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Russian Crew Members of Seized Oil Tanker Still in U.S. Custody, Lavrov Says

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U.S. forces seize the Marinera on Jan. 7, 2026. **US European Command / X**

The United States has yet to release the Russian crew members of an oil tanker that American forces seized in the northern Atlantic Ocean earlier this month, Russia's Foreign Minister said Tuesday.

American forces boarded and seized the Marinera, a Russian-flagged oil tanker under U.S. sanctions, on Jan. 7 following a weeks-long chase on the high seas. The seizure of the ship came as part of the Trump administration's efforts to block Venezuelan oil exports.

Russia initially condemned the ship's seizure as "maritime piracy" but later claimed U.S. officials had agreed to release the two detained Russian crew members of the Marinera. The U.S. has not publicly confirmed whether it plans to release the Russians.

"We were assured that a decision had been made at the highest level to secure their release," Sergei Lavrov told a press conference on Tuesday.

“Unfortunately, the following days have shown that this decision is not being implemented. We expect our American colleagues to fulfill their promises,” the foreign minister added.

U.S. officials previously said that the Marinera’s crew could face prosecution in the United States, which Russia called “categorically unacceptable.”

Washington sanctioned the ship, originally known as the Bella 1, in 2024 for operating within a so-called “shadow fleet” of tankers transporting Iranian or Russian oil.

Russia has accused the United States of stoking tensions and threatening international shipping as American forces have seized ships leaving Venezuela in recent months.

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