

# Iran confiscates US oil cargo



## International Desk

Iran will unload about \$50 million worth of crude owned by the US from a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker following a Tehran court order in favor of Iranian patients of Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB).

Advantage Sweet is a Suezmax crude tanker that had been chartered by US firm Chevron and was seized in April 2023 by Iran's Army following a collision with an Iranian boat, which resulted in the injury and missing of a number of the Iranian crew members. The tanker had attempted to flee the scene

in serious breach of international laws and regulations.

The unloading of the cargo follows a Tehran court order in favor of Iranian patients of Epidermolysis Bullosa or butterfly patients, a rare skin disease, who had filed a lawsuit against the "severe physical and mental harm" caused by the non-provision of Swedish-made medicine, which is said to be caused by US sanctions according to the lawsuit. They said that the Western sanctions, especially those by the US, have prevented the Swedish company, Mölnlycke Health Care, from selling medicines to Iran.

The United States reinstated its sanctions against Iran in May 2018 after leaving a United Nations-endorsed nuclear agreement with Iran and five other countries.

Since then, Mölnlycke Health Care has stopped selling pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, including special bandages for EB patients, to Iranian companies, citing the unilateral US sanctions.

The move has deprived EB patients of essential medical items, caused the deaths of many of them, and inflicted serious physical injuries such as amputation of some of the patients.

## Biden-Trump rematch looks certain after Super Tuesday votes

The US presidential election looks all but certain to be a repeat of the 2020 poll, with Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump both sweeping to victory in nomination contests across the country.

US President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump swept to victory in statewide nomination contests on Tuesday, setting up a historic rematch in November's election, Sky News reported.

On a day traditionally dubbed Super Tuesday – when the most states choose who they think should be candidates – both virtually secured the nomination from their respective parties.

Republican Trump won in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Minnesota and Virginia, brushing aside Nikki Haley, who only won Vermont.

Haley suspended her White House campaign Wednesday, declining to endorse former Trump but calling on him to earn the support of moderates and independents who backed her in the primary.

"It is now up to Donald Trump to earn the votes of those in our party and beyond it who did not support him, and I hope he does that," Haley said in a televised address in Charleston, South Carolina.

Meanwhile, Biden appeared to win easily in 14 states but faced a sizeable protest vote in Minnesota where he still won. He lost in the US territory of American Samoa.

Despite their clear victories, a rematch between Trump, 77, and Biden, 81 – the first repeat US presidential matchup since 1956 – is one few Americans seem to want, based on opinion polls. Speaking to a crowd gathered at his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida, Trump described the president as the "worst" the country has ever seen.

"There's never been anything like what's happening to our country," he added, before wrongly adding 15 million people have crossed the southern border from Mexico to the US.

But Biden warned his rival – who is facing a litany of criminal charges, including interference in the 2020 election – is "determined to destroy our democracy".

## 'Israel seeks to depopulate northern Gaza'

### International Desk

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry said Israel is attempting to depopulate the northern Gaza Strip by intensifying its attacks and escalating famine.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemns in the strongest terms the war of genocide that Israel is carrying out against our people in the Gaza Strip for the 152nd day," the ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The ministry confirms that more than 500,000 people live in northern Gaza under the most horrific acts of genocide: constant bombardment, deepening famine, and creating strife and chaos."

An aid mission to two hospitals in northern Gaza found horrifying scenes of children dying of starvation, amid dire shortages of food, fuel and medicines, the World Health Organization said.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Monday the agency's visits over the weekend to the Al-Awda and Kamal Adwan hospitals "were the first since early October 2023 despite our efforts to gain more regular access to the north of Gaza". The findings were "grim", he said on X, adding that "the situation at Al-Awda was particularly appalling, as one of the buildings is destroyed".

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry's statement came as negotiations are underway to establish a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas resistance group in Gaza.

Jihad Taha, a Hamas spokesperson, said the negotiations were ongoing but "the ball is in the Israeli court".

He said Israel had thus far refused Hamas' demands for people who fled northern Gaza to be allowed to return and for guarantees of a long-term cease-fire and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

"Hamas is open to proposals and initiatives that are consistent with its position calling for a cease-fire, withdrawal, the return of the displaced, the entry of relief convoys and reconstruction," Taha said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has publicly rejected Hamas' demands and repeatedly vowed to continue the war until Hamas is dismantled and all the captives are returned.

## Persian Gulf Arab states, Red Sea tensions

# Avoiding an unwanted war

By Hoda Yousefi  
Middle East affairs expert

### EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Russia-Ukraine crisis has had a significant impact on global trade, particularly on the Asia-Europe rail transit route. This route, which previously accounted for a significant portion of trade between the two continents, has become less viable due to the conflict. As a result, the importance of the Red Sea as a maritime trade route has increased.

The Red Sea connects the Bab al-Mandab strait to the Suez Canal, a vital shipping lane that allows goods to be transported between Asia and Europe. Over 30% of the world's maritime trade passes through the Red Sea, with an average of \$400 million worth of cargo transported every hour.

The recent escalation of tensions between Israel and Hamas has also had an impact on the Red Sea. In response to Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, the Houthi rebels in Yemen launched drone and missile attacks on Israeli commercial and military vessels. This prompted the United States to form a coalition of countries, including the UK, France, Italy, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Seychelles, Australia, and Bahrain, to counter Houthi military attacks.

Many analysts believe that the US-led coalition is a pretext for Washington to increase its influence over the Red Sea. The region is strategically important and the US has long sought to assert its dominance there. The current tensions provide an opportunity for the US to do so under the guise of countering Houthi aggression.

The US and UK have already launched retaliatory strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. However, these actions are likely to do little to resolve the underlying tensions in the region. Instead, they are likely to further destabilize the region and create a more dangerous environment for maritime trade.

### Consequences of rising Red Sea insecurity

With the security of the Red Sea as a major international waterway compromised, shipping vessels are now forced to re-route around South Africa, a journey that takes at least two weeks longer. This has primarily affected Egypt's revenue from the Suez Canal, with unofficial figures showing a 22% decrease in ship traffic in recent months.

In addition to the longer transit time, the insecurity in the Red Sea has also led to increased transportation risks and higher tariffs for goods. This is because ships are now exposed to greater risks of piracy, terrorism, and other maritime hazards. These increased costs are passed on to consumers, which contributes to inflation.

Even countries that have not been involved in the recent tensions are suffering from the current situation. For example, the cost of shipping a commercial vessel from China to Europe, which previously cost around \$1,500, is now estimated at \$4,000. This is a significant increase that will have a negative impact on businesses and consumers in both countries.

In the long run, continued insecurity in the Red Sea could even disrupt the global supply chain.

From a political perspective, the tensions in the Red Sea have the potential to exacerbate various layers of past and present conflicts.

Firstly, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis could escalate due to the Houthis' perception of Riyadh as a close ally of Washington. This could lead to a renewed military confrontation between the two sides.

Secondly, the tensions between Iran and the US will also be amplified in this context. The Houthis are part of the "Axis of Resistance" and a regional ally of Tehran. On the other hand, Iran has taken a strong and explicit stance against Israel and the US, and any military action they may take in the region.

### Stance of Persian Gulf Arab states

When the United States announced its intention to form a coalition against the Houthi Ansarullah of Yemen, none of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, except for Yemen, welcomed such an initiative. There are several reasons for the lack of support for the US in this incident and the general avoidance of any tension in the Red Sea by the Gulf Arab states.

Firstly, at the height of tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE with the Houthi Ansarullah, the United States did not provide the military support that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi expected. This issue particularly created resentment between these countries when the UAE requested military assistance after its facilities were attacked by the Houthis, but Washington did not respond adequately. Now, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are in a position of retaliation against this US action and seem to be making the most of it.

Secondly, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have experienced the brunt of Houthi Ansarullah military attacks on vital targets within their territories and are seeking to adopt a position that will prevent such attacks from happening again with all their might. In its Vision 2030 document, Saudi Arabia seeks to become a regional commercial and economic hub. Under such circumstances, foreign military attacks are seen as potentially irreparable obstacles.

The UAE, which has also improved its position in the field of tourism in the region and the world in recent years, avoids any conflict that could jeopardize its national security. In addition to the issue of tourism, the United Arab Emirates hosted the UN Climate Change Conference last year and committed to making large investments in the field of renewable energy. Abu Dhabi seeks to attract more foreign investment, so it will not participate in events that make its country unsafe.

Abu Dhabi has also invested in important infrastructure in southern Yemen in order to achieve its commercial goals in the near future by increasing its influence in these areas. Increased tensions in the Red Sea will also threaten the UAE's economic interests in Yemen.

Thirdly, Arab countries are forced to take some actions to manage public opinion; in the case of Palestine, public opinion in the Arab world is entirely against Israel. In this context, even countries like the UAE, which have normalized relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords, or countries like Saudi Arabia, which have a vision of improving relations with Tel Aviv, will not be able to participate in Israeli-American plans in order to manage public opinion.

### Conclusion

After the outbreak of tensions in the Red Sea, countries such as Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait considered the continuation of the conflict in this region to be crisis-prone and called for a de-escalation of tensions. However, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are more than other countries trying to reduce conflicts in the Red Sea because these two countries will not only be harmed by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, but will also be exposed to military confrontation.

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