

Sabotage of oil tankers stirs concerns over Gulf shipping

Wed, 2019-05-22 00:51

DUBAI: Amid rising tensions between the US and Iran, sabotage attacks on four commercial vessels off the coast of the UAE's Fujairah port have raised serious questions about maritime security in the Gulf.

The incidents, which included attacks on two Saudi oil tankers, were revealed by the UAE government on May 12, drawing strong condemnation from governments in the Middle East and around the world as well as the Arab League.

Now experts have warned that the sabotage attacks highlight a new threat to maritime traffic and global oil supplies.

A Saudi government source said: "This criminal act constitutes a serious threat to the security and safety of maritime navigation, and adversely affects regional and international peace and security."

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said the incidents threatened international maritime traffic.

While crimes on the high seas, including piracy, have tapered off in recent years, the attacks on the ships, three of which are registered to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have called into question common assumptions about the Gulf's stability.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Theodore Karasik, a senior adviser at Gulf State Analytics in Washington D.C., said governments of the Gulf region are mandated to watch over oceans and waterways. "On top of this requirement is the need for a new regime of maritime coordination to prevent attacks on shipping because of the repercussions for logistical chains, corporate strategies and insurance rates," he told Arab News.

The sabotage attacks took place east of Fujairah port, outside the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway through which most Gulf oil exports pass and which Iran has threatened to block in the event of a military confrontation with the US.

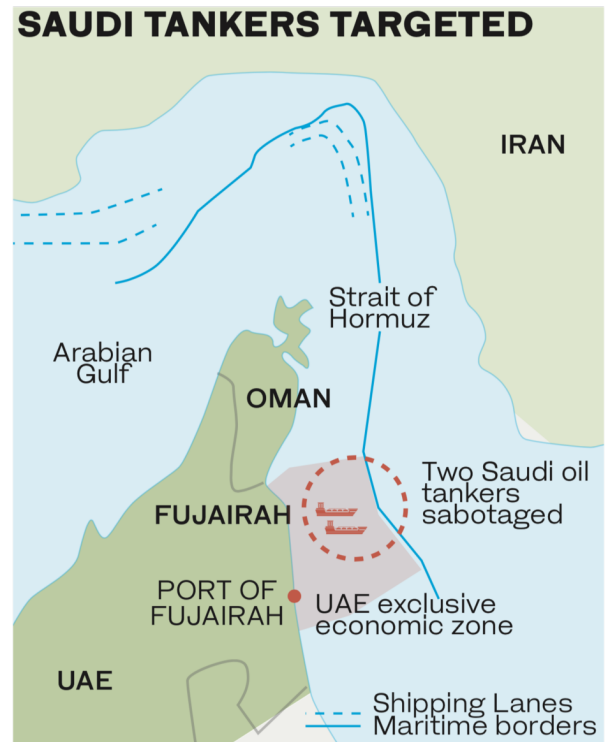
Johan Obdola, president of the International Organization for Security and Intelligence, said the recent attacks underscore the need for closer intelligence-coordinated capabilities among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including satellite communication and maritime or vessel

security technology.

“The threats to oil tankers are not limited to the Gulf, but have a global dimension,” he said.

According to Obdola: “A coordinated joint task force integrating oil, intelligence security and military forces should be (established) to project and prepare (for potential future attacks). This is a time to be as united as ever.”

GCC countries have intensified security in international waters, the US navy said. Additionally, two US guided-missile destroyers entered the Gulf on May 16 in response to what the US called signs of possible Iranian aggression.



“The attack has brought (the region) a bit closer to a possible military confrontation amid the escalation in tensions between the US and Iran,” Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a former chairman of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, told Arab News.

He said Iran is purposely dragging Saudi Arabia, the UAE and possibly other Gulf countries into its fight with the US. “The credibility of the US is at stake and Trump has said he will meet any aggression with unrelenting force. If Iran continues on this path, we might see some kind of a military showdown on a limited scale.”

Given the importance of the region’s oil supplies to the US, Abdulla said “it’s not just the responsibility of Arab Gulf states but an international responsibility” to keep the shipping lanes safe.



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Egypt's street iftar comes with a community flavor

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-21 23:22

CAIRO: Hardly a street in Egypt is without its iftar table as families organize "mercy meals" for friends, relatives and neighbors during Ramadan.

A tradition that began to help the poor has been extended to include entire streets and neighborhoods, giving residents and friends a chance to meet, share old memories and instil community values in their children.

In Cairo, people compete to organize large iftar tables laden with food items.

Each year Moataz Aburiyeh plans an iftar table for friends and neighbors in the capital's central Abdin area.

"I consider it a great opportunity to see a lot of friends and talk about everything," 38-year-old Aburiyeh told Arab News.

The table contains all kinds of food. "On the table is meat, chicken, rice, salad and other items. I know the family and neighbors' preferences and I meet their taste," said Aburiyeh, who owns a men's clothing store.

Meanwhile, residents in Umm Reza, a village west of Cairo, organized an iftar table to gather all the people of the village for the second year in a row.

School teacher Khaled Kamal, who was behind the idea, said: "I suggested to residents that they gather during Ramadan and everyone welcomed the idea."

Villagers donated money for the gathering until they had raised more than 10,000 Egyptian pounds (\$600).

"We let all the people of the village, including Christians, share the meal," said Kamal.

Another villager, Sayed Fouad, said: "The iftar was well organized and included hot meals consisting of meat, rice, vegetables, salad, pickles and damietta sweets."

National unity

For the past five decades, Christian clerics in Egypt have organized annual Muslim iftar meals to encourage national unity.

In the 1970s, the Coptic religious brotherhood began hosting Ramadan meals for Muslims, a move that was followed by the Justice and Peace association a

decade later.

Pope Shenouda, the Coptic Orthodox Pope of Alexandria, promoted iftar meals to strengthen the church's connection with the Egyptian nation.

The Church of the Palace of Dupara in Tahrir Square in central Cairo has been organizing a breakfast table for several years, attended by Muslim and Christian leaders. The church is being supervised by a number of young men and women.

Coptic scholar Robert Al-Fares said: "The Christians of Egypt are organizing iftar to show that society has returned to a period of friendship and unified spirit.

"This is a positive phenomenon that confirms the end of a dark era of division between sects and religions," he said, referring to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 and 2013.

"Egyptians have returned to their normal state after a period of radicalization by extremists who sought to destroy the culture of tolerance and acceptance between Egyptian people," Al-Fares said.



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Frugal fare for Ramadan in Damascus as war saps spending

CNN Turk criticized for cutting opposition mayor interview

Tue, 2019-05-21 23:05

ISTANBUL: CNN's Turkish channel was criticized Tuesday after it cut short an interview with the opposition candidate for Istanbul mayor as he began to talk about the municipality's "extravagant" spending.

Social media users lashed out at CNN Turk after it stopped Monday night's interview with Ekrem Imamoglu of the Republican People's Party half an hour ahead of schedule.

One Twitter user @muratagirel suggested CNN Turk change the program's name from "Unbiased Zone" to "Biased Zone."

Imamoglu was dramatically stripped of his victory in March's vote after the country's top election body annulled the results over claims of "irregularities" and ordered a new election for June 23.

He is rarely given time on Turkish screens, whereas President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered almost daily televised speeches ahead of the March vote on behalf of ruling party candidate Binali Yildirim, a former prime minister.

Imamoglu was interrupted by the CNN Turk anchor as he began to talk about the lavish spending in Istanbul municipality which he said he discovered during his brief 18-day stint as mayor.

He held up placards depicting alleged waste, such as high numbers of unnecessary official cars, and said his campaign would focus on turning this information into savings.

FASTFACT

Ekrem Imamoglu was interrupted by the CNN Turk anchor as he began to talk about the lavish spending in Istanbul municipality which he said he discovered during his 18-day stint as mayor.

This prompted the anchorman, Ahmet Hakan, first to interrupt him for a commercial break and then to end the program entirely when Imamoglu insisted on talking about the finances.

Imamoglu countered that the interview was supposed to last 30 minutes more, but was told time was up.

Many social media users reacted with anger, such as one person on Twitter who

wrote: "Ahmet Hakan you are a very bad journalist ... are you aware that the time is up for you and those like you?"

The Istanbul Municipality responded late Monday, denying Imamoglu's allegations about the official cars and said the claims amounted to "intentional distortion" to manipulate public opinion.

Turkey is ranked 157th in the world for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders, which says the government has increasingly seized control of media outlets and is the world's biggest jailer of professional journalists.

CNN Turk has been mocked in the past for toeing the government line, particularly during the "Gezi Park" protests in 2013, when it ran a documentary about penguins instead of covering the demonstrations.

It is a joint venture of CNN's parent company, Turner Broadcasting System International, and Turkey's privately owned Dogan Media Group.

Dogan was sold last year to Demiroren Group, which has close ties to Erdogan.



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Syria harassing ex-foes in former opposition zones

Tue, 2019-05-21 22:41

BEIRUT: Damascus has carried out a wave of arbitrary arrests against former activists in opposition areas that surrendered under deals brokered by its ally Moscow, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

The so-called “reconciliation” agreements that restored government control over swathes of central and southern Syria last year were heavily criticized from the start because they were signed under the pressure of military blockade and intense air and artillery bombardment.

The regime offered amnesty to all who agreed to end their political activities.

But thousands of residents, particularly former fighters and their families, chose to be evacuated to remaining opposition-held territory rather than accept renewed rule by Bashar Assad’s regime.

Human Rights Watch said its research showed that former government critics and opposition activists who signed up for “reconciliation” had paid heavily for their decision.

It said it had documented 11 cases of arbitrary detention and disappearance in three areas retaken by regime forces last year – the southern province of Daraa, the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus, and southern neighborhoods of the capital.

Syrian organizations had documented at least 500 arrests in the three areas since August, it added.

“Active combat has ended in much of Syria, but nothing has changed in the way intelligence branches trample rights of perceived opponents of Assad’s rule,” said HRW’s acting Middle East director, Lama Fakih.

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Lama Fakih, Top rights activist

“Lack of due process, arbitrary arrests, and harassment, even in so-called reconciled areas, speak louder than empty government promises of return, reform and reconciliation.”

HRW said those targeted included family members, as well former opposition activists and fighters.

“In all cases, the people targeted ... had signed reconciliation agreements with the government,” it said.

The UN on Tuesday said that, between 26 July 2018 and 31 March 2019, at least 380 people were arrested or detained in Daraa province alone.

At least 230 of these were subjected to enforced disappearances, while the rest were released after a few days in detention.

“Many families in Daraa continue to have limited or no information about their missing or detained relatives,” said Marta Hurtado, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Assad’s forces secured full control of Daraa province from fighters in July, in a massive blow to the country’s ill-fated revolt that erupted in the southern city.



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