

# U.S. Navy Analysis Confirms Iranian Link to Drone Attack



Graphic illustration and images captured by a U.S. Navy explosive ordnance disposal team aboard M/T Pacific Zircon, Nov. 16, showing the location where an Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) penetrated M/T Pacific Zircon's outer hull during an attack Nov. 15. *U.S. NAVY*

MANAMA, Bahrain – A U.S. Navy lab in Bahrain has confirmed Iran's connection to a Nov. 15 aerial drone attack on a Liberian-flagged commercial tanker transiting international waters in the Middle East, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs said in a Nov. 22 release.

Two U.S. Navy explosive ordnance technicians boarded M/T Pacific Zircon, Nov. 16, to assess the damage and collect unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) debris fragments for forensic analysis. During a two-hour survey and evidence collection process, the technicians also obtained explosive residue samples for lab testing.

U.S. 5th Fleet transported the gathered evidence to a lab at its Bahrain headquarters where technicians confirmed Iran's connection to the attack. The aerial drone that hit the commercial tanker was identified as a Shahed-136 UAV, fitting a historical pattern of Iran's increasing use of a lethal capability directly or through its proxies across the Middle East. Iran has supplied aerial drone technology to the Houthis in Yemen used in attacks against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates earlier this year.

Additionally, the Shahed-136 platform is the same aerial drone Iran has supplied to Russia for use against Ukraine.

On Nov. 15, the explosive-laden aerial drone attacked Pacific Zircon at approximately 7:30 p.m. in the Northern Arabian Sea,

tearing a 30-inch-wide hole into the back of the ship while subsequently penetrating and damaging internal compartments. The UAV's explosive impact also damaged a shipboard boiler, potable water tank and life raft.

"The Iranian attack on a commercial tanker transiting international waters was deliberate, flagrant and dangerous, endangering the lives of the ship's crew and destabilizing maritime security in the Middle East," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces. Cooper also serves as the multinational task force commander for the International Maritime Security Construct, a 10-member naval coalition whose forces provide maritime security near the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb.

Upon learning of the attack, the British Royal Navy dispatched frigate HMS Lancaster (F229) to the scene. U.S. 5th Fleet also directed guided-missile destroyer USS The Sullivans (DDG 68), patrol coastal ship USS Chinook (PC 9) and a P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft to assist and assess the situation.