

US seizes Iran-bound ship from China in Arabian Sea

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US Marines boarded and seized an Iranian-flagged container ship in the Gulf of Oman on Sunday after the destroyer USS Spruance put five-inch shells through its engine room. It was the first time a US warship had fired on a merchant ship since the blockade of Iran began on February 28.

The seizure—an act of international piracy, wholly illegal under international law—marks a new escalation of the 52-day-old US-Israeli war on Iran. It comes two days before the scheduled expiration of a nominal ceasefire between the United States and Iran.

The ship, the M/V Touska, was bound for Bandar Abbas. Over the six weeks before the seizure, it had twice docked at Zhuhai, in southern China.

In a report Monday, the *Wall Street Journal* identified the Touska as part of a fleet operated by a subsidiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines that “often sails to China, one of Tehran’s most important backers.”

The Touska has been under US Treasury sanctions since 2018. The US military has not disclosed its cargo. A search of the 965-foot ship will follow once tugs bring it in.

The seizure extends a pattern of US attacks on Russian and Chinese shipping that began with the military campaign against Venezuela. US President Donald Trump ordered a blockade of Venezuelan oil exports beginning last December 17. This has accompanied a series of missile strikes on small boats in the Caribbean and Pacific that have killed at least 181 people and that Human Rights Watch has called extrajudicial killings. Since December, the US Navy has boarded and seized at least 10 tankers carrying Venezuelan crude.

The Russian-flagged *Marinera*, formerly the *Bella 1*, was seized on January 7 in the North Atlantic south of

Iceland while under Russian navy escort, including a submarine. Navy SEALs carried out the boarding, ferried by Army special operations helicopters and watched over by AC-130J gunships and P-8 surveillance planes. A Chinese-operated tanker, the *M Sophia*, was taken in the Caribbean the same month. On February 9, the US Navy captured the tanker *Aquila II* in the Indian Ocean with 700,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude that were bound for China.

Since February 28, the US military has stopped 25 ships off Iran and turned them back. Roughly 230 loaded oil tankers now sit trapped inside the Persian Gulf.

“China became the leading buyer” of Iranian oil after Washington sanctioned the sector, the *Wall Street Journal* noted; “Beijing doesn’t uphold US sanctions, which it calls unilateral and illegal.” The Russian Foreign Ministry said last week that the United States “sought to take control of Iranian oil in Persian Gulf.”

The two-week ceasefire is set to lapse at midnight Wednesday, April 22. In an interview Monday with Bloomberg News, Trump said it was “highly unlikely” he would extend it.

The *Journal* reported Monday afternoon, citing a White House official, that “President Trump is unlikely to extend a cease-fire with Iran that is set to expire on Wednesday evening.” The *New York Times* reported from Islamabad that US Vice President JD Vance was due to arrive Tuesday for a second round of talks in Pakistan, accompanied by Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff and senior adviser Jared Kushner, but Iranian state media said Tehran would not attend.

On Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X that the Strait of Hormuz was open to commercial shipping on a route hugging the Iranian coast. Nineteen ships transited the strait on Friday and

Saturday morning—the first cargo to move through since the war began 51 days earlier.

On Saturday afternoon, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps gunboats fired on two Indian-flagged ships without the standard radio warnings. That evening, the Revolutionary Guard overruled Araghchi and announced the strait was re-closed.

“No vessel should make any movement from its anchorage in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman,” the Guard’s statement read. “Approaching the Strait of Hormuz will be considered as cooperation with the enemy.”

India’s Foreign Ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador. On Sunday morning, the USS Spruance stopped the Touska.

Within hours, US President Donald Trump had posted a burst of messages on Truth Social threatening to destroy the civilian infrastructure on which 90 million Iranians depend. “The United States is going to knock out every single Power Plant, and every single Bridge, in Iran. NO MORE MR. NICE GUY!”

On Fox News Sunday, in a pre-taped phone interview with chief foreign correspondent Trey Yingst, Trump said: “You’re going to see bridges and power plants dropping all over their country.” Of Iran’s 90 million people: “If they don’t sign the deal, then the whole country is going to get blown up.”

On the ABC News Sunday interview program, “This Week,” US Ambassador to the United Nations Michael Waltz defended Trump’s threat. Destroying civilian power stations and bridges, he said, “is not a war crime.” He cited the Allied strategic bombing campaigns in the Second World War as precedent.

By Monday’s close, US oil futures rose about 7 percent to \$89.61 a barrel; Brent crude settled near \$97. The American Automobile Association posted a nationwide average gasoline price of \$4.05 a gallon.

International Air Transport Association Director General Willie Walsh warned of jet fuel shortages forcing flight cancellations across Europe by the end of May. Goldman Sachs has modeled a Brent price of \$135 in an extended closure of the Strait of Hormuz; Oxford Economics has modeled a peak of \$190 a barrel and a world downturn exceeded in the last four decades only by the 2008 crash and the COVID shock.

Al Jazeera puts the Iranian dead at 2,076, among them 240 women and 212 children. The independent

Iranian human rights monitor HRANA puts the toll at 3,636.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society counts 339 damaged hospitals and clinics, 857 schools and 32 universities. The UN refugee agency estimates that between 600,000 and a million Iranian households—up to 3.2 million people—have been driven from their homes. Iran’s government puts the monetary damage at \$270 billion.

The Lebanon ceasefire signed at midnight April 17 was broken within 48 hours. UN experts, quoted by Al Jazeera, describe the Israeli pattern in southern Lebanon as “domicide.”

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz has ordered the demolition of Lebanese houses along a 10-kilometer “Yellow Line” that runs across 55 villages; residents of those villages have been barred from returning to them. “We have not yet finished the job,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.



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