Massive cargo ship turns sideways, blocks Egypt's Suez Canal

24/03/2021 16:09 by admin

Tankers have started to pile up near the Suez Canal as they wait for the container ship to be moved.

Egyptian fishermen fish in front of a Maltese ship crossing the Suez Canal in Ismailia, Egypt. A massive cargo ship has turned sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal, blocking traffic in a crucial East-West waterway for global shipping, according to satellite data accessed Wednesday, March 24, 2021. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil, File)

Seven tug boats have come to the aid of a container ship that ran aground in the Suez Canal on Tuesday and blocked other vessels from transiting one of the worldâ€™s most important waterways. Shiptracking data on Refinitiv Eikon showed the tug boats surrounding the Rotterdam-bound vessel, which appeared in the tracking maps to still be grounded.

The 200,000-tonne vessel en route from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean ran aground at about 7:40 a.m. (05:40 GMT) on Tuesday after the ship suffered a blackout, port agents GAC said on its website. GAC said 15 other ships in the northbound convoy behind the vessel were detained at anchorages waiting for the canal to be cleared. A southbound convoy was also blocked, it said.

The container ship, the Ever Given, is 400 metres long (1,312 feet), 59 metres wide (193 feet), and can carry up to 20,000 20-foot equivalent (TEU) shipping containers.

The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) could not be immediately reached for comment.

Nearly 19,000 ships, or an average of 51.5 ships per day, with a net tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes passed through the canal during 2020, according to the SCA.

About 12% of the world trade volume passes through the man-made canal, which is a major source of hard currency for Egypt.

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â€œThis can have impact on freight very much. If it lasts longer, it can lead to shipment delays both ways,â€• said a Singapore-based ship broker.

The impact on oil and gas flows will depend on how long it takes to clear the container ship, industry sources said.

â€œIf it extends to, say, weeks it will of course disrupt all shipping in a major way,â€• said Ashok Sharma, managing director of Singapore-based shipbroker BRS Baxi.

â€œBut I think there should be sufficient resources available and pretty much in close proximity to deal with the situation quickly, in days rather than weeks,â€• Sharma said.

Two LNG tankers are stuck at the canal unable to pass through and by Thursday may swell to six, a second Singapore-based shipbroker.

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