

Report: Russia is Providing Targeting Data to Houthis for Attacks on Ships



Explosions aboard the tanker Sounion after it was disabled and boarded by Houthi forces (Houthi Military Media)

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An exclusive in the Wall Street Journal has [confirmed](#) that Russia has been providing details of ship movements to enable Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

The middlemen between the Russians and the Houthis are the Iranians. A brigadier from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force sits on the Houthi Jihad Council as deputy to its leader, Abdulmalik al-Houthi. A second IRGC member also sits on the Council, with particular responsibility for drones and missiles.

The IRGC gets the intelligence to feed to the Houthis from its own sources, including long-range drones and Iranian naval vessels permanently on station in the Red Sea area. The Houthis also have their own reconnaissance drones and a fleet of fishing boats acting as spotters as well.

The Russian feed of intelligence to the Iranians, and thence to the Houthis, is well established.

In August 2022, a Russian Soyuz 2.1b rocket launched an Iranian intelligence satellite from Kazakhstan. The [Khayyam satellite](#), jointly built and based on the Russian Kanopus-V imagery satellite, was placed in a 500-kilometer low earth orbit, and is now giving the Iranians access to one-meter resolution imagery, sufficiently accurate to use for targeting an area of a ship.

The Khayyam's orbit allows it to visit any specific point of interest about four times a day, but then the satellite needs to be in position to download the imagery back to Earth. This limits the utility of the system in targeting moving targets such as ships. However, the Khayyam system is almost certainly being used in an intelligence-swap [arrangement](#) alongside Russia's own Kanopus-V constellation of

spy satellites, meaning that ship movement information available to the Iranians is likely to be much more up to date.

The Khayyam satellite is far more effective than the three satellites that the Iranians have built and launched themselves. One of these, the size of a washing machine, was described by US Space Command General John Raymond as “a tumbling webcam in space, unable to generate any useful intelligence.” Even so, the Khayyam is significantly less responsive and accurate than Western systems, and it is no surprise that the Houthis have attacked Russian ships in error on several [occasions](#).