

# Making the Case against Iranian Sanctions Busting in Yemen

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

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**Clear evidence exists of Iranian arms smuggling to the Houthis, but the United States and its allies must get better and faster at sharing intelligence with the UN if they expect to garner more international support for border controls and sanctions.**

On December 14, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley unveiled new evidence of Iranian arms deliveries to the Houthi rebels in Yemen. At a military hangar at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, in Washington DC, Haley and Pentagon officials exhibited missile fragments and photography showing a range of Iran-produced weapons systems discovered in Yemen. Alongside Qasef-1 drones and Toophan antitank guided missiles used by the Houthis—both of which precisely match Iran-produced systems—the briefing focused on two advanced weapons: the Qiam-1 short-range ballistic missile and the "Shark-33" self-guiding explosive drone boat.

## Qiam-1 Missile Exports to Yemen

At the center of Haley's presentation were segments of two Iran-produced Qiam-1 missiles that were fired at Saudi Arabia—one toward Yanbu on July 22 and another toward Riyadh on November 4. These were specially modified Qiam-1 variants with a reduced-size warhead and maximized use of aluminum to gain extra range. Called Burkan-2H by the Houthis, the Qiam-1 missiles are significant because they represent a leap forward in the capabilities fielded by the Houthi rebels, allowing strikes at ranges of more than 1,000 kilometers, thereby placing all Saudi Arabia and almost all the Gulf states within striking distance. The new capability was touted by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who claimed on September 14 that the United Arab Emirates was "now within range of our missiles."

As early as November 7, Saudi Arabia provided Haley with compelling evidence to present regarding Iran's provision

of Qiam-1 systems. Indeed, identifying markings on the missiles that landed in Saudi Arabia precisely match those on Qiam-1 systems broadcast by Iran's Fars News Agency, displaying a tail section with jet vane nozzles rather than tail fins. The Qiam-1, which is only manufactured and operated by Iran, is unique among missile of its class in not having fins. Yemen's own stocks of Russian SS-1C/North Korean Hwasong-5 (Scud B) and extended-range Russian SS-1D/North Korean Hwasong-6 (Scud C) missiles all have tail fins, indicating that the missiles striking Yanbu and Riyadh were imported Iran-manufactured missiles, not converted Yemeni systems.

Missile components included a number of "smoking gun" connections to Iran's industries. One missile actuator—which controls positioning—was stamped with the logo of the Shahid Bakeri Industrial Group (SBIG), an Iranian defense company targeted by UN, EU, and U.S. sanctions. A circuit board found within the inertial measurement unit of a wrecked missile was stamped as a product of Iran's Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group (SHIG), another UN-, EU-, and U.S.-sanctioned entity. U.S. Department of Defense spokeswoman Laura Seal noted: "The point of this entire display is that only Iran makes this missile. They have not given it to anybody else. We haven't seen this in the hands of anyone else except Iran and the Houthis."

## **DRONE BOAT LINKED TO IRAN**

**H**aley also provided evidence, gathered by the Saudi-led coalition, of Iranian provision to the Houthis of the self-guiding Shark-33 explosive drone boat, which can be programmed to follow a course or home in on a target using electro-optical television guidance. The Saudi Arabian government claims that such a device was used to strike a Saudi frigate on January 30, 2017, wounding at least five personnel. Although this type of drone boat had been known to exist since February 2017 and was documented by the UK-based Conflict Armament Research company in early December 2017, the U.S. government publicized new details on December 14.

This previously withheld data, from the March 29, 2016, boarding of the Iranian dhow *Adris* by the USS *Sirocco*—a patrol ship operating in the waters between Iran and Yemen—shows six fuse plates identical to the one on the Shark-33. (A fuse plate holds firing switches and wiring in place). The U.S. government claims to have paperwork showing that the fuse plates were provided by Shahid Julaie Marine Industries (JMI), Tehran, Iran's main builder of drone boats. (The *Adris* also carried scores of Iran-made RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers and AK-series rifles). Further, the Shark-33 housed a circuit board and software linked to FHM Electronics, an Iranian manufacturer. More damningly, the computer hard drive inside the Shark-33 held over ninety sets of coordinates for locations in Iran, Yemen, and the Red Sea. One of two Tehran locations corresponds to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Self-Sufficiency Jihad Organization, which is sanctioned by the United States. Camera images on the onboard computer showed a facility with an IRGC hat atop a work surface.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

**S**eparate UN Security Council resolutions—2216 (April 2015) and 2266 (February 2016)—call on member states to "take the necessary measures" to prevent arms transfers to the Houthis and their local allies. The resolution endorsing the U.S.-led nuclear deal with Iran, UNSCR 2231 (July 2015), calls on states to "take the necessary measures to prevent, except as decided otherwise by the UN Security Council in advance on a case-by-case basis, the supply, sale, or transfer of arms or related materiel from Iran by their nationals or using their flag vessels or aircraft, and whether or not originating in the territory of Iran." The evidence provided by Haley on the Qiam-1 missile compellingly shows that Iran has delivered at least two 16-meter-long, 13,569-pound Iranian missiles have been exported to Yemen. (The Houthis claim to have fired four such missiles).

Despite this evidence, many nations remain deeply skeptical of intelligence materials after historic failures such as the 2003 presentation of evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction at the UN. Some countries have self-serving reasons for placing a very high evidentiary bar on sanctioning Iran, such as their national pursuit of business

opportunities in Iran. The UN is itself cautious. A November 24 report from the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen concluded that four missiles fired into Saudi Arabia in 2017 were manufactured by Iran, but that there was "no evidence as to the identity of the broker or supplier." The United States and its partners need to ensure that such evidence is always provided to the UN when it is available and would not compromise sources or methods of intelligence collection. Following Haley's presentation on December 14, Sweden's UN ambassador, Olof Skoog, reflecting international skepticism, said that the United States "may be in possession of evidence I have not seen. The information I have up to now is less clear."

One lesson for the United States and its allies should be that transparency must be maximized and the presentation of intelligence more comprehensively and clearly storyboarded, with extra effort taken to place extraneous information in context, rather than excluding it. Saudi openness in providing the UN panel of experts with direct access to Qiam-1 wreckage was a smart decision. Further, the U.S. release of intelligence gleaned from the *Adris* is a great step, allowing a new link to be established between an Iranian dhow carrying weapons and the fuse boards used in the Shark-33 drone boat. But whereas UN experts were able to directly view the Qiam-1 wreckage, they had no opportunity to see the Shark-33 vessel and examine its vital hard drive, or view the fuse boards carried by the *Adris*. Thus, the UN will not consider this important evidence in its assessment of Iran's compliance with UNSCR 2231 next week. Furthermore, while the United States has released some data from the *Adris* seizure, it has not given the UN access to the GPS systems from the dhow or provided a track of the ship's known coordinates before it was boarded, data that the United States surely retains. Although U.S. and Gulf coalition engagement with credible research companies such as Conflict Armament Research is important, there is no substitute for the UN as a partner in the certification of Iranian sanctions busting. The United States and its partners must also provide evidence as quickly as possible, considering that UN documents pass through a lengthy review and translation process.

A second lesson is that naval interdiction appears to be working, and that it should be extended and complemented with a thorough policing solution for the Oman-Yemen border. Iran has been forced to develop land-based smuggling due to the vulnerability of maritime shipments and the ability by other actors to definitively trace them back to the source. U.S. and UN reports will conclude that the Qiam-1 shows evidence of "field disassembly for illicit transport," meaning that the missiles were broken down into components to be smuggled into Yemen. One Qiam-1 fragment showed evidence of a "field weld" of a fuel oxidizer tank, suggesting strongly that the Qiam-1 was reassembled in Yemen by the Houthis at a local missile-assembly workshop, not in an Iranian facility, where a much neater "factory weld" would have been applied. Evidence from previous missile-related interdictions of Omani imports in Marib, Yemen, indicate that missile fuel oxidizer tanks, fuel cells, rocket casings, and warheads have been landed in Oman and driven into Yemen in packages no larger than three square meters, making them easily loadable into trucks.

The United States and its allies should prioritize the use of diplomatic pressure, economic incentives, intelligence platforms, disclosure of intelligence, and military advisors alongside the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman to interdict the flow of Iranian arms into Oman and onward into Yemen. Focus should also be maintained on preventing smugglers' use of the southeastern Yemeni coastline in the al-Mahra governorate and elsewhere, including the remaining Houthi ports such as Hodeida. Maintaining the blockade will require a solution to the unintended constriction of humanitarian flows. As a result, Washington and its allies should work in concert to push the UN to administer Yemeni ports and deliver civilian supplies in order to avert a greater humanitarian crisis. Similar arrangements at airports—and tight monitoring of air traffic—should precede any reopening of air corridors. Meaningful reduction of Iran's ability to smuggle weapons through Oman is possible: in the much tougher case of Sudan, a Saudi-led effort very effectively weaned Khartoum from Iran's influence in 2014-16.

Finally, Washington should seek to broaden the sanctions outlined in UNSCRs 2216 and 2266 so that they prohibit

arms transfers to all Houthi and allied forces, not just to specific leaders. In addition, the administration could consider using its domestic authority under Executive Order 13611—which was signed in May 2012 by former president Barack Obama with the goal of stemming violence in Yemen—to sanction specific individuals within arms agencies like SHIG, SBIG, and other firms involved with transfers. Just as the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned Ali Akbar Tabatabaei—commander of the IRGC Qods Force Africa Corps—on March 27, 2012, the department should impose new Specially Designated Nationals sanctions on Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah individuals identified in relation to arms smuggling to Yemen.

*Michael Knights is a Lafer Fellow with The Washington Institute who has worked in Yemen and spent time embedded with the country's security forces.* ❖

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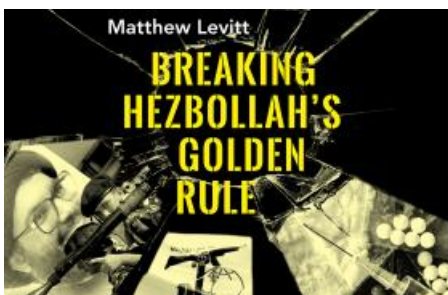
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