

UK reveals Royal Navy seizure of smuggled Iranian missiles

In early 2022, whilst 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 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 28th January and 25th February 2022, took place in the early hours of the morning. HMS Montrose's [Wildcat helicopter](#), equipped with state of the art radar systems, 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, United States Navy 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.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heapey said:

The UK 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. The UK 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 UK for technical analysis which revealed that 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 1,000km. It is 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 17th January 2022, which killed three civilians.

On Friday 24 June, the Ministry of Defence hosted the 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 UK's Defence Intelligence analysts.

Commanding Officer of HMS Montrose, Commander Claire Thompson, said:

These interdictions demonstrate the professionalism and commitment of the Royal Navy to promoting stability in this region. I am extremely proud of my crew – the Royal Navy sailors, aircrew and Royal Marines involved in these endeavours and the significant positive impact they are having in maintaining the international rules-based order at sea.

The UK retains a permanent presence in the Middle East, with HMS Montrose having been deployed to the region since early 2019, actively supporting multi-national 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](#) (UKMCC), based in Bahrain.

In the wider Gulf, HMS Montrose regularly works alongside international partners as part of the 38-nation coalition Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). CMF is the world's largest multinational maritime partnership, which exists to counter illicit non-state actors. HMS Montrose, a Type 23 frigate, has taken part in numerous successful operations to seize illicit drugs in the Gulf of Oman, most recently in January when [£15 million worth of heroin, methamphetamine, hashish and marijuana were seized](#).