container ship

Jeremy Binnie

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Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy (IRGC) forced a container ship to divert as it transited through the Strait of Hormuz on 28 April, the US Department of Defense (DoD) confirmed later that day.

It said *Maersk Tigris* (IMO: 9694581) was in a recognised international shipping lane inside Iranian territorial waters and had the right of 'innocent passage' when several IRGCN patrol vessels approached it at about 06:05 GMT.

"The ship's master was contacted and directed to proceed further into Iranian territorial waters. He declined and one of the IRGCN craft fired shots across the bridge of *Maersk Tigris*," said DoD spokesman Colonel Steve Warren. The ship's master then complied with the demand and proceeded towards the Iranian island of Larak.

Col Warren added that the US Navy picked up the ship's distress signal and directed the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS *Farragut* to the nearest location and that maritime reconnaissance aircraft were

monitoring the situation.

AIS tracking data shows the vessel was destined for Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates, but instead headed out of the shipping lane running through the Strait of Hormuz to anchor between the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and Qeshm island.

The seizure of *Maersk Tigris* followed another suspected attempt by the IRGCN to intercept a Maersk container ship as it transited the Strait of Hormuz in the other direction on 24 April. According to a US official cited by CNN, four IRGCN boats followed *Maersk Kensington* (IMO: 9333010) "for a period of time before withdrawing".

Maersk said in a statement on 30 April that it presumed its ships were being targeted in connection with 10 containers it delivered to Dubai on behalf of an Iranian company in 2005. The containers were disposed of when they were not collected after 90 days. Maersk said it had only been informed earlier that day that an Iranian court had ordered it to pay USD3.6 million in compensation to the Iranian company. ■

Analysis

The apparent justification for seizing *Maersk Tigris* appears to be a weak excuse for aggressive IRGCN behaviour that is probably linked to the Iranians' growing frustration over the blockade currently imposed on Yemen.

US officials said on 20 April that a convoy of seven Iranian cargo ships was heading towards Yemen, which is currently subject to a UN-approved blockade on arms shipments reaching

the pro-Iranian group Ansar Allah. That convoy turned around three days later, raising suspicions that it did not want to risk being searched as it was carrying arms for Ansar Allah.

Iranian media have also claimed that Saudi aircraft have intercepted Iranian aircraft carrying humanitarian supplies to Yemen and bombed Sanaa International Airport when humanitarian flights were on the ground.

IDF to refurbish Achzarit APC fleet

Jeremy Binnie

London

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Israeli Achzarit armoured personnel carriers returning to Israel from the Gaza Strip during Operation 'Protective Edge' on 4 August 2014.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are set to receive another 100 Achzarit heavy armoured personnel carriers (APCs) with new engines.

The US Department of Defense announced on 29 April a Foreign Military Sales contract covering the supply of 100 unidentified engine assembly kits and 100 transmission upgrade kits "in support of efforts to repair and upgrade Israel's Achzarit heavy armoured personnel carriers".

Worth USD16 million, the contract was awarded to Diesel Engineering Inc and is expected to be completed by October 2017.

This follows a USD20.8 million contract that the DoD awarded to Diesel Engineering Inc in May 2010 for an unstated number of engine upgrade kits, transmission and cooling systems for Israeli Achzarit APCs. The Israeli company Nimda, which is carrying out the upgrade, subsequently told *IHS Jane's* that 710 hp Detroit Diesel Corporation 8V-92TA turbocharged diesel engines and Allison XTG-411-5A fully automatic transmissions were being installed in the vehicles.

The Achzarit programme involved extensively reworking the hulls of T-54/55 tanks captured from Arab armies into well-armoured APCs weighing around 44 tonnes. It has never been confirmed how many Achzarits were produced, with figures ranging from 200 to 500. However, the latest contract suggests the IDF will have at least 200 Achzarit APCs with the new drive train. ■

SANG deploys to Yemeni border

Jeremy Binnie

London

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In a move that could indicate that Saudi forces deployed along the Yemeni border are struggling to contain the Ansar Allah group, the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) has been ordered to deploy to the Najran region.

The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on 26 April that the SANG forces being deployed included a mechanised infantry brigade as well as artillery, air defence, reconnaissance, engineering, logistics,

and anti-armour units.

The SPA report came after the Saudi news channel almnatiq.net released a video showing a large SANG convoy arriving in Najran. The convoy included numerous General Dynamics Land Systems



The SANG has deployed numerous LAVs to the Yemeni border.

Light Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) in various configurations.

The well-equipped SANG is generally considered to be a more capable force than the Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF).

Najran borders the stronghold of Ansar Allah (the Houthis) that the air forces of Saudi Arabia and several of its allies have been attacking since 25 March. The group has attempted to retaliate against the kingdom by carrying out cross-border attacks that have killed several members of the Saudi military and security forces. ■