

Saudi-Led Coalition Seizes Yemen-Bound Fuel Tanker Despite Truce

SANA'A (Dispatches) – The Saudi-led coalition detained another oil tanker carrying thousands of tons of fuel toward Yemen in violation of a truce.

Al-Masirah television network quoted Essam al-Mutawakel, a spokesman for the Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC), as saying on Thursday that the war coalition “continues its piracy on fuel tankers and is detaining the tanker Kor-net.”

Mutawakel added, “The Kor-net ship, loaded with 20,000 tons of gasoline and 9,000 tons of diesel, was detained despite the UN-sponsored truce.”

The company’s spokesman also announced that the coalition forces had released the Yemen-bound fuel ships of Yahud and Princess Khadija.

In a statement last Friday, the YPC announced that the Saudi-led coalition did not allow the Princess Khadija tanker, which was carrying 29,226 tons of diesel fuel, to dock at Hudaydah port and offload its cargo.

This is not the first time the Saudi-led coalition has seized Yemen-bound fuel ships notwithstanding the truce that went into effect at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan.



A ship is docked at the Red Sea port of Hudaydah, Yemen.

Yemenis Tortured to Death

In another development, a hospital in the northwestern Yemeni province of Sa’ada has received the bodies of seven Yemeni citizens who were tortured to death by the Saudi occupation troops in a border area neighboring the kingdom, in yet another indication of atrocities committed by Riyadh against civilians in the war-ravaged country, Yemeni media reported.

“Security source in Sa’ada confirmed that the seven victims died after being tortured with electricity,” Yemen’s Arabic-language al-Masirah television network reported late on Thursday, saying the death toll was preliminary and that the atrocity was perpetrated

by Saudi forces in the al-Raqo district of the northwestern province.

The television network condemned the heinous crime and the Saudi army’s insistence on shedding Yemeni people’s blood by various means, including airstrikes, rocket and artillery shells, and torture.

The Human Rights Office in Sa’ada held the Saudi regime responsible for the murders and called on the United Nations and all international organizations to condemn the crime.

It also denounced the silence of the United Nations and international organizations as “complicity” in the Saudi crimes against the Yemeni people.

Last month, three citizens were killed when the Saudi-led coalition

forces bombed the border areas of Sa’ada Province.

Various areas of the border districts in Sa’ada are subjected on a daily basis to Saudi missile and artillery shelling, inflicting heavy losses upon Yemenis in spite of a UN-brokered ceasefire, which went into effect early last month.

Last week, a Yemeni military official said Saudi-led coalition forces and their mercenaries had violated the ceasefire at least 211 times during the past 24 hours.

The two-month humanitarian truce, announced on April 2, was meant to halt all military operations in the war-ravaged country and bring the foreign military invasion to an end.

Saudi Arabia launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in collaboration with its Arab allies and with arms and logistics support from the US and other Western states.

The objective was to reinstall the Riyadh-friendly regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and crush the Ansarullah resistance movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of a functional government in Yemen.

While the Saudi-led coalition has failed to meet any of its objectives, the war has killed hundreds of thousands of Yemenis and spawned the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

U.S. Lifts Sanctions on Militants in Syria

WASHINGTON (Anadolu) – In a hypocritical move, the U.S. on Thursday issued a general license to exempt northern Syrian territories where the PKK’s regional branch continues to freely roam, from American sanctions.

The Treasury Department’s action lifts prohibitions on business activities in 12 different economic sectors in northern Syria, including agriculture, telecommunications, power grid infrastructure, construction, manufacturing, trade, finance and clean energy.

Purchases of Syrian oil from the

region are also permitted as long as they do not benefit the Syrian government.

The areas that are covered by the license run from Aleppo governorate in the west to Hasakah governorate in the east. Geographical exemptions to the affected area are included.

Any business with the legitimate Syrian government is unaffected by Washington and is still prohibited under U.S. law. Importing Syrian oil to the U.S. also remains prohibited, according to the license, which was signed by the Treasury Department’s Office

of Foreign Assets Control Director, Andrea Gacki.

The YPG, which is the Syrian branch of the PKK, remains in control of large swathes of northeastern Syria with U.S. backing.

The PKK is a designated terrorist organization in Turkey and the U.S., but Washington has refrained from similarly designating the YPG and continues to partner with it in the region against the Daesh terror group despite adamant protests from Ankara.

The U.S. has imposed sweeping sanctions on the Syrian govern-

ment.

Syria has lambasted U.S.-led sanctions against his country, saying the bans amount to economic terrorism and have catastrophic impacts on Syria’s human rights situation.

Damascus says the coercive economic measures by the U.S. target Syrian people’s livelihood and their right to life and welfare, adding the terrorist war against Syria, foreign occupation of its territory and the external support for terrorism have caused catastrophic impacts on the human rights situation in Syria.

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is very low and needs to be multiplied, the Leader said.

On the political front, the ground is ready for more exchange of ideas, he added. “I hope this trip will mark a new beginning for expanding cooperation.”

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi also discussed regional affairs, which have been a main focus of his foreign policy directive, and called for an end to the war in Yemen and stability in neighboring Afghanistan. He emphasized that the region will be worse off if there is any foreign intervention.

Al Thani confirmed that Palestine and regional affairs were major talking points on Thursday. Moreover, he said Qatar will welcome Iranians who wish to watch their national team during the upcoming FIFA World Cup football tournament in November.

The Qatari leader led a delegation to Tehran that also included his foreign minister, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, who met his Iranian counterpart Hussein Amir-Abdollahian.

The officials also commemorated Al Jazeera’s Abu Akleh and criticized double standards of international organizations and human rights groups in dealing with human rights violations in Palestine.

Zionist...

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Many of Abu Akleh’s colleagues and fellow journalists were also at the funeral.

The renowned journalist was known and highly regarded by viewers across the Arab world, particularly in Palestine, where her murder has resonated with people from across the political and social spectrum.

Her assassination, the attacks on other journalists and the crackdown on her funeral procession have brought Palestinians together in what has been described as a rare moment of national unity. Across the Old City of Al-Quds, church services have been dedicated to Abu Akleh, with Palestinian flags flying.

“I’m watching these scenes of Shireen’s funeral and it’s both a celebration of her life and also a great deal of anger at the way she was killed,” Palestinian lawyer Diana Buttu told Middle East Eye.

“Shireen touched every single Palestinian house. Every Arab house. She brought Palestine to the Arab world and through her the world understood what it means to be a Palestinian,” Buttu added.

“Seeing these thousands of people is such a fitting tribute for Shireen; she was really the person who did her best to make sure that our stories were heard and I can’t tell you how proud I am to say that she was my friend.”

Following the funeral service, large crowds carried Abu Akleh’s coffin 300 meters from the church to cemetery, with heavily-armed officers stationed across the Old City.

Israeli special forces gathered outside the church, arresting and assaulting several people who waved the Palestinian flag.

Still, thousands of Palestinians determined to give Abu Akleh a fitting farewell marched along the narrow road leading to the cem-

etery.

A cross of flowers, carried in front of the coffin by Muslim and Christian crowds, finally arrived in the graveyard.

There, in an extraordinary moment, representatives from the Christian denominations in Al-Quds rang church bells in tandem, a gesture of unity seldom seen in the city’s history.

Draped in a Palestinian flag, which Zionist authorities had banned supporters from carrying, the coffin of Abu Akleh was finally placed in the ground in a plot alongside her parents.

Ahead of the funeral, Israeli forces had imposed a number of restrictions that Palestinians saw as an attempt to disrupt the service and limit the number of people attending.

They banned Palestinian flags at the funeral and imposed a ban on posters and the chanting of nationalist songs.

Abu Akleh’s brother was called in for questioning on Thursday night, in a move many denounced as an effort to pressure the family and disrupt Friday’s proceedings.

According to local sources, Zionist forces stormed Abu Akleh’s home on Thursday, attempting to tear down a Palestinian flag that was erected in her honor.

Since her assassination, Israeli forces have maintained a heavy military presence in Al-Quds. Despite the restrictions and intense crackdown, thousands of Palestinians vowed to gather for the funeral service and walk alongside her coffin until her burial.

The journalist was fatally shot dead in the flashpoint city of Jenin which was raided by Zionist troops hours before the funeral on Friday.

Explainer...

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At the time, Iran’s currency had recently begun a long freefall as a result of former United States President Donald Trump’s threats to pull out of the 2015 nuclear accord – which he made good on a month later. Trump then embarked on his “maximum pressure” campaign of harsh sanctions that, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, battered the Iranian economy.

Officials and economists now agree that not only did the subsidized currency rate fail to meaningfully curb skyrocketing prices, but it also benefitted corrupt intermediaries to the tune of untold billions. The open market rate of the rial now stands at about seven times the subsidized rate.

The Rouhani administration also considered dismantling the subsidized currency rate, but his government and the parliament could not agree on how to do it in a way that would not introduce new price

shocks at a time when the annual inflation had risen to 50 percent. The rate stood at 39.2 percent in April.

Raisi’s decision to effectively phase out the artificial currency rate signals Iran’s economy has now fully shed its Trump-era form, according to economist and journalist Saeed Leylaz.

“Up to 70 percent of the subsidy funds from the former policy would get lost on their way of reaching the people,” he told Al Jazeera.

“Moreover, estimates show about 15 million people living close to Iran’s borders – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and even northern borders – benefitted from Iranian subsidies on goods like wheat and medicine in the form of smuggling. That can now stop, too, which I think will save a considerable amount of money for the country and lead to economic growth.”

Leylaz added that, while removing the subsidized rate could lead to an uptick in inflation, the trend could be reversed from next month depending on how Raisi manages the situation. He cautioned the sustainability and long-term success of the president’s reforms hinge on how well he can tackle the money supply.

Economists have for years identified rampant money printing as the main culprit behind Iran’s traditionally high inflation. Much of the runaway money supply is also generated by the activities of a banking system that has seen no significant reforms in more than three decades.

Multi-layered foreign exchange rate regimes have been proven to be ineffective, and just a handful of troubled nations have resorted to them in the past few decades, said economist Meysam Hashemkhani.

Iranians last experienced coupon schemes during and after the eight-year Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, when essential goods became scarce.

The economist said the only two support programs implemented in Iran in recent decades that have been successful in reducing inequality have been direct cash subsidies, and offering education and health services to disenfranchised areas.

One of the concerns preventing a subsidies reform plan so far has been how to manage the budget. Hashemkhani said his estimates show the Raisi administration will have enough money for the tentative cash subsidies program, so prices are unlikely to experience sudden hikes as a result of it.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Tuesday he expects prices of chicken, eggs, dairy products, and vegetable oil to experience gradual hikes, but all other goods should remain stable.

President Raisi announced the plan one day before the European Union’s coordinator for the nuclear deal talks, Enrique Mora, arrived in Tehran in an effort to help end the standoff in the stalled Vienna talks.

The president has repeatedly emphasized he will not tie the fate of the country’s economy to the Vienna negotiations and has promised an 8 percent gross domestic product growth rate for the current year using a budget that presumes U.S. sanctions will remain in place.

Choosing to publicize substantial economic reform at this time may carry a direct signal to Washington and other signatories of the nuclear accord, Leylaz said.

“The reforms that Mr Raisi are undertaking could be a sign of reduced hope for restoring the JCPOA,” he said, referring to the accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, by its acronym.

That possibility was strengthened when Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian also referred to the issue in a tweet on Wednesday, saying both “nullification” and lifting of sanctions are being pursued.

“Making the country immune through economic development and fairly distributing subsidies is a main strategy,” he wrote. “Negotiations to lift sanctions while maintaining Iran’s red lines in achieving a good, strong and sustainable agreement is also being followed up in its correct path.”

Raisi’s security chief, Ali Shamkhani, also linked the two issues in a tweet on Tuesday.

The fact the economic reform plan and Mora’s visit have coincided “demonstrates the high capacity of people for great action and government’s control over the most important affairs”, Shamkhani wrote.

UAE ...

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Sheikh Khalifa took over as the UAE’s second president in November 2004, succeeding his father as the 16th ruler of Abu Dhabi, the richest of the federation’s seven emirates.

He has rarely been seen in public since 2014, when he had surgery following a stroke, although he has continued to issue rulings. The cause of death was not imme-

diately released.

The UAE, a former British protectorate that was founded in 1971, has gone from desert outpost to booming state in its short history, fuelled by its oil wealth and Dubai’s rise as a trading and financial centre.

The country of 10 million joined military campaigns in Libya and Yemen and broke ranks with much of the Arab world to establish ties with Israel in 2020.

The bearded Sheikh Khalifa had cut a frail figure on his occasional public appearances, while his brother Muhammad bin Zayed hosted world leaders and led diplomatic forays abroad.

A Taste...

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for a proper implementation of the nuclear agreement.

Borrell said the latest visit by Mora had “gone better than expected” and expressed optimism about negotiations.

“The negotiations had stalled and now they have been reopened,” Borrell told reporters on the sidelines of a G7 meeting in Germany. “There is a perspective of reaching a final agreement.”

Mora held two days of meetings with Iran’s chief negotiator Ali Bagheri in Tehran this week.

Among the main sticking points in the negotiations has been the U.S. refusal to undo its past wrongs, including removing Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps from its blacklist.

Borrell said “these disagreements” had hampered progress in the talks for two months.

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Al-Mortada, for his part, hailed Iran’s special place in the West Asian region, saying Beirut is ready to expand its relations with all friendly and brotherly regional countries, especially the Islamic Republic.

He touched on problems related to the livelihood and basic needs of the Lebanese people, stressing that the Lebanese government and nation, nonetheless, will act in the national interests of their country and will never wait for outside help or solutions.

Book...

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as another upcoming book by journalists Susan Glasser and Peter Baker that makes the same claim.

According to the two journalists, Netanyahu implored the Trump administration to attack Iran from the moment it was clear that the election results had gone against Trump. General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is quoted as saying: “If you do this, you’re gonna have a fucking war.”

Esper’s book chronicles his tenure in the Trump administration, which saw tensions between the U.S. and Iran reach near boiling point several times, most notably with the January 2020 assassination of Iranian commander General Qassem Soleimani.

Media reported earlier this week on several excerpts of Esper’s book that had been released, in which he wrote that Trump had been vying to strike an Iranian official.

The desire to do so was linked to political gain, according to the book, with Esper believing that Trump’s team wanted news that could be used to aid his 2020 reelection bid.

In addition to making a strong line against Iran a key part of his administration’s foreign policy, the former president used it as a platform for his failed bid at winning the White House for a second term.

Esper wrote that Milley told him that Robert O’Brien, Trump’s national security adviser, had called to say that “the president wanted to strike a senior military officer who was operating outside of Iran.”

“But why now? What was new? Was there an imminent threat? What about gathering the national security team to discuss this?”

“Milley said he was ‘stunned’ by the call, and he sensed that O’Brien ‘put the president up to this,’ trying to create news that would help Trump’s re-election.”

Esper says he refused to carry out such an action without a written order from Trump, writing that it was “fraught with a range of legal, diplomatic, political and military implications, not to mention that it could plunge us into war with Iran.”

Trump’s rhetoric led to fears that he might attempt to provoke a war with Iran as the 2020 presidential election neared.

Esper served as Pentagon chief from June 2019 to November 2020, when he was fired over a range of differences on policy issues.