

Watch an Iran-backed militia's missile strike that prompted US destroyers to head to Yemen

By Alex Lockie, October 4, 2016

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US Navy UAE navy HSV Swift

(The HSV Swift, formerly of the US Navy, now serving the UAE.US Navy photo)

On Saturday, a guided missile struck the United Arab Emirates' HSV Swift, a high-speed ferry formerly operated by the US Navy off the coast of Yemen, prompting the US to respond with two guided-missile destroyers and an amphibious transport dock ship from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group, Fox News reports.

"Rockets targeted an Emirati warship as it approached the coast of Mokha" on Yemen's western coast, Yemen's Iran-supported Houthi fighters said in a statement, reported by Al Jazeera.

"It was completely destroyed," the Houthis said.

The UAE has fought against the Houthi militants since last year as part of a Saudi-led coalition.

A video released online shows the Swift, a catamaran-style transport ship of US design, a rocket launching, and the rocket hitting the ship and causing a sustained fire on the water as those near the camera cheer.

The Emirati military confirmed that an incident occurred at sea while the ship was on a routine trip from Aden, Yemen, but it did not mention any injuries or deaths.

The US ships USS Nitze, USS Mason, and USS Ponce have headed to the Bab el-Mandeb strait that links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.



Yemen map

(The Yemeni government controls the majority of the country, but the Houthis control almost all of the western coast, where the incident took place. Reuters)

According to the US Naval Institute, "reports indicate the weapons used could have been Chinese-built C-802 anti-ship missiles ... or guided anti-tank weapons."

"The attack is believed to be related to the ongoing conflict in Yemen and not an attack against general shipping. US Naval Forces Central Command has ships in the area and is working closely with our allies and regional partners to ensure the free flow of commerce," a defense official told USNI News.

Shipping lanes and commerce are especially vital to Yemen, where the UN has said that 21 million out of 28 million Yemenis need some form of humanitarian aide and that half the country is likely malnourished.



yemen UAE HSV swift

(A still from the video of the Houthi-launched rocket reportedly striking the HSV Swift. The footage appears to show sustained fire aboard the ship, and perhaps a hole in the hull.Nachrichtensignal 301 via YouTube)

If the missile that hit the Swift was indeed a cruise missile, it marks an escalation in hostilities and arms in use in the conflict.

Though the US ships headed to Yemen can destroy incoming cruise missiles, Iran has shown time and time again it's not afraid to harass and threaten the US Navy at sea.

Iran has military ties to Russia and China, both of whom produce capable cruise and antiship missiles. And Iran has been known to provide weapons to the Houthi militants in Yemen.

Watch the footage of the missile strike:

