

# AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR: BULK CARRIER STRUCK BY A MISSILE OFFSHORE ROMANIA

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## A. Executive Summary

- On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September a missile struck a Saint Kitts and Nevis-flagged bulk carrier AYA whilst en route from Ukraine to Turkey. At the time of the strike, the vessel was in the Romanian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
- This incident marks the first direct missile attack on a merchant vessel in the Black Sea since November 2023.
- It also represents the first instance of non-sea mine-related physical damage to a merchant vessel outside the Black Sea Joint War Committee Listed Area (JWLA).
- Vessels transiting the Black Sea are advised to conduct comprehensive dynamic voyage risk assessments.

## B. Situation

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September at approximately 20:00UTC, a likely Russian-launched missile struck a Saint Kitts and Nevis-flagged bulk carrier whilst en route from Ukraine to Turkey, 40NM southeast of Sulina, Romania. The vessel was carrying grain bound for Egypt. The still images of the aftermath of the strike showed that the vessel was struck on the port side. A cargo hold and a crane were also damaged. Romanian Coast Guard confirmed in a statement that the master "of a civilian ship, outside our country's territorial waters, but in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Romania, sent a radio message informing that an explosion had occurred on board the ship. The ship's captain requested the change of the navigation route to Constanta (Romania) in order to assess the effects." According to the AIS data, the vessel managed to sail toward Constanta under its own power, indicating that its propulsion system was not compromised. Ambrey observed the Romanian search and rescue vessel ARTEMIS sailing out of Constanta, Romania shortly after the Saint Kitts and Nevis-flagged bulk carrier began drifting 24NM east of the Romanian port. At the time of writing, the bulk carrier remained drifting off the coast of Constanta. No casualties were reported.

## C. Threat Update

This incident marks the first apparent direct Russian attack on a merchant vessel in the Black Sea since November 2023, when a bulk carrier, KMAX RULER, was struck by an air-to-surface missile. In that case, Russia claimed that the KMAX RULER was not the intended target. This strike on AYA represents the first reported non-sea mine physical damage to a merchant vessel outside the Black Sea JWLA. Historically, Russia has employed tactics of plausible deniability, such as deploying sea mines in shipping lanes and striking grain export facilities, where merchant vessels could suffer collateral damage.

After Russia's withdrawal from the UN-Humanitarian Grain Corridor in July 2023, Ukraine launched a campaign targeting Russian naval assets and ports using unmanned systems. This led to the Russian navy retreating from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk, allowing Ukraine to establish its Unilateral Export Corridor (UEC). Meanwhile, Russia has continued targeting Ukrainian grain export facilities and maritime infrastructure to limit Ukraine's grain revenue. However, a direct attack on a vessel carrying grain from Ukraine inside the Romanian EEZ marks a significant escalation.

On the same day, ten vessels sailed south from Ukraine towards Romania, five of which were bulk carriers likely transporting agricultural products. Russia has not responded to the accusations or provided an account of why it may have, targeted the Saint Kitts and Nevis-flagged bulk carrier.

Ambrey assesses that vessels calling Ukrainian ports face a heightened risk of direct attack by Russian forces, extending beyond JWLA-designated boundaries. Until Russian officials provide an explanation, the threat to vessels calling Ukraine remains high. However, Ambrey has observed that vessels have continued to use the UEC. Ukraine has targeted military supply shipments and, if it were to retaliate, this would likely significantly increase the risk of navigating the Black Sea. Ukraine has also shown capability and willingness to attack Russian Baltic maritime infrastructure. However, further escalation is not in the strategic interest of either Russia or Ukraine. Any additional attacks on merchant vessels could trigger an expansion of the JWLA zone beyond Russian and Ukrainian waters, the escalation would also result in the raising of War Risk Premiums within the Black Sea region. This increase would make trade with both Russia and Ukraine significantly more costly, placing further pressure on maritime trade and supply chains in the region.

#### **D. Mitigation**

Vessels are advised to conduct comprehensive dynamic voyage threat assessments. Ambrey can provide vessels with an Ordnance Identification Sheet for other threats including sea mines.

Vessels calling Ukraine are advised to transit in the territorial waters of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey where possible.

Vessels are advised not to disclose their true AIS destination.

Safe navigation permitting, vessels are advised to consider turning off the radar, given the use of anti-radiation missiles.

The bridge team is advised to implement a visual watch for floating objects.

Limit deck movement to a minimum. Designate Safe Muster Point, which is above the waterline.

The bridge team has been briefed and drilled on the emergency communications plan. The SSAS, ship's alarm and PA system have been tested and are functioning.

Brief the crew on how to adopt a brace position

#### **E. Contact Information**

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