



Tensions with Iran Escalate After an Oil Tanker Attack off the Coast of Oman

An oil tanker attack off the coast of Oman this past week has threatened to heighten tensions with the Iranian regime. The incident took place when an armed drone believed to be operated by Iran was used to target the *Mercer Street* tanker, killing one Briton and one Romanian crewmember who were both on board. Analysts note that the attack is the latest in a series of hostilities between Iran and Israel. The two have been accused of repeatedly targeting the other's commercial enterprises on sea and land. In recent months, Israel has also been attributed with the assassination of a top Iranian nuclear scientist and an attack on a uranium enrichment site in Natanz. While deaths are rare in these maritime incidents, the actual assaults are quite common. There have been over 150 attacks in the region and neither side has acknowledged a large amount of them. Israel and Iran are responsible for many of the attacks in their vicinity, as well as the interruption they sometimes bring to the trade industry. The strike on the oil tanker is the first known fatal one of this kind following years of attacks on shipping vessels in the area, a significant number of which have been linked to tensions between Iran and Israel.

The tit-for-tat behavior between Iran and Israel is not a new development and has been a large proponent of each government's efforts to debilitate the other. They have been strongly suspected of targeting each's cargo ships and oil tankers, and often both deny involvement or claims that the actions were retaliatory. These attacks also occur on facilities located on land, and the largest Iranian naval ship suspiciously caught fire in the middle of the night with no known cause. Mines, missiles, rockets, and drones are all frequently used to damage the ships currently being used by each nation. In cases where fatalities occur, they can shed light on the discreet sabotage attempts that both regimes try to engage in.

When Israel and Iran commit these attacks against each other over trans-boundary waters, they are in breach of international law. This is because the assaults are not only being carried out against civilians, but are also being done in free waters where trade and ships are not regulated by any one entity. Thus, the recklessness by the two nations infringes on rights granted to citizens by the United Nations. If these actions are to occur unimpeded, they will continue to hamper trade within the region. Ultimately, global trade is dependent upon the rule of law and consistency, and when governments choose to jeopardize that it puts all trade within that geographical area at constant risk.

Another important factor related to this issue is how the United States is attempting to revitalize the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran over their nuclear program. Events like the oil tanker attack this past week place increased pressure on the Biden administration to secure progress on these efforts. Whenever an incident such as this occurs, the likelihood of positive negotiations decreases. Reigniting the JCPOA is already a difficult task as is without this type of inflammatory behavior.