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Turkey oil tanker logjam snarls Russia oil sanctions

ISTANBUL, Dec 9 (Reuters) - Turkey emerged as a critical stumbling block to a complex international plan to deprive Russia of wartime oil revenues as the number of tankers waiting to exit the Black Sea through Turkish straits continued to rise on Friday.

Ankara has declined to scrap a new insurance inspection rule it implemented at the beginning of the month despite days of pressure from Western officials.

A total of 28 oil tankers are in a queue seeking to leave the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, the Tribeca shipping agency said on Friday.

G7 wealthy countries, the European Union and Australia agreed to bar providers of shipping services, such as insurers, from helping export Russian oil unless it is sold at an enforced low price, or cap, aimed at depriving Moscow of wartime revenue.

Turkey's maritime authority said it would continue to keep out of its waters oil tankers that lacked appropriate insurance letters.

Western insurers said they could not provide the documents required by Turkey as it might expose them to sanctions if it emerged that the oil cargoes they covered were sold at prices that exceeded the cap.

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The Turkish authority said that in the event of an accident involving a vessel in breach of sanctions it was possible the damage would not be covered by an international oil-spill fund.

“(It) is out of the question for us to take the risk that the insurance company will not meet its indemnification responsibility,” it said, adding that Turkey was continuing talks with other countries and insurance companies.

It added the vast majority of vessels waiting near the straits were EU vessels, with a large part of the oil destined for EU ports - a factor frustrating Ankara's Western allies.

The Turkish authority said Turkey had plans for removing eight tankers that did not have P&I insurance waiting in the Marmara sea to cross the Dardanelles from its waters. These tankers would be escorted to cross the Dardanelles under additional measures after the strait is closed to maritime traffic, the statement said.

A shipping source said four of the tankers waiting to cross the Dardanelles were scheduled to go on Saturday with tug



escorts.

One Turkish-flagged tanker got a P&I insurance letter from an international P&I group member insurance company after Turkey first asked for insurance letters from oil tankers, and that tanker crossed the Bosphorus on Friday, the statement said.

The ship backlog is creating growing unease in oil and tanker markets. Millions of barrels of oil per day move south from Russian ports through Turkey's Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits into the Mediterranean.

KAZAKH OIL

Most of the tankers waiting at the Bosphorus are carrying Kazakh oil and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday the U.S. administration saw no reason that such shipments should be subjected to Turkey's new procedures.

Washington had no reason to believe Russia was involved in Turkey's decision to block ship transits, she added.

The European Commission said on Friday the delays were unrelated to the price cap and Turkey could continue to verify insurance policies in “exactly the same way as before”.

“We are therefore in contact with the Turkish authorities to seek clarifications and are working to unblock the situation,” a spokesperson told Reuters.

Turkey has balanced its good relations with both Russia and Ukraine since Moscow invaded its neighbour in February. It played a key role in a United Nations-backed deal reached in July to free up grain

exports from Ukrainian Black Sea ports.

Relations between NATO allies Ankara and Washington have at times been rocky, however, as Turkey last month renewed calls for the United States to stop backing Syrian Kurdish forces.

The Biden administration levied sanctions on Thursday on a prominent Turkish businessman Sitki Ayan and his network of firms, accusing him of acting as a facilitator for oil sales and money laundering on behalf of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Russia has targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure in recent weeks, leaving millions without heating and electricity. The head of Ukraine's state energy company Ukrenergo, Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, said more than 1,000 missiles and drones had hit the country's energy systems since October.

Ukraine's atomic power agency on Friday accused Russian forces of abducting two senior Ukrainian staff at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station and detaining a third.



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OPEC+ oil output cut shows widening rift between Biden and Saudi royals

WASHINGTON/LONDON, Oct 7(Reuters) - The OPEC+ organization's decision this week to cut oil production despite stiff U.S. opposition has further strained already tense relations between President Joe Biden's White House and Saudi Arabia's royal family, once one of Washington's staunchest Middle East allies, according to interviews with about a dozen government officials and experts in Washington and the Gulf.

The White House pushed hard to prevent the OPEC output cut, these sources said. Biden hopes to keep U.S. gasoline prices from spiking again ahead of midterm elections in which his Democratic party is struggling to maintain control of the U.S. Congress. Washington also wants to limit Russia's energy revenue during the Ukraine war.

The U.S. administration lobbied OPEC+ for weeks. In recent days, senior U.S. officials from energy, foreign policy and economic teams urged their foreign counterparts to vote against an output cut, according to two sources familiar with the discussions.

Amos Hochstein, Biden's top energy envoy, along with national security official Brett McGurk and the administration's special envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking, traveled to Saudi Arabia last month to discuss energy issues, including the OPEC+ decision.

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They failed to prevent an output cut, just as Biden did after his own July visit.

US officials "tried to position it as 'us versus Russia,'" said one source briefed on the discussions, telling Saudi officials they needed to make a choice.

That argument failed, the source said, adding that the Saudis said that if the United States wanted more oil on the markets, it should start producing more of its own.

The United States is the world's No. 1 oil producer and also its top consumer, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.



The Saudi government media office CIC did not respond to Reuters emailed requests for comment about the discussions.

"We are concerned first and foremost with the interests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and then the interests of the countries that trusted us and are members of OPEC and the OPEC + alliance," Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz told Saudi TV Wednesday.

OPEC weighs its interests with "those of the world because we have an interest in supporting the growth of the global economy and providing energy supplies in the best way," he said.

Washington's handling of the Iran nuclear deal and withdrawal of support for a Saudi-led coalition's offensive military operations in Yemen have upset Saudi officials, as have actions against Russia after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A U.S. push for a price cap on Russian oil is causing uncertainty, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV after the OPEC cut, noting the "lack of details and the lack of clarity" about how it will be implemented.

A source briefed by Saudi officials said the kingdom views it as "a non-market price-control mechanism, that could be used by a cartel of consumers against producers."

A Biden-directed sale of 180 million barrels of oil in March from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve put downward pressure on oil prices. In March, OPEC+ said it would stop using data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), a Western oil watchdog, due to Saudi-led concerns the United States had too much influence.

Editor's Choice



Ethiopia's Werkuha Getachew celebrates winning the women's 3000m steeplechase at Diamond League, Monaco. REUTERS/Eric Gaillard



A member of Peru's Congress displays a Peruvian flag after Congress approved the removal of President Pedro Castillo, in Lima, Peru, December 7. REUTERS/Sebastian Castaneda



People dressed as Santa Claus take part in the Nikolaus Lauf (Saint Nicholas run), in the streets of Michendorf, Germany, December 4. REUTERS/Lisi Niesner



A Ukrainian serviceman jumps from a military vehicle near a frontline in Mykolaiv region, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, Ukraine. REUTERS/Anna Kudriavtseva



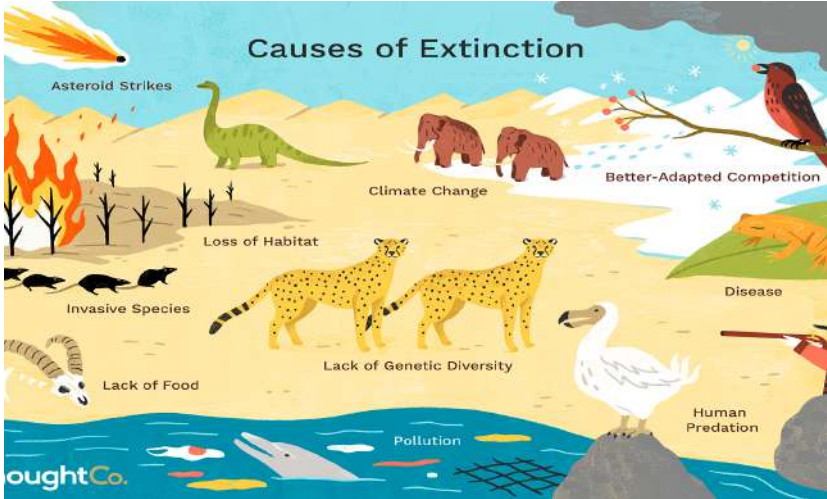
France's President Emmanuel Macron makes a toast, as the Bidens host the Macrons for a State Dinner at the White House, in Washington, December 1. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein



An interior view of the prison building which was damaged by shelling in July in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict, in the settlement of Olenivka in the Donetsk Region, Ukraine, in this picture taken during a media tour organized by the Russian Defence Ministry. REUTERS/Alexander Ermochenko

Coffee, Wine, And Wheat Varieties Are Among The Foods We Could Lose Forever

The Extinction Crisis That No One Is Talking About



Key Point

Supply chain challenges and inflation spikes in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic have now been joined by growing and documented concerns for the potential extinction of endangered foods and the lack of food choices along with the diversity of foods as well as the nutritional values they represent that are in serious danger of disappearing from the global marketplace. Scientific observers are now saying it is time to act and make efforts to bring diversity back into the food system while being motivated by the health of society.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Your morning coffee is in a perilous state. There are just two species of coffee plants on which the entire multibillion-dollar industry is based: One of them is considered poor-tasting, and the other, which you're likely familiar with, is threatened by climate change and a deadly fungal disease. Thankfully, there's another kind of coffee out there, known as stenophylla. It has a higher heat tolerance, greater resistance to certain fungal pathogens, and it tastes great. There's just one problem: It's incredibly rare, and until recently, scientists believed it was extinct. Stenophylla is just one of dozens of important foods that are threatened with extinction, according to Dan Saladino, a BBC journalist and author of the new book, "Eating to Extinction: The World's Rarest Foods and Why We Need to Save Them." While grocery stores may seem as abundant as ever, Saladino argues that the diversity of food is actually in decline. Of the hundreds of thousands of wheat varieties that farmers once cultivated, for example, only a handful are now farmed on a large scale, he told Vox. As we grow and harvest fewer varieties of plants

and animals, the foods you can buy in the grocery store may become less nutritious and flavorful, and — as the current state of coffee demonstrates — the global food system could become less resilient. That's why it's so crucial to lift up communities that are protecting foods from disappearing, Saladino told Vox in an interview about his new book. The important conversation that followers was held between author Dan Saladino and Vox.com interviewer Benji Jones and pinpoints the food diversity challenges that face us all. Grocery stores may be stocked, but the variety of food is in decline



Benji Jones

BUSINESS

pull nutrients out of the air. (Photo/Allen Van Deyn et. al/PLOS Biology)

Why should we care? If we understand how this plant works, could we potentially use it to reduce our use of fertilizer globally? We know there is a way in which some plants are feeding themselves. We need to give thanks to the Indigenous people who have looked after this maize for centuries, if not thousands of years.

Benji Jones

A wider variety of crops also makes our food system more resilient to threats like disease and climate change, right?

Dan Saladino

That's another really important lesson. I traveled to eastern Turkey to get as close as I could to the Fertile Crescent, where wheat was first domesticated. I found farmers who had saved a type of emmer wheat that had been growing for 8,000 to 9,000 years. It's been growing in high altitudes where it's damp.

If you put a modern wheat variety in that environment, fungal diseases would ruin the crop. And so what they have in Turkey is a precious genetic resource that has forms of resistance, such as to fungal pathogens.



A field of kavalica, or emmer, wheat. (Dan Saladino)

You can also find those principles of disease resilience among ancient varieties of rice and maize — really, in all of the crops. Over thousands of years, our ancestors created these adaptations through farming under different conditions.

What we've done since is create these incredibly high-performance plants that need specific conditions to grow, and a lot of inputs, like fertilizer. Each wheat or maize plant is almost a clone, whereas in traditional farming, there's a huge amount of genetic diversity in the field. If you get a bad summer or too much or too little rain, some of those traditional varieties are still going to bear grains because there is diversity within the crops.

You can breed out bitterness, but you might lose deliciousness

Benji Jones

Is there a flavor extinction happening as well?

Dan Saladino

Absolutely. I tell the story of a type of wild citrus from northern India called memang narang. It has a cultural, culinary, and medicinal function, but the striking thing is how bitter these fruits are. The people who live here place huge value

on bitterness, a flavor that's disappearing from most of our palates. Fruit breeders, over centuries, have been ingenious at giving us something that we love: sweetness. They have bred out the bitterness.

When you realize that the bitter taste comes from compounds that help plants protect themselves from pests, then you understand why it might be beneficial to retain that flavor. We've taken the beneficial bitter compounds out, and we've cloaked plants in pesticides and other chemicals to protect them.



A type of rare coffee, Coffea stenophylla. (Getty Images)

Another example comes from coffee. We live in a world where we can enjoy a lot of different types of arabica coffee. There's robusta as well. But these are just two of more than a hundred different types of coffee around the world.

Historically, there were cultures in parts of Africa that had more distinctive types of coffee, including one called stenophylla that was prized in parts of East Africa up until the 1960s, when it pretty much went extinct because farming systems changed. It has greater disease resistance than arabica. And arabica is under pressure now because of climate change — it's an extremely delicate plant. Stenophylla offers the benefit of disease resistance, and it's an amazing-tasting coffee.

Coffee as we know it is in danger. Can we breed a better cup?

Benji Jones

Another example that helps explain the decline of flavor comes from a region of France, home to the Salers cow. It really shows the connection between biodiversity and flavor, right?

Dan Saladino

"Salers" is a place, a breed of cow, and a cheese. Farmers would take their cattle in the spring and summer to [mountain] places where the pasture is richest, often ending up in remote places. It was a monastic experience; they were up there living a solitary life. At the end of the summer, the cheese would end up back down in the village. It's this mind-blowing process that highlights the power of cheese: The pasture captures the energy of the sun, the animals convert the pasture into milk and cheese, and the villagers then eat the cheese during the winter when other foods are running out.

(Article Continues Below)

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

Coffee, Wine, And Wheat Varieties Are Among The Foods We Could Lose Forever

The Extinction Crisis That No One Is Talking About

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Dan Saladino

The remarkable thing is that the pasture is so rich in microbes that these farmers don't even need a starter culture to coagulate the milk and turn it into cheese. As soon as the milk hits these wooden barrels, it's inoculated with microbes. For a modern health inspector, it would be a nightmare to watch. We've been talking about the endangered genetics of crops and endangered tastes. Here, we're talking about endangered microbes that are not only missing from the cheese making process, but also from our gut microbiomes.



A breed of cattle called Salers in the Cantal region of France. (Photo/Andia/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Benji Jones

You also explain that when these cows have access to a wide diversity of plants in the pasture, their milk and cheese end up tasting richer. That's because different grasses have different types of defense chemicals called terpenes, which can translate to flavor in the milk.

Dan Saladino

Terpenes can be found in milk from rich pastures, but not in cheese made from cattle that have been fed on grains. We're only beginning to understand the connections between biodiversity and our food and our health and our flavors.

Benji Jones

You traveled the world sampling all of these foods with unique flavors. What were some that stood out?



Dan Saladino

Skerpijot is this food from the Faroe Islands. There's not enough sunlight or firewood there to produce salt to preserve food. People instead built these huts that have gaps that allow the sea air in. They raise sheep and hang the meat in these huts, which gets bathed by the salty air and slowly fermented and preserved. It doesn't look like food. It's covered in mold. It needs to be washed. It's almost as if this sheep meat is gently rotting away in these huts, but actually, the conditions are exactly right so it doesn't rot or become too funky. It becomes this wonderful preserved meat.

Benji Jones

You also have an incredible chapter about a type of wine in the country Georgia, which you explain is where some of the world's first — or the first — winemakers were practicing their craft.

Dan Saladino

Georgia is the most likely country in which grapes were domesticated and the first winemakers were practicing their craft. They have a technology that predates the barrel by thousands of years — the qvevri. These are terracotta vessels that you bury underground with whole branches of grapes with skin and pips [seeds] inside. Many people think France and Italy and Spain and California are great wine-producing regions. Here is a place where the relationship with wine just goes up another level. There is a reverence and spiritual dimension to wine drinking.



A workshop where Georgian qvevri are being made. (Photo/Dan Saladino) Our relationship with food mirrors our relationship with nature

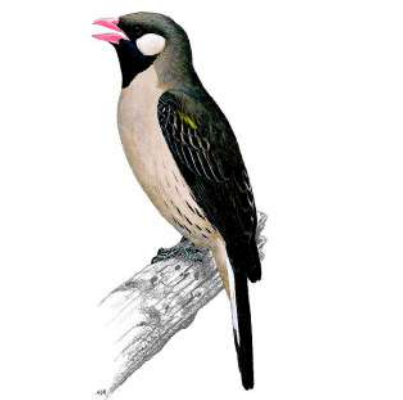
Benji Jones

In your book, you talk about how losing certain foods isn't just about losing resilience, flavor, and culture, but also about our changing relationship with nature. You explain that some groups, like the Hadza people of Tanzania, are deeply connected to their environment through food — and by losing certain foods, we may be losing these connections.

Dan Saladino

The Hadza story brilliantly sums that up. I followed some of these hunter-gatherers out within a landscape of baobab trees. In those trees, some of which are a thousand years old, you can find bees' nests and one of the greatest prizes the Hadza can find: honey. It's an extremely important food — and their favorite food — but it's hard for them to find the hives high up in the trees.

The Hadza whistle, and after a period of time, if they're lucky, a very humble-looking bird will fly down. The bird will start a "conversation" with the hunter-gatherers and lead them to a tree with honey. The bird knows where the honey is, whereas the hunter-gatherers have the fire and the smoke to get rid of the bees, which are a risk for the bird. The Hadza can go up, extract the honey, and then leave something behind for the birds.



An illustration of a greater honeybird

eyguide. (Photo/Brown Bear/Windmill Books/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.)

Toward the end of the Hadza visit, we went to a mud and brick hut, and inside there were cans and cans of soda. This was a source of sugar and energy that could mean that they no longer use that skill to find honey within our lifetimes — something so fundamentally important to human history could disappear.

Benji Jones

Do we run the risk of glorifying some of these older cultures? Don't some of these groups want soda — or access to health care, or other benefits that come with Western or modern life?

Dan Saladino

There's story after story of another culture coming in and imposing its food and



A man dries a rare, prized type of Venezuelan cacao called criollo. (Photo/Dan Saladino)

This also needs to be dealt with on a much larger scale. I was inspired by stories of cities, such as Copenhagen, where schools use diversity as a criterion for the contracts they're issuing to farmers: Don't just give me the cheapest apples — give me a choice of apples, and we will reward you. That's also happening in Brazil. Over the last few decades, they've had a policy that requires schools to source 30 percent of ingredients from local family farms.

These levers do exist for governments to make a big, significant change. I also think we have the most selfish reasons to embrace diversity — our own health. We know what's happening in many parts of the world, in terms of type 2 diabetes, cancers, and other diseases that have a food dimension. Perhaps we will be motivated by health to try and bring diversity back into the food system. The science says we need to. (Courtesy vox.com)