

The American destroyer USS Laboon approaches the oiler USNS Kanawha (background) for replenishment-at-sea operation in the Red Sea on December 25, 2023.

● AFP

Raisi condemns US strikes on Yemen

Ansarallah targets US warship in Red Sea

International Desk

Yemen's Ansarallah movement on Sunday fired an anti-ship cruise missile toward an American destroyer in the Red Sea after the movement vowed to retaliate against the US-led coalition on the Arab country.

The attack on Sunday marked the first US-acknowledged fire by the resistance movement since America and allied nations, including the UK, began strikes Friday on Yemen following weeks of assaults on shipping in the Red Sea.

The Ansarallah's missile on Sunday went in the direction of the USS Laboon, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer operating in the southern reaches of the Red Sea, the US military's Central Command said in a statement.

Since November, the Yemeni forces have repeatedly targeted Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea, saying they are avenging Israel's brutal onslaught on the Gaza Strip since October 7.

On December 18, the US announced the launch of a multinational force to purportedly protect trade in the

Red Sea after attacks by Yemen forced at least a dozen shipping lines to suspend operations in the region.

The US-led coalition launched two deadly strikes on the Arab country last week, which met with condemnations from many countries, especially the regional states.

Iran slams US strikes

On Sunday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi censured the US missile strikes carried on Yemen, saying the move portrays Washington's aggressive and anti-human rights nature.

In a phone call with the Head of Yemen's Supreme Political Council Mahdi al-Mashat, Raisi said all freedom-seeking nations in the world condemn the US aggression against the Yemeni people.

The first day of US-led strikes Friday hit 28 locations and struck more than 60 targets with cruise missiles and bombs launched by fighter jets, warships, and a submarine. Sites hit included weapon depots, radars, and command centers, including in remote mountain areas, the US said. The Ansarallah

movement asserted the strikes killed five of their troops and wounded six others.

US forces followed up with a strike Saturday on a radar site in Yemen. The attacks are raising fear of the expansion of the Gaza conflict in the region.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Monday that the US cannot say it is seeking to prevent the spread of war in the region while it launches attacks on Yemen and expands the ongoing war in Gaza to the Red Sea.

During a joint press conference with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on Monday, the Iranian top diplomat said that the US cannot, on one hand, support Israel's genocide in Gaza and, on the other hand, ask the regional countries to exercise restraint.

UK involvement under scrutiny

The UK, which is also part of the coalition, has also launched attacks on Yemen. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was due to face Parliament Monday to explain why the UK joined the US in striking Yemen

and why British lawmakers did not get a say on the military action.

Four Royal Air Force Typhoon jets took part in last week's US-led strikes on Yemen.

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps said Monday that Friday's strikes had been intended "as a single action" rather than part of a campaign, but did not rule out UK participation in further military strikes. Keir Starmer, leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party, said he supported last week's strikes but expects more openness from the government in future.

"If the government is proposing further action, then it should say so and set out the case, and we're going to have to consider that on a case-by-case basis on the merits," he said.

The smaller opposition Liberal Democrats accused the government of "riding roughshod over a democratic convention," and that the Parliament should get a vote on military action.

"For Rishi Sunak to attempt to ignore elected representatives is disgraceful," Liberal Democrat defense spokesman Richard Foord said.

UN tells Israel access to northern port critical for Gaza aid

International Desk

Three United Nations agencies called Monday on Israel to allow access to the port of Ashdod, north of Gaza, for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid.

Bringing food and supplies to the besieged population of Gaza, which is increasingly at risk of famine, also depends on the opening of new entry routes into the territory, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) said in a joint statement.

The use of Ashdod, located some 40 km (25 miles) north of the Gaza border, is "critically needed by aid agencies", they said, while calling for a "fundamental step change in the flow of humanitari-

an aid into Gaza".

The war on Gaza, now in its 100th day, has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe for the besieged strip's 2.4 million people, who are struggling to get food, water, fuel and medical care.

Opening the Ashdod port would reduce the time it takes to transport food to Gazans from the north, WFP's regional director for the Middle East, Corinne Fleischer, told AFP earlier this month.

Meanwhile, four US officials told Axios that President Joe Biden and other senior US officials are becoming increasingly frustrated with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his rejection of most of the administration's recent requests related to the war

in Gaza.

Biden's administration keeps pressing Israel to reengage with Palestinians as partners once fighting in Gaza is over and support their eventual independence. Netanyahu keeps saying no.

Even on actions to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian civilians, the two allies are far apart.

That cycle, frustrating to much of the world, seems unlikely to end, despite US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's fourth urgent diplomatic trip this week to the Middle East since the war started. Though the United States, as Israel's closest ally and largest weapons supplier, has stronger means to apply pressure on Israel, it shows no willingness to use them. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Monday the United States made a "big mistake" by providing Israel with extensive support, adding that it was a complete miscalculation by Israel and its allies who thought they could destroy Hamas in a short period of time.

He emphasized that Israel achieved none of its goals through its attacks against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

Lawsuit against US, UK

After South Africa filed a case against Israel at the International

Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide in Gaza, the country's nearly 50 lawyers are preparing a separate lawsuit against the US and UK governments on the grounds that they are complicit in Israeli forces' war crimes in Palestine.

The initiative, led by South African lawyer Wikus Van Rensburg, aims to prosecute those who are complicit in the crime in civilian courts in collaboration with lawyers from the US and UK, with whom he is already in contact.

Rensburg, who has been writing letters to various countries and the ICJ for the last few weeks demanding that Israel and its supporters be prosecuted, has begun preparations to file a lawsuit against the two Western countries, with the support of his colleagues.

On Monday, health officials in Hamas-run Gaza reported more than 24,000 deaths in the war with Israel which has sent shockwaves across the region.

According to the ministry, more than 60 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military strikes across the territory overnight.

It said dozens of people were also wounded in what the resistance group's media office described as "intense" Israeli strikes and artillery bombardments across the Gaza Strip.

Seizure of oil tanker conforms to int'l law: Navy chief



International Desk

The Iranian Navy's seizure of an oil tanker in the Sea of Oman on January 11, 2024, was made in compliance with international law, as the country took back what had been stolen by the US, Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Rear Admiral Irani said the thuggish American forces committed a theft, and so it was necessary for Iran to reclaim its rightful possession, Tasnim news agency reported.

According to Iranian state media, Iran on Thursday seized the oil tanker St. Nikolas, which was sailing under the Marshall Islands flag and owned by the Greek shipowner Empire Navigation with Iraqi crude destined for Turkey, in retaliation for last year's confiscation of the same vessel and its oil by the US.

Echoing remarks from the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Navy chief warned the enemies of the country that the era of hit and run is over.

In Washington, the Pentagon claimed Iranian forces unlawfully boarded the St. Nikolas in the Gulf of Oman and forced it to change course toward Iranian territorial waters.

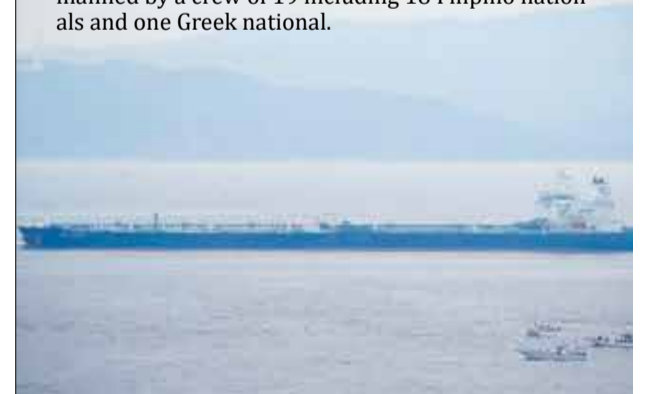
The White House condemned the seizure. "No justification whatsoever to seize it, none whatsoever. They need to let it go," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

The US seized the St. Nikolas last year in a sanctions enforcement operation when it sailed under a different name, Suez Rajan. Iran warned the US the move would "not go unanswered".

Armed intruders boarded the St. Nikolas as it sailed close to the Omani city of Sohar, according to British maritime security firm Ambrey, and its AIS tracking system was turned off as it headed in the direction of the Iranian port of Bandar-e-Jask.

"Communication with the oil tanker has been cut off around 06:30 on January 11 in the waters of Oman," Turkish oil refiner Tupras told Reuters in an emailed statement, confirming it had bought the cargo from Iraqi state marketer SOMO.

The ship loaded around 145,000 metric tons of oil in the Iraqi port of Basra and was heading to Aliaga in western Turkey via the Suez Canal, Empire Navigation told Reuters. It said it had lost contact with the vessel, manned by a crew of 19 including 18 Filipino nationals and one Greek national.



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