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U.S. Tightens Sanctions Waiver on Russian Oil After Tanker Reportedly Delivers Fuel to Cuba

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William Koo / unsplash

The United States on Thursday amended its sanctions relief for Russian oil tankers already at sea, saying shipments bound for Cuba and North Korea remain prohibited.

Under an updated general license, Washington continues to allow the sale of Russian crude and petroleum products loaded onto vessels as of March 12, but bars transactions involving Cuba and North Korea, as well as occupied parts of Ukraine.

The U.S. Treasury Department issued a waiver last week for the delivery and sale of Russian crude oil and petroleum products loaded onto ships between March 12 and April 11.

Some European leaders have criticized the decision, arguing that it will help the Kremlin fund its invasion of Ukraine.

The original order had only excluded transactions involving Iran.

Thursday's amendment came after reports emerged that a Russian tanker was on its way to deliver gasoline to Cuba this month as it grapples with a deepening energy crisis that has caused widespread blackouts in recent days.

The Kremlin declined to comment on Friday when asked about those reports.

Related article: Tanker 'Likely' Delivered Russian Diesel to Fuel-Starved Cuba

Cuba, which imports around 60% of its energy supply, previously relied on oil sold by Venezuela. Those shipments ended after then-President Nicolás Maduro was captured in a U.S. military raid.

Russia has since pledged to send humanitarian oil shipments to the island.

A Russian oil tanker likely discharged its cargo of 190,000 barrels of diesel early this month after using deceptive routing, according to maritime intelligence firm Windward.

If confirmed, it would mark the first delivery of refined products to the island since early January.

A second vessel, the sanctioned Russian tanker Anatoly Kolodkin, is currently sailing toward Cuba, maritime analytics firm Kpler said Wednesday. It is carrying around 730,000 barrels of crude oil.

AFP contributed reporting.

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