

Francop Crew Members Deny Weapons Aboard Ship

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The Ship Francop Arrives in Beirut Port, Lebanese Army Interrogating its Crew

The crew of a ship intercepted by Israel has denied that the vessel was carrying Iranian weapons destined for Hizbullah, security sources told An Nahar newspaper.

According to the source, Israel would have arrested Francop's crew if it had found arms aboard the ship. The Jewish state should have also called for an international probe into the incident if its allegations were true, the source told An Nahar.

Francop entered on Friday Lebanese waters where authorities are questioning its crew, the army said.

"The Francop ship entered Lebanese territorial waters at noon today and, upon its arrival off Beirut port, the navy in cooperation with U.N. naval forces searched the vessel," an army communiqué said.

"Military intelligence began interrogating the crew on the motives for the seizure of the vessel while the concerned authorities... will take all the necessary measures to ensure it does not carry banned goods," it said.

Israel said the ship which it intercepted around 100 nautical miles from the Israeli coast overnight Wednesday was carrying "hundreds of tons" of weapons.

Israeli media reported the military tracked the containers from Iran to the Egyptian port of Damietta, where they were transferred onto the German-owned Francop vessel en route to Syria.

However, the security sources told An Nahar that investigation carried out by the Lebanese army intelligence on Friday showed that the vessel was heading from Iran to Syria with foodstuff on board and stopped in Damietta. Then it continued its journey to Syria before being stopped by Israel.

The sources wondered why Israel didn't seize the ship's cargo in Damietta if it was carrying weapons as the Jewish state alleges.

Beirut, 07 Nov 09, 09:03

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&2D4F76550A8506AAC225766700564C07>

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Lebanese Army reported on Friday that it inspected the ship Francop and started investigations with its crew after the ship entered the Lebanese waters.

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"Military intelligence began interrogating the crew on the motives for the seizure of the vessel while the concerned authorities... will take all the necessary measures to ensure it does not carry banned goods," it said.

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The arsenal included rockets, grenades and ammunition which Tehran was sending to Hizbullah, according to Israel.

A U.N. Security Council resolution which brought an end to the devastating 2006 war between Hizbullah and Israel demanded the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon and imposed a ban on all arms exports to them.

Iran and Hizbullah have both denied any link to the ship -- an Antigua-flagged vessel seized by Israeli naval commandos around 100 nautical miles from the Israeli coast.

Israeli media reported the military tracked the containers from Iran to the Egyptian port of Damietta, where they were transferred onto the German-owned "Francop" vessel en route to Syria.

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