

Iranian official says Tehran will respond to banditry in international waters



Tehran, October 13 (RHC)-- An Iranian official says his country will not let attacks on its vessels go unanswered after an Iranian oil tanker was hit by two suspicious explosions in the Red Sea early Friday.

"Piracy and banditry in international waterways which is done with the aim of making shipping lanes for commercial vessels insecure will not go unanswered," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said on Saturday.

On Friday, the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) reported that the SABITI tanker had been hit by two separate explosions near the Saudi port city of Jeddah. The blasts caused an oil spill that was stopped shortly after.

Shamkhani said a special committee has been set up to investigate the attack on the SABITI tanker that was targeted by two missiles off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea. The panel's report, he said, will be submitted to responsible authorities in order to make a decision.

"By examining the available video images and information gathered [from the incident], the main clues to this dangerous adventurism have been obtained," Shamkhani added.

The top security official recalled "destructive moves" against other Iranian oil tankers in the Red Sea in recent months, citing the Happiness-1 and the Helm.

Happiness-1 faced "engine failure" off Jeddah on April 30 and was later transferred to the Saudi port city for maintenance. The Saudis initially refused to let the vessel go, demanding some \$10 million in maintenance fees before releasing it on July 20.

Iranian officials also said in August another oil tanker, the Helm, faced a technical failure while passing through the Red Sea. "Creating insecurity in international waterways will bring out worrying risks for the world economy, the consequences of which will be the responsibility of planners, executives and supporters of such provocative actions," Shamkhani said.

Tensions have been high in the region after a series of suspicious explosions targeted oil tankers crossing the Strait of Hormuz earlier this year.

Iran's Government spokesman Ali Rabiei on Saturday described the attack on the SABITI as "cowardly", saying the Islamic Republic will respond after the facts has been studied. "Iran is avoiding haste, carefully examining what has happened and probing facts," Rabiei said. "An appropriate response will be given to the designers of this cowardly attack, but we will wait until all aspects of the plot are clarified," he added.

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