

DISPATCH FROM THE FIELD

MARITIME INTERDICTIONS OF WEAPON SUPPLIES TO SOMALIA AND YEMEN

Deciphering a link to Iran

November 2016



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Cover Image: Weapons seized by the crew of the *HMAS Darwin*, 29 February 2016.

Design and layout by Julian Knott (www.julianknott.com)

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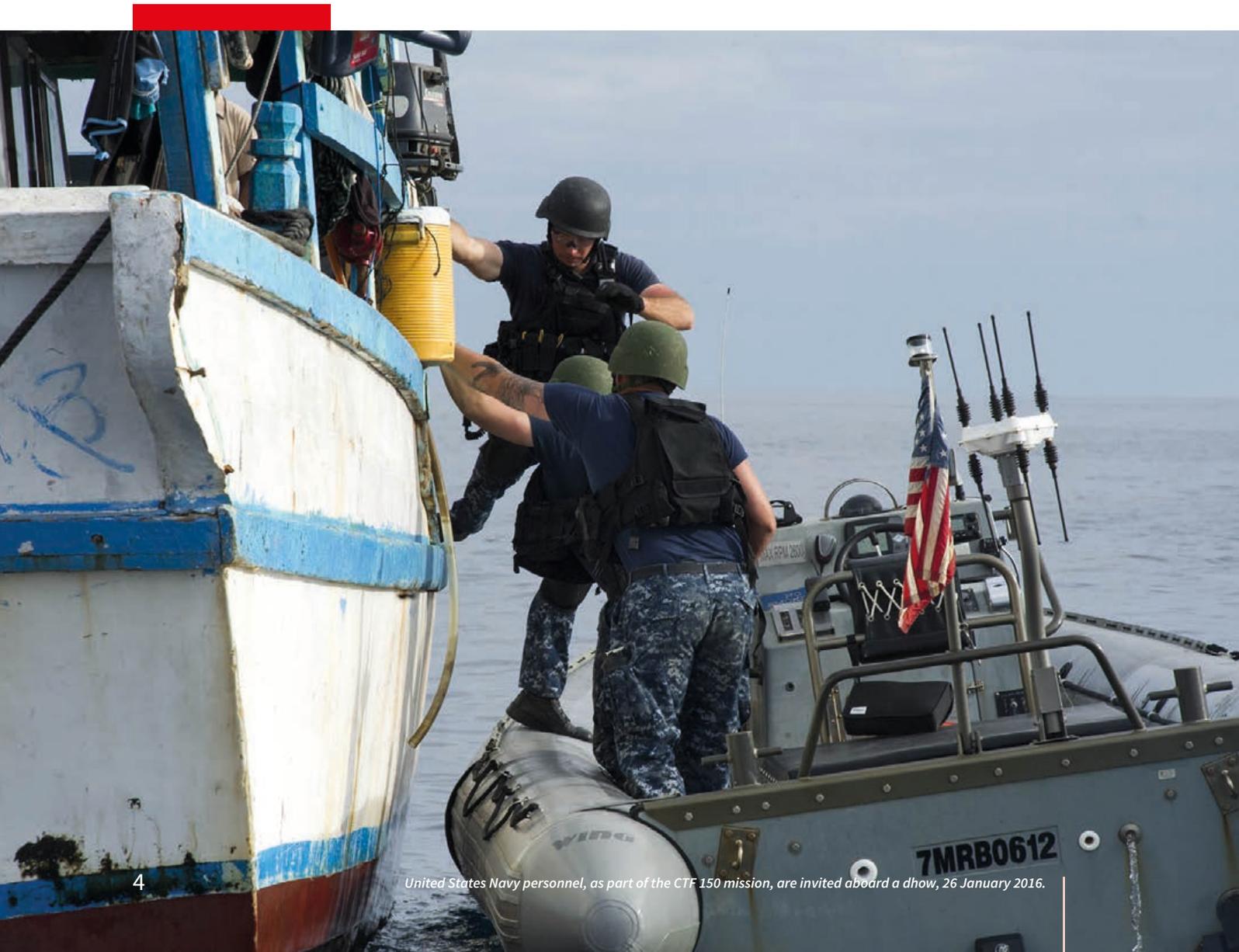
BACKGROUND

During a four-week period in February and March 2016, the warships *HMAS Darwin*, *FS Provence*, and *USS Sirocco*, operating as part of the multi-national Combined Maritime Forces (CMF),¹ intercepted three *dhow*s transporting weapons in the Arabian Sea. The *dhow*s, and a significant quantity of military materiel on board, are suspected to have originated in Iran and were destined for Somalia and Yemen.²

Conflict Armament Research (CAR) obtained photographs of a cross-section of the weapons seized from two of the *dhow*s (*HMAS Darwin* and *FS Provence*), including a complete list of serial numbers of weapons from one of the seizures (*FS*

Provence). In October 2016, CAR also documented military equipment that United Arab Emirates (UAE) forces had reportedly recovered in Yemen. A portion of this materiel matches weapons recovered from one of the seized *dhow*s (*FS Provence*).³

CAR's analysis of the seized materiel, and its investigations into the *dhow* trade around the Horn of Africa, suggests the existence of a weapon pipeline extending from Iran to Somalia and Yemen, which involves the transfer, by *dhow*, of significant quantities of Iranian-manufactured weapons and weapons that plausibly derive from Iranian stockpiles.



KEY FINDINGS

- All three interdictions involved significant weapon seizures, with the weight of evidence pointing to Iran as the original source and Somalia and/or Yemen as the intended destinations.
- The *FS Provence* intercepted a *dhow* carrying weapons, including 2,000 new condition AKM-pattern assault rifles with serial numbers in sequential order, which suggests that the rifles derived from a national stockpile, rather than disparate non-state sources.
- The crews of the *FS Provence* and *HMAS Darwin* each seized RPD-pattern light machine guns, of suspected North Korean manufacture. Weapons from the same serial number sequence were present on both vessels, which suggests that the materiel derived from the same original consignment.
- UAE forces claim to have recovered weapons in Yemen, including a 2015 Iranian-manufactured Dehlavieh anti-tank guided weapon (ATGW) and a Russian-manufactured 9M133-1 Kornet ATGW. The Kornet's lot number matches those of five Kornets seized by the crew of the *FS Provence* in March 2016, and its serial number falls within the same sequence. The discovery of weapons in Yemen from the same production run as weapons on board the *dhow* intercepted by the *FS Provence* supports allegations that the weapons originated in Iran and that the *dhow's* cargo was destined for Yemen.
- The Iranian shipbuilder, Al Mansoor, manufactured two of the three *dhow*s intercepted by the CMF. Local sources in Puntland, Somalia, report that Al Mansoor vessels have supplied weapons to local markets and used the region's ports as transshipment points for maritime weapon transfers.

THE DISCOVERY OF WEAPONS IN YEMEN FROM THE SAME PRODUCTION RUN AS WEAPONS ON BOARD THE *DHOW* INTERCEPTED BY THE *FS PROVENCE* SUPPORTS ALLEGATIONS THAT THE WEAPONS ORIGINATED IN IRAN AND THAT THE *DHOW'S* CARGO WAS DESTINED FOR YEMEN.



ANALYSIS OF MARITIME WEAPON SEIZURES

This section provides analysis of weapons seized by the crews of the *HMAS Darwin*, *FS Provence*, and *USS Sirocco* from three *dhow*s in the Arabian Sea in early 2016. Although CAR did not physically inspect the seized materiel, it obtained verified photographs of a cross-section of materiel seized by the crew of the *HMAS Darwin*, in addition to photographs and a complete list of serial numbers for weapons seized by the crew of the *FS Provence*.

HMAS DARWIN

On 27 February 2016, the Royal Australian Navy frigate, *HMAS Darwin*, which was patrolling in the Arabian Sea, intercepted a *dhow* found to be carrying a total of 2,197 weapons. This shipment included an assortment of AK-pattern assault rifles, Iranian-manufactured RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers, various machine guns, and mortar tubes. Coordinates entered into the *dhow*'s GPS

CAR submitted requests to the US Central Command (CENTCOM) for access to the *USS Sirocco* seizure, but CENTCOM denied its requests. Without direct access to the weapons, CAR is unable to determine the precise types, manufacturers, and potential sources of the weapons.

navigation system revealed that it was bound for the port of Caluula, Somalia.⁴

CAR was supplied with photographs of five of the seized AK-pattern assault rifles. The sample includes Bulgarian-, Chinese-, Romanian-, and Russian-manufactured rifles (Figures 1-5).



Figure 1

Chinese-manufactured Factory 5336 Type 56 assault rifle with mismatching receiver cover



Figure 2
Chinese-manufactured Factory 965 Type 56 assault rifle



Figure 3
Russian-manufactured AKM assault rifle, produced in 1977



Figure 4
Romanian-manufactured AIM assault rifle, produced in 1984



Figure 5
Bulgarian-manufactured SA93 assault rifle

The crew of the *HMAS Darwin* also seized 100 Iranian-manufactured RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers, which are identifiable by their olive green furniture, cylindrical rear firing grips, and yellow serial numbers.⁵ CAR examined photographs of two of these rocket launchers (Figure 6).



Figure 6
Iranian-manufactured RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers on board the *HMAS Darwin*



CAR also examined photographs of a PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun and an RPD-pattern light machine gun (Figures 7-8).

CMF forces recovered neither ammunition, nor ammunition magazines, in the *dhow's* cargo. While it is not unusual for suppliers to ship weapons and ammunition separately, it is unusual to supply weapons without ancillary equipment, including (empty) magazines.



Figure 7

Russian-manufactured PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun



Figure 8

Unidentified RPD-pattern light machine gun

FS PROVENCE

On 20 March 2016, the French multi-mission frigate, *FS Provence*, intercepted a *dhow* off the coast of Oman. French government sources state the *dhow* was destined for Somalia for possible transshipment to Yemen, either directly or via Eritrea,⁶ although this claim has not been independently verified. CAR obtained 25 photographs representing a cross-section of the captured materiel, in addition to a complete list of serial numbers for the seized weapons.

The *FS Provence* seizure included 2,000 new condition AKM-pattern assault rifles, which are characteristic of Iranian manufacture (Figure 9). The rifles' serial numbers fall into four sequences, which indicates they derive from four separate production batches. The shipment also included: 64 new condition Hoshdar-M (SVD-pattern) sniper rifles with sequential serial numbers (Figure

10); nine Russian-manufactured Kornet ATGWs, manufactured in two production lots in 2008 (Figure 11); and six RPD-pattern light machine guns of unknown manufacture (Figure 12).⁷

The serial number on one of the RPD-pattern machine guns seized by the crew of the *FS Provence* (701242) is close in sequence to that of an RPD-pattern machine gun seized by the crew of the *HMAS Darwin* (709027). The proximity of these serial numbers (separated by fewer than 8,000 weapons) suggests that the weapons originated from the same production run and, potentially, the same supplier.

As with the *HMAS Darwin* seizure, the shipment did not include any associated ammunition or magazines for the weapons.



Figure 9
Possible Iranian-manufactured AKM-pattern assault rifles

THE *FS PROVENCE* SEIZURE INCLUDED 2,000 NEW CONDITION AKM-PATTERN ASSAULT RIFLES, WHICH ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF IRANIAN MANUFACTURE



Figure 10
Iranian-manufactured Hoshdar-M (SVD-pattern) sniper rifles



Figure 11
Russian-manufactured Kornet ATGWs, produced in 2008



Figure 12
Unidentified RPD-pattern light machine guns

USS SIROCCO

On 28 March 2016, a US Navy coastal patrol ship, the *USS Sirocco*, intercepted a *dhow* carrying 1,500 AK-pattern assault rifles, 200 RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers, and 21 12.7 x 108 mm machine guns. US authorities believe the *dhow* and its cargo originated in Iran and were destined for Yemen,⁸ although these claims have not been independently verified. Photos taken by the U.S. Navy of the RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers indicate that their design is consistent with Iranian

production. Like the *HMAS Darwin* and *FS Provence* seizures, US forces found no ammunition or magazines on the vessel.

CENTCOM denied CAR's request to document the seized materiel. Without access to the materiel, CAR is unable to determine the precise types, manufacturers, and potential sources of these weapons.

ANALYSIS

All three interdictions involved significant weapon seizures, with the weight of evidence pointing to Iran as the original source. Although comparison of the three seizures does not reveal a great deal of similarity in weapon models, the types of weapons are fairly consistent. Analysis of the weapons suggests that at least two of the three deliveries

were probably supplied with the complicity of Iranian security forces. The new condition weapons resembling Iranian manufacture with consecutive serial numbers, in addition to the prevalence of Iranian-manufactured RPG-7-pattern rocket launchers, supports this assertion.



CONNECTION BETWEEN WEAPONS RECOVERED IN YEMEN AND THE *DHOWS*

In October 2016, a CAR investigation team documented several items in the possession of the UAE's Presidential Guard, which the Guard claimed to have seized from Houthi fighters in Yemen. Although CAR is unable to verify this claim, its analysis of the recovered weapons reveals similarities with the CMF *dhow* seizures.

The items include a 2015 Iranian-manufactured Dehlavieh ATGW and a Russian-manufactured Kornet ATGW, which UAE forces reportedly captured from a Houthi fighting position in Taiz province on 29 November 2015.⁹ The Kornet's lot number matches those of five Kornets seized by the crew of the *FS Provence* in March 2016 and its serial number falls within the same sequence. This suggests that the weapons originated from the same source (Figure 13-14 and Table 1).



Figure 13

Iranian-manufactured Dehlavieh ATGW, produced in 2015



Figure 14
Russian-manufactured Kornet ATGW, produced in 2008

Table 1
Lot and serial numbers of Russian-manufactured Kornet ATGWs

| Lot Number | Serial Number | Location/Seizure |
|------------|---------------|------------------|
| 02-08 | 51035 | FS Provence |
| 02-08 | 51174 | FS Provence |
| 02-08 | 51214 | UAE/Yemen |
| 02-08 | 51397 | FS Provence |
| 02-08 | 51426 | FS Provence |
| 02-08 | 51449 | FS Provence |

Additionally, CAR documented two anti-tank weapons, which the Presidential Guard claim to have recovered from a consignment of weapons that had crossed from Oman en route to Houthi-aligned fighters in Marib Governorate, Yemen.¹⁰ The Presidential Guard reported that it seized

the items in the town of Safir, Marib Governorate in September 2016.¹¹ The sample included one suspected Iranian-manufactured Tosan (Konkurs-pattern) ATGW and one Russian-manufactured RPG-27 rocket launcher (Figure 15-16).



Figure 15
Suspected Iranian-manufactured Tosan (Konkurs-pattern) ATGW, produced in 2002



Figure 16
Russian-manufactured RPG-27 rocket launcher, produced in 2008

CAR submitted formal trace requests to the governments of Russia and Iran for information on these items to clarify their chains of custody. It had yet to receive responses at the time of writing.

AL MANSOOR AND THE *DHOW* TRADE AROUND THE HORN OF AFRICA

Al Mansoor, a shipbuilder located in Konarak, Iran, manufactured two of the *dhow*s, which CMF forces intercepted in early 2016. Since 2012, Al Mansoor *dhow*s have been involved in multiple cases of trafficking in heroin, cannabis, and more recently, weapons.¹² According to records maintained by the Iranian Registry for Personal and Deed Organizations, Al Mansoor is located next to an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) facility.¹³ CAR is unable to determine whether a relationship exists between Al Mansoor and the IRGC. Al Mansoor *dhow*s bear a company logo in three locations—one on each side of the bow, and one on the stern (Figure 17).

CAR field investigations in Puntland, Somalia, identified three ports known to be frequented by *dhow*s carrying cargoes of illicit weapons: Bosaso, Qandala, and Caluula (Figure 18). According to sources at various ports in Puntland, traffickers use these ports to off-load weapons intended for local arms markets or as transshipment points for onward supply to Yemen, and in particular the town of Ash-Shihr.¹⁴ It is common for cargo to be distributed onto smaller vessels in port or off the coast.



Figure 17
Australian forces boarding an Al Mansoor *dhow*, 12 February 2014

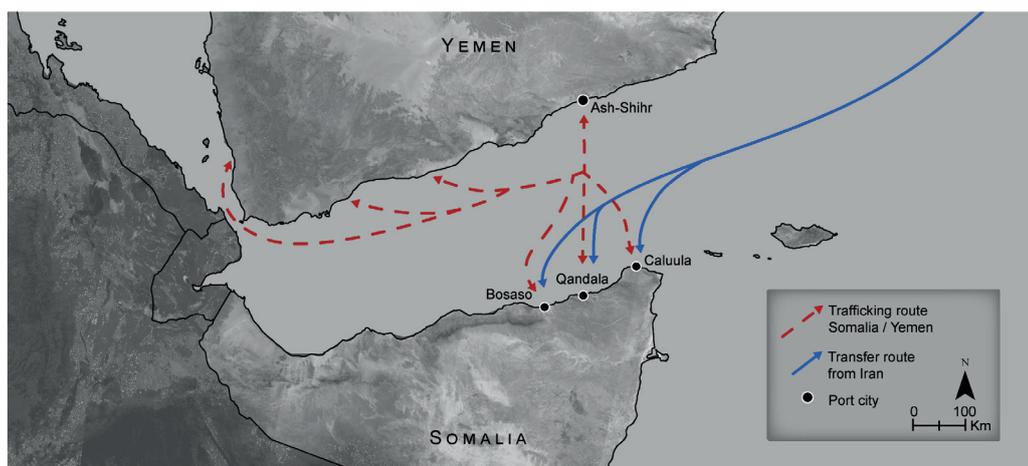


Figure 18
Map of Somali and Yemeni ports known to receive illicit weapon shipments

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this report, whilst relatively limited, provide some of the best evidence at hand and a level of confirmation that is usually absent from discussions of weapon flows into Yemen.

The presence of large consignments of weapons on board the *dhow*s, a significant proportion of which were manufactured in Iran, including some Iranian weapons with consecutive serial numbers from the *FS Provence* seizure, suggests that Iranian entities may have been involved in the supply of these weapons.

Furthermore, the presence of materiel in Yemen with matching lot numbers and displaying the same serial number sequence as weapons seized by the *FS Provence*, supports the assertion that materiel on board the *dhow*s was ultimately destined for Yemen, and likewise, that the materiel recovered in Yemen probably originated in Iran.

CAR continues to seek access through multiple channels in order to broaden the current base of evidence, including direct observation of materiel at the point of seizure in Yemen, materiel seized along the Yemen-Saudi border, and complete access to future maritime seizures.

THE PRESENCE OF LARGE CONSIGNMENTS OF WEAPONS ON BOARD THE *DHOWS*, A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF WHICH WERE MANUFACTURED IN IRAN, SUGGESTS THAT IRANIAN ENTITIES MAY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THEIR SUPPLY.



ENDNOTES

- 1 The CMF is a multi-national naval partnership that exists to promote security, stability and prosperity across international waters. The 31 member nations include: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, The Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, United Kingdom, United States and Yemen (<https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/>).
- 2 See for example <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-officials-iran-supplying-weapons-yemen-s-houthi-rebels-n674181>.
- 3 The equipment displayed the same lot number and semi-sequential serial numbers.
- 4 Interview with a western diplomat, April 24 2016.
- 5 *Identifying Small Arms and RPGs Produced in Iran*, U.S. Army National Ground Intelligence Center.
- 6 Note Verbal from the permanent mission of France to the United Nations Security Council, S/AC.29/2015/NOTE.27/Add.3, 14 July 2016.
- 7 Photographs of the markings on the RPD-pattern machine guns were insufficient for identification purposes.
- 8 See for example <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/713256/third-illicit-arms-shipment-in-recent-weeks-seized-in-arabian-sea>.
- 9 Documents provided by the Commander of the Presidential Guard, 3 November 2016.
- 10 See for example <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160930-omani-truck-with-weapons-for-houthis-seized-in-yemen/>.
- 11 Documents provided by the Commander of the Presidential Guard, 3 November 2016.
- 12 Multiple news reports: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hms-westminster-makes-huge-drugs-haul>; <http://maritimesecurity.asia/free-2/maritime-security-asia/cmf-warships-work-together-to-gain-another-successful-narcotic-seizure/>; <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2014/05/28/ctf-150-ship-seizes-22-4m-heroin-in-arabian-sea/>; <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/07/08/navy-ship-makes-african-heroin-bust>; <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c0fd2d7a2a454d7c993cef8575093fd7/saudi-led-coalition-says-it-seized-iran-arms-bound-yemen>.
- 13 See for example <http://www.ilenc.ir/Design/Print/RegisterOrgPrint.aspx?param=10500006476>.
- 14 Interview with an Iranian *dhow* crew impounded in Bosaso, Somalia, 23 May 2016; CAR field investigation in Puntland, May 2016.

