

## **'Iranian boats harassed US warship near Persian Gulf'**

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**Washington:** US Navy has alleged that four Iranian small boats harassed its warship in the Strait of Hormuz near Persian Gulf on Tuesday although no missiles were fired by them.

### **USS Nitze**

According to a US defence official, two of the Iranian vessels came within 300 yards of the guided missile destroyer USS Nitze and they harassed the destroyer by conducting a high speed intercept despite repeated warnings.

Reacting to the incident, Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations, today said that it reflects America's naval tensions with Tehran.

He also recalled the brief detention of 10 U.S. Navy sailors in January this year who mistakenly steered into Iranian waters.

Sharing details of the incident, the US official said the Iranian boats approached the Nitze at high speed on Tuesday, in an unsafe and unprofessional manner. The destroyer fired ten flares in the direction of the Iranian boats and sounded the ship's whistle several times in an effort to warn the boats away, the official said. The Nitze also tried to communicate with the Iranians over the radio, and also changed course to avoid the vessels.

The official said two boats ignored the warnings and continued to speed toward the Nitze until they were within 300 yards of the U.S. ship.

The USS Nitze was in international waters in the Strait of Hormuz with the USS Mason, also a guided missile destroyer. The official wasn't authorized to discuss the incident publicly so spoke anonymously.

Richardson said the encounter raises questions about what is the "new normal," adding, "We have to be mindful that we don't become complacent as things get steadily busier, steadily more engaging and that we're thoughtful about how we approach those challenges."

Last December, Iranian ships fired rockets near U.S. warship and other vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, and a month later flew an unarmed drone over the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf.

The January detention incident triggered a Navy investigation which found that the sailors failed to navigate properly and did not use appropriate communications as they sailed near Farsi Island, a base for the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy in the Persian Gulf.

The Iranians boarded the boats, pointed their guns at the U.S. sailors and took them to the island where they were held overnight. They were released after Washington intervened.

Several of the sailors were fired from their jobs or disciplined in connection with the incident.

- (With AP inputs)