

Tankers attacked in Gulf of Oman

By admin On June 14, 2019 June 14, 2019 In Cargo, Insurance Marine News, Keep, Marine Hull, Political Risk, Credit & Finance

Two tankers were targeted yesterday morning while transiting waters in the Gulf of Oman. Aframax tankers **Front Altair** (IMO 9745902) and handysize **Kokuka Courageous** (IMO 9568495) were hit by surface attacks, leaving the former on fire and the latter adrift.

The two targeted ships were about 50 km apart, in Iranian waters east of Fujairah. The vessels would have been just outside the recently designated high-risk area (Kokuka Courageous would have just left it), but within the voluntary reporting area.

The crew of both were safely evacuated, with nearby general cargo ship Hyundai Dubai picking up the 23 crew of Norway-based Frontline's Front Altair (11 Russians, 11 Filipinos and one Georgian), transferring them to Iran, while the US Navy was reported to have picked up the 21 crew of Bernhard Schulte's chemical/oil products tanker Kokuka Courageous, counteracting earlier reports that the crew from both tankers had been taken to Iran.

The Front Altair rescue took 74 minutes and the crew members were handed over to Iranian authorities, according to Hyundai Merchant Marine, which manages to the 20,000 gt Hyundai Dubai.

While one source blamed the attack on Front Altair on a magnetic mine, the attack on the Kokuka Courageous was alleged to have been via torpedo. However, it was later thought that mines were likely to have been used in both attacks. Iranian News Agency IRNA had initially reported that Front Altair had sunk, but later photographs showed it afloat, albeit still on fire.

Bernhard Schulte said on its website that "the hull has been breached above the water line on the starboard side. All crew are reported safe and only one minor injury reported."

Further reports from the Front Altair indicated that the hull was breached on the starboard side partially below the waterline.

The Norwegian Maritime Authority noted that there were reportedly three detonations on board the Front Altair, which was carrying 75,000 tonnes of petrochemical feedstock naphtha to Taiwan.

Japan's Kokuka Sangyo, the owner of the Kokuka Courageous, claimed that the ship was hit twice over a three-hour period. Kokuka Courageous was carrying a cargo of methanol from Saudi Arabia to Singapore.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was in Tehran, trying to negotiate between the US and Iran, when news broke that Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous was one of the attacked vessels.

Gard said that the cause of the incidents had not been confirmed, but that "all vessels, and tankers in particular, are advised to operate with a heightened level of security in the Gulf of Oman/Strait of Hormuz/Persian Gulf region."

Some Flag Administrations may require a heightened security level for the Gulf of Oman/Strait of Hormuz/Persian Gulf region, meaning that ships must implement additional protective measures in accordance with the formal Ship Security Plan (SSP). The Norwegian Maritime Authorities yesterday June 13th instructed Norwegian ships arriving at the Strait of Hormuz within the boundaries of N25° – N28° and E054° – E058° to implement security measures as described in their SSP according to ISPS/MarSec level #2.

IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim condemned the suspected attacks. Speaking during the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) 101st session at IMO Headquarters in London, Lim said that "the threat to ships and their crews, peaceably going about their business, is intolerable. I urge all Member States to redouble their efforts to work together to find a lasting solution to ensure the safety and security of international shipping around the globe and protection of the marine environment. I will carefully review the results of the investigations, once they are completed, to consider if additional IMO action is warranted." US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday blamed Iran for the "unprovoked attacks". He said that the US had made its assessment based on intelligence about the type of weapons used.

Iran said that it "categorically rejects" US claims that it was behind the attacks.

Shortly after this denial, the US military's Central Command released a video which it claimed showed Iran's Revolutionary Guard "removing [an] unexploded limpet mine" from the side of the Kokuka Courageous following the blasts".

2016-built, Marshall Islands-flagged, 62,849 gt Front Altair is owned by Front Altair Inc care of Frontline Management AS of Oslo, Norway. ISM manager is ITM Ltd of Dubai, UAE. It is entered with Gard P&I on behalf of Front Altair and with Gard AS for H&M and Loss of Hire. H&M WAR was reported to be insured with the Norwegian Pool.

2010-built, Panama-flagged, 19,349 gt Kokuka Courageous is owned by Coral Island Maritime SA care of Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (Singapore) Pte Ltd of Singapore. It is entered with Japan Club (Tokyo Office in Charge) on behalf of Coral Island Maritime SA.

Voice of America video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHQ7JE7pO20>