

# Iran sends warships to Atlantic amid Venezuela concerns

Author:

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DUBAI: An Iranian destroyer and support vessel are now sailing in the Atlantic Ocean in a rare mission far from the Islamic Republic, Iran's state TV reported on Thursday, without offering the vessels' final destination. The trip by the new domestically built destroyer Sahand and the intelligence-gathering vessel Makran comes amid U.S. media reports, citing anonymous American officials, saying the ships were bound for Venezuela. The Associated Press could not immediately confirm the ships' destination.

The vessels departed last month from Iran's southern port of Bandar Abbas, said Adm. Habibollah Sayyari, Iran's deputy army chief. He described their mission as the Iranian navy's longest and most challenging voyage yet, without elaborating.

Iranian state TV released a short clip of the destroyer cruising through the Atlantic's rough seas. The video likely was shot from the Makran, a converted commercial oil tanker with a mobile launch platform for helicopters.

"The Navy is improving its seafaring capacity and proving its long-term durability in unfavorable seas and the Atlantic's unfavorable weather conditions," Sayyari said, adding that the warships would not call at any country's port during the mission.

Images from Maxar Technologies dated April 28 appear to show seven Iranian fast-attack craft typically associated with its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on the deck of the Makran. Satellite images from Planet Labs Inc. suggest it left a port at Bandar Abbas sometime after April 29. It wasn't immediately clear where the Makran and the destroyer are now.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price would not speculate on what the vessels were carrying, saying only "that if this is an effort to transfer weapons or otherwise to violate its international obligations we would be prepared to respond."

"We have seen the press reports regarding this movement," Price said. "We're prepared to leverage our applicable authorities, including sanctions, against any actor that enables Iran's ongoing provision of weapons to violent partners into proxies."

The website Politico first reported in late May, citing anonymous officials, that the ships' final destination may be Venezuela. Iran maintains close ties to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and has shipped gasoline and other products to the country amid a U.S. sanctions campaign targeting fuel-starved Caracas. Venezuela is believed to have paid Iran, under U.S. sanctions of its own, for the shipments.

A top aide to Maduro has denied press reports that the ships will dock there. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive geopolitical issues.

During a news conference May 31, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh declined to say where the Makran was going.

"Iran is always present in international waters and it has this right based

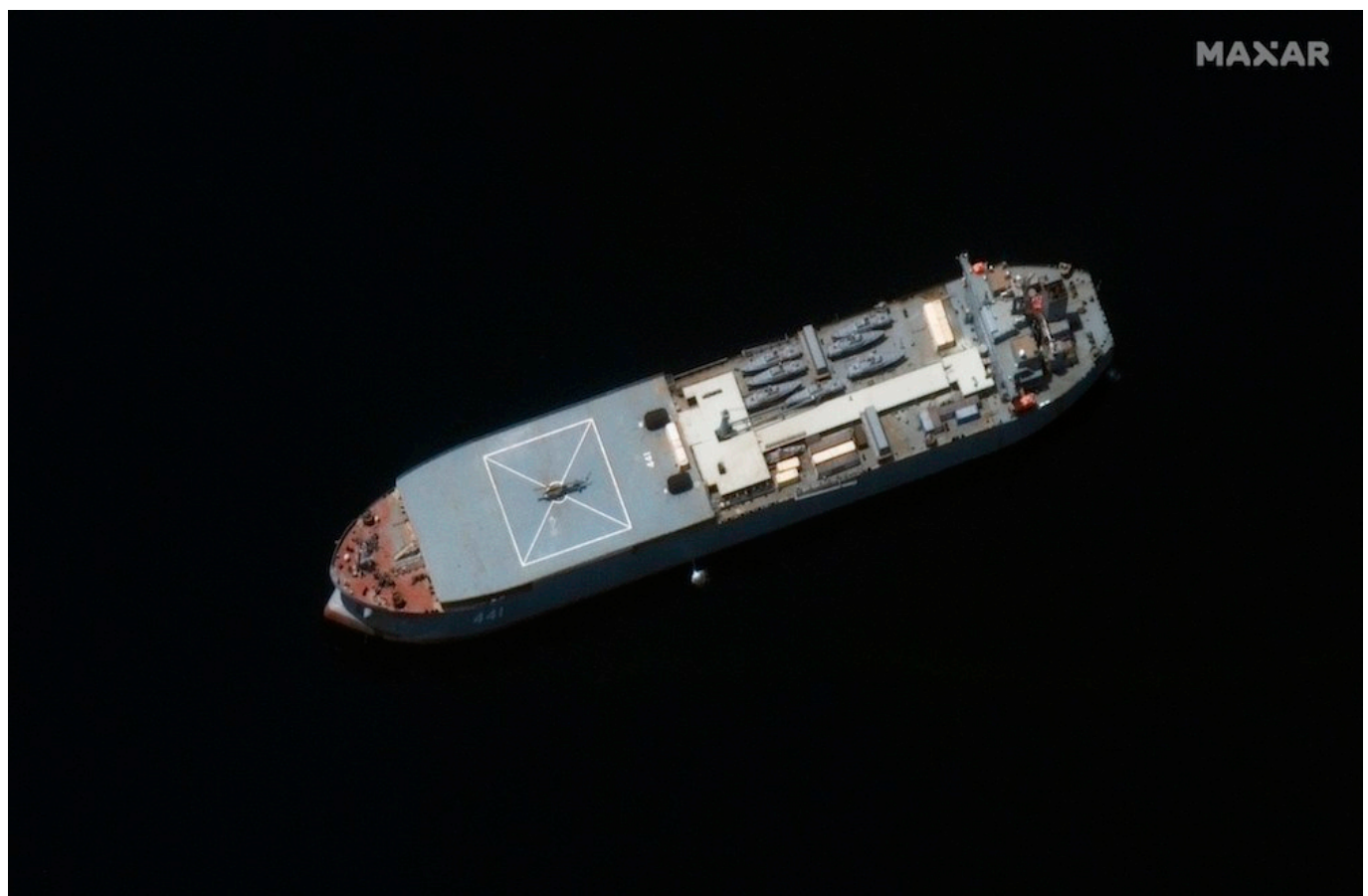
on international law and it can be present in international waters,” he said. “No country is able to violate this right, and I warn that no one makes miscalculations. Those who sit in glass houses should be careful.”

The fast-attack craft aboard the Makran are the type that the Guard uses in its tense encounters with U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz. It’s not immediately clear what Venezuela’s plans would be for those ships.

“If the boats are delivered, they may form the core of an asymmetrical warfare force within Venezuela’s armed forces,” the U.S. Naval Institute said in an earlier published analysis. “This could be focused on disrupting shipping as a means of countering superior naval forces. Shipping routes to and from the Panama Canal are near the Venezuelan coast.”

Earlier this month, fires sank Iran’s largest warship, the 207-meter (679-foot) Kharg, which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and conduct training exercises. Officials offered no cause for the blaze, which follows a series of mysterious explosions that began in 2019 targeting commercial ships in Mideast waterways.

The unusual voyage comes ahead of Iran’s June 18 presidential election, which will see voters select a successor for the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani.



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## [Yemen calls on international community to protect civilians](#)

Fri, 2021-06-11 18:56

ALEXANDRIA: Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has accused the Iran-backed Houthis of seeking to undermine peace efforts with recent missile strikes on the city of Marib. Hadi and a number of NGOs have called on the international community to protect Yemeni civilians from militia strikes, which have claimed dozens of lives in the last week.

Hadi said that Houthi missile and drone strikes on the densely populated city of Marib would destroy attempts to establish peace in Yemen and accused the Houthis of working on behalf of Iran.

“While the international community is working sincerely to find hope and opportunities for peace, the coup militias continue to escalate and claim innocent ... lives, ignoring any efforts to spare Yemeni blood and serving Iran’s destructive projects in the region,” Hadi said in a statement carried by Yemen’s official news agency, SABA.

On Thursday, Houthi forces fired a barrage of missiles and explosive-laden drones at Marib, killing eight civilians and wounding 27 others.

The missiles and drones reportedly ripped through a mosque filled with worshippers and a prison, and later targeted ambulances.

On June 6, a missile and a rigged drone hit a gas station in Marib, killing 21 civilians including a five-year-old child, sparking outrage inside and outside Yemen.

Marib Governor Sultan Al-Arada said the Houthis’ escalating missile and drone strikes on the city prove that the rebels have no serious interest in peace initiatives to end the war in Yemen, SABA reported.

The Yemeni government on Friday renewed its support for the Saudi Initiative and the current UN-brokered peace plan, known as the Joint Declaration, and other initiatives aimed at ending the war, stressing that the government has offered concessions to pave the way for a peace settlement.

In a statement, Yemen’s Foreign Ministry said the Houthis had specified conditions for reopening Sanaa airport under the UN-brokered peace deal and that the militias are seeking to turn the airport into an entry point for military experts and weapons.

The ministry was referring to the Houthis' demand for unchecked, unlimited flights to Sanaa airport from destinations including Iran, Syria and Lebanon, and vice-versa.

"Yemen's government has made sufficient concessions to guarantee the safe travel of all citizens, and not to turn this airport into a point for security and military services and the smuggling of (military) experts," the ministry said.

On Friday, an Omani delegation left Houthi-held Sanaa having failed to convince the Houthis to accept the UN peace deal. The delegation met with senior rebel officials, including Abdel Malik Al-Houthi.

Meanwhile, American and European officials have once again called on the Houthis to halt their military operations across Yemen and to engage positively with peace efforts.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said America would continue pressurizing the Houthis until they cease hostilities and agree to peace plans.

"The conflict in Yemen must end and bring relief to Yemeni people. It's time for the Houthis to accept a ceasefire and engage in real negotiations. The United States will maintain pressure on the Houthis, including through sanctions," Price tweeted.

Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, said after a meeting with Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak that the EU stands by the Yemeni government and its people and backs the current peace efforts led by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths.

"Met with Yemen FM @BinmubarakAhmed. Expressed full EU support to Government and people of Yemen. Stressed EU work with @OSE\_Yemen for immediate ceasefire and political talks. Good discussion on the importance of humanitarian access and an inclusive peace process" Fontelles tweeted on Friday.





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8 killed, 27 wounded after Houthis launch missile, drone strikes on Marib  
Yemen condemns Houthi attacks on Marib in letter to UN Security Council

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## [Tunisian cemetery offers living memorial to 'unknown migrants'](#)

Fri, 2021-06-11 16:45

ROME: A garden cemetery to honor some of the unknown migrants who died while crossing the Mediterranean in an attempt to reach Europe has been inaugurated in Zarzis, a Tunisian fishing village near the border with Libya.

The Jardin d'Afrique (Garden of Africa) cemetery includes a traditional 17th-century door, hand-painted ceramic naves and a prayer hall for all religions made by Algerian artist Rachid Koraichi.

Foreign envoys to Tunisia and a UNESCO representative attending the inaugural ceremony at the site were told that half of its 200 burial places are already full.

More than 21,000 people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean since 2014, according to the UN.

The cemetery and its garden of olive trees will hold the remains of unknown migrants, and aims to be a symbol as well as a place to remember and pray.

Koraichi, 74, said that the migrants buried there were “condemned by the sea” after facing “the Sahara, bandits and terrorists” and sometimes even torture.

“I wanted to help them go to heaven after the hell they went through,” he told Italian news agency ANSA.

A member of Tijaniyya, an influential Sufi order, launched the burial site project after hearing that Zarzis was running out of space to bury the dozens of dead bodies that washed up in the coastal village each summer.

The remains of more than 1,000 migrants have been buried in the town in the past decade.

In 2018, Koraichi bought land for the cemetery, and began work on decorations and facilities.

“I did this to help families mourn their loved ones, knowing that they have a dignified burial place,” he said.

Koraichi said that he viewed the garden as a symbolic place, similar to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, “because we are all responsible for this tragedy.”

The cemetery holds more than 200 white graves, surrounded by five olive trees, which symbolize the five pillars of Islam, and 12 vines representing the Christian apostles.

Gravestone markers have various descriptions, such as “Man, black shirt, Four Seasons Hotel,” or “Woman, black dress, Hachani beach,” which describe the unidentified corpse, where the body was found, and other elements that could help with identification.

An onsite facility where autopsies can be performed is planned in order to help identification.

Currently, autopsies take place in Gabes, 140 km away, which means the authorities have to transport the bodies in difficult conditions.

At the inauguration, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay paid tribute to Koraichi but also to “the shipwrecked people who died at sea in search of a better life” and to the “universal solidarity of associations, fishermen or individuals who save lives.”

Zarzis Mayor Mekki Lourraidh said: “Many of the young people from Zarzis left for Europe by sea. There were deaths, and we see our children among them.”



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[Jardin d'Afrique \(Garden of Africa\) cemetery](#)

[Rachid Koraichi](#)

[Audrey Azoulay](#)

Drowned migrants get 'dignified' burial in Tunisia cemetery  
At least 57 migrants drowned in shipwreck off Tunisia

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## [Russia preparing to give Iran advanced satellite system: report](#)

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Fri, 2021-06-11 07:16

WASHINGTON: Russia is set to deliver an advanced satellite system to Iran that will vastly improve its spying capabilities, according to a US media report.

Moscow is preparing to give Iran a Kanopus-V satellite with a high-resolution

camera, the Washington Post reported Thursday.

It will allow the Islamic republic to monitor facilities of its adversaries across the Middle East, the paper said, citing current and former US and Middle Eastern officials.

The report comes just days before Russian President Vladimir Putin meets his American counterpart Joe Biden for June 16 talks in Switzerland on the US leader's first foreign tour.

It could add to a long list of grievances in Washington ahead of the talks, from election interference to hacking operations linked to the Russian government.

The officials said the launch of the satellite could happen within months, and is the result of multiple trips to Russia by leaders of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards.

The satellite would be launched in Russia and contain Russian-made hardware, according to details shared by the officials.

While not of the capability of American satellites, Iran could "task" the new satellite with spying on specific locations.

There are fears that it would share such imagery with its proxies in Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon, one official said, among other concerns about Iran's ballistic missile and drone development.

Russian trainers have helped ground crews who would operate the satellite from a new site near the northern Iranian city of Karaj, The Post reported.

The deal could allow Tehran greater monitoring of the Arabian Gulf, Israeli bases and America's troop presence in Iraq.

Details of the sale also come at a delicate time when world powers are meeting to bring the US back to the Iran nuclear deal and Tehran back into compliance with it.

The 2015 landmark accord has been hanging by a thread since the US left it in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions, leading to Tehran to step up its nuclear activities long curtailed by the deal.



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Kremlin says date and location of Putin-Biden summit not yet decided

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## [Outgoing Mossad chief signals Israel behind Iran nuclear attacks](#)

Author:

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1623387265759756200

Fri, 2021-06-11 04:25

DUBAI: The outgoing chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence service has offered

the closest acknowledgment yet his country was behind recent attacks targeting Iran's nuclear program and a military scientist.

The comments by Yossi Cohen, speaking to Israel's Channel 12 investigative program "Uvda" in a segment aired Thursday night, offered an extraordinary debriefing by the head of the typically secretive agency in what appears to be the final days of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rule.

It also gave a clear warning to other scientists in Iran's nuclear program that they too could become targets for assassination even as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate terms to try to salvage its atomic accord with world powers.

"If the scientist is willing to change career and will not hurt us anymore, than yes, sometimes we offer them" a way out, Cohen said.

Among the major attacks to target Iran, none have struck deeper than two explosions over the last year at its Natanz nuclear facility. There, centrifuges enrich uranium from an underground hall designed to protect them from airstrikes.

In July 2020, a mysterious explosion tore apart Natanz's advanced centrifuge assembly, which Iran later blamed on Israel. Then in April of this year, another blast tore apart one of its underground enrichment halls.

Discussing Natanz, the interviewer asked Cohen where he'd take them if they could travel there, he said "to the cellar" where "the centrifuges used to spin."

"It doesn't look like it used to look," he added.

Cohen did not directly claim the attacks, but his specificity offered the closest acknowledgement yet of an Israeli hand in the attacks. The interviewer, journalist Ilan Dayan, also seemingly offered a detailed description in a voiceover of how Israel snuck the explosives into Natanz's underground halls.

"The man who was responsible for these explosions, it becomes clear, made sure to supply to the Iranians the marble foundation on which the centrifuges are placed," Dayan said. "As they install this foundation within the Natanz facility, they have no idea that it already includes an enormous amount of explosives."

They also discussed the November killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an Iranian scientist who began Tehran's military nuclear program decades ago. US intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency believe Iran abandoned that organized effort at seeking a nuclear weapon in 2003. Iran long has maintained its program is peaceful.

While Cohen on camera doesn't claim the killing, Dayan in the segment described Cohen as having "personally signed off on the entire campaign." Dayan also described how a remotely operated machine gun fixed to a pickup truck killed Fakhrizadeh and later self-destructed.

Cohen described an Israeli effort to dissuade Iranian scientists from taking part in the program, which had seen some abandoned their work after being warned, even indirectly, by Israel. Asked by the interviewer if the scientists understood the implications if they didn't stop, Cohen said: "They see their friends."

They also talked about Israel's operation seizing archival documents from Iran's military nuclear program. Cohen said 20 agents, none Israelis, seized material from 32 safes, then scanned and transmitted the documents before successfully sneaking them out.

“It was important to us that the world will see this, but this thing should also resonate with the Iranian leadership, to tell them, ‘Dear friends: One, you have been infiltrated. Two, we are (watching you). Three, the era of ... lies is over,’” Cohen said.

Media in Israel operate under a decades-old policy that requires journalists to clear stories involving security matters through military censors. That Cohen’s remarks apparently cleared the censors suggests Israel wanted to issue a new warning to Iran amid the Vienna nuclear negotiations.

Iran has repeatedly complained about Israel’s attacks, with Iran’s ambassador to the IAEA Kazem Gharibabadi warning as recently as Thursday that the incidents “not only will be responded decisively, but also certainly leave no option for Iran but to reconsider its transparency measures and cooperation policy.”

Iran’s mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment over the comments by Cohen, who was replaced by former operative David Barnea. Cohen in the interview acknowledged he might one day seek the prime minister’s office himself.





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Khojir and Natanz explosions wreck Iran's strategy of deception