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Insurance Revoked on Ship Carrying Choppers to Syria

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The MV Alaed

A ship believed to be carrying military helicopters to Syria appears to have turned back after its U.K. insurer removed its coverage, officials said.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague told lawmakers on Tuesday that the MV Alaed has "turned back now apparently toward Russia."

British marine insurer Standard Club had earlier canceled its policy on all vessels owned by Russian cargo line Femco, including the MV Alaed, which is suspected to be carrying helicopters to Syria.

"We have already informed the ship owner that their insurance cover ceased automatically in view of the nature of the voyage," Standard Club said in a statement, The Associated Press reported.

British law enforcement officials told the insurer that it was likely a violation of European

Union sanctions against the Syrian government to cover the shipment, according to the British daily.

The officials said they were monitoring the ship, which collected Mi-25 helicopters for delivery to Syria from the Baltic Sea port of Kaliningrad, where they were being serviced. The helicopters had been sold to the Syrian government about two decades ago by Soviet authorities.

A London maritime lawyer who requested anonymity told The Moscow Times that revoking insurance would not have necessarily forced the ship to return to its port of origin. But the ship may not be able to dock to refuel, since many ports do not allow ships without insurance.

The withdrawal of insurance means that Femco's ships will not be covered for risks including damage to cargo, injury or death, running into quays and pollution.

Most shipping insurance is provided by 13 Protection and Indemnity, or P&I, clubs, which are members of the International Group of P&I clubs. Most are based in Britain, and while there are non-EU insurers, it would be "very, very difficult" for Femco to find replacement cover, the lawyer said.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton set off a spat last week when she accused Moscow of supplying Damascus with attack helicopters. The Foreign Ministry denied the claim.

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