

## **Iranian cargo ship attacked in Red Sea off Yemen: Report**

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The US military's Central Command said it was "aware of media reporting of an incident involving the Saviz in the Red Sea."

*Image Source : AP*

**Dubai:** An Iranian cargo ship believed to be a base for the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and anchored for years in the Red Sea off Yemen has been attacked, Iranian state television acknowledged Wednesday. The state TV acknowledgment, citing foreign media, marks the first Iranian comment on the mysterious incident involving the MV Saviz.

In a statement, the US military's Central Command only said it was "aware of media reporting of an incident involving the Saviz in the Red Sea."

"We can confirm that no US forces were involved in the incident," the command said. "We have no additional information to provide." Iran previously described the vessel as aiding in "anti-piracy" efforts in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait, a crucial choke point in international shipping.

The Saviz, owned by the state-linked Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, came to the Red Sea in late 2016, according to ship-tracking data. In the years since, it has drifted off the Dahlak archipelago, a chain of islands off the coast of the nearby African nation of Eritrea in the Red Sea. It likely received supply replenishments and switched crew via passing Iranian vessels using the waterway.

Briefing materials from the Saudi military earlier obtained by The Associated Press showed men on the vessel dressed in camouflage, military-style fatigues, as well as small boats capable of ferrying cargo to the Yemeni coast. That briefing material also included pictures showing a variety of antennas on the vessel that the Saudi government described as unusual for a commercial cargo ship, suggesting it conducted electronic surveillance.

The Washington Institute for Near-East Policy has called the Saviz an "Iranian mothership" in the region, similarly describing it as an intelligence-gathering base and an armory for the Guard. Policy papers from the institute don't explain how they came to that conclusion, though its analysts routinely have access to Gulf and Israeli military sources.

The Saviz had been under international sanctions until Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran receive economic relief in exchange for limiting its enrichment of uranium. The Trump administration later renewed American sanctions on the Saviz as part of its decision to unilaterally withdraw from the accord.

In June 2019, Saudi Arabia flew a critically ill Iranian off the Saviz after Tehran made a request through the United Nations for assistance.

- AP