

Iran seizes Israeli-linked cargo ship in Strait of Hormuz

International Desk

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) seized an Israeli-linked cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, days after Tehran warned it would retaliate for an Israeli strike on its Syria consulate.

Iran's IRNA news agency reported that an IRGC helicopter had boarded and taken into Iranian waters the Portuguese flagged MSC Aries, saying it was linked to Israel.

MSC, which operates the Aries, confirmed Iran had seized the ship and said it was working "with the relevant authorities" for its safe return and the wellbeing of its 25 crew.

MSC leases the Aries from Gortal Shipping, an affiliate of Zodiac Maritime, Zodiac said in a statement, adding that MSC is responsible for all the vessel's activities. Zodiac is partly owned by Israeli businessman Eyal Ofer.

The incident comes amid rising regional tensions since the start of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza in October, with Israel or its ally the United States clashing repeatedly with resistance groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.



Iran has threatened to retaliate for Israeli airstrike on its consulate in Syria's capital Damascus on April 1 that killed seven IRGC members including two senior generals.

US President Joe Biden said on Friday he expected Iran to attack Israel "sooner, rather than later" and warned Tehran not to do so. "Don't," he said when asked

by reporters if he had a message for Iran.

Israel's military spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said "Iran will bear consequences for choosing to escalate this situation

any further", in response to reports of the seizure of MSC Aries.

Israel panicking

However, an adviser to Iran's Leader said Satur-

day that Israel is panicking over a possible retaliatory response from Iran.

"It has been a week that the Zionists are in complete panic and are on alert," Yahya Rahim Safavi, senior adviser to Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

"They don't know what Iran wants to do, so they and their supporters are terrified," ISNA quoted him as saying.

"This psychological, media and political war is more terrifying for them than the war itself, because they are waiting for an attack every night and many of them have fled and gone to shelters," Safavi added. The US military is moving more military assets to the Middle East as it anticipates an Iranian response to the Israeli attack on the consulate in Syria.

US media confirmed the move but the Pentagon has not officially said which assets it is moving to the region.

The Wall Street Journal quoted unnamed US officials as saying on Friday that it includes repositioning two destroyers, with one of the warships already in the region and

another redirected there.

Diplomatic efforts

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts are underway to prevent a possible Iran's response.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called on her Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to urge "maximum restraint" to avoid further escalation.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that, "Right now it's very important for everyone to maintain restraint so as not to lead to a complete destabilization of the situation in the region, which doesn't exactly shine with stability and predictability."

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron also called the Iranian foreign minister to appeal for "restraint" by the Islamic Republic.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani called on Iran to show restraint over the expected response.

"We cannot risk escalation at such an extremely volatile stage. All regional actors must show responsibility," the top Italian diplomat said.

The US has also asked China and other countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to urge Tehran not to launch a retaliatory attack on Israel.

Other western and Arab governments have also sought to convince Iran to show restraint.

Up for Iran ...

The heightened state of alert within the echelons of the Israeli regime underscores the palpable impact of Iran's response, potentially exacting a toll on Israel's strategic calculus.

In recent days, the US government has been pulling out all the stops in its efforts to dissuade Tehran from retaliating against Israel, even resorting to China to help talk Iran out of hitting back. President Joe Biden has made it clear that the US stands with Israel in the escalating situation. The White House's intervention adds fuel to the

fire of their longstanding unresolved issues.

Over the past two years, Iran and the United States have been treading carefully to keep tensions in check, as neither side wants a direct clash, especially with the crucial presidential election looming on the horizon in the US. The dynamics of the Iran-Israel conflict differ significantly from the Iran-US standoff, making it imperative for Washington not to stir the pot further in support of Israel. Recent reports have shed light on the back-and-forth messaging between Tehran and Washington on the

matter.

A crucial aspect to consider is Iran's stance on maintaining its autonomy and not getting entangled in the games of its adversaries or rivals. The delayed response from Iran can be attributed to Tehran's logical decision-making process, rooted in its own strategic calculations and interests. The Islamic Republic is well-versed in crafting responses to threats, drawing from past crises to shape its policies. Iran's approach involves thorough consideration of all angles, avoiding actions that may not yield results. Its strategy en-

compasses the flexibility of giving quick, indirect, or delayed responses, as well as exploiting ambiguity to its advantage. The key in this unique scenario lies in Tehran taking the lead and controlling the narrative.

As intense talks go on and various tactics are employed to dissuade Iran from retaliating against Israel, it becomes evident that Tehran is in the driver's seat. The psychological warfare and media campaigns aimed at restraining Iran highlight Tehran's strategic advantage and its adeptness at playing its trump card effectively.

Israeli settlers storm West Bank villages



Hundreds of armed Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank as a missing teenage settler is found dead. The settlers set fire to several homes and cars in

one of the largest attacks by settlers this year. At least one Palestinian man was killed by gunfire in the village of Al-Mughayyir, east of Ramallah, according to the head of the village council

Amin Abu-Allia, who is related to the deceased.

About 25 others were also injured in the rampage, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, the scale of which has not been seen since hundreds of settlers stormed through the villages of Turmusayya and Huwara in two separate incidents last year.

According to Abu-Allia, Israeli security forces had informed Palestinian officials that the settlers were looking for an Israeli teenager who had gone missing earlier in the day.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Pro-Palestine rallies held in London, New York

International Desk

Thousands of people gathered in central London to protest against Israeli attacks and demand an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Carrying Palestinian flags, the demonstrators chanted slogans such as "Free Palestine" and "Stop the genocide" as they marched from Russel Square towards Parliament Square. "Israel has been occupying so many years, and killed so many people," Steve, a 31-year-old protester, told Anadolu news agency, criticizing the international community for not doing enough. "So the only way we can do is

to make our voices heard."

In the US, demonstrators took to the streets of New York to demand end to Israel's genocide in Gaza. The protest resulted in numerous arrests as dozens of marchers marched through midtown Manhattan calling for an end to the violence.

The nearly daily pro-Palestinian protests in New York and other cities against the war in Gaza have caught many politicians and police officials off guard in the growing support the movement has gathered.

In Germany's capital, Berlin, police interrupted and cancelled a pro-Palestinian con-

ference less than an hour after it started on Friday, citing concerns about anti-Semitic statements. Officers initially halted the congress because one of the speakers was subject to a ban on political activity in Germany, police wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Police did not give the name of the speaker, but participants in the congress wrote on X that it was Palestinian researcher Salman Abu Sitta. Police then later wrote on X that they had banned the remainder of the conference, which was due to last until Sunday.

Berlin police on Friday said they had dispatched 930 of-

ficers, including reinforcements from other regions of Germany, to secure the event. On the congress website, the organizers denounce "Israeli apartheid and genocide" and accuse Germany of "being complicit". The organizers on Friday wrote in a Telegram post that Ghassan Abu Sitta, a Palestinian doctor specializing in plastic and reconstructive surgery, had been denied entry into Germany to attend the conference.

The outbreak of the war in Gaza has roiled Germany, where Berlin's staunch backing for Israel has prompted protests that pro-Palestinian voices are being marginalized.