

WAR IN MIDDLE EAST

IRAN TIGHTENS CONTROL OF STRAIT OF HORMUZ



REUTERS

Ships and tankers are seen Saturday in the Strait of Hormuz off the coast of Musandam, Oman.

Tehran reverses course, citing US blockade; vessels report attacks

TREVOR HUNNICUTT, ARIBA SHAHID AND MUHAMMAD AL GEBALY
Reuters

ISLAMABAD — Iran said it tightened control over the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, warning mariners the vital energy route again was closed, but President Donald Trump said Tehran could not blackmail the United States by shutting the waterway.

Tehran said it responded to a continued U.S. blockade of Iranian ports, calling it a violation of their ceasefire, while Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said Iran's navy was ready to inflict "new bitter defeats" on its enemies.

Shipping sources said at least two vessels reported that they came under fire and were hit as they tried to transit the waterway. India later said it summoned the Iranian ambassador in New Delhi and expressed deep concern to him that two Indian-flagged ships came under fire in the strait.

State media in Iran quoted the Supreme National Security Council as saying Iranian control over the strait included demanding the payment of costs related to security, safety and environmental

protection services.

State television also quoted the council as saying the U.S. put forward new proposals after talks mediated by Pakistan in recent days.

Tehran was considering them but had not yet responded, it said.

There was no immediate sign of direct U.S.-Iran talks taking place over the weekend, despite Trump saying Friday that negotiations would take place.

Tehran's renewed tough messaging caused fresh uncertainty around the conflict, raising the risk that oil and gas shipments through the strait could remain disrupted just as Washington weighs whether to extend the fragile ceasefire.

Trump said the U.S. was having "very good conversations" with Iran but Tehran wanted to close the strait again.

Maritime security and shipping sources said some merchant vessels received radio messages from Iran's navy saying no ships were allowed through the waterway, reversing Friday's signs that traffic might resume.

Maritime trackers earlier showed a convoy of eight tankers transiting the narrow passage in the first major movement of

ships since the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran began Feb. 28.

Iran announced it temporarily reopened the Strait of Hormuz after a separate U.S.-brokered 10-day ceasefire agreement Thursday between Israel and Lebanon. Israel invaded parts of Lebanon after the Iran-allied Hezbollah militant group joined the fighting in March.

But on Saturday Iran's armed forces command said transit through the strait reverted to strict Iranian military control, citing U.S. violations and acts of "piracy" under the guise of a blockade.

The spokesperson said Iran earlier agreed, "in good faith," to the managed passage of a limited number of oil tankers and commercial vessels following negotiations, but said continued U.S. actions forced Tehran to restore tighter controls on the strategic chokepoint, through which about a fifth of the world's oil supply typically transits.

U.S. Central Command said American forces were enforcing the maritime blockade of Iran but did not comment on the latest Iranian actions.

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Companies scramble for tariff refunds as system nears launch

More than 56K importers filed for total of \$127B as of April 9, customs officials say

TIMOTHY AEPPEL, NICHOLAS P. BROWN AND CHRISTOPHE STEITZ
Reuters

Jay Foreman said he's "locked and loaded" for the U.S. government's Monday launch of a new system to refund up to \$166 billion in illegally collected tariffs, but he and many other importers are realistic that much still could go wrong.

"You have to be worried about what they could possibly do to jam things up," said the CEO of toymaker Basic Fun, which sells Tonka trucks, Care Bears and K'Nex

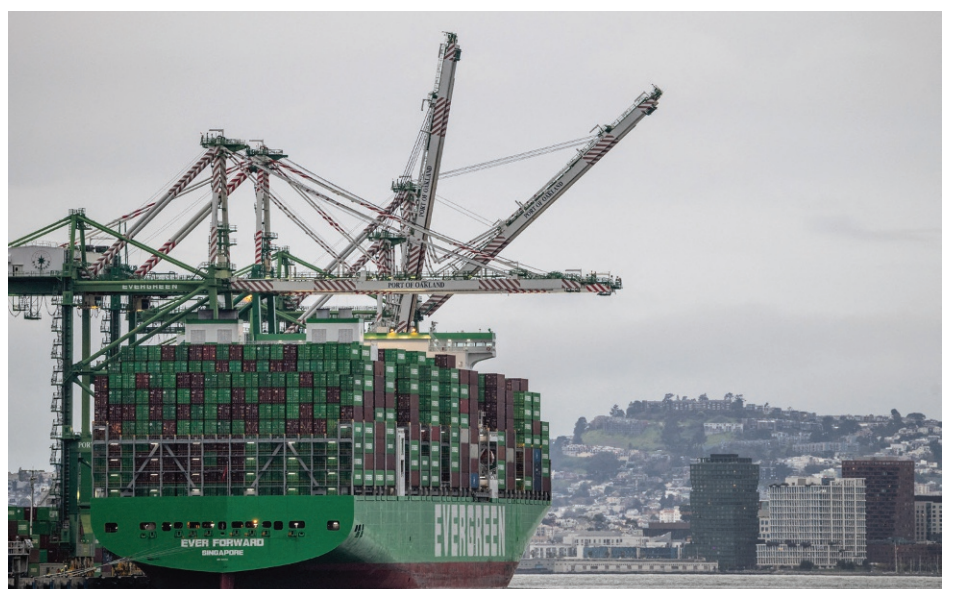
construction toys.

The refund system is the latest twist in a battle over tariffs collected over the past year as part of President Donald Trump's effort to restructure U.S. trade relations. The shifting tariffs roiled global business as companies rushed to shift supply chains to avoid the import taxes and figure out who ultimately would pay the levies.

In February, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the tariffs the Republican president pursued under a law meant for use in national emergencies.

In a court filing this past week, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said it completed development of the initial phase of the refund system, known as CAPE.

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CARLOS BARRIA, REUTERS

Shipping containers are stacked Feb. 24 on a cargo ship at the port in Oakland, Calif., following the Supreme Court's ruling that President Donald Trump exceeded his authority when he imposed many of his tariffs.