

# US Navy searching for missing sailor in Arabian Sea

Thu, 2019-07-18 20:16

DUBAI: The US navy and other ships are conducting search and rescue operations for a missing US sailor in the Arabian Sea, the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet said.

“The Sailor has been listed as Duty Status Whereabouts Unknown (DUSTWUN) after a reported man overboard incident onboard Abraham Lincoln while operating in the Arabian Sea, July 17,” a Fifth Fleet statement said, without giving the sailor’s name.

A Spanish and a Pakistani navy ship are assisting two US navy ships in the search operation.

Tensions in the Gulf region are currently high, with fears that foes the United States and Iran could stumble into war.

The United States has blamed Iran for a series of attacks since mid-May on shipping around the Hormuz Strait, the world’s most important oil artery, which Tehran rejects.

Tehran has also accused Britain of piracy and warned of repercussions after Royal Marines seized an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar on July 4 on suspicion it was shipping oil to Iran’s ally Syria, in breach of EU sanctions.



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Video released on Iran's state TV shows seized fuel tanker matches MT RiahUK  
says seized Iranian oil tanker could be released

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## [Pence announces sanctions on Iranian-linked leaders in Iraq](#)

Thu, 2019-07-18 18:19

WASHINGTON: Vice President Mike Pence said Thursday that the United States is imposing sanctions on the leaders of two Iranian-linked militia groups in Iraq.

"Let me be clear, the United States will not stand idly while Iranian-backed militias spread terror," Pence told a high-level meeting on religious freedom, without naming the individuals targeted.

A US Treasury statement said the sanctions were being imposed on the four Iraqi militia leaders due to suspicion of human rights abuses and corruption.

Further sanctions were imposed on five people and seven entities in connection to Iran's nuclear program and non-proliferation matters, the Treasury Department said on its website on Thursday. They are the first punitive steps by Washington since Tehran announced earlier this month it would increase its levels of enriched uranium that can be used for bomb fuel.

Tehran announced on July 1 that it had amassed more low-enriched uranium than permitted under its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, marking its first major step beyond the terms of the pact since the United States withdrew more than a year ago.

"Treasury is taking action to shut down an Iranian nuclear procurement network that leverages Chinese- and Belgium-based front companies to acquire critical nuclear materials and benefit the regime's malign ambitions," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement.

"Iran cannot claim benign intent on the world stage while it purchases and stockpiled products for centrifuges," he added.



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## [Turkey blocked from US F-35 program after Russian missile purchase](#)

Wed, 2019-07-17 21:32

WASHINGTON: The United States said on Wednesday that it was removing Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program, a move that had been long threatened and expected after Ankara began accepting delivery of an advanced Russian missile defense system last week.

The first parts of the S-400 air defense system were flown to the Murted military air base northwest of Ankara on Friday, sealing Turkey's deal with Russia, which Washington had struggled for months to prevent.

"The US and other F-35 partners are aligned in this decision to suspend

Turkey from the program and initiate the process to formally remove Turkey from the program,” said Ellen Lord, the under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment.

“The United States is spending between \$500 and \$600 million in non-recurring engineering in order to shift the supply chain,” she said.

Used by NATO and other US allies, the F-35 stealth fighter jet is the world’s most advanced jet fighter. Washington is concerned that deploying the S-400 with the F-35 would allow Russia to gain too much inside information of the stealth system.

“The F-35 cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities,” the White House said in a statement earlier on Wednesday.

Washington has long said the acquisition may lead to Turkey’s expulsion from the F-35 program.

The Pentagon had already laid out a plan to remove Turkey from the program, including halting any new training for Turkish pilots on the advanced aircraft.

“The situation with Turkey is a government-to-government matter and we’ll comply with any guidance issued by the United States Government,” said a spokesperson for Lockheed Martin Corp. , the prime contractor on the jet.



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# US-Iran envoy says Bahrain to host Gulf maritime security conference

Wed, 2019-07-17 19:11

LONDON: The US said Bahrain will host a maritime security conference to ensure freedom of navigation in the region's waters.

The comments come after Washington said last week it was seeking partners for a military coalition to protect the busy shipping lanes off Iran and Yemen.

Brian Hook, the special envoy to Iran, said 65 countries would attend the event, Al-Arabiya reported, which comes amid a heightened threat for shipping in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula.

Several oil tankers have been attacked since May near the Strait of Hormuz – the narrow passage between the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf, which serves as one of the world's main conduits for crude oil. Iran has been blamed for the attacks, which many view as a calculated response to increased economic and military pressure from the US over Tehran's nuclear program and destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

Tensions increased further when British forces helped seize an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar, which London said was attempting to deliver oil to Bashar Assad's Syrian regime.

Iran threatened to retaliate and last week a British warship had to aid a UK-owned tanker when Iranian vessels tried to block the ship as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

On Wednesday the UK's defense ministry said the reason it was deploying a third warship to the Gulf was "to protect UK interests and ensure freedom of navigation."

## US 'SUSPECTS' IRAN SEIZED UAE-BASED OIL TANKER



Meanwhile, mystery continued to surround a UAE-based tanker, which stopped transmitting tracking data late on Saturday after passing through the Strait of Hormuz and which the US said is now located in Iranian waters.

Iran said late Tuesday that it towed a ship into its waters after the ship issued a distress call.

A US official said the Panamanian-flagged Riah was in Iranian territorial waters, but it was not clear whether that was because Iran had seized it or rescued it.

\*With Reuters



## US 'SUSPECTS' IRAN SEIZED UAE-BASED OIL TANKER



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## [Iran's foreign minister walks back from remark on missile talks](#)

Wed, 2019-07-17 17:36

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country has no choice but to manufacture missiles for defense purposes – comments that reflect more backtracking after a remark by the top diplomat suggesting the missiles could be up for negotiations.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview with NBC News that aired earlier this week that if the US wants to talk about Iran's missiles, it needs "first to stop selling all these weapons, including missiles, to our region."

Iran has long rejected negotiations over its ballistic missile program, which remains under the control of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The foreign minister's remarks suggested a possible opening for talks as tensions remain high between Tehran and Washington.

But the Iranian mission to the United Nations promptly called Zarif's suggestion purely "hypothetical" and said the Iranian missiles were "absolutely and under no condition negotiable with anyone or any country, period."

In Tehran, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Abbas Mousavi, tweeted late on Tuesday that Zarif's comments meant to challenge Washington and "threw the ball into the US court while challenging America's arm sales" to its Mideast allies.

Zarif himself on Wednesday backpedaled on the missiles issue, saying Iran has no choice but to manufacture the missiles for its own defense.

He cited the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and tweeted that, "For 8 YEARS, Saddam (Hussein) showered our cities with missiles & bombs provided by East & West. Meanwhile, NO ONE sold Iran any means of defense. We had no choice but building our own. Now they complain."

"Instead of skirting the issue, US must end arms sales to Saddam's reincarnations," Zarif also said.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have sharply escalated since President Donald Trump unilaterally last year withdrew America from the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, sending its economy into freefall.

America has also rushed thousands of additional troops, an aircraft carrier,



nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets to the Mideast amid unspecified threats from Iran.

Mysterious oil tanker blasts near the Strait of Hormuz, attacks by Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen on Saudi Arabia and Iran's shooting down of a U.S. military drone in the past months further raised fears of a wider conflict engulfing a region crucial to global energy supplies.

A compromise deal remains the best way to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday.

The UN nuclear watchdog has confirmed that Iran earlier this month violated the 2015 accord, and Iran's supreme leader on Tuesday said Tehran would keep removing restraints on its nuclear activity in the deal.

In her last major speech before stepping down next week, May said the nuclear deal must be protected "whatever its challenges".

"Whether we like it or not a compromise deal remains the best way to get the outcome we all still ultimately seek – to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and to preserve the stability of the region," May said.

Recently, British authorities intercepted the Iranian supertanker Grace 1, carrying 2.1 million barrels of light crude oil, and seized it with the help of British Royal Marines off the coast of Gibraltar.

They believed it to be violating European Union sanctions by carrying a shipment of Iranian crude oil to Syria. Spanish authorities said the seizure came at the request of the United States.

This is not the only issue between Iran and Britain.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman imprisoned in Iran following her arrest in April 2016 on charges of plotting against the Iranian government, has been transferred to a hospital mental health facility, her husband said Wednesday.

Her family denies the allegations against her.

Her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, said in Britain that his wife has been moved to the mental health ward of Iman Khomeini hospital under the control of the Revolutionary Guard.

"Hopefully her transfer to hospital means that she is getting treatment and care, despite my distrust of just what pressures can happen behind closed doors. It is unnerving when we don't know what is going on," he said.

Iran does not recognize dual nationality.

British officials have urged Iranian officials to let her have contact with her family.



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Donald Trump tells Iran to 'get out of Yemen' US 'suspects' Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz