

Japan publishes further evidence of North Korean ship-to-ship activity



The Japanese government on Tuesday published further evidence of North Korean vessels engaged in ship-to-ship (STS) transfers on the high seas, a practice prohibited by UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions.

The posts on multiple government websites include photographs of the STS transfer taking place on the morning of February 24 between a North Korean ship and a vessel flying a Maldives flag.

“At midnight on February 24, 2018, a P-3C aircraft of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (Fleet Air Wing 1 P-3C: Kanoya) found that Chon Ma San, North Korean-flagged tanker, was lying alongside Xin Yuan 18, Maldivian-flagged tanker, on the high sea (around 250 km eastern offshore of Shanghai) in the East China Sea,” a post on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website read.

“Following a comprehensive assessment, the Government of Japan strongly suspects that they conducted ship-to-ship transfers banned by UNSCR,” it added.

The UNSCR 2375, unanimously adopted on September 11 last year, banned all

such STS transfers.

Member states are required to prohibit their nationals, entities or vessels flying their flags, “from facilitating or engaging in ship-to-ship transfers to or from DPRK-flagged vessels of any goods or items that are being supplied, sold, or transferred to or from the DPRK.”

Despite the resolution, the Japanese government has released evidence of such transfers on multiple occasions in January and February, with Tuesday’s update representing the fourth notice on the subject since the beginning of the year.

The STS transfers likely involve the transfer of oil products, which are also subject to caps under UNSC resolutions.

In response to emerging evidence of such practices continuing to take place, the U.S. Department of the Treasury on Friday imposed sweeping designations against one individual, 27 entities, and 28 ships.

The Chon Man San – the North Korean oil tanker photographed by Japan in Tuesday’s post – was one of the vessels designated on February 23, as was its registered DPRK owner, Korea Achim Shipping Co.

The other ship involved – the Xin Yuan 18 – is also an oil tanker. While flying the flag of the Maldives, it is owned by a Hong Kong company called Ha Fa Trade International.

According to company documents, Director Tang Yun Hui has a registered residential address in Hubei Province, China.

“Japan notified the Security Council Committee of this incident and shared information with related countries,” Tuesday’s statement from the MOFA reported. “Japan also expressed its interest to the Xin Yuan 18-related countries.”

Five entities from Hong Kong and two from China were among the Treasury designations handed down on Friday.

According to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, the sanctions imposed on Friday are intended to “significantly hinder the Kim regime’s capacity to conduct evasive maritime activities that facilitate illicit coal and fuel transports, and erode its abilities to ship goods through international waters.”

“We will do everything to stop these ship-to-ship transfers,” Mnuchin told the White House press corps during a briefing on the same day.

The U.S. Treasury also simultaneously published a ten-page advisory detailing North Korea’s maritime sanction evasion techniques, risk mitigation strategies, and ways to report suspicious DPRK vessel activity to the U.S. Coast Guard.

In the document is an image of the region off the coast of Shanghai in which STS transfers have been observed previously – consistent with Japan’s findings on Tuesday.

The document also warned of evasion techniques employed by North Korean vessels, which includes physical alterations being made to ships: including the practice of “painting over vessel names and IMO numbers with alternate ones.”

Evidence of such practices was also observed by Japan in the most recent case of a suspected STS transfer.

“Government of Japan confirmed that Chon Ma San erased its vessel name,” Tuesday’s statement by the Japanese MOFA read.

Featured Image: North Korean flagship tanker “Chon Ma San” and a Maldivian flagship tanker “Xin Yuan 18”, photographed around 22:30 on February 24 – Japan MOD

Source: <https://www.nknews.org/2018/02/japan-publishes-further-evidence-of-north-korean-ship-to-ship-activity/>

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