

Defense official: Israel readying for attack on Iran

Israel's recent deployment of warships across the Red Sea

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Israel's recent deployment of warships across the Red Sea should be seen as serious preparation for an attack on Iran, an Israeli defense official told the Times of London on Thursday.

"This is preparation that should be taken seriously. Israel is investing time in preparing itself for the complexity of an attack on Iran. These maneuvers are a message to Iran that Israel will follow up on its threats," the official was quoted as saying.

Earlier this week, two Israel Navy gunboats openly sailed through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea.



The ships that passed through the Suez Canal on Tuesday were two Sa'ar 5 gunboats, the Hanit and the Eilat. This follows a similar incident in late June, when an Israeli Dolphin-class submarine passed through the canal, later returning the same way.

The move, apparently coordinated with Egypt, is seen as a warning message to Middle Eastern radicals, first and foremost Iran.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit confirmed the crossings and said that Cairo's agreements with Jerusalem permit Israeli military ships to transit the canal. He declined to speculate on whether the voyage was meant as a warning to Iran or anyone else.

While Israeli naval ships have gone through Suez before, the last such occurrence was at least a year ago.

An Israeli diplomat told the Times that Israel's has been bolstering its ties with certain Arab nations just as wary of the Iranian nuclear threat. In particular, the diplomat cited a "shared mutual distrust of Iran" between Israel and Egypt.

Though neither side says so publicly, there is ongoing security coordination between Israel and Egypt, which could be expanded if necessary in the future.

Israel has an interest in a naval presence in the Red Sea for two reasons: the effort to halt arms smuggling from Iran to the Gaza Strip - which, according to international media reports, mainly takes place by sea from Iran to Sudan, and then overland via Egypt, and the effort to bolster its deterrence against Iran in the event of a direct conflict breaking out.

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