

Iranian boxship converted into drone carrier readies for duty

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To add to merchant shipping's long list of concerns surrounding the security situation in the Middle East, Iran is readying to launch its first drone carrier, the *Shahdid Mahdavi*, a converted boxship previously called *Sarvin*.

Splash has obtained exclusive satellite images (see below) of the ship taken by Planet Labs 10 days ago, following an investigation by Samir Madani-led TankerTrackers.com.

Iranian hardware and intelligence has been assisting the Houthis in Yemen in their targeting of merchant vessels over the past three months with the Houthis demanding Israel end its war in Gaza. Around 35 merchant ships have been targeted by drones and missiles, while one car carrier, the *Galaxy Leader*, was [hijacked with its crew](#) and remains in Yemeni waters.

Iran's coming drone carrier will eventually wreak havoc against commercial vessels in the Arabian Sea

The *Shahid Mahdavi* started out as a 3,280 teu boxship, delivered from Hyundai Heavy Industries in the year 2000. It has recently undergone a conversion at the ISOICO shipyard west of Bandar Abbas, and is now controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The reconfigured vessel has added width to its deck and has around 170 m of runway, now able to accommodate the departure and landing of a very large fleet of fixed-wing long-range drones.

The semi-official *Fars* news agency described the vessel as a “mobile naval city” capable of “ensuring the security of Iran’s trade lines, as well as the rights of Iranian sailors and fishermen in the high seas.”

The *Fars* report noted: “This range of new defense and combat innovations for the construction of heavy vessels, in line with the mass development of light vessels, and equipping them with various arrays can maintain Iran’s authority over the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman always in the face of transregional enemies”.

Speaking with *Splash*, Madani, who has been tracking Iranian vessels closely for the last six years, said: “We anticipate Iran’s coming drone carrier will eventually wreak havoc against commercial vessels in the Arabian Sea, somewhere halfway to India.”

Speaking with the *Associated Press* earlier this week, vice admiral Brad Cooper, the head of the US Navy’s 5th Fleet, in charge of operations in the Middle East, discussed Iran’s ties with the Houthis.

“What I’ll say is Iran is clearly funding, they’re resourcing, they are supplying and they’re providing training,” Cooper said. “They’re obviously very directly involved. There’s no secret there.”



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