

### Maritime Summary

On Wednesday 17 January, UKMTO received a report of an attack on a merchant ship 60 nautical miles southeast of the port city of Aden, Yemen, in the middle of the western Gulf of Aden. This latest incident comes as the United States has carried out a number of strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen in recent days. However, Houthi rebels have continued to target merchant shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

According to the UKMTO report, the incident on Wednesday occurred in position 115800N – 0453100E. The vessel's master reported that the ship had been hit on the port side by an Uncrewed Aerial System. The strike caused a fire which was later extinguished. The vessel and crewmembers have been reported safe and are proceeding to the next port of call.



In the wake of this latest incident, UKMTO has said that “vessels are advised to transit with caution and report any suspicious activity to UKMTO.” In a statement posted on social media shortly after the incident, Houthi spokesman Yahya Sare claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that “the naval forces of the Yemeni Armed Forces carried out a targeting operation against the American ship (*GENCO PICARDY*) in the Gulf of Aden with several of adequate naval missiles leaving direct hits. The Yemeni armed forces will not hesitate to target all sources of threat in the Arab and Red Seas within the legitimate right to defend dear Yemen and to continue supporting the oppressed Palestinian people.” The US Central Command confirmed the incident on the *GENCO PICARDY* in a statement released on Wednesday, stating that it was a single one-way attack drone that had originated from Yemeni territory.

The attack on the US vessel occurred just hours after the US put the Houthi group back on a list of “terrorist” entities. In response to the designation, Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdelsalam told Al Jazeera TV that the rebels would continue attacking Red Sea shipping, adding “we will not give up targeting Israeli ships or ships heading towards ports in occupied Palestine...in support of the Palestinian people.” He went on to say that the Houthis would respond to new strikes on Yemen by the US or Britain, despite already facing multiple rounds of airstrikes in response to their targeting of merchant vessels.

#### Advisory

The Combined Maritime Forces, which represents 39 navies including the US and UK, continues to advise all civilian shipping to stay well clear of the Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea. In recent days, the US has carried out further strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen and further such strikes cannot be ruled out. Tensions have significantly increased in the wake of these bombings over Houthi warnings that they will strike back. There is currently a heightened risk that Houthi forces may seek immediate retribution for those strikes by targeting accessible vessels within their vicinity. While the threat level for vessels transiting the region remains high, it is severe for those vessels with specific links to Israel, the United State, the United Kingdom and any other countries that are involved in the direct military strikes.

## Maritime Summary (18 Jan 2024)

With the US and UK launching strikes on targets linked to Houthi militants in Yemen on 11 January, tensions in the region are likely to rise further in the coming days, and could include additional attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, as well as possible seizures of vessels by the Iranian navy in the Gulf of Oman. Possible attacks targeting commercial shipping in the region could include deliberate sinkings, damage to vessels or seizure of vessels; hazards to safe navigation in shipping lanes; helicopter attacks; aerial threat and indirect fire risks from drones, missiles, ship and shore launched rocket systems; helicopter borne capture parties; small craft attacks and capture parties; sea drones and sea mines; state boardings and seizures (by Iran or other state actors); non-state actor boarding and capture of vessels (by Houthis and other non-state actors); pirate attacks and hijacking by Somali-based pirates. While initially, the Houthis stated that they would target Israeli-shipping, vessels with no links to Israel have been targeted, and in the wake of the US and British airstrikes, all vessels transiting this region are now at risk of being targeted.

Any vessels operating in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb at this time are advised to exercise caution at all times. A pre-voyage risk and threat assessment should be carried out prior to entering this region, as well as a review of the vessel's security plan. Security training and drills are advised and should be carried out prior to entering any areas of increased risk and strict observance of any exclusion zones or guidance issued by coastal states is strongly advised. When transiting this region, vessels are advised to ensure that AIS is always transmitting, except in extraordinary circumstances, and in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and should monitor VHF Channel 16. Vigilance is critical when transiting this region and vessels should pay careful attention to any small craft approaching the vessel; it should be noted that fishermen regularly operate in these waters and may attempt to protect their nets by aggressively approaching merchant ships. Vessels are advised to immediately report any incidents and/or suspicious activity.

In addition to the heightened security situation in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb, there is also a risk of piracy in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden off Somalia. Since late November 2023, Somali pirates have been implicated in three incidents that have targeted commercial shipping in the area – two hijackings in the Arabian Sea and one boarding in the Gulf of Aden. Additionally, a number of Iranian fishing vessels operating in the area have also been targeted and at least five Iranian fishing vessels have been hijacked. These attacks are allegedly in response to illegal Iranian fishing in Somali waters, which has threatened the livelihoods of local fishermen. Somali pirates have also threatened to use these hijacked vessels as motherships to target other vessels transiting this region.