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## IRANIAN TANKER AT CENTRE OF STANDOFF WITH WEST LEAVES GIBRALTAR

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The Iranian tanker caught in a standoff between Tehran and the West left Gibraltar on Sunday night, shipping data showed, hours after the British territory rejected a US request to detain the vessel further.

British Royal Marines seized the tanker in Gibraltar in July on suspicion it was carrying oil to Syria, a close ally of Iran, in violation of European Union sanctions. That triggered a series of events that have heightened tensions on international oil shipping routes through the Gulf.

The Grace 1, renamed the Adrian Darya 1, left anchorage off Gibraltar around 11pm, Refinitiv shipping data showed. Its destination was not immediately clear.

Iran's ambassador to Britain, Hamid Baeidinejad, had written on Twitter earlier that the vessel was expected to leave on Sunday night, adding that two engineering teams had been flown to Gibraltar.

The tanker's detention ended last week, but a federal court in Washington on Friday issued a warrant for the seizure of the tanker, the oil it carries and nearly \$1million.

Gibraltar said on Sunday it could not comply with that request because it was bound by EU law.

The EU sanctions regime against Iran – which is applicable in Gibraltar – is much narrower than that applicable in the US, the government said in a statement.

The Gibraltar Central Authority is unable to seek an Order of the Supreme Court of Gibraltar to provide the restraining assistance required by the United States of America.

Washington had attempted to detain the Grace 1 on the grounds that it had links to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which it has designated a terrorist organisation.

US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that Iran would like to talk, attributing the willingness to economic conditions in the country, when asked on Sunday by reporters about the status of the tanker.

We can do something very fast, but they don't quite know how to begin, Trump told reporters before boarding Air Force One in New Jersey.

Iran has denied the tanker was ever headed to Syria.

Tehran said it was ready to dispatch its naval fleet to escort the tanker if required.

The era of hit and run is over \* if top authorities ask the navy, we are ready to escort out tanker Adrian, Irans navy commander, Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi, was quoted as saying by Mehr news agency.

Earlier on Sunday, video and photographs showed the tanker flying the red, green and white flag of Iran and bearing its new name, painted in white, on the hull. Its previous name, Grace 1, had been painted over.

The initial impounding of the Grace 1 sparked a diplomatic row that escalated when Tehran seize a British-flagged oil tanker in the Gulf two weeks later. That tanker, the Stena Impero, is still detained.

The two vessels have since become pawns in a bigger game, feeding into wider hostilities since the United States last year pulled out of an international agreement to curb Irans nuclear programme, and reimposed economic sanctions.

Iran has denounced U.S. efforts to set up an international maritime security coalition in the Gulf and insisted regional countries could protect the strategic waterway and work towards signing a non-aggression pact.

On a trip to Kuwait on Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet that Irans proposal for Regional Dialogue Forum and non-aggression pact trumps reliance on extraneous actors.

The Grace 1 had originally flown the Panamanian flag but Panamas Maritime Authority said in July that the vessel had been de-listed after an alert that indicated the ship had participated in or was linked to terrorism financing.

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Kaynak/Source: