Royal Navy, Assisted by US Navy's 5th Fleet, Seizes Smuggled Iranian Missiles



HMS Montrose seized Iranian weapons from speedboats earlier this year, including surface-to-air missiles and engines for land-attack cruise missiles. *ROYAL NAVY*

LONDON — In early 2022, while on routine maritime security operations, Royal Navy ship HMS Montrose seized Iranian weapons from speedboats being operated by smugglers in international waters south of Iran, the U.K Ministry of Defence said July 7. The weapons seized included surface-to-air-missiles and engines for land attack cruise missiles, in contravention of UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015).

This is the first time a British naval warship has interdicted

a vessel carrying such sophisticated weapons from Iran.

The seizures, which occurred on Jan. 28 and Feb. 25, took place in the early hours of the morning. HMS Montrose's Wildcat helicopter was scanning for vessels smuggling illicit goods. The helicopter crew spotted small vessels moving at speed away from the Iranian coast.

During the February interdiction, U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley supported efforts by deploying a Seahawk helicopter to provide critical overwatch during the operation. On both occasions, the Wildcat helicopter pursued the vessels and reported back to HMS Montrose that they could see suspicious cargo on deck.

A team of Royal Marines approached the vessels on two rigid-hulled inflatable boats before securing and searching the vessel. Dozens of packages containing advanced weaponry were discovered, confiscated and brought back to HMS Montrose.

"The U.K. is committed to upholding international law, from standing up to aggression in Europe to interdicting illegal shipments of weaponry that perpetuates instability in the Middle East," said Minister for the Armed Forces James Heappey. "The U.K. will continue to work in support of an enduring peace in Yemen and is committed to international maritime security so that commercial shipping can transit safely without threat of disruption."

The seized packages were returned to the U.K. for technical analysis, which revealed the shipment contained multiple rocket engines for the Iranian-produced 351 land-attack cruise missile and a batch of 358 surface-to-air missiles.

The 351 is a cruise missile with a range of 1,000 kilometers, regularly used by the Houthis to strike targets in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and was also the type of weapon used to attack Abu Dhabi on Jan. 17, which killed three civilians.

On June 24, the Ministry of Defence hosted a panel of experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014), which concerns the conflict in Yemen. The panel inspected the seized weapons and received a technical brief by the U.K.’s defense intelligence analysts.

“These interdictions demonstrate the professionalism and commitment of the Royal Navy to promoting stability in this region,” said Cmdr. Claire Thompson, commanding Officer of HMS Montrose. “I am extremely proud of my crew – the Royal Navy Sailors, aircrew and Royal Marines involved in these endeavors and the significant positive impact they are having in maintaining the international rules-based order at sea.”

The U.K. retains a permanent presence in the Middle East, with HMS Montrose having been deployed to the region since early 2019, actively supporting multinational maritime security operations and protecting the interests of the United Kingdom and its allies. The ship operates under the control and direction of the UK Maritime Component Command, based in Bahrain.