

Reuters reviewed documents showing the IRGC requires details including cargo value, flag, destination, ownership and crew nationalities.

BY REUTERS

The crew of the tanker Agios Fanourios I followed a route designated by Iran through the Strait of Hormuz, hugging the coastline and passing island checkpoints.

The 330-metre vessel, carrying Iraqi crude oil to Vietnam, had been stranded off Dubai since late April. On May 10, it entered the strait after a direct deal with Iran overseen by Iraq's prime minister.

Its passage reflected a system Iran has developed to manage vessels crossing Hormuz. With Tehran now exercising de facto control over the strategic waterway, transit can involve government-to-government deals, strict Iranian vetting and, in some cases, fees for safe passage, according to Reuters interviews with 20 people, including shipping sources and Iranian and Iraqi officials.

The tanker's movements were tracked in Vietnam, Iraq and Greece. At times its transponder went dark, though it continued sailing. On the same day, another ship nearby was struck by a projectile, causing a small fire, according to a British maritime safety agency.

Late on May 10, the Agios Fanourios I was stopped near Hormuz Island by speedboats from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). An Iranian official said the Guards suspected smuggled cargo and ordered an inspection. Hours later, the vessel was cleared to continue, turning a normally five-hour transit into a two-day ordeal.

"Once we were informed Agios Fanourios I passed Hormuz, we breathed a sigh of relief," one monitor said.

No payments were made, according to Eastern Mediterranean Shipping and sources familiar with the passage. Operations man-

Iran tightens grip on Hormuz with checkpoints, diplomacy



The tanker Agios Fanourios I loaded a cargo of oil off Basra, Iraq, in late April. Soon after, it set sail for the Strait of Hormuz. PHOTO/ REUTERS

ager Konstantinos Sakellaris said Iraq and Vietnam likely pressured Iran into allowing the ship through.

Iran's tightening control over Hormuz — through which about a fifth of global oil passes — has disrupted energy markets. The International Energy Agency has described the situation as the world's worst energy crisis.

Navigating the Strait

By early May, around 1,500 vessels carrying about 22,500 sailors were trapped in the Gulf, according to the US military. Iran's capacity to threaten shipping from its coastline has sharply reduced traffic. SynMax Intelligence estimated fewer than 60 ships crossed Hormuz between April 18 and May 6, compared with a pre-war average of 120 to 140 daily crossings.

The US Treasury warned on May 1 of sanctions risks linked to payments to Iran for safe passage. Reu-

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Iran effectively controls the waterway. The straits will be blocked or opened up only by the approval of the Iranian regime. Some will get through because of political alliances, others will have to pay, others will be turned back.

navigation fees may be charged depending on cargo, though they gave no figures.

Under international maritime law, governments cannot charge for safe passage through a strait, though security or service fees are allowed if applied equally.

'Affiliation Checks

Beyond bilateral deals, vessels

seeking Iranian approval undergo vetting by the IRGC. Shipping sources said operators submit "affiliation documents" to assess links to the US or Israel.

Reuters reviewed documents showing the IRGC requires details including cargo value, flag, destination, ownership and crew nationalities. Several Iranian bodies are involved, including the Ports and

Maritime Organisation, the Ministry of Industry and the Supreme National Security Council.

For government-arranged passages, countries contact Iran's foreign minister, who forwards requests to the Supreme National Security Council, which includes IRGC representatives and aides to Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei.

In the case of the Agios Fanourios I, Iraq's government and state oil marketer SOMO negotiated with Iran under then-prime minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani. Iraqi officials said they submitted the ship's manifest and crew details before passage.

India has a separate arrangement. An Indian shipping official said New Delhi coordinates via its embassy in Tehran with Iranian authorities, including the IRGC and navy. Captains are instructed to follow routes, switch off transponders and avoid satellite communications.

The route through Hormuz now involves multiple Iranian-controlled checkpoints staffed by armed personnel. The Agios Fanourios I passed Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Larak before being halted near Hormuz Island.



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