

Questions Remain on Shipment of Tanks to Africa

Where were they going and who sent them?

By [Global Research](#)

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Faina freed, but questions remain

Russia Today

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The crew of the Ukrainian ship Faina that had been hijacked by Somali pirates for more than four months has landed in Kiev airport. President Viktor Yushchenko has greeted the crew personally.

The ship has been released after a \$US 3.2 million [ransom was parachuted](#) onto its decks last week.

The Belize-flagged Faina then set sail on Saturday for Kenya with a US military escort and US Navy commandos on board to provide security.

Overall, the pirates, who initially demanded a \$US 35 million ransom, had to lower their ambitions though they controlled the vessel from September 25, 2008 to February 5, 2009.

On Thursday, February 12 Faina docked in Mombasa.

The only casualty a Russian

The crew was greeted at the port by Ukrainian officials and then spoke briefly with journalists before being taken away for a medical screening.

"There were a lot of difficulties, negotiations about our liberation and about the liberation of the vessel," said acting captain Viktor Nikolsky who, like other crew members, is set to finally return home Friday morning.

Nikolsky took over the ship after Faina's captain, Vladimir Kolobkov, died following [a heart attack](#) just days after his ship's hijacking.

While the cause of his death has yet to be confirmed, the fate of Kolobkov's body has not been made clear either.

Following Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov's request, his Ukrainian counterpart, Vladimir Ogryzko, promised to ensure that Ukrainian officials bring the body of Faina's late captain to Kiev, should they get permission from Kenyan authorities.

The Russian ambassador in Nairobi, Valery Yegoshkin, is working on issuing a death

certificate and acquiring permission at this moment.

The rest of the crew, 17 Ukrainians, two Russians and a Latvian, are said to be in good health. However, the latter statement probably needs a confirmation following the results of medical screenings, especially following unconfirmed reports of an [attempt to regain](#) the hijacked ship by its crew.

Cargo in place, but for whom?

Its valuable and deadly cargo – 33 [T-72 tanks](#), grenade launchers and a large amount of ammunition – is still aboard ship, according to Ukrainian officials.

Andriy Honcharuk, deputy head of the Ukrainian Presidential Administration and a member of the delegation welcoming the Faina crew at the Kenyan port of Mombassa, has denied allegations that some of Faina's military cargo disappeared on the way to Kenya.

"All armaments and military hardware are in place," he told Interfax on Thursday.

The Somali pirates clearly prefer to buy their own arms from the money received as a ransom.

These tanks and ammunition – as the Ukrainians claim – were destined for the Kenyan military. On Friday, according to a spokesman for the Kenyan government, the cargo will be unloaded and, in the near future, handed to the Kenyan armed forces.

Meanwhile, some experts are convinced that these weapons are bound to reach Sudan, which was one of the [‘hot spots’ in the 2008](#) and is still caught in the fifth year of civil instability (active military action halted three years ago).

The Russian press hinted that the battle tanks on the Faina may have been paid for [by the U.S.](#) itself and intended for use by militant groups in South Sudan.

Also, as the International Crime Court having issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir, the country is subject to an international arms embargo.

A parliamentary commission in Ukraine claims the country's President, Viktor Yushchenko, is involved in [illegal arms sales](#) and oil-rich Sudan remains a likely arms recipient despite the embargo.

The BBC has published an alleged freight manifest from Faina, with a contract number containing MOD/GOSS initials that could mean Ministry of Defense/Government of South Sudan.

Though the Kenyan government has dismissed these claims, citing a minor division of Kenyan Defense Ministry with a similar acronym, the real destination of Faina's cargo is still in question.

The Horn of troubles

Talking to RT in December, Somalia's Ambassador to Russia, Mohammed Mahmud [Handule repeated](#) that the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea are parts of a massive maritime transport route through which most oil from Arab countries, like Iran, Iraq, as well as other goods, are

shipped.

He also noted that the presence of pirates near the Horn of Africa is an excellent cover for many illegal activities.

“It’s convenient to write everything off to the pirates’ presence, Handule believes, adding, “the phenomenon of piracy in Somalia is unique in itself – it is artificially created. ‘Somali pirates’ are just hired for the job and get their salaries.”

According to East African Seafarer’s Assistance Program, the number of pirates in Somalia today is around 1,100, up ten-fold from the 2005 figure. According to the UN, Somali pirates carried out at least 120 attacks on ships in 2008, resulting in an overall yield of around \$150 million.

Some 20 warships from the navies of at least 10 countries, including Russian warships such as [the Neustrashimy](#), are involved in anti-piracy operations off Somalia. The country, ravaged by 20 years of [civil war](#), has no functioning government and is no position to combat piracy on its own.

[Ruben Zarbabyan](#), RT

U.S. Military Targets: Next Stop – Sudan

Russia Today
January 28, 2009

The plans of the new U.S. administration to put diplomacy ahead of military solutions in its foreign policy is all over the world media. There may be exceptions: the war in Afghanistan is going to intensify. In Somalia, there will be a fight with the pirates. And then there is Sudan.

Very little is said these days about this conflict zone with a prospective U.S. military angle.

However, just a few months ago, when Barack Obama was still busy with his electoral campaign and George Bush, in the spare time from his own campaigning, kept carrying the burdens of power, the signs of attention – articles, documentaries and news reports on Sudan – started appearing in the world media.

It is strange how there hadn’t been all that much information about the African country before. It is strange how abruptly the flow of information stopped in early December, after it was established that the Ukrainian battle tanks onboard the freighter Faina, captured by the Somali pirates, may have been intended for Sudan.

In the pre-New Year blast of data and opinions on Sudan, which somehow fizzled out by mid-December, there was a lot of emphasis put on the warrant of arrest, expected to be issued by the International Criminal Court, for the President of Sudan Omar Al-Bashir, who has been in office for the past nineteen years. For the last three years he has been at the helm of a coalition government composed of his supporters in a fair proportion with his former civil war enemies from the South.

Amazingly, when the warrant came out in January, the world media hardly noticed it at all.

Even if I suggest that the Great Spin Machine stopped for a long Christmas holiday, what was that other mechanism, the Mean Green Machine of the U.S. military, planning or doing about Sudan? The only piece of information available, and pure hearsay at that, is the story that when the mediators proposed, on behalf of the owners of the vessel, to unload the cargo of tanks from the pirate-held 'Faina,' the U.S. Navy threatened to sink the vessel.

The Russian press (Kommersant, 12.12.2008) hinted that the battle tanks on the 'Faina' may have been paid for by the U.S. and intended for the use by the militant groups in the South of Sudan which America is allegedly going to turn into something like Afghanistan's Northern Alliance. That may or may not be true. The fact is, the civil war of the Sudanese South against the Sudanese North ended three years ago on a very pleasant note for the South. It was agreed that in 2011 there will be a referendum which will decide if the South stays with Sudan or becomes an independent nation.

For the South Sudanese, therefore, there is no direct interest in going to war again. However, they consider themselves 'cousins' of the new U.S. president, because Barack Obama's father belongs to a tribe that used to live in the South of Sudan and moved to Kenya only recently. Maybe that could have become a reason enough for some armed groups in the South of Sudan to accept the role of an arrowhead in a future American operation?

But what is going to be the target? The long civil war was for the oil wells in South Sudan and the untapped resources of Darfur, an area the size of France covering the western parts of both Sudanese North and partly - South. The oil stays with the South if it secedes from Sudan, so it's just a matter of a couple of years before the international community can start developing oil deposits to international standards - and receive an additional source of fuel for its needs.

With Darfur the situation is different. It remains Sudanese and inherits from the South its role of natural opposition to the government of Omar Al-Bashir, simultaneously holding most of the country's natural resources which are so far at the complete disposal of the central government in Khartoum. But - there is a catch: the resources stay undisturbed by anyone, because there is an ongoing war in Darfur, a war between the Arabs of the North united in a government-sponsored militia, and the Africans of Darfur, and a great many living in refugee camps after their villages have been burned down.

The war in Darfur is a cruel and violent African conflict, with rape always accompanying murder. It is one of those conflicts that never fail to cause a strong emotional reaction in those who learn the details. Then again, it's one of those ethnic conflicts about which the international community usually can do next to nothing. Except this time things may turn out to be different, but that war has many faces.

To Khartoum it is a clash of two ethnic groups which, since 2003 when it started, has killed over 10,000 people. To the U.S. Congress it's a case of genocide, with 300,000 victims. The UN or any other international organization hasn't named it genocide so far but the 300,000 figure comes from UN aid workers and NGO members hired for fact finding missions by various UN bodies. The International Criminal Court definitely sees genocide there if it issues an arrest warrant on these grounds for the incumbent president of an independent nation.

Sudan is the biggest country in Africa, and it is also a place where two worlds meet: the Arab world and the African world. The Arabs populate the North, the Africans (a multitude of tribes and ethnic groups) live in the South – and many Southerners displaced by the civil war live in camps in the North and in Darfur. In Darfur the population is both Arab and African. Historically, it is hard to expect lasting peace between ethnic groups totally different in everything from skin colour to religion and culture, and the history of Sudan confirms that.

It is also hard to imagine, again from the point of view of history, that a certain mechanism of co-existence would not emerge from the time these ethnic groups have lived side by side. It does exist, for if it didn't, there would be no end to the civil war, and it would not have ended in such a satisfactory way for the both sides. The South enjoys a wide autonomy and is getting ready for the referendum of 2011, while the North gets an equal share in oil income.

So, may there be ways to solve the Darfur problem as well? In the UN opinions differ. In the United States and in the International Criminal court they do not. Days after the U.S. election a Democratic think tank, which included many veterans of the Clinton administration, issued a letter of advice to then President-elect Barack Obama in which, in the chapter devoted to foreign policy, the next president was urged to fight genocide in the world by all possible means. There was also a notion in the letter that the U.S. must not neglect the problems of Africa.

Officials of the Khartoum government routinely call the efforts of the International Criminal court against president Al-Bashir part of an American plot against Sudan. Taking into consideration all the above, it may not be just domestic propaganda. At the very least, it is clear that the arrest warrant issued for the Sudanese president on the grounds of suspected masterminding genocide and ethnic cleansing in his country, can be a perfect pretext for an invasion and 'regime change.'

As in Darfur, where the genocide is allegedly happening, there is no such African ethnic force that could become an ally of the U.S. against the government in Khartoum. It is logical for the U.S. to turn to the only strong non-government (and formerly anti-government) force that exists in the country: the Sudan People's Liberation Movement which represents most of the Southern armed groups that fought in the civil war. They can easily become a 'Northern Alliance' or, to be geographically correct, the 'Southern Alliance' of Sudan.

The Southern armies are combat-ready and have experience of a war that lasted over 20 years. They may lack hardware, but that is not a problem for anyone who becomes a U.S. ally. They lack air support too, but that is not a problem either.

There's a question I'd like to ask – would they be willing, after a mere three years of peace, to go back to war for U.S. interests? Their own interests are provided by the peace treaty signed with the North and by the very fact of the existence of the coalition government in Khartoum. In addition: does America, or anyone else, have the moral right to drag these people into yet another war when they are just getting the taste of the fruits of peace?

Maybe just one more: is it possible to try solving the Darfur problem by joint diplomatic and political efforts of the main power centers of the modern world? Could the U.S. – together with Russia, China, India, with UN permission – put enough pressure on Khartoum to find out, once and for all, the real picture of the events in Darfur, and to make the government of

Sudan solve the issue?

Starting wars and changing regimes may be easier than that. Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that finishing a war is much harder than starting it.

Anyway, now it is the end of January and the Great Spin Machine seems to be as indifferent to Sudan as it was in the last week of 2008. Maybe things are changing?

Maybe the world economic crisis presented America with a choice: no two wars at a time, so is it Afghanistan or Sudan? America certainly answered 'Afghanistan,' because its interests there need daily protection, while an operation in Sudan would be more ideologically-based than implemented for the sake of straight national interest.

Maybe the Obama team means it when it speaks of diplomacy, not war, as the first echelon of foreign policy. Or maybe one day we will hear again about Sudan becoming a military target because of the human rights record of its president. If it happens, the spin will come first. Let's look out for an avalanche of media information on Sudan – that will be the sign!

At this point, let me depart and apologize for telling you a story of a future war instead of a past one as promised.

Evgeny Belenkiy, RT.

'Ukraine laundered billions in arms trade'

Russia Today
December 9, 2008

Ukraine's government has been accused of illegally trading in arms by its own parliamentary commission. An inquiry was launched to investigate whether laws were broken in the selling of weapons to Georgia. The head of the commission says President Viktor Yushchenko forced officials into damaging Ukraine's own interests.

After more than three months of investigation into arms trading between Ukraine and Georgia, the Rada commission says it's ready to make its results public. According to its head, Valery Konovaluk, the main conclusion is that Kiev sold offensive and defensive weaponry to Tbilisi at a fraction of their real value.

"The weaponry was sold at a highly reduced price. And revenues from the deals never made it to the state budget," Konovaluk said.

Konovaluk's investigation has been making waves in Ukraine since September, when the first talk of Ukraine arming Georgia prior to August's military action came up. The deputy revealed that several air-defence missile systems were shipped to the conflict zone straight from military bases in the west of the country. And allegedly the shipments were personally sanctioned by President Yushchenko. After travelling to Tskhinval, the commission says it found proof that it wasn't only Ukrainian arms which were involved in the conflict.

"The most burning issue for us was to reveal whether any Ukrainian took part in the military

action. This not only brings more pressure on our leader's involvement in the war, but also contradicts the will of our people. But here's the list of the people who operated Ukrainian missile systems in Georgia during the conflict," says Konovaluk.

Officially Kiev hasn't reacted to the allegations, but the defence ministry says all weapon sales are legal. But according to Konovaluk, no matter what is being said now, Ukraine's defence forces have been shortchanged by the deals.

"When President Yushchenko signed a decree to sell air-defence systems to Georgia, the Russian Rosoboronexport company was offering to modernize our production lines. We could have received better weaponry and also created more jobs at our weapon factories. But when Russia learnt that Kiev secretly sold arms to Georgia, it reversed its unprecedented offer," Konovaluk said.

This is a great loss, Konovaluk says, given the condition of Ukraine's army, which he describes as crippled.

Meanwhile, the cargo ship Faina with Ukrainian weapons onboard is still being held by Somali pirates. Some sources claim part of the shipment wasn't headed to Kenya, but to Southern Sudan, which is subject to an arms embargo. Should this prove correct, Kiev could face a serious international scandal.

Information leak allowed Faina seizure

As the crew of the released cargo ship Faina has arrived in Ukraine, scandalous details concerning the alleged information leak have surfaced. The vessel loaded with heavy weaponry was released last week after almost five months of captivity.

Russian daily Kommersant reports pirates received a phone call from the Ukrainian port of Odessa prior to the capture. The phone number, though, belongs to a Georgian cell operator, Ukrainian security services told Kommersant under the condition of anonymity. They also said that pirates got \$US 4 million in ransom instead of \$US 3.2 million reported earlier.

According to the paper, information leaks occurred in the course of the four months of Faina's captivity and were from a high-ranking source.

Kommersant also reports there were attempts by foreign intelligence to protract release talks in order to squeeze Ukraine from the African weapons market. A document the daily managed to get hold of does not specify the countries, but its unnamed source claims Russian security services were involved.

The intervention of Ukraine's political parties allegedly hampered the talks with the pirates. Originally they demanded \$US 2 million, but when the ransom was raised pirates were informed that the Ukrainian authorities were ready to pay more and the deal failed.

Faina, carrying 33 tanks, grenade launchers and a large amount of ammunition onboard, was captured on September 25, 2008 in the Indian Ocean. On February 3 a ransom was paid and the ship freed. On Thursday it reached the Kenyan port of Mombassa from where the

crew was then flown to the Ukrainian capital Kiev.

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