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US is making plans to intercept Venezuela-linked oil tanker that Russia has claimed jurisdiction over, sources say

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This photograph taken on March 18, 2025, shows the Bella 1 vessel in the Singapore Strait. Hakon ...



The US is making plans to try to intercept a **fleeing oil tanker** that Russia has claimed jurisdiction over, according to four people familiar with the matter, setting **up a possible confrontation between Washington and the Kremlin over the vessel's**

fate.

Originally called the Bella 1, the tanker was sanctioned by the US in 2024 for operating within a “shadow fleet” of tankers transporting illicit oil. It was initially headed for Venezuela before turning around to avoid seizure by the US Coast Guard last month. The tanker was in the North Atlantic as of two days ago, heading northeast near the coast of the United Kingdom, according to open-source **vessel data** from Kpler, a trade intelligence firm.

At some point while being pursued, the crew of the tanker painted a Russian flag on its hull and claimed it was sailing under Russian protection. Shortly thereafter, the vessel appeared on Russia’s official register of ships under a new name — the Marinera. Russia filed a formal diplomatic request last month demanding that the US stop pursuing the vessel. By claiming Russian status, the legalities of seizing the tanker could become more complicated.

The White House declined to comment. CBS News **first reported** that the US is planning to seize the tanker.

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The US is planning to try to intercept other sanctioned oil tankers that have attempted to evade capture in recent days as well, two of the sources said.

President Donald Trump last month announced a “complete blockade” on sanctioned oil tankers attempting to enter or leave Venezuela, as a way to pressure the regime of then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. The US **captured**

Maduro from a compound in Caracas early Saturday morning, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said the US will continue to enforce the blockade as “leverage” over the interim Venezuelan government.

The plans to intercept the Bella 1 come as US P-8 surveillance aircraft flying out of RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, England, appear to have been surveilling the tanker in recent days, according to open-source flight data.

There has also been a broader repositioning of US military assets to the UK, according to two of the sources and open-source flight tracking data. Over the past 48 hours, at least 12 US C-17s have landed at Fairford and Lakenheath airbases, many originating from airfields in the US. At least two V-22 Ospreys have also been active in the UK over the past three days, with flight data appearing to show them running training missions in the eastern UK out of Fairford air base. And two AC-130 gunships were seen arriving at Mildenhall base in the UK on Sunday.

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Flight data also shows two KC-135 aerial refueling tankers flying out over the North Atlantic, likely to refuel US assets operating there.

The US used Special Operations Forces and assets to help the US Coast Guard interdict a sanctioned tanker off the coast of Venezuela on December 11, and it would likely need to do so again to intercept a vessel in the north Atlantic, sources said — an operation that would be more complicated given the bad weather in the area and the fact that Russia has claimed ownership of the ship.

Seizing the Bella 1 would likely also require a Maritime Special Response Team with experience in boarding vessels that do not submit to seize control of it, CNN has reported.



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