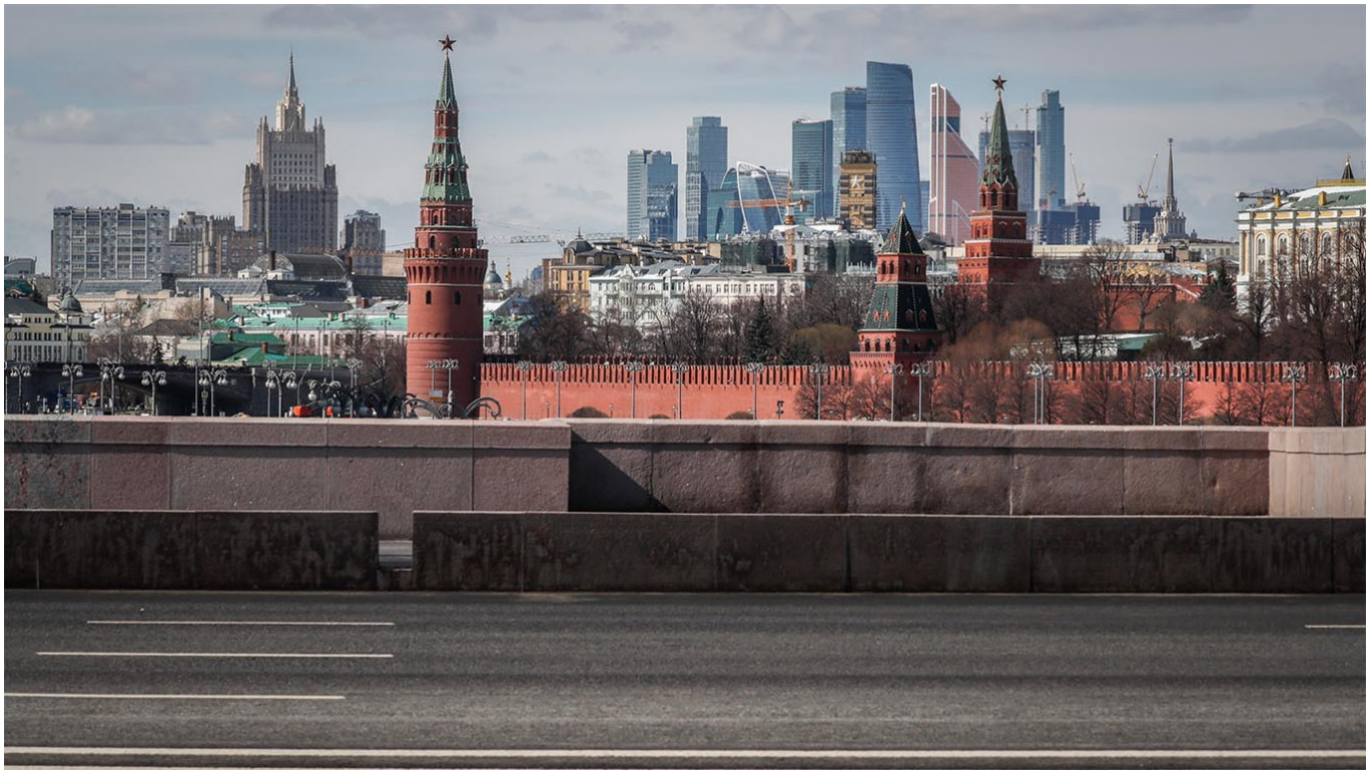
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Russia Accuses U.S. of Stoking 'Military-Political Tension' With Tanker Seizure

By AFP

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The Moscow skyline featuring (from left) the Foreign Ministry, the Kremlin and the Moscow City business district. **Yuri Kochetkov / EPA / TASS**

Russia on Thursday accused the United States of stoking tensions and threatening international shipping with its seizure of a Russian-flagged oil tanker in the North Atlantic a day earlier.

The U.S. has said the ship carried oil for states like Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of Western sanctions and seized it after an American raid toppled Moscow's ally Nicolás Maduro in Caracas.

Moscow's Foreign Ministry said the move will "only result in further military and political tensions," adding that it was worried by "Washington's willingness to generate acute international crisis situations."

The U.S. seizure came as Washington grew frustrated with Moscow as little progress on its diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine has been made.

Related article: U.S. Seizes Russia-Flagged Oil Tanker: What We Know

It seized the ship days after U.S. President Donald Trump said he was "not thrilled" with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Trump also said in recent days he did not believe Putin's claim that Kyiv tried to attack his residence.

Moscow said the ship was sailing "in accordance to the norms of international law and under Russian law's temporary allowance to sail under the state flag of the Russian Federation."

It said it was heading to a Russian port and that Moscow had several times informed U.S. authorities of its "civilian peaceful status."

The U.S. has said the crew could be prosecuted, which the Russian Foreign Ministry said was "categorically unacceptable."

Moscow also said it considered Western sanctions "illegitimate," adding that they cannot be used as a "justification" to "seize ships in high seas."

It also accused Britain — which has said it provided support to the U.S. in the tanker seizure — of "long being engaged in maritime piracy."

The U.K. said it had provided "pre-planned operation support" to the U.S. in the ship seizure.

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