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Israeli oil-spill ship shortlist narrows

Agencies identify two oil spills over past month but single out February 11 event as likely responsible for the closing of Israeli beaches after 1,000 tonnes of bunker fuel washed ashore on February 17

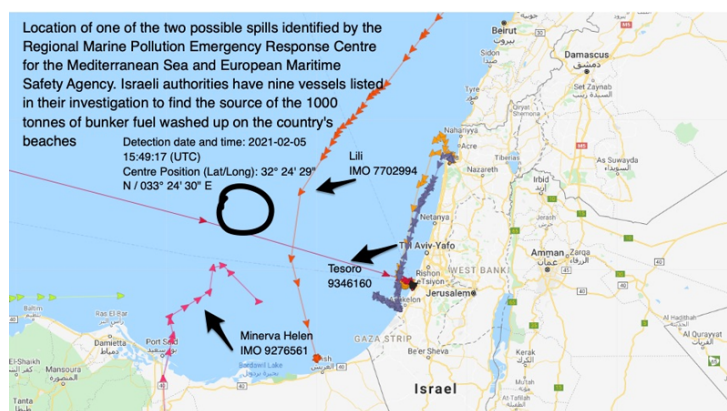
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Both locations suggest that aframax tanker **Minerva Helen**, named as one of the suspected vessels, was not responsible

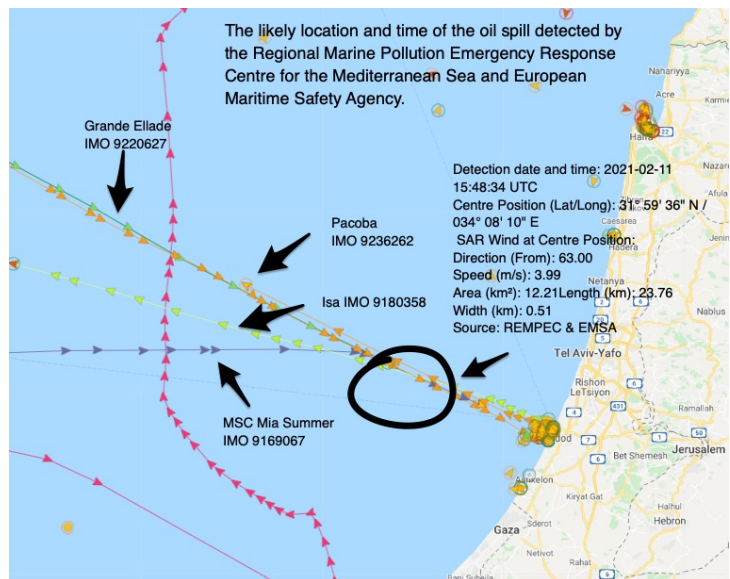


AGENCIES have identified the time and location of the spill likely responsible for dumping as much as 1,000 tonnes of bunker fuel on Israel's beaches, leading to widespread closures.

Vessel-tracking shows that the authorities using Automatic Identification System data can narrow their list of some nine vessels to the four or five vessels tracked around the area at the time, some 50 km (31 miles) off the port of Ashdod.

Not all ships would be captured if vessel-tracking responders were switched off, and there is no suggestion that any of those seen in the area at the time are responsible.

A Malta-based emergency response agency funded by the International Maritime Organization worked with the European Maritime Safety Agency using satellite images and wave patterns.



The co-ordinates and dates provided to Lloyd's List show that the vessel responsible was likely sailing to or from Ashod around February 11.

“There were two identified spills,” Malek Smaoui, from the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea, told Lloyd's List. “The potential spill is the one detected on February 11 and used by Emsa and REMPEC for respective predictions.

Israeli authorities initially had nine possible vessels to investigate based on both the first spill detected on February 5 and the second one on February 11.

Lloyd's List Intelligence data show the second spill location is regularly traversed by containerships,

ro-ro vessels, bulk carriers and tankers calling at the port. At least four ships were tracked in this area some 24 hours before and after.

None of the ships are operated by a Greek-owned tankers outfit, Minerva Marine, that has been linked to the oil spill, which first affected Israel's Mediterranean coastline and has now reached southern Lebanon.

Israeli public and private media reports said the hunt for the source of the spill had allegedly focused on 17-year-old aframax *Minerva Helen* (IMO: 9276561).

Minerva Marine, a longstanding player in the sector with a current fleet including 60 tankers, said in a statement that the allegations were “unfounded and inaccurate”.

It also provided a timeline for the tanker's movements, countering what appears to be information stemming from the official probe that positioned the tanker as leaving Port Said in Egypt on February 11 bound for Israel and leaking oil while more than 50 miles offshore.

More than 100 miles of beaches, including sensitive ecological areas, have been affected by the spill, according to Israeli reports.

Minerva denies tanker link to Israel oil spill

By Nigel Lowry

24 Feb 2021

Minerva Marine provides a timeline for *Minerva Helen*'s movements, countering what appears to be information stemming from the official investigation

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