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Attacked Russian Tanker Drifting Toward Libya – Italian Authorities

By AFP

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This aerial photo taken on March 15, 2026, shows the wreck of Russian liquified natural gas (LNG) carrier Arctic Metagaz, which is adrift between Malta and Lampedusa. **Miguela Xuereb / Newsbook Malta / AFP**

A Russian tanker that was badly damaged in an attack in the Mediterranean last week is drifting without crew toward the Libyan coast, Italy's civil protection service said on Friday.

Russia has accused Ukraine of trying to blow up the Arctic Metagaz, which was carrying a consignment of liquified natural gas (LNG) from Russia to Egypt when it was hit on March 3.

Italian officials said there was no sign that the fuel used to power the tanker had leaked, but they were unable to comment on the fate of the gas consignment.

The ship, whose 30 crew abandoned it, faced U.S. and European Union sanctions as a suspected part of Russia's "shadow fleet" of vessels carrying Russian oil and gas in

contravention of international sanctions.

Ukraine has not commented on the case but Italian authorities are among Mediterranean nations nervously watching the ship's movements. Salvage experts have been waiting in Malta.

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Russia has said vessel was carrying about 700 tons of fuel as well its gas consignment when it was hit. Libya's port authority has said the ship was carrying 62,000 tons of LNG intended for Egypt.

"At this stage, we have no information that the fuel has started to disperse," the civil protection service's press chief, Pierfrancesco Demilito, told a news conference.

He said the tanker was currently in international waters but in Libya's search and rescue zone about 53 nautical miles north of Tripoli and heading south.

According to the official, it was not possible to say how much gas was on the tanker but he said it was "potentially dangerous" because of the risk of an explosion.

The ship, though still afloat, "is severely damaged and even towing it is a complex operation," Demilito said.

"It has a large lateral breach and is not a very stable vessel at the moment, even if it is not showing any imminent signs of sinking."

Images taken by AFP on Sunday showed the tanker much further north from the location given by the Demilito. Some parts had been blackened and seriously damaged by explosions and fire. There were two holes on each side.

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