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Mysterious Blazes on Six Iranian Ships in Iranian Ports

Jerusalem Center - Iran Desk, June 12, 2019



Iranian boats, apparently large cargo Dhows, ablaze. (IRNA)¹

As the strategic port of Shahid Rajaei, north of the Strait of Hormuz, was still dealing with the effects of a huge fire that caused serious destruction, Iranian media reported² that six Iranian ships were ablaze in several ports in the southern part of the country.³

The *Iranian Republic News Agency* reported that on June 7, 2019, four merchant ships caught fire in the port of Nakhli Taqi (Taghi) in the Asaluyeh region of Bushehr Province. Three ships were burned entirely, while two others in Asaluyeh suffered major damage. While the governor of Asaluyeh claimed the fires were extinguished without anyone harmed, the head of the emergency rooms in Bushehr Province said that several civilians and sailors had been injured and brought to hospitals in the region. The mayor of the town of Delvar, near the port of Bualhir, confirmed that one vessel in the port burned completely.⁴

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The Farsi-language broadcasts on *Voice of America TV* from Washington referred to these cases as a "suspicious event" and noted that it occurred a month after four oil tankers were damaged off the port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates.⁶ *Euronews* in Persian made the connection between the mysterious fires that hit the Iranian ships and the sabotage on the shores of the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf.⁷

The mysterious fires occurred one day after the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Norway – whose ships were attacked near the Fujairah port on May 12, 2019 – submitted an initial report to the United Nations Security Council on June 6.⁸ The document called the tanker attack "sophisticated and coordinated," and said it was apparently carried out by a "state actor" with "significant operational capacity." The report – which the United States and France also helped prepare – did not specify the name of the state responsible. Although the UAE and Saudi Arabia initially blamed Iran for the attack, Iran was not mentioned in the document, possibly as part of the effort to calm the winds and enable diplomatic activity to allay U.S.-Iranian tension and perhaps even renew the negotiations between them. At the same time, the Saudi ambassador to the United Nations, Abdallah al-Mouallimi, declared, "We believe that the responsibility for this action lies on the shoulders of Iran. We have no hesitation making this statement."⁹

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U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and other officials expressed confidence that Iran was behind the attack near the Strait of Hormuz. Bolton, while visiting the United Arab Emirates, said, "There's no doubt in anybody's mind in Washington who's responsible for this." The operation, he added, was carried out with "naval mines almost certainly from Iran." The American fleet also closely monitored several Iranian ships, from which the attack was apparently conducted by divers from the navy of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGCN).

The United States may choose to reveal the plentiful information accumulated on Iran's direct responsibility for the oil tanker attacks off the port of Fujairah. At present, it still is not clear whether the burning of the Iranian boats is related, and constitutes, as several foreign media have hinted in Farsi, some kind of retaliation.