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Moscow Says U.S. Released 2 Russian Crew From Seized Tanker

By AFP

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Hakon Rimmereid / AFP

Russia on Friday said the United States had decided to release two Russian members of the crew of a Russian-flagged oil tanker that Washington seized earlier this week.

The American authorities said the tanker was part of a shadow fleet that carried oil for countries such as Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions, and seized it in the North Atlantic despite the ship being escorted by the Russian Navy.

"In response to our request, U.S. President Donald Trump has decided to release two Russian citizens aboard the Marinera tanker, previously detained by the United States during an operation in the North Atlantic," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

"We welcome this decision and express our gratitude to the U.S. leadership," she added.

Russian special envoy Kirill Dmitriev said on Telegram that Trump decided to release "all Russians" on board the Marinera tanker.

The United States said previously the Marinera's crew could be prosecuted — which Russia said was "categorically unacceptable."

Moscow on Thursday accused Washington of stoking tensions and threatening international shipping with the seizure of the tanker, which it has cast as illegal.

Russia'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."

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