U.S. Navy Seizes 1,400 Assault Rifles During Illicit Weapons Interdiction



Illicit weapons seized from a stateless fishing vessel in the North Arabian Sea are arranged for inventory aboard guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane's (DDG 77) flight deck, Dec. 21. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Elisha Smith*

MANAMA, Bahrain – U.S. 5th Fleet ships seized approximately 1,400 AK-47 assault rifles and 226,600 rounds of ammunition from a stateless fishing vessel during a flag verification boarding in accordance with customary international law in the North Arabian Sea, Dec. 20, NAVCENT public affairs said Dec. 22.

U.S. Navy patrol coastal ships USS Tempest (PC 2) and USS Typhoon (PC 5) found the weapons during a search conducted by embarked U.S. Coast Guard personnel. The illicit weapons and

ammunition were later transported to guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane (DDG 77) where they await final disposition.

The stateless vessel was assessed to have originated in Iran and transited international waters along a route historically used to traffic weapons unlawfully to the Houthis in Yemen. The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of weapons to the Houthis violates U.N. Security Council Resolutions and U.S. sanctions.

The vessel's five crew members identified themselves as Yemeni nationals and will be returned to Yemen.

After removing the crew and illicit cargo, U.S. naval forces determined the stateless vessel was a hazard to navigation for commercial shipping and sank it.

U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity. U.S. Navy warships operating in the U.S. 5th Fleet region have seized approximately 8,700 illicit weapons in 2021.

Guided-missile cruiser USS Monterey (CG 61) seized dozens of advanced Russian-made anti-tank guided missiles, thousands of Chinese Type 56 assault rifles, and hundreds of PKM machine guns, sniper rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers from a stateless vessel transiting the North Arabian Sea in May.

In February, guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) seized a cache of weapons off the coast of Somalia, including thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and crew served weapons. The inventory also included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses

approximately 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al Mandeb.