

In Time of U.S.-Iran Tension, U.S. Navy Rescues Two Iranian Crews

Dear Teacher,

In a time of high tension between the United States and Iran, the U.S. Navy performed two at-sea rescues of Iranian crews in distress within the last nine days. While neither action is expected to reduce the strain between the two countries -- and while responding to ships in distress is standard procedure for the Navy -- the two actions did provide real help to the members of the two crews, possibly saving their lives. The incidents also give us an opportunity to talk about how the teachings of Jesus and of the Christian faith may be applied to our dealings with personal adversaries. So that will be the topic of this installment of *The Wired Word*.

Remember, if you wish to provide your class members with an abbreviated copy of the lesson, [click here](#), and you can send them a copy via e-mail today.

May God bless you as you teach the Scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of *The Wired Word*



In Time of U.S.-Iran Tension, U.S. Navy Rescues Two Iranian Crews

The Wired Word for January 15, 2012

In the News

On January 6, a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Arabian Sea rescued 13 Iranian fishermen held hostage by Somali pirates for some 45 days. Four days later, a U.S. Coast Guard cutter operating under U.S. Navy command saved six Iranian mariners from a cargo ship sinking near the Persian Gulf. Both of these actions came during a time of increased tension between the United States and Iran.

The U.S. and its allies have imposed economic sanctions on Iran to pressure that country to stop its nuclear program, which is widely believed to be developing nuclear weapons. Iran says its program is for peaceful purposes only.

In a ratcheting up of brinkmanship, Iran recently threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in response to the sanctions. About 20 percent of the world's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz. More significantly, this amounts to roughly 35 percent of seaborne -traded oil. On the other hand, Iran itself imports about 38 percent of the gasoline it uses, while revenue from petroleum products makes up about 75 percent of Iranian government revenues and about 20 percent of the Islamic Republic's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

A spokesperson for the Navy has said the United States will not tolerate the closing of the strait. Since most of the oil goes to Asian markets, one would expect India, China, Japan and South Korea to find such a closure intolerable as well.

The rescue of the fishermen was accomplished by a ship steaming with a fleet that included the aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis*. Three days earlier, Iranian officials had warned that same carrier to stay out of the Persian Gulf, a statement that spooked global oil markets. The U.S. Navy has no intention of avoiding the Persian Gulf, Naval officials say.

The rescues, however timely they may seem from a diplomatic standpoint, are actually standard procedure for the U.S. Navy. “When we get a distress signal, we’re going to respond,” said Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. The Iranian government has already declared that the rescues make no difference in relations between the two nations. In fact, Iran’s state-run news media have played down and ridiculed the aid given to their crews, suggesting that the actions may even have been staged.

While there is no reason to believe such claims, it does appear that Pentagon public affairs officers considered the rescue of Iranians from Somali pirates to be a publicity windfall. Those officers set up a conference call between reporters and Navy commanders in the region where the rescue took place.

In any case, the seamen who were saved appeared deeply appreciative.

“It is like you were sent by God,” one of the fishermen freed from pirates said to his Navy saviors. “Every night we prayed for God to rescue us. And now you are here.”

“Without your help, we were dead,” said the owner of the sinking vessel to the American sailors who plucked his crew from the foundering ship.

The Navy captured the pirates during the first rescue and is holding them in the brig of the *Stennis*. Current anti-piracy policy in the United States has shifted from an “enemy of humanity” model to a “catch and release” model, but the fate of these particular pirates has not yet been announced.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[U.S. Navy Reports Second Rescue of Iranian Mariners. *New York Times*](#)

[U.S. Navy Rescues Iran Fishermen Held by Somalia Pirates. *Los Angeles Times*](#)

[For Iranians Waylaid by Pirates, U.S. to the Rescue. *New York Times*](#)

[World Oil Transit Chokepoints. *U.S. Energy Information Administration*](#)

The Big Questions

1. Should the possibility that our personal good deeds or acts of succor will be misrepresented keep us from doing them? Explain your answer. How should our Christian faith affect our answer?
2. One of the rescued Iranian fishermen said that his crew prayed every night for God to rescue them. Could their rescue by the U.S. Navy have been an answer to prayer? Why or why not? Can our personal good deeds be answers to someone’s prayers? How do we know? Keeping in mind that members of the U.S. Navy come from many faith backgrounds, when Muslim prayers seem to be answered by a nation identified as Christian and Jewish by the Iranian government, what does this say about God?
3. Overall, how should we behave toward our personal adversaries -- those who take advantage of us, those who lie about us, those who simply dislike us? What biblical models help us decide? Is this same behavior always -- or ever -- applicable to governments? Why and when, or why not?
4. Can a good deed toward someone who is against us make us look weak or like appeasers? Should we care? Why?
5. Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies, but *what* should we pray for them? That somebody will trouble them as much as they have troubled us? That they come around to our way of thinking? That they become more open and sensitive human beings? That something will happen to stymie their plans? That we be spared the consequences of their nastiness? That they die? Something else

(specify)? And how do we deal with the fact that we don't *feel* like praying for those who "despitefully" use us?

Confronting the News with Scripture

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 23:5

"If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it." (For context, read 23:1-9.)

This command from the Mosaic Law both teaches that we ought to do good toward those who hate us and reminds us that those associated with our enemies are not necessarily our enemies as well. That's obvious in the case of the donkey fallen under its burden; as an animal, the donkey bears no animosity toward those its master dislikes. But replace the donkey with the Iranian mariners in distress, and the verse can serve as a reminder that even if our country is at odds with the Iranian government, all Iranians are not automatically our enemies as well.

In any case, the command is a down-to-earth example of what it means to love our enemies.

Questions: When have you seen a personal opponent do something good toward you? How did it make you feel? When have you helped an opponent in need? How was it received? How did you feel about it afterward?

2 Kings 6:21-22

"When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, 'Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?' He answered, 'No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master.'" (For context, read 6:8-23.)

When a troop of Arameans was raiding in Israel, the prophet Elisha prayed that they would be struck blind, which they were. He then led them into the Israelite stronghold at Samaria. Once inside, their sight returned. When the Israelite king saw these enemy troops now under arrest in his city, he was going to kill them, but Elisha told him to instead serve them a great banquet and then let them go. That was done, and, says the narrator, "the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel" (v. 23).

Questions: In what ways can this biblical story be a model for how we treat our enemies? In this incident, the kindness toward enemies resulted in their ceasing to raid in Israel. But what about when our kindness toward those who make trouble for us does not result in improved relations or lessening of troubles?

Luke 6:27-28

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (For context, read 6:27-36.)

Many of Jesus' teachings have a surprising, counter-intuitive sense about them. Intuitively, we should hate those who hate us, curse those who curse us and abuse those who abuse us. But in this statement about dealing with enemies, as in so many other of Jesus' teachings, the instruction rules against what the unredeemed spirit inside of us would do. Thus, Jesus is calling us to live as redeemed people.

Questions: The phrase rendered "abuse you" in Jesus' statement above is translated in the King James Version as "despitefully use you." Both renderings are valid, but what images does "despitefully use you" bring to mind? What power does that add to Jesus' teaching here? How would you respond to someone who says that doing good to those who hate you may be the right thing to

do, but is not very practical? What is your response to the words of Jesus that make you feel uncomfortable?

Luke 6:35

“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” (For context, read 6:27-36.)

Jesus made this statement as part of the same teaching as the “love your enemies” instruction in Luke 6:27-28. (Note that we’ve indicated the same context verses for both statements.) But here, Jesus is deliberately calling us to be God-like -- that is, to behave toward those who are against us in the same kind way God treats those who are against him.

Jesus clearly says we should do good without expecting anything in return. But then he adds that there is nonetheless a God-given reward in that by doing good toward our enemies, we “will be children of the Most High.” And, of course, if we are God’s children -- behaving according to God’s family values -- we can expect the eternal reward of life forever in God’s kingdom.

Question: What is your reaction to this (from a sermon we heard): “In praying for an enemy, maybe the first part of our prayer should be to ask God to help us know what to pray and what place to give our feelings about that person. And the second part, I suspect, should be to ask God to help us see this person as he does. If we pray those two things, I think God will help us to know how to finish the prayer”?

Romans 12:20-21

“No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (For context, read 12:9-21.)

On the surface, the advice above sounds as if Paul is saying we should treat our enemies nicely so that we can really do them harm, but that’s not what he means. Actually, he’s quoting from the Old Testament book of Proverbs (25:21-22), where it says, “If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the LORD will reward you.” Since the *Lord* will reward you, it cannot mean that you’ve earned it for hurting someone.

This saying about coals of fire may have come from an ancient Egyptian rite of contrition where, as a sign of penitence, a person would carry a literal tray of hot coals, though that is not certain. But in context, the expression seems to mean that by treating an enemy kindly, you may awaken a burning shame of remorse in that person for having treated you so badly.

Note Paul’s final sentence: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Paul includes that as the conclusion of several brief remarks to encourage the Roman Christians to live their faith daily. While he refers to a number of aspects of Christian living in quick succession (see the context verses), the overall thrust of them is that Christianity ought to be lived in a positive, proactive way. This statement, coming at the end of that string of advice, is of the same tone. Rather than let evil provoke us to respond in kind, we can, at least in some circumstances, overcome it with goodness.

Question: Where in your life have you seen goodwill overcome ill will?

For Further Discussion

1. How can we urge praying for our nation’s enemies when we don’t bother to pray for the person who cheated us on a purchase; when we have trouble praying for a two-timing spouse, a mouthy

child, a shoplifting employee, a selfish, egotistical neighbor or the coach of our child's sports team who never lets our kid play?

2. In Hebrews 13:2 we are told to practice hospitality because some have entertained angels without knowing it. In the original Greek, "hospitality" literally means "love of strangers." Keeping in mind that biblically the term "angels" means "messenger," and that the term refers to both supernatural and natural individuals, to what extent are those who were rescued and those who rescued them angels, or messengers, to each other?

3. Current anti-piracy policy in the U.S. has shifted from an "enemy of humanity" model to a "catch and release" model. What are the pros and cons of this change? Does it reduce or increase the amount and effectiveness of piracy? Given the harm that modern-day pirates do, is our romanticizing of pirates in the movies and as Halloween costume characters really a good idea?

4. Pirates look upon piracy as an easy way to make a lot of money quickly by force. Most come from areas where the lack of freedom and the rule of law -- i.e., high levels of corruption and tribalism -- have deeply impoverished most people. Economic aid sometimes supports and empowers the rulers over the people. How can this whole issue be helpfully addressed?

5. Respond to this: Following the freeing of the Iranian fishermen from Somali pirates, an Iranian representative interviewed on a U.S. radio program said the rescue was just grandstanding by the United States to deflect attention from the new embargoes going into effect. He added that Iranian ships assist Saudis and Somalis on a regular basis, but the world never notices that.

Responding to the News

This is a good time to begin making a conscious effort to pray not only for our nation's enemies, but also for our personal adversaries and those who make life difficult for us.

Closing Prayer

O God, let not our difficulties with problematic rulers and personal adversaries cause us to forget that all of them are people you love. Help us to know what we should pray for them, and enable us to be gracious in doing so. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.



In Time of U.S.-Iran Tension, U.S. Navy Rescues Two Iranian Crews *The Wired Word for January 15, 2012*

In the News

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[World Oil Transit Chokepoints. *U.S. Energy Information Administration*](#)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. Should the possibility that our personal good deeds or acts of succor will be misrepresented keep us from doing them? Explain your answer. How should our Christian faith affect our answer?
2. One of the rescued Iranian fishermen said that his crew prayed every night for God to rescue them. Could their rescue by the U.S. Navy have been an answer to prayer? Why or why not? Can our personal good deeds be answers to someone’s prayers? How do we know? Keeping in mind that members of the U.S. Navy come from many faith backgrounds, when Muslim prayers seem to be answered by a nation identified as Christian and Jewish by the Iranian government, what does this say about God?
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(specify)? And how do we deal with the fact that we don't *feel* like praying for those who "despitefully" use us?

Confronting the News with Scripture

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Exodus 23:1-9

2 Kings 6:8-23

Luke 6:27-36

Romans 12:9-21

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight on the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

Scriptures for The Wired Word Online Bible Study for January 15, 2012

Exodus 23:1-9

¹You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. ²You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; ³nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit. ⁴When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back. ⁵When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free. ⁶You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. ⁷Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ⁹You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

2 Kings 6:8-23

⁸Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." ⁹But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Take care not to pass this place, because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place so that it was on the alert. ¹¹The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, "Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?" ¹²Then one of his officers said, "No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber."

¹³He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him." He was told, "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed: "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸When the Arameans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, please, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. ¹⁹Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria. ²⁰As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men so that they may see." The Lord opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria. ²¹When the king of Israel saw

them he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" ²²He answered, "No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master." ²³So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.

Luke 6:27-36

²⁷"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Romans 12:9-21

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



January 10, 2012

U.S. Navy Reports Second Rescue of Iranian Mariners

By RICK GLADSTONE

In the second diplomacy-tinged sea rescue in less than a week, a vessel on patrol with the Navy's Fifth Fleet near the Persian Gulf saved a group of distressed Iranian mariners on Tuesday, pulling them to safety from a cargo dhow that was foundering with a flooded engine room, the naval central command reported.

In a statement, the command said the Coast Guard patrol boat Monomoy, on assignment with a Fifth Fleet task force in the northern Arabian Gulf, approached the stricken Iranian dhow, the Ya-Hussayn, after the dhow's crew hailed the Monomoy with flares and flashlights before dawn.

"The dhow's master requested assistance from Monomoy indicating the engine room was flooding and deemed not seaworthy," the statement said.

The six Iranian crewmen — two aboard the Ya-Hussayn and four on a life raft tied to its stern — were transferred to the Monomoy, the statement said, and were given "water, blankets and halal meals," noting that such meals are routinely stowed aboard Coast Guard ships "to provide to Muslim mariners in distress."

Following the customary protocols, the Monomoy crew informed the Iranian maritime rescue service, and the six rescued crewmen were later transferred by inflatable boats to the Naji 7, an Iranian Coast Guard vessel. The statement quoted the owner of the stricken dhow, Hakim Hamid-Awi, as thanking the Monomoy crew and saying, "Without your help, we were dead."

The rescue followed a [dramatic two-day Fifth Fleet action](#) that began last Thursday in the Gulf of Oman, 210 miles off [Iran's](#) coast. Sailors on a naval task force led by the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis, which had just left the Persian Gulf, broke up a Somali pirate attack on a cargo ship, boarded the [pirates'](#) vessel and freed 13 Iranians who had been held captive by the pirates for more than a month.

The two episodes came at a time of rising tensions between the United States and Iran, partly over Iranian warnings about Fifth Fleet naval operations in the Persian Gulf, a vital oil shipping route.

Just before the Stennis-led rescue, senior Iranian military officials warned the carrier not to return to the gulf or it would face the "full force" of Iran's military.

While the Fifth Fleet has been publicizing its good Samaritan role, the rescues have been played down or ridiculed by Iran's state-run news media.

The Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, was quoted by Press TV, an Iranian satellite channel, as saying that the Stennis-led rescue operation was fairly routine and would not reduce the tensions between the nations.

The Fars News Agency, which has close ties to the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, suggested that the rescue had been staged.

Fars reported that [video of the rescue](#) released by the United States was “like a Hollywood film with a fixed location and specific actors,” which “shows the Americans were looking at using it for propaganda advantage.”

Robert Mackey contributed reporting.

latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-us-iran-pirates-20120107,0,7311400.story

latimes.com

U.S. Navy rescues Iran fishermen held by Somalia pirates

Sailors from a destroyer boarded the Iranian dhow and detained 15 Somalis after one of the fishermen revealed the crew was captive. The rescue came days after Iran warned the U.S. Navy to get out.

By David S. Cloud, Los Angeles Times

January 7, 2012

Reporting from Washington

A Navy destroyer rescued 13 Iranian fishermen held hostage by Somali pirates in the Arabian Sea only days after Tehran warned the United States to keep its ships out of the nearby Persian Gulf.

Sailors from the guided-missile destroyer Kidd boarded the Iranian dhow Thursday and detained 15 Somalis after one of the fishermen was able to reveal in a radio communication that his vessel's crew was being held captive.

Seeing a publicity windfall at a time of growing tension with Iran, Pentagon public affairs officers quickly swung into action, setting up a conference call for reporters with Navy commanders in the region.

Among those briefing journalists was Rear Adm. Craig S. Faller, who commands the John C. Stennis aircraft carrier strike group, which conducted the rescue and includes the Kidd. Faller later received a congratulatory telephone call from Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, the Pentagon said in a statement.

"When we get a distress signal, we're going to respond," Pentagon spokesman George Little quoted Panetta as saying.

The Stennis is the ship that Gen. Ataollah Salehi, head of Iran's army, advised Tuesday not to return to the Persian Gulf after the carrier had passed through the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic choke point that Iran has threatened to close in response to economic sanctions by the United States and its allies.

About one-fifth of the world's oil exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

The U.S. and its allies are trying to pressure Iran to halt its nuclear program, suspecting that the Islamic Republic is trying to develop weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful

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"We recommend ... to the American warship that passed through the Strait of Hormuz and went on to the Gulf of Oman, not to return to the Persian Gulf ... since we are not in the habit of repeating a warning and we warn only once," Salehi said in a statement released by Iran's official news agency.

Faller said the decision to go to the aid of the Iranians was standard practice for the Navy when alerted that another ship needed aid. "We saw a need and moved in to help people at sea who were in distress," he said.

It is not unusual for Navy vessels to assist Iranian ships, Faller said, adding that his task force had helped an Iranian vessel last year.

The possibility of a clash with Iran over the Strait of Hormuz is an entirely separate matter, Faller said. "The U.S. and U.S. Navy won't tolerate the Strait of Hormuz being closed," he said. "If that means moving back through the strait, then that's what we'll do."

The rescue operation began early Thursday after a helicopter from the Stennis, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, started tracking a small boat suspected of carrying pirates until the vessel pulled alongside the Iranian fishing dhow 175 miles southeast of Muscat, the capital of Oman.

When the Kidd made radio contact with the dhow, the captain identified himself as Iranian and initially denied that any pirates were on board.

However, it became clear that he was "under duress" when the Iranian began speaking in Urdu so that the Somalis could not understand what he was saying, said the Kidd's captain, Cmdr. Jennifer Ellinger. The Kidd had a linguist on board who could understand Urdu, a South Asian language.

After revealing that there were indeed pirates on board, the Iranian "pleaded with us to come over and board their vessel," Ellinger said.

The U.S. sailors boarded the vessel without firing a shot and detained the Somalis, who were being held aboard the Stennis awaiting a decision on whether they would be prosecuted, Faller said.

The Iranian said the pirates had been using his vessel as a "mother ship," a base from which to mount other raids.

After its crew received food and water, the dhow went on its way, crew members wearing smiles and Kidd baseball caps, Faller said.

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For Iranians Waylaid by Pirates, U.S. to the Rescue

By **C. J. CHIVERS**

ABOARD THE FISHING VESSEL AL MULAHI, in the Gulf of Oman — Senior Iranian military officials this week bluntly warned an American aircraft carrier that it would confront the “full force” of the Iranian military if it tried to re-enter the Persian Gulf.

On Friday, Fazel Ur Rehman, a 28-year-old Iranian fisherman, had a warmer greeting for the carrier task force.

“It is like you were sent by God,” said Mr. Rehman, huddled under a blanket in this vessel’s stern. “Every night we prayed for God to rescue us. And now you are here.”

In a naval action that mixed diplomacy, drama and Middle Eastern politics, the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis broke up a high-seas pirate attack on a cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman, then sailors from an American destroyer boarded the [pirates’](#) mother ship and freed 13 Iranian hostages who had been held captive there for more than a month.

The rapidly unfolding events began Thursday morning when the pirates attacked a Bahamian-flagged ship, the motor vessel Sunshine, unaware that the Stennis was steaming less than eight miles away.

It ended Friday with the tables fully turned. The captured Somali pirates, 15 in all, were brought aboard the U.S.S. Kidd, an American destroyer traveling with the Stennis. They were then shuttled by helicopter to the aircraft carrier and locked up in its brig.

This fishing vessel and its crew, provided fuel and food by the Navy, then set sail for its home port of Chah Bahar, [Iran](#).

The rescue, 210 miles off the coast of Iran, occurred against a tense political backdrop. On Tuesday the Iranian defense minister and a brigadier general threatened the Stennis with attack if it sought to return to the Persian Gulf, which it had left roughly a week before. The warning set up fears of a confrontation over the vital [oil](#) shipping lanes of the Strait of Hormuz.

None of that tension was evident at sea. The Sunshine, a 583-foot cargo ship carrying bulk cargo from Calais, France, to Bandar Abbas, Iran, continued its journey. The freed hostages, Iranian citizens, greeted the American sailors with wide-eyed relief.

Mahmed Younes, 28, the fishing vessel's captain, said he and his crew had been captured roughly 45 days ago by pirates in a skiff, who boarded their 82-foot dhow and forced it to an anchorage in the northern Somali port of Xaafuun. There, the pirates took on provisions and more gunmen.

In late December the pirates, using their hostages to run the dhow, set back out to sea, hunting for a tanker or large cargo ship to capture and hold for ransom.

For several days, Al Mulahi roamed the Gulf of Oman, unmolested under its Iranian flag, the pirates and former hostages said. They saw several ships. But the pirates' leader, Bashir Bhotan, 32, did not think any of them would command a high ransom. They let them pass.

"The pirates told us, 'If you get us a good ship, we will let you go free,' " Captain Younes said. "We told them, 'How can we get you a ship? We are fishermen, not hunters.' "

On Thursday morning, six of the pirates set out in a fiberglass skiff and found their quarry — the Sunshine, 100 miles from the shore of Oman. One of the pirates, Mohammed Mahmoud, 33, later said this was the type of vessel they would hope might fetch a ransom of several million dollars.

Brandishing a rocket-propelled grenade and several Kalashnikov rifles, they rushed alongside, threw a grappling hook and tried to lash a ladder to the Sunshine's side. They hoped to scale the gunwales and seize the bridge.

Their plans unraveled immediately. As the Sunshine radioed for help, and tried to deter the boarding by spraying the pirates with fire hoses, the pirates were unable to board.

"Our ladder broke," Mr. Mahmoud said.

Then an American helicopter appeared.

Neither the pirates nor the crew of the Sunshine had known it, but three Navy ships — the Stennis; the U.S.N.S. Rainier, a supply ship; and the U.S.S. Mobile Bay, a guided-missile cruiser — were steaming in formation a few miles away. The carrier was taking on provisions from the Rainier and had several helicopters in the air when the Sunshine radioed its distress call.

Aboard the carrier, Rear Adm. Craig S. Faller, who commands the carrier strike group, looked at the chart and radar images of the Sunshine's location with something like disbelief. The Sunshine and the Stennis were only a few miles apart. "These might be the dumbest pirates ever," he said.

He ordered a helicopter and the cruiser toward the Sunshine and other helicopters to investigate the radar images of other ships in the area, to search for the skiff's possible mother ship.

Seeing the approaching aircraft, the pirates let the Sunshine pull away and tossed their weapons over the side, they said.

Aboard the carrier, the officers watched a video feed from the helicopter, showing the six men in

T-shirts and tank tops in a small white boat, bobbing on the waves. For a few minutes the Somalis seemed unsure what to do. Then they put their hands atop their heads.

“They are surrendering, they are surrendering,” said Capt. Todd W. Malloy, the carrier strike group’s chief of staff. A boarding team from the Mobile Bay soon approached in an inflatable boat.

The pirates told them they were at sea “for fun,” the sailors said. There were no weapons on board and the Sunshine had steamed away. The Mobile Bay’s sailors began to take the pirates’ fingerprints and photographs for a biometric database.

Meanwhile, two other Navy helicopters had made four passes by Al Mulahi. The fishing vessel was about 30 miles away and carried a skiff identical to the pirate’s skiff on the dhow’s deck. But Al Mulahi was flying an Iranian flag, which made boarding the vessel politically delicate. There were no pirates visible on board.

The Navy quickly made a plan. The sailors on the boarding team gave the pirates oranges and water and set them free. But a helicopter from the Mobile Bay lingered outside of eyesight and followed the skiff’s movements with long-range optics.

The skiff headed toward the Iranian dhow.

The Kidd, a guided-missile destroyer serving as the command ship for Combined Task Force 151, an international counterpiracy team off the coast of Africa, steamed toward the dhow from 120 miles away. Several hours later, after the pirates boarded the dhow, the Kidd approached and called Al Mulahi on a bridge-to-bridge radio.

The ship asked if the dhow had any foreigners aboard. The dhow answered that it did not.

“While doing surveillance aerially, we had seen that there were Middle Easterners aboard and Somalis, and that socially they were not intermingling,” said Cmdr. Jennifer Ellinger, the top officer on the Kidd. “We could also see that some of the clothing hanging on board was Somali.”

A brief standoff ensued, as the ship and dhow bobbed alongside each other at sea. The Somalis were hiding and forcing the Iranian captain, a hostage, to speak to the American ship.

The ship had brought many of its crew who spoke different languages onto the bridge. One of the sailors, Chief Petty Officer Jagdeep Sidhu, speaks English, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi.

Al Mulahi is from eastern Iran, near Pakistan, where many residents speak Urdu. He heard Captain Younes use an Urdu phrase, and was given the radio to hail him.

“At first he was hesitant to answer because he was afraid,” Chief Sidhu said. “But the Somalis could not understand Urdu, and he was able finally to muster enough courage and say: ‘We need help. Please help.’ ”

With the dhow's request, the political uncertainties of boarding an Iranian-flagged vessel were lifted, because the ship's master had asked for help. Rear Adm. Kaleem Shaukat, the Pakistani commanding Combined Task Force 151, gave permission, and late in the afternoon two inflatable boats from the Kidd ferried armed sailors to Al Mulahi.

They climbed aboard and discovered six Somalis hiding near the bow and nine more inside a cargo space. The Somalis did not resist, and were searched and moved to the bow, where they were held overnight.

A search of the dhow found four assault rifles and ammunition. Several of the Somalis, slumped with resignation, discussed their lives as pirates with a reporter and photographer traveling with the boarding team.

They said they knew the risks of being caught, but had been willing to try nonetheless. Mr. Mahmoud said he had three wives and seven children to feed. "In [Somalia](#) we have no jobs," he said. "That's the reason to go to sea. Our country has a civil war, and I don't have skills."

He said this had been his maiden voyage, a claim that could not be independently verified.

He said they had set sail with a rifle for every man and a single rocket-propelled grenade with 10 rockets, but, when the Navy approached from multiple directions, "we put them in the sea."

As he sat smoking a cigarette a large liquid natural gas tanker steamed by on the horizon. "Ahhh," he said. "L.N.G."

He looked at it longingly. "Before we would have liked to catch that ship," he said. Then he looked at the armed sailors standing about five yards away. He exhaled smoke and shook his head. "Not now," he said.

On Friday morning, Mr. Bhotan, the leader of the pirate crew, looked dejectedly as his former charges were ferried away on inflatable boats to the Kidd, where they were showered, dressed in white suits and flex-cuffed before being flown to the carrier.

Al Mulahi, soon to be given fresh fuel from the Kidd for the journey home, was about to sail back to Iran. Mr. Bhotan said he did not know what would happen to him. "I am a prisoner," he said.



World Oil Transit Chokepoints

[Download Full Country Analysis Brief](#)

Last Updated: Dec. 30, 2011

Background

World oil transit chokepoints are a critical part of global energy security. Chokepoints are narrow channels along widely used global sea routes, some so narrow that restrictions are placed on the size of vessel that can navigate through them. They are a critical part of global energy security due to the high volume of oil traded through their narrow straits.

About half of the world's oil production moves on maritime routes.

Generally used oil tanker terminology	
Tanker Type	Deadweight Tons
Panamax	60,000 - 100,000
Aframax	80,000 - 120,000
Suezmax	120,000 - 200,000
VLCC	200,000 - 320,000
ULCC	320,000 +

Source: Clarksons

In 2011, total world oil production amounted to approximately 88 million barrels per day (bbl/d), and over one-half was moved by tankers on fixed maritime routes. By volume of oil transit, the [Strait of Hormuz](#) leading out of the Persian Gulf and the [Strait of Malacca](#) linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans are two of the world's most strategic chokepoints.

The international energy market is dependent upon reliable transport. The blockage of a chokepoint, even temporarily, can lead to substantial increases in total energy costs. In addition, chokepoints leave oil tankers vulnerable to theft from pirates, terrorist attacks, and political unrest in the form of wars or hostilities as well as shipping accidents which can lead to disastrous oil spills.

Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is by far the world's most important chokepoint with an oil flow of almost 17 million barrels per day in 2011. Located between [Oman](#) and [Iran](#), the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Hormuz is the world's most important oil chokepoint due to its daily oil flow of almost 17 million barrels in 2011, up from between 15.5-16.0 million bbl/d in 2009-2010. Flows through the Strait in 2011 were roughly 35 percent of all seaborne traded oil, or almost 20 percent of oil traded worldwide.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom out for alternate routes](#))

On average, 14 crude oil tankers per day passed through the Strait in 2011, with a corresponding amount of empty tankers entering to pick up new cargos. More than 85 percent of these crude oil exports went to Asian markets, with Japan, India, South Korea, and China representing the largest destinations.

At its narrowest point, the Strait is 21 miles wide, but the width of the shipping lane in either direction is only two miles, separated by a two-mile buffer zone. The Strait is deep and wide enough to handle the world's largest crude oil tankers, with about two-thirds of oil shipments carried by tankers in excess of 150,000 deadweight tons.

Closure of the Strait of Hormuz would require the use of longer alternate routes at increased transportation costs. Alternate routes include the 745 mile long Petrolina, also known as the East-West Pipeline, across Saudi Arabia from Abqaiq to the Red Sea. The East-West Pipeline has a nameplate capacity of about 5 million bbl/d. The Abqaiq-Yanbu natural gas liquids pipeline, which runs parallel to the Petrolina to the Red Sea, has a 290,000-bbl/d capacity. Additional oil could also be pumped north via the Iraq-Turkey pipeline to the port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, but volumes have been limited by the closure of the Strategic pipeline linking north and south Iraq.

The United Arab Emirates is also completing the 1.5 million bbl/d Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline pipeline that will cross the emirate of Abu Dhabi and end at the port of Fujairah just south of the Strait. Other alternate routes could include the deactivated 1.65-million bbl/d Iraqi Pipeline across Saudi Arabia (IPSA), and the deactivated 0.5 million-bbl/d Tapline to Lebanon.

Malacca

The Strait of Malacca, linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans is the shortest sea route between the Middle East and growing Asian markets. The Strait of Malacca, located between [Indonesia](#), [Malaysia](#), and Singapore, links the Indian Ocean to the [South China Sea](#) and Pacific Ocean. Malacca is the shortest sea route between Persian Gulf suppliers and the Asian markets—notably [China](#), [Japan](#), [South Korea](#), and the Pacific Rim. Oil shipments through the Strait of Malacca supply China and Indonesia, two of the world's fastest growing economies. It is the key chokepoint in Asia with an estimated 13.6 million bbl/d flow in 2009, down slightly from its peak of 14 million bbl/d in 2007.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom](#))

At its narrowest point in the Phillips Channel of the Singapore Strait, Malacca is only 1.7 miles wide creating a natural bottleneck, as well as potential for collisions, grounding, or oil spills. According to the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre, piracy, including attempted theft and hijackings, is a constant threat to tankers in the Strait of Malacca, although the number of attacks has dropped due to the increased patrols by the littoral states authorities since July 2005.

Over 60,000 vessels transit the Strait of Malacca per year. If the strait were blocked, nearly half of the world's fleet would be required to reroute around the Indonesian archipelago through Lombok Strait, located between the islands of Bali and Lombok, or the Sunda Strait, located between Java and Sumatra.

There have been several proposals to build bypasses to reduce tanker traffic through the Strait of Malacca. Construction began in 2009 to build a 240,000 bbl/d crude oil pipeline from Burma to China that could eventually be expanded.

Suez Cana/SUMED Pipeline

Closure of the Suez [Suez Canal](#)

Canal and SUMED The Suez Canal is located in [Egypt](#), and connects the Red Sea and Gulf of Suez with the Mediterranean Sea, **Pipeline would add** spanning 120 miles. Year-to-date through November of 2010, petroleum (both crude oil and refined products) **an estimated 6,000** as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) accounted for 13 and 11 percent of Suez cargos, measured by cargo **miles of transit** tonnage, respectively. Total petroleum transit volume was close to 2 million bbl/d, or just below five percent of **around the continent** seaborne oil trade in 2010. **of Africa.**

Almost 16,500 ships transited the Suez Canal from January through November of 2010, of which about 20 percent were petroleum tankers and 5 percent were LNG tankers. With only 1,000 feet at its narrowest point, the Canal is unable to handle the VLCC (Very Large Crude Carriers) and ULCC (Ultra Large Crude Carriers) class crude oil tankers. The Suez Canal Authority is continuing enhancement and enlargement projects on the canal, and extended the depth to 66 ft in 2010 to allow over 60 percent of all tankers to use the Canal.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom](#))

Closure of the Suez Canal and the SUMED Pipeline would divert oil tankers around the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, adding approximately 6,000 miles to transit, increasing both costs and shipping time. According to a report released by the International Energy Agency (IEA), shipping around Africa would add 15 days of transit to Europe and 8-10 days to the United States.

[SUMED Pipeline](#)

The 200-mile long SUMED Pipeline, or Suez-Mediterranean Pipeline provides an alternative to the Suez Canal for those cargos too large to transit the Canal (laden VLCC's and larger). The pipeline has a capacity of 2.3 million bbl/d and flows north from Ain Sukhna, on the Red Sea coast to Sidi Kerir on the Mediterranean. The SUMED is owned by Arab Petroleum Pipeline Co., a joint venture between the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC), Saudi Aramco, Abu Dhabi's National Oil Company (ADNOC), and Kuwaiti companies.



Source: Oil Capital Ltd.

Crude Oil

The majority of crude oil flows transiting the Canal travel northbound, towards markets in the Mediterranean and North America. Northbound canal flows averaged approximately 428,000 bbl/d in 2010. The SUMED pipeline accounted for 1.15 million bbl/d of crude oil flows along the route over the same period. Combined, these two transit points were responsible for over 1.5 million bbl/d of crude oil flows into the Mediterranean, with an additional 307,000 bbl/d travelling southbound through the Canal. Northbound crude transit represented a decline from 2008 when 940,000 bbl/d of oil transited northbound through the Canal and an additional 2.1 million travelled through the SUMED to the Mediterranean.

Suez Canal Hydrocarbon Traffic (2008 - November 2010)			
	2008	2009	2010*
NORTHBOUND			
Crude Oil (bbl/d)	940	314	428
Gasoline	429	379	413
Middle Distillate	150	261	250
Fuel Oil	6	19	6
Naptha	45	1	13
LPG	49	14	24
Other	2	7	20
Total Oil (bbl/d)	1,621	994	1,153
LNG (Bcf)	316	803	1,320
Number of ships			
Tankers	2,089	1,867	1,768
LNG	229	283	393
SOUTHBOUND			
Crude Oil (bbl/d)	211	271	307
Gasoline	165	173	108
Middle Distillate	22	50	27
Fuel Oil	291	188	250
Naptha	63	103	78
LPG	27	38	24
Other	39	27	19
Total Oil (bbl/d)	818	850	813
LNG (Bcf)	281	48	97
Number of ships			
Tankers	1,706	1,612	1,451
LNG	200	242	370
TOTAL			
TOTAL OIL (bbl/d)	2,440	1,843	1,966
Crude	1,151	585	735
Product	1,288	1,258	1,232
LNG (Bcf)	596	852	1,416
TOTAL SHIPS			
Tankers	3,795	3,479	3,219
LNG	429	525	763
SUMED flows (bbl/d)	2,100	1,100	1,150

Source: Suez Canal Authority, converted with EIA conversion factors. SUMED pipeline flows are EIA estimates based on APEX (Lloyd's MIU) Tanker Data.

*2010 information is year-to-date January-November

Total Oil and Products

Total oil flows from the Suez Canal declined from 2008 levels of over 2.4 million bbl/d in 2008 to just under 2 million bbl/d on average in 2010. Flows through the SUMED experienced a much steeper drop from approximately 2.1 million bbl/d to 1.1 million bbl/d over the same period. The year-on-year difference reflects the collapse in world oil market demand that began in the fourth quarter of 2008 which was then followed by OPEC production cuts (primarily from the Persian Gulf) causing a sharp fall in regional oil trade starting in January 2009. Drops in transit also illustrate the changing dynamics of international oil markets where Asian demand is increasing at a higher rate than European and American markets, while West African crude production is meeting a greater share of the latter's demand. At the same time, piracy and security concerns around the Horn of Africa have led some exporters to travel the extra distance around South Africa to reach western markets.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

Unlike oil, LNG transit through the Suez Canal has been on the rise since 2008, with the number of tankers increasing from approximately 430 to 760, and volumes of LNG traveling northbound (laden tankers) increasing more than four-fold. Southbound LNG transit originates in Algeria and Egypt, destined for Asian markets while northbound transit is mostly from Qatar and Oman, destined for European and North American markets. The rapid growth in LNG flows over the period represents the startup of five LNG trains in Qatar in 2009-2010. The only alternate route for LNG tankers would be around Africa as there is no pipeline infrastructure to offset any Suez Canal disruptions. Countries such as the United Kingdom and Italy received more than half of their total LNG imports via the Suez Canal in 2009 while over 90 percent of Belgium's LNG imports transited through the canal.

Bab el-Mandab

Closure of the Bab el-Mandab could keep tankers from the Persian Gulf from reaching the Suez Canal/Sumed pipeline complex, diverting them around the southern tip of Africa. The Strait of Bab el-Mandab is a chokepoint between the horn of Africa and the Middle East, and a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. It is located between [Yemen](#), [Djibouti](#), and [Eritrea](#), and connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. Most exports from the Persian Gulf that transit the Suez Canal and SUMED pipeline also pass through the Bab el-Mandab.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom](#))

An estimated 3.2 million bbl/d flowed through this waterway in 2009 (vs. 4 million bbl/d in 2008) toward Europe, the United States, and Asia. The majority of traffic, about 1.8 million bbl/d, moved northbound through the Bab el-Mandab en route to the Suez/SUMED complex.

The Bab el-Mandab is 18 miles wide at its narrowest point, making tanker traffic difficult and limited to two 2-mile-wide channels for inbound and outbound shipments. Closure of the Strait could keep tankers from the Persian Gulf from reaching the [Suez Canal or Sumed Pipeline](#), diverting them around the southern tip of Africa. This would effectively engage spare tanker capacity, and add to transit time and cost.

The Strait of Bab el-Mandab could be bypassed via the East-West oil pipeline, which crosses [Saudi Arabia](#) with a nameplate capacity of 4.8 million bbl/d. However, southbound oil traffic would still be blocked. In addition, closure of the Bab el-Mandab would block non-oil shipping from using the [Suez Canal](#), except for limited trade within the Red Sea region.

Security became a concern of foreign firms doing business in the region, after a French tanker was attacked off the coast of [Yemen](#) by terrorists in October 2002. In recent years, this region has also seen rising piracy,

and Somali pirates continue to attack vessels off the northern Somali coast in the Gulf of Aden and southern Red Sea including the Bab el-Mandab.

Bosporus

Increased oil exports from the Caspian Sea region make the Bosporus Straits one of the busiest and most dangerous chokepoints in the world supplying Western and Southern Europe. The Bosporus and Dardanelles comprise the Turkish Straits and divide Asia from Europe. The Bosporus connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles links the Sea of Marmara with the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. The 17-mile long waterway located in Turkey supplies Western and Southern Europe with oil from the Caspian Sea Region.

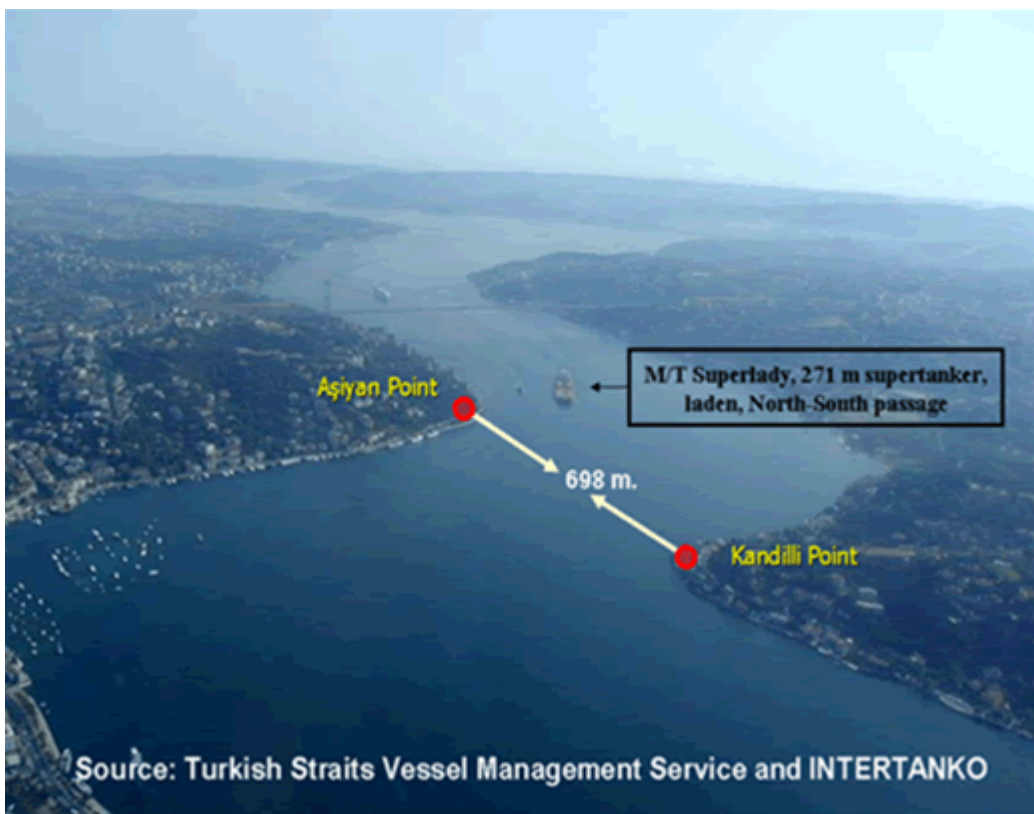
An estimated 2.9 million bbl/d flowed through this passageway in 2009, of which over 2.5 million bbl/d was crude oil. The ports of the Black Sea are one of the primary oil export routes for Russia and other former Soviet Union republics. Oil shipments through the Turkish Straits decreased from over 3.4 million bbl/d at its peak in 2004 to 2.6 million bbl/d in 2006 as [Russia](#) shifted crude oil exports toward the Baltic ports. Traffic through the Straits has increased again as [Azerbaijan](#) and [Kazakhstan](#) crude production and exports rose.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom](#))

Only half a mile wide at its narrowest point, the Turkish Straits are one of the world's most difficult waterways to navigate due to its sinuous geography. With 50,000 vessels, including 5,500 oil tankers, passing through the straits annually it is also one of the world's busiest chokepoints.

Turkey has raised concerns over the navigational safety and environmental threats to the Straits. Commercial shipping has the right of free passage through the Bosporus Straits in peacetime, although Turkey claims the right to impose regulations for safety and environmental purposes. Bottlenecks and heavy traffic also create problems for oil tankers in the Bosporus Straits. While there are no current alternate routes for westward shipments from the Black and Caspian Sea region, there are several pipeline projects in various phases of development underway.



Panama Canal

The United States is the primary country of origin and destination for all commodities transiting through the Panama Canal. The Panama Canal is an important route connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. The Canal is 50 miles long, and only 110 feet wide at its narrowest point called Culebra Cut on the Continental Divide. Over 14,000 vessels transit the Canal annually, of which more than 60 percent (by tonnage) are for traffic to and from the United States.

transiting through the Panama Canal, however, it is not a Closure of the Panama Canal would greatly increase transit times and costs adding over 8,000 miles of travel. Vessels would have to reroute around the Straits of Magellan, Cape Horn and Drake Passage over the tip of South America.

significant route for U.S. petroleum trade. However, the Panama Canal is not a significant route for petroleum transit or for U. S. petroleum imports. Roughly one-fifth of the traffic through the canal (measured by both transits and tonnage) was by tankers. According to the [Panama Canal Authority](#), 766,000 bbl/d of crude and petroleum products were transported through the canal in Fiscal Year 2011, of which 645,000 bbl/d were refined products, and the rest crude oil (EIA conversions from long tons to barrels). Most petroleum traffic passed from north (Atlantic) to South (Pacific).

However, the relevance of the Panama Canal to the global oil trade has diminished, as many modern tankers are too large to travel through the canal. Some oil tankers, such as the ULCC (Ultra Large Crude Carriers) class tankers, can be nearly five times larger than the maximum capacity of the canal. The largest vessel that can transit the Panama Canal is known as a PANAMAX-size vessel (ships ranging from 50,000 – 80,000 dead weight tons in size and no wider than 108 ft.)

In order to make the canal more accessible, the Panama Canal Authority began an expansion program to be completed by end-2014. However, while many larger tankers will be able to transit the canal after 2014, some ULCC's will still be unable to make the transit.



Source: U.S. Government ([Click here to zoom](#))



Source: BBC News

Trans-Panama Pipeline

The Trans-Panama Pipeline (TPP - Petroterminal de Panama, S.A.) is located outside the former Canal Zone near the Costa Rican border and runs from the port of Charco Azul on the Pacific Coast to the port of Chiriquie Grande, Bocas del Toro on the Caribbean. The pipeline was built in 1982, with the original purpose being to facilitate crude oil shipments from Alaska's North Slope to refineries in the Caribbean and the U.S. Gulf Coast. However, in 1996, the TPP was shut down as oil companies began shipping Alaskan crude along alternative routes. Since 1996, there were intermittent requests and proposals to utilize the TPP. In August 2009, TPP completed a project to reverse its flows in order to enable it to carry oil from the Caribbean to the Pacific.

Danish Straits

The Danish Straits An estimated 3.3 million bbl/d flowed westward through this waterway in 2009 to European markets, up from **are becoming an increasingly important route for Russian oil exports to Europe.** 2.4 million bbl/d in 2005. Russia has increasingly been shifting its crude oil exports to its Baltic ports, especially the relatively new port of Primorsk, which accounted for half of the exports through the Straits. An additional 0.3 million bbl/d of crude oil, primarily from Norway, flows eastward to Scandinavian markets.



Source: U.S. Government

About one-third of the westward exports through the Straits are for refined products, coming from Baltic Sea ports such as Tallinn (Muuga), Venstpiils, and St. Petersburg.

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Links

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[EIA - International Energy Data](#)

Other Links

[Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia \(National Defense University\)](#)
[International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre](#)
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[Panama Canal Authority](#)
[Petroterminal de Panama](#)
[Suez Canal Authority](#)

[Turkish Maritime Pilots' Association](#)
[U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea](#)

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