

Ship hijacked near Libya by migrants rescued at sea

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Wed, 2019-03-27 21:46

VALLETTA, Malta: Migrants hijacked a cargo ship in Libyan waters Wednesday and forced the crew to redirect the vessel north to Europe, according to Italian and Maltese authorities.

As the vessel headed in a direction leading to the island nation of Malta and Italy's shores, both countries vowed to keep the hijacked ship out of their territorial waters.

Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini identified the ship as the Turkish oil tanker El Hiblu 1 and said the crew had earlier rescued migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. He put the number of migrants on board at around 120 and described what was happening as "the first act of piracy on the high seas with migrants that hijacked" a cargo ship.

"Poor castaways, who hijack a merchant ship that saved them because they want to decide the route of the cruise," Italian news agency ANSA quoted Salvini saying with sarcasm.

There was no immediate word on the condition of El Hiblu I's crew. Other information about the reported hijacking was unavailable or difficult to confirm while the vessel remained at sea.

Italian media reports said the ship was heading to Libya to drop off the group that was rescued when migrants seized control six miles from the Libyan coast.

A private group that operates a rescue ship and monitors how governments treat migrants, Mediterranea Saving Humans, urged compassion for the group on the hijacked vessel and said it hoped European countries would act "in the name of fundamental rights, remembering that we are dealing with human beings fleeing hell."

The Armed Forces of Malta said military personnel were standing by and the tanker still was in Libyan territorial waters as of early Wednesday night. A Maltese military official told Maltese media the ship was carrying 108 migrants. The official was not authorized to speak to reporters and requested anonymity.

The official also said Malta would not allow the ship to enter the country's waters.

Salvini said weather conditions were not good and it was too early to tell if the ship was being directed toward Malta or Italy's Lampedusa island. But he had a message for the pirates: "Forget about Italy."

Mass migration to Europe has dropped sharply since 2015, when the continent received one million refugees and migrants from countries in the Middle East, Asia and African. The surge created a humanitarian crisis in which desperate travelers frequently drowned and leading arrival spots such as Italy and Greece struggled to house large numbers of asylum-seekers.

Along with the dangerous sea journey itself, those who attempt to cross the Mediterranean risk being stopped by Libya's coast guard and held in Libyan detention centers that human rights groups have described as bleak places where migrants allegedly suffer routine abuse.

European Union member countries, responding to domestic opposition to welcoming immigrants, have decided to significantly downscale an EU operation in the Mediterranean, withdrawing their ships and continuing the mission with air surveillance only.

EU officials on Wednesday lamented the move, while Amnesty International reiterated its view that Europe's collaboration with Libya to stem migration was a human rights outrage.

EU members "alert the Libyan coast guard when refugees and migrants are spotted at sea so they can be taken back to Libya, despite knowing that people there are arbitrarily detained and exposed to widespread torture, rape, killings and exploitation," Matteo de Bellis, an international migration researcher for Amnesty. "This shameful decision has nothing to do with the needs of people who risk their lives at sea, but everything to do with the inability of European governments to agree on a way to share responsibility for them."



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HRW criticizes Italy, EU's Libya migrant policy
Europe, N. Africa ministers seek to curb Libya migrant flows

Israel treats Gaza like a PlayStation

Wed, 2019-03-27 21:08

GAZA CITY: Israel's targeting of Al-Multazem Insurance Co. in Gaza, in an airstrike that destroyed its headquarters, must raise serious questions over the country's "target bank," the pool of information Tel Aviv uses to decide where to launch attacks.

The company was located on the ground floor of a three-story building with four apartments, housing the 28-member Al-Ghazali family.

Talal Al-Ghazali said he received a call from an Israeli officer telling him to evacuate the house, followed by five "warning rockets" from an Israeli drone overhead before a military jet destroyed the building completely.

Al-Multazem was established in Gaza in 2008 as a Palestinian public shareholding company, and has branches across Gaza. Its old headquarters in Gaza City was destroyed in 2014, and in an area where people live cheek-by-jowl alongside businesses and government bodies, there is always the chance that they will suffer disproportionately.

"Gaza is a small area densely populated with civilians, and Israel, with its vast arsenal, treats it as a video game," said Adnan Abu Amer, a commentator on Israel.

"Israel relies on a broad security and military system, including collaborators working on the ground, aerial photography via satellites and drones, and other forms of espionage through mobile phones and computers, and extracting information via interrogation. This information is used by Israel to update the database of its target banks."

The banks, according to Abu Amer, include human targets, such as political and military leaders. They also contain military buildings, but also, curiously, civilian establishments and organizations crucial to Gaza's financial structure and security.

The decision to bomb a target is taken at the top level. The bombing of the house of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, for instance, would have required clearance from the Israeli defense minister. It stands to reason that bombing targets like Al-Multazem would need similar authority.

In 2014, Israel bombed all branches of banks run by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in addition to bombing retail outlets and other economic targets.

Abu Amer claims the bombing of Al-Multazem follows that pattern, trying to cripple Gaza's financial support structure.

Economic analyst Hamed Jad said Israel's targeting of economic facilities had had "catastrophic consequences" for the Gaza economy over the years, exacerbated by the blockade of the area by the Israeli Defense Force for the past 13 years.

He pointed out that Israel's stance of targeting Gaza's economy as much as Hamas's military wing had worsened living conditions at an alarming rate, with unemployment in Gaza now standing at 52 percent, 53 percent of Palestinians in Gaza City now living in poverty, and 68 percent of the population facing food insecurity.



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Uneasy calm holds in Gaza despite exchange of fire
Palestinian killed by Israeli fire in West Bank clash: ministry

[Actors union expels two stars for criticizing Egypt in US](#)

Wed, 2019-03-27 22:01

CAIRO: The Egyptian Actors Union has cancelled the membership of two prominent former associates – Khalid Abol Naga and Amr Waked – after they attended a session in Washington, DC. criticizing the country's human rights

record.

The union called their actions “a great betrayal of their homeland and of the Egyptian people ... pushing the agenda of conspirators against the security and stability of Egypt.”

It added that the pair would not act in Egypt again, stressing that it could not accept members it considered traitors.

Waked ridiculed the decision, describing the organization, through his official Twitter account, as “the union of political arts.” Naga said that it was important that the union should not rush to judgements, and that it should have contacted him first to ask for an explanation.

Lawyers on behalf of the organization have filed letters to the Egyptian attorney general’s office against the pair, accusing them of committing acts of treason, incitement against the state and publishing false news.

In an informal session of the US Congress in Washington, Waked called on Egyptian people not to fear the regime.

He added that he had received threats that he would be arrested if he returned, but that it was his duty to express his opinion on behalf of the Egyptian people.

Mohamed Abdel Fattah, a member of the union, told Arab News that regardless of his opinion of the actors’ visit to the US, the union had overstepped the mark.

“There are hundreds of unemployed actors, but I do not see any activity from them on that, only decisions to persecute colleagues. I am surprised by their interest in political affairs, all the while ignoring the problems of members such as the unsafe environments under which many members work.”

Doubts have also been raised over the legality of the decision, given that it remains unclear whether Waked and Naga were notified of the intention to expel them, or even investigate them before their expulsion, contravening Egyptian law.



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Egyptian singer Sherine banned after claiming lack of free speech
Banned Egyptian singer appeals to president

[Syria requests urgent Security Council meeting](#)

Wed, 2019-03-27 21:46

NEW YORK: Syria asked the UN Security Council on Tuesday to hold an urgent meeting on the US decision to recognize the Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

President Donald Trump signed a proclamation Monday in which the US recognized Israel's annexation of the strategic plateau, despite UN resolutions that call for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan.

In a letter, the Syrian mission to the UN asked the council presidency, held by France, to schedule an urgent meeting to “discuss the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the recent flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council’s resolution by a permanent member-state.”

The French presidency did not immediately schedule the meeting and diplomats said there would be a discussion at the council about the request.

On Friday, Syria wrote a separate letter urging the council to uphold resolutions demanding that Israel withdraw from the Golan.

US acting Ambassador Jonathan Cohen told a council meeting on the Middle East that Washington had made the decision to stand up to Syrian President Bashar Assad and Iran.

“To allow the Golan Heights to be controlled by the likes of the Syrian and Iranian regimes would turn a blind eye to the atrocities of the Assad regime and malign and destabilizing presence of Iran in the region,” said Cohen.

Trump’s decision could be seen as a “God-send” for Iran which will “try to capitalize on the US-Israeli move to try to fill the void of official Arab leadership” in the region, said Fawaz Gerges, an international relations expert at the London School of Economics.

Arab countries, which have long fought for the Palestinian cause, “have been reduced to extreme fragility and none of them will go to war for Syria,” said Said Sadeq, a political sociology professor.

“Trump’s decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights ensure that Israel will be in a state of perpetual war with its Arab-speaking neighbors,” added Gerges.



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Saudi Arabia condemns US move on occupied Golan Heights
Golan Druze protest
Trump's pledge to Israel

Joint Media Release with the Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer, Minister for Jobs and Industrial Relations – Regulation Changes to Strengthen the Asbestos Border Control

Importers who knowingly or recklessly import goods containing asbestos could now face up to five years jail, under increased penalties announced by the Morrison Government.