

The Iranian “oil convoy” confuses Lebanon.. Where will the “Nasrallah” ship dock and how will the state deal with it? | News

Lebanon is awaiting the arrival of the first Iranian ship loaded with oil derivatives, amid intense official confusion, which revealed – according to many – the fragility of coordination between state institutions and the Lebanese Hezbollah, after its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah announced, in his second speech in less than a week, the imminent sailing of an oil ship. A second Iranian to Lebanon within days.

At a time when Nasrallah included these two ships in the framework of the “oil convoy” towards Lebanon, which suffers from a shortage of fuel, he broadened the framework of the challenge by linking the economic, living and financial crises to a siege imposed by Washington on the Lebanese.

And if the Iranian ship’s sailing exacerbates regional polarization, following what was described as the tanker war between Iran and Israel off the Gulf of Oman, but it raises internally a number of questions about how Lebanon’s official dealings with Nasrallah’s announcement, the destination of the ship, the size of its cargo and the mechanism of its unloading, storage and distribution.

Confuse the Ministry of Energy

In an official position, Tehran announced on Monday, August 23, through Iranian government spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh, that it is ready to ship more fuel to Lebanon if necessary, and stressed that his country sells its oil and derivatives based on its decisions and the needs of its friends.

However, the General Directorate of Oil at the Lebanese Ministry of Energy has not yet received an official request for permission to enter the Iranian ship, according to what an official source indicates to Al-Jazeera Net. The Director General of Oil in the Ministry, Aurour Feghali, considered that the entry of Iranian ships requires a political decision, not just an administrative one.

Here, the former Director General of Investment at the Ministry of Energy, Ghassan Beydoun, points out that entering an oil ship requires fulfilling conditions, including: submitting an import license application, obtaining the approval of the General Directorate of Oil Installations before sailing, and authorizing the papers and documents that reveal the ship’s specifications and to whom it stores its cargo and how. Unloaded, and this did not happen with the Iranian ship.

Beydoun expects that the official authorities will seek to find a way out, such as the Minister of Energy giving an exceptional approval to it under the pretext of the urgent need for fuel, “but this case needs boldness and an official incubator for the political dimensions that the Iranian ship carries, both internally and regionally.”

Hezbollah’s options

Hezbollah is keen to maintain the secrecy of the ship’s path in order for the operation to reach its conclusion successfully, provided that three considerations are taken into account: political, legal and logistical.

Although Nasrallah had previously described the ship as “Lebanese land” to deter Israel and America from striking it or blocking its way at sea, the option of docking it at the Syrian port of Baniyas became possible, according to Lebanese sources, to prevent embarrassing the Lebanese state, so the search remains on how to bring it in by land. , whether through tankers or other roads, especially since Lebanese businessmen are among those brought in and prefer to cross by legal mechanisms.

The sources speculate that the first ship will carry more than 2 million liters of fuel, and that it will cross the Suez Canal directly towards the Mediterranean, and not through another route.

US sanctions

Since 2018, the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the US Department of the Treasury (OFAC) has imposed sanctions on anyone who makes deals with Iranian oil companies in order to buy, possess, sell, transfer, or market their derivatives, and US sanctions prevent any dealings with Iranian oil companies. Iran would provide it with resources, according to academic and legal expert Paul Morcos.

Morcos points out – in an interview with Al Jazeera Net – that there are still ambiguous dilemmas about Iranian ships, in terms of determining the form of the operation, if it is for the purpose of commercial dealings, for example, and by any Iranian oil company.

Morcos believes that the Iranian ships will expose Lebanon to US threats of sanctions, which requires the government to submit a special exemption request from the US Treasury, given the urgent need for fuel.

Here, the former Lebanese Minister of Justice Ibrahim Al-Najjar comments that the Lebanese state alone has the right to import oil and other materials, noting that the oil refineries are owned by the state, and therefore nothing can be brought to it without legitimate approval, and not through a Lebanese party.

Al-Najjar said – to Al-Jazeera Net – that since the announcement of the recruitment of the Iranian ship, Nasrallah has opened a path to challenge the Lebanese legitimacy, and that entering it without a license constitutes a clear violation of the law, which exposes Lebanon to UN sanctions and perpetuates its Arab isolation.

It is surprising – according to the former minister – that an official position was not announced, so that the recent Baabda meeting chaired by President Michel Aoun to discuss the fuel crisis, “did not mention the Iranian ship, and did not take a position, despite the sensitivity of the event.”

Hezbollah’s fronts

Politically, Nasrallah broke the official mechanisms used by importing Iranian diesel, according to the writer and political analyst Hussein Ayoub.

It seems that Nasrallah’s appearance twice within a week to talk about the Iranian ships conveys a message that contains Hezbollah’s determination not to retreat, in return for the pressure that America is exerting on it and its closest allies, according to Ayoub.

Ayoub describes – to Al Jazeera Net – the Lebanese authorities’ abuse of a “mass escape” from the Iranian ship, and everyone who is asked about the state does not have an answer about it, and

he talks about data about the Americans directing threats to each Lebanese party – according to its position in the official administration – dealing with Iran’s ships.

Ayoub believes that the ship’s cargo is likely to be unloaded in Syrian ports, specifically in Baniyas, given that Lebanon did not obtain the required customs and administrative approvals.

And if the cargo arrives in Syria, “it is not included in Hezbollah’s accounts to enter it into Lebanon through illegal crossings,” according to Ayoub, noting that “the party wished the state institutions to adopt the cargo by opening bank credits for it in Lebanese pounds.”

Accordingly, the political function of bringing in the Iranian ship is achieved as soon as the Americans enter the line and give a signal to bring in Jordanian electricity through Syria, provided that the power is generated through Egyptian gas, although the process requires several months, financing and negotiation with the Syrian authorities, according to Ayoub, while The issue of hydrocarbons is urgent and “requires the Americans to ask if they have a second recipe other than the Egyptian one.”

The political analyst believes that the recent decision to partially extend fuel subsidies, according to the price of 8,000 pounds to the dollar instead of 3,900 pounds, and a step back from the Central Bank of Lebanon’s decision to completely lift subsidies, “would not have happened without the American green light, because everyone wants to gain time that has become urgent.”

Ayoub said that the nature of the political price becomes clear after the arrival of Iranian fuels to Lebanon, and it may range between positive and negative, such as imposing US sanctions on Lebanese correspondent banks abroad, or pushing for the formation of a government that faces many obstacles, although it is the only way to put Lebanon on the path of recovery.

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