
'Playing part in anti-Tehran policy?' UK marines seize ship with alleged Iranian crude for Syria

04/07/2019



Iran has summoned the British ambassador after the seizure of a supertanker that was allegedly carrying crude to fuel-starved Syria in defiance of EU sanctions. It comes as the US is trying to stifle Iranian oil trade to zero.

The MT Grace 1, a 300,000-ton Very Large Crude Carrier, was detained in a raid conducted by the British Royal Navy Marines and Gibraltar law enforcement on Thursday morning. The government of Gibraltar, a British overseas territory located on the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, said the ship was [detained](#) for allegedly violating EU sanctions on Syria.

The Panama-flagged vessel owned by a Singaporean company was en route to deliver its cargo to the Banyas refinery in Syria, Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said. *"That refinery is the property of an entity that is subject to European Union sanctions against Syria,"* the official explained. The EU imposed sanctions on the Syrian government in 2011, but this appears to be the first time a shipment of crude allegedly violating them was detained by a European authority.

[Detention of Super Tanker 'The Grace 1'...](#)

Spain's caretaker Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said the British targeted the tanker on a request from the US. He added that Spain, which considers the waters off Gibraltar as its own, was assessing the implications of the operation.

Iran has reportedly acknowledged ownership of the cargo. Its foreign ministry summoned the British ambassador in Tehran to protest the *"unlawful seizure of the Iranian tanker,"* [according](#) to the IRNA news agency.

According to Reuters, the MT Grace 1 has been used by Iran in the past to ship crude to Singapore and China in defiance of unilateral sanctions imposed against Iran by the US. The current trip allegedly started in Iran's port of Bandar Assalyeh, though the papers state that the crude was loaded in the Iraqi port of Basra.

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In seizing the tanker under the pretext of sanctions on Syria, the EU seems to be at least partially siding with Washington, which is trying to cripple the Iranian economy through harsh economic sanctions. The pressure campaign was escalated after the US broke its commitment under the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"Maybe the EU was trying to show that it was siding with the Americans, playing its part in anti-Iranian policy? We know that the Trump administration has been critical of the European countries," Ali Rizk, a Middle East-based journalist and writer, told RT.

"And it's likely a demonstration against Syria. It all helps an ongoing plan of parting Syria with its allies."

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The seizure also comes amid an escalation in the Gulf of Oman, where several tankers have been damaged in two separate incidents. Washington accused Iran of attacking the tankers, presumably to show it can interrupt the flow of Arab crude through the crucial waterway. Iran denied the accusation and said the attacks were likely false-flag operations meant to justify an increased US military presence in the region.

Syria has been experiencing fuel shortages for years amid devastating armed conflict within the country. A large part of its oil fields in the northeastern part of the country are currently controlled by the US-backed Kurdish militias.
