On January 12, 2016, it was reported by international media that two US Navy riverine command boats were seized by a unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iranian territorial waters and how the Iranians brought valiant American Marines to their knees, taking away their weapons. Tehran circulated a video of this detention of two boats with ten US Navy Marines, “boarded” without firing a single shot. According to the Pentagon’s report, one of the American ships had failed navigation equipment. The other boat rushed to assist but was spotted by an Iranian border patrol. The Islamic Republic’s “Mosquito Fleet” had no trouble blocking and disarming the Americans. However, Tehran made do with a light slap in the face, without escalating tension, although Washington, according to the General Staff of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, issued a formal apology.

And now, a new, hazardous incident took place on October 24-25 this year between Iran and the USA in the Gulf of Oman, a video of which was aired by Iran. As can be seen in the footage, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy thwarted an attempt by the US Navy to steal an Iranian oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman. The said confrontation followed the unprofessional behavior of the US warship in the southern waters of the Islamic Republic, which, as the
Iranian media noted, “was met with firm response by the IRGC fast boats.”

According to the Mehr News Agency, the United States detained a tanker carrying Iranian oil and began pumping the oil cargo to another ship, leaving in an unknown direction. It is stated that in response to the blatant pirating by the US Navy warship, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Special Forces were sent to the area, landed from helicopter on its deck, and interrupted the pumping of the hydrocarbons. “The IRGC naval forces carried out heliborne operation to thwart the attempted “oil piracy” by the US warship. The Iranian oil tanker was moved back to Iran territorial water,” Mehr News Agency reported on November 3. It is claimed that Iranian sailors were able to prevent a US attempt to “seize a giant oil tanker in the strategic Gulf of Oman and move the vessel into the territorial waters of a third country.” The US Navy, using several warships and helicopters, attempted to block the tanker’s path but again failed. The merchant vessel in question is currently in the territorial waters of the Islamic Republic, Mehr notes.

The video shows the IRGC encircling the Sothys tanker, using a Shahid Nazeri catamaran and a Bell 412 helicopter to land troops on the deck. Other videos on the Internet about the incident show the Arleigh Burke-type destroyers USS The Sullivans (DDG-68) and USS Michael P. Murphy (DDG-112) of the US Navy, operating in the region, arriving on the scene. At least one US Coast Guard cutter can also be seen in the footage (the US Navy sent two such ships to the Middle East earlier this year: USCGC Charles Moulthrope and USCGC Robert Goldman). The footage also shows an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, which could have been launched from an American warship, carrying two AGM-114 Hellfire missiles. The Iranian boats, actively maneuvering in the path of the American ships, forced them to turn around and head back. The stolen oil was safely returned to Iran.

The video of the incident circulated on the Internet shows the emotions of the American sailors. The details of the incident caught on camera are being actively discussed on the web. The reason for the jokes was the actions of US sailors who were frightened, as in the events of January 2016, of clashing with Iranian special forces, which were significantly inferior to the Americans both in numbers and firepower. What is then visible in the footage is a series of “very close encounters,” at least between The Sullivans destroyer, which came close to the Sothys tanker, and the Iranian warships. IRGC personnel are seen pointing deck-mounted machine guns at an American ship, although there is no evidence that any shots have been fired.

There are various bird’s-eye view shots of the entire incident, which may have been taken by Iranian manned aircraft or drones and which show numerous ships and small boats in the vicinity of the tanker. Although there is no indication of how close the US and Iranian vessels came to each other, it is clear that, at times, the distance between them was very short. In one episode of the confrontation, an IRGC gunboat is seen cutting the movement of The Sullivans destroyer right in front of its bow. Judging by the footage, the aircraft were unhindered by US warships.

According to the US news and analysis website The Drive, the said incident is an unprecedented clash between the two countries in the Persian Gulf. Iran accused the US of attempting to steal oil from a tanker in the Gulf of Oman. “Such incidents can be hazardous for all parties involved because of the risk of clashes. Larger ships such as the Arleigh Burke-type destroyers, which are over 150 meters long and have a displacement of over 8,000 tons, may not even see the smaller vessel and may have trouble stopping or otherwise maneuvering away from such vessels,” The Drive concludes.

The Iranian media reported that the US warship eventually left the scene.

The incident took place against the backdrop of Iran’s ongoing oil export embargo, which the United States imposed in November 2018 under President Donald Trump.

The US Army Command said the incident did occur on October 24-25. However, in its official statement, the Pentagon, as usual, substantially distorted the incident in its favor, claiming that Iranian troops had allegedly hijacked a private ship that was under the protection of the US Navy. The agency did not say why the US Navy had not taken any action to protect the ship. Neither could they reject the documentary video footage of US Navy piracy and its suppression by IRGC fighters, which has already been circulated on the web.

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