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U.S. Charges Russians, Syrians for Sanctions Violations

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Five Russian and three Syrian nationals have been indicted by the United States for allegedly helping to ship jet fuel to Syria, in violation of U.S. sanctions.

Russia has been carrying out airstrikes for the past three years in support of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's ongoing civil war. The U.S. has since imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia and Syria, including the supply of goods via the United States and U.S. dollar wires.

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An indictment unveiled by the U.S. Department of Justice on Tuesday charges eight people involved in international shipping of sanctions violations and money laundering. The combined charges carry a maximum penalty of 25 years in prison.

"The defendants allegedly conspired to defy our sanctions against Syria and Crimea,

endangering both American interests in the region as well as our foreign policy and national security," John Demers, Assistant U.S. Attorney General for National Security, said in a statement.

The Justice Department claims that five Russian employees with the Russian Sovfracht shipping company sidestepped sanctions by using shell companies to wire money that was then used to ship jet fuel to Syria.

Sovfracht was blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2016 for operating in the annexed Crimean peninsula.

The defendants, who the Wall Street Journal reports are believed to be overseas, allegedly utilized vessels that were spotted by publicly available tracking data sailing to Syria in 2016. An EU intelligence source said the ships, bearing Russian flags, smuggled jet fuel to Syria via Cyprus in violation of EU sanctions.

The owner of Sovfracht declined to comment on the charges.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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