Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

November 5, 2009

The Israeli Navy captures a ship carrying a large shipment of weapons (including rockets, mortar shells and anti-tank weapons) from Iran. The shipment was apparently on its way to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The boat and cargo anchored at the southern Israeli port of Ashdod. Some of the containers on deck are labeled IRISL, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines.

Some of the containers are labeled SEPAH (the Revolutionary Guards).

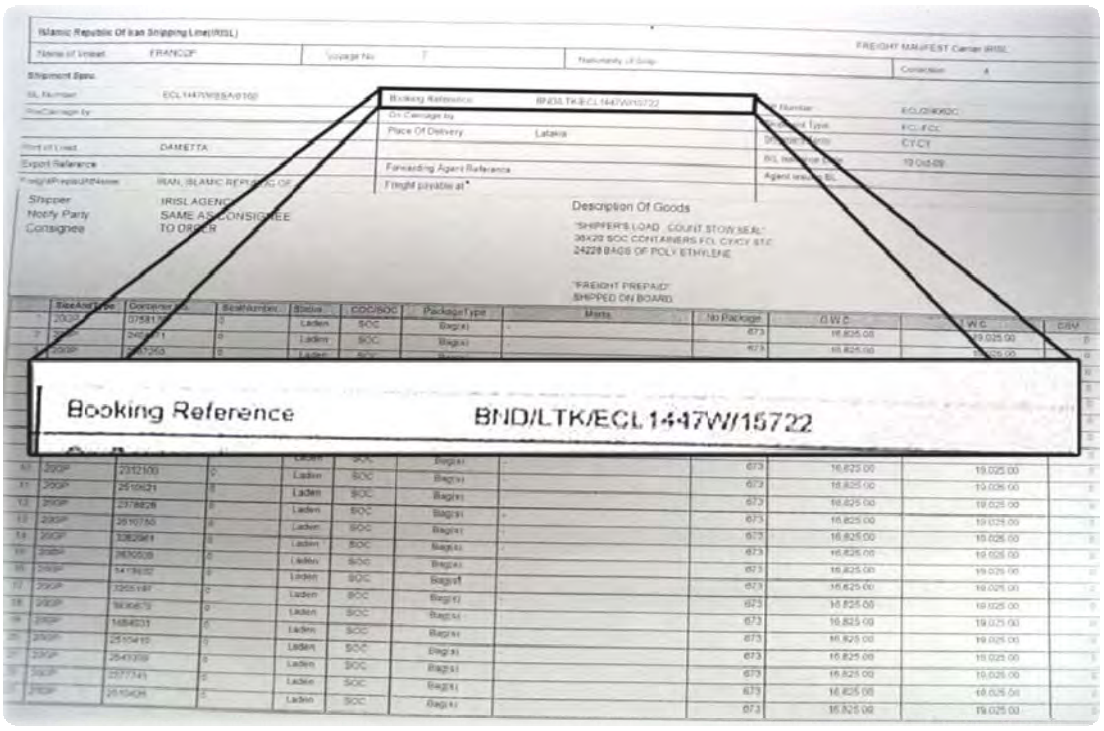
Overview

1. On the night of November 3, 2009, the Israeli Navy stopped an arms shipment on its way from **Iran** to **Syria**, **destined for Hezbollah in Lebanon**. The weapons were being transported by the cargo ship **MV Francop**, which was flying the Antigua and Barbuda flag, and was rented by UFS (United Feeding Services), a Cypriot freight delivery company. The weapons were delivered from Iran and unloaded at the Egyptian port of Damiat, where they were transferred to the MV Francop on November 2-3 and dispatched to the Syrian port of Latakia, **with scheduled stops at Limassol, Cyprus, and Beirut, Lebanon**.

2. About 5**00 tons of weapons** were seized, hidden in **36 containers**. The arms included thousands of 107mm and 122mm rockets, 106mm recoilless artillery shells, hand grenades and various types of light weapon ammunition (See below).

3. The ship's manifest falsely described the containers as holding 24,224 sacks of polyethylene. In reality, the many inscriptions on the containers, the ship's manifest and other documents, and the polyethylene sacks in the containers used to camouflage the weapons **clearly show that the weapons came from Iran**. They indicate that the Iranians, possibly overconfident, did not bother to conceal the weapons' point of origin. The weapons themselves, however, did not bear any signs of having been manufactured in Iran.

Labeling on some of the containers showing that the transport company was based in Ispahan, Iran.



The ship's manifest, proving the cargo was being transported by the Iranian company IRISL.

4. Apparently **Hezbollah** was the final destination for the weapons. Should the shipment have been completed, it would have **significantly enlarged Hezbollah's arsenal**. Some of the weapons were high-quality, chiefly 60mm, 81mm and 120mm mortar shells produced between 2007 and 2009. **The large quantity of rockets (about 2,800) equaled about 70% of those fired during the second Lebanon war (July 2006),** when Hezbollah fired approximately 4,000 rockets of various types into Israeli territory,[1] most of them 122mm rockets similar to those found on board the ship.

5. The latest incident, as well as others involving Iran's smuggling of arms to various conflict zones in the Middle East,[2] **clearly illustrates that Iran continues its subversive activities in areas where there is a Shi'ite population** (Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon) or **where there are terrorist organizations operating under Iranian aegis** (Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip).

6. **Iran's objective** is to promote its strategy of **acquiring regional hegemony** by exploiting local proxies and of exporting Iranian radical Shi'ite islam. The strategic support comes from the highest levels of the Iranian regime and is usually implemented by the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the Intelligence Ministry.[3]

[1] Of which there were 1,381 identified hits in Israeli territory.
[2] On October 26, 2009, the Yemeni authorities detained an Iranian arms ships on its way to the Shi'ite Houthi rebels in the north of the country. In that case as well the Iranians did not make a great effort to disguise the ship's provenance. The ITIC issued a detailed bulletin about the affair.
[3] For further information see our January 12, 2009 bulletin "Iranian Support of Hamas" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e004.pdf., and our December 8, 2008 bulletin "Exporting the

The weapons found on board the ship

7. According to information revealed after the ship had been seized, the shipment of weapons left the port of Bandar Abbas ten days previously, loaded on an Iranian National Shipping Company boat bound for the Egyptian port of Damiat. In Egypt the containers were loaded on board the MV Francop, bound, according to the ship's manifest, for the Syrian port of Latakia, with stops at the ports of Limassol and Beirut (Anshel Pfeffer for *Haaretz*, November 5, 2009).

8. The Israeli navy began tracking the ship when it left Damiat. Towards evening a missile boat made contact with the ship and requested permission to board and search. The missile boat was joined by two others with crews of naval commandos. Around midnight, when the ship was near Cyprus and about 100 nautical miles west of Israel, it was boarded and its manifests were examined. The initial examination of the cargo took place at sea and **containers full of cases of ammunition were found hidden behind sacks of polyethylene pellets**. The ship was then requested to change course for the port of Ashdod where a more thorough examination could be conducted. The entire operation was carried out peacefully with the full cooperation of the ship's crew.

9. The ship was found to be carrying large amounts of arms apparently intended for **Hezbollah in Lebanon.** The top, side and front containers were covered with sacks and they were separated by sheets of styrofoam.

Sacks of polyethylene pellets secured with white plastic ropes. The cases of weapons were hidden behind them

Iranian revolution to Lebanon" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e003.pdf.

One of the polyethylene sacks used as camouflage. According to the English and Farsi markings, it was produced by Iran's National Petrochemical Company, whose telephone number was given as 9821 [98 is Iran's international dialing code] +8788987.

Cases of 107mm rockets.

Cases of 122mm rockets.

Right: A few of the crates of weapons found on the ship. Left: Cases of 122mm rockets.

10. The weapons found included the following:

i) **More than 2,000 107mm rockets,** with a range of 8.3 km, or 5.15 miles. They are used by Hezbollah. The ones found were manufactured in 2007, apparently in Iran.

Two left pictures: 107mm rockets found on the ship. Two right pictures: Similar rockets found in Iraq in 2009. Both were exported by Iran.

ii) **About 700 122mm rockets,** with a range of 20 km, or 12.42 miles. The rockets found on board were manufactured in 1988 and their shelf life had expired, making them less reliable and subject to technical difficulties during launch. They were packed in crates labeled "**replacement parts for bulldozers**."

Two left pictures: 122mm rockets found in crates on the ship.
Two right pictures: Similar rockets found in Lebanon during the second Lebanon war.

iii) **About 700 fuses for 122mm rockets**. The fuses were new.

Fuses for 122mm rockets. Left: A fuse. Right: Packages of fuses.

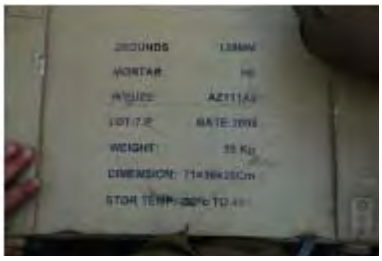
iv) **About 5,700 60mm mortar shells**, with a range of 3.1 km, or 1.92 miles. The shells were manufactured in Iran and were new.

Left: Boxes of 60mm mortar shells found on the ship. Right: A shell.

v) **About 2,300 81mm mortar shells,** with a range of 4.7 km, or 2.92 miles. The shells were manufactured in Iran and were new.

Left: Cases of 81mm mortar shells. Right: A shell.

vi) **About 780 120mm mortar shells**, with a range of up to 6.5 km, or 4.03 miles. They were manufactured in Iran and were new.



Left: A case of 12mm mortar shells, labeled in English. Right: A shell.

vii) **About 3,000 106mm recoilless artillery shells**, an anti-tank weapon with a range of up to 1.6 km, or .99 miles with direct lay, and 4.4 km, or 2.73 miles with indirect lay. All the crates were labeled in Spanish.

Left: Boxes of recoilless artillery shells, labeled in Spanish. Right: A shell.

viii) **About 20,000 hand grenades** manufactured in 2007.

Left: A box of hand grenades. Right: A grenade.

ix) **About 570,000 rounds of light arms ammunition** for sniper rifles and machine guns, apparently manufactured in China.

One of the cases of ammunition found aboard ship, labeled in Chinese.

Information regarding the ship

11. The cargo ship **MV Francop** flew the Antigua and Barbuda, is owned by a German company and was rented by the Cypriot shipping company UFS (United Feeding Services). The crew, including the Polish captain, did not know what was in the containers, some of which were labeled IRISL (Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines).

The containers aboard the ship, some of them labeled IRISL.

Appendix I

Reactions

Iran

1. Generally speaking the official Iranian media did not widely cover the seizing of the ship and discovery of Iranian arms. The main reaction was Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki's November 4 **denial** of the Israeli claim that the arms were intended for Hezbollah and of the ship's course. He made the statement at a press conference held with the Syrian foreign minister, Walid al-Mualem, currently visiting Iran.[4]

2. The Ayande website, affiliated with the Rafsanjani family, stated that the reports of the incident were intended to create a media sensation to reduce the international pressure on Israel in view of the UN General Assembly deliberations of the Goldstone Report and the proposal to turn the matter over to the Security Council.[5] The Tabnak website, affiliated with Mohsen Rezaei, former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, claimed at "it would seem that the Zionist regime is trying to write another Karin-A scenario" to create tension and encourage the United States to take a stance hostile to Iran. [6]

Lebanon

3. Hezbollah issued a short report quoting the IDF Spokesman stating that a ship claimed to be transporting weapons for Hezbollah had been seized. The item was the third of four reported by Hezbollah's Radio Nur on November 4. "A source close to Hezbollah" said that the organization was following developments and their implications, but did not comment further (Al-Nashra website, Lebanon, November 4, 2009). Hezbollah later denied any involvement in the affair.

4. **Michel Aoun**, Hezbollah's Christian ally, said that Lebanon had no information about the ship, but as long as Israel had not yet returned the Palestinians their land, they [the Lebanese] would continue arming themselves. He said that if they did not get weapons from Iran they would import them from China, and that if he had any money, he would use it to buy weapons for Palestine (Al-Nashra website, Lebanon, November 4, 2009).

[4] http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=110505&sectionid=351020203
[5] http://www.ayandenews.com/news/14750
[6] http://tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=71406

Syria

5. At a press conference with the Iranian foreign minister during a visit to Tehran, the Syrian foreign minister rejected the report that the ship had been carrying weapons for Syria or military equipment to manufacture it, and accused Israel of harming trade relations between Iran and Syria (Al-Alam TV, November 4, 2009).

6. A Syrian commentator refused to discuss whether or not the arms were meant for Syria, but stressed the "piratical" nature of the ship's seizure, and asked the United States to enforce international law on Israel as it did on the pirates operating off the Somalia coast (Radio BBC, not 4, 2009).

The Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers meet in Tehran (ISNA, November 4, 2009).

Appendix II

Previous publicly-exposed Iranian attempts to smuggle weapons to terrorist organizations

1. This was not the first time Iran tried to smuggle weapons to terrorist organizations by air, land and sea. Some of the former attempts were the following:

i) In **December 2001** the Karin-A was loaded with weapons in Iran bound for the Gaza Strip. It sailed toward Egypt with the intention of unloading its cargo. Small fishing boats were supposed to pick up the weapons and transfer them to the Gaza Strip. The ship carried large quantities of weapons which w**ould have significantly upgraded the terrorist organizations' capabilities to attack Israel**. It was captured by the Israeli Navy on January 3, 2002.

The weapons found on board the Karin-A (IDF Spokesman).

ii) Between **December 2003 and January 2004** the Iranian Revolutionary Guards flew weapons to Hezbollah through Syria. The humanitarian assistance for the victims of the earthquake in Bam in southern Iran was flown in and the Iranians exploited the return flights to smuggle arms to Hezbollah.

iii) In **May 2007** an Iranian train carrying weapons (mortar shells, light arms, rocket launchers and ammunition) was discovered in Turkey. The weapons were intended for Hezbollah. The Iranians tried to disguise them to avoid raising the suspicions of the Turkish authorities.

iv) In **January 2009** a shipment of weapons was seized in Cyprus on a Cypriot ship named Monchegorsk leased by the Iranian Shipping Company. It contained anti-tank weapons, artillery and rockets, as well as materials for manufacturing rockets.

v) In **October 2009** the ship Hansa India, which sailed from Iran flying the German flag, was supposed to unload a cargo of eight containers in Egypt. Following a warning from the German authorities it did not unload and instead sailed to Malta, where it was found to be carrying bullets and materials for the manufacture of weapons, apparently linked to Syria.

vi) In **January 2009**, according to the foreign media, Israeli planes attacked a convoy of 20 trucks in Sudan. The trucks were loaded with weapons and were on their way to the Gaza Strip. According to the reports, the attack was carried out in the desert southwest of Port Sudan. The weapons included long-range Fajr missiles which could reach Tel Aviv from the Gaza Strip.

Pictures which according to Al-Jazeera TV were taken at the site of the attack in Sudan (Al-Jazeera TV, March 26, 2009).