

DISAPPEARING KURDISH OIL

The other day, a Houston judge threw out an order that would have prevented the sale of a tanker of Kurdish oil the Kurds and the central government were squabbling about.

The Kurdistan Regional Government can bring \$100 million of crude ashore in Texas after a U.S. judge threw out a court order that would have required federal agents to seize and hold the cargo for the Iraqi Oil Ministry until a court there decided which government owns it.

U.S. District Judge Gray Miller in Houston said he lacked authority under federal laws governing property stolen at sea to decide the dispute. Both Iraq's central government and the regional government claim control of 1 million barrels of Kurdish crude waiting in a tanker moored in international waters off the Texas coast for almost a month.

Miller ruled yesterday that Iraq's national oil ministry lost control of the crude when the Kurdish government pumped it without authorization from oilfields in the northern part of the country. Iraq failed to convince Miller that the oil was misappropriated when it was loaded into a tanker in the Mediterranean Sea after being pumped across Turkey in an Iraq-owned pipeline.

"Kurdistan's unauthorized export of oil over land -- and later overseas -- may violate Iraqi law, but it does not violate U.S. maritime law," Miller said.

After which you'd assume the tanker would come ashore and make the Kurds some money they can

use to fight ISIS, right?

That didn't happen. Instead, the tanker disappeared.

A tanker near Texas loaded with \$100 million of disputed Iraqi Kurdish crude has disappeared from satellite tracking, the latest development in a high stakes game of cat-and-mouse between Baghdad and the Kurds.

The AIS ship tracking system used by the U.S. Coast Guard and Reuters on Thursday showed no known position for the United Kalavrvta, which was carrying 1 million barrels of crude and 95 percent full when it went dark.

Several other tankers carrying disputed crude from Iran or Iraqi Kurdistan have unloaded cargoes after switching off their transponders, which makes their movements hard to track.

Read the whole article – there's apparently a lot of Kurdish oil disappearing, which makes sense given the legal fights over who owns it (not to mention US selectivity about when to enforce national rights, as we have in Libya of late, and when not to, as we're apparently not in Iraq).

Still, the prospect of buying and selling Kurdish oil off the books sure would free up money for other purposes (especially given Hunt Oil's involvement in Kurdish drilling, which happened with a great deal of winking and nodding).