



RiskIntelligence

Security Threat Update: Red Sea / Gulf of Aden

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Security Threat Update: Red Sea / Gulf of Aden

This report provides an overview of recent incidents in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as well as an assessments of threat levels for additional attacks against different types of merchant vessels.

Time of latest intelligence included in this report: 1 May 2024, 08:00 UTC.

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Recent incidents (Red Sea / Gulf of Aden)

Below is a list of incidents directly affecting merchant ships in the Red Sea, the Bab el Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden which have been recorded on the Risk Intelligence System during the past 30 days. Information includes date, time and a short description of the respective incident. Comprehensive descriptions for these and older incidents can be found on the Risk Intelligence System.

1 April	19:56 UTC	Cruise ship CRYSTAL SYMPHONY hailed and targeted
The ship reported being hailed by an entity claiming to be the "Yemeni Navy", requesting they turn on their AIS, while transiting the BAM. Crew reported small arms fire to have hit the vessel. No casualties.		
6 April	Unknown	Container vessel HOPE ISLAND targeted
The ship reported being targeted by two missiles. One was intercepted by coalition forces whereas a second splashed a distance from the vessel. No damage reported and vessel proceeded to next port of call.		
7 April	05:03 UTC	Container vessel HOPE ISLAND targeted again
The Joint Maritime Information Centre in the UK reported three separate launches against the vessel as well as drone activity prior to the launches. Vessel reported new missile splash in close proximity but no damage.		
24 April	09:00 UTC	Container vessel MAERSK YORKTOWN targeted
The ship reported an attack 72 nm ESE of Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden while underway under escort. Crew reported seeing an explosion three to five cables astern. Vessel reported to be safe and proceeded to next port of call.		
25 April	07:15 UTC	Container vessel MSC DARWIN VI targeted
The ship reported an attack with crew observing explosion and smoke on the sea surface three to four cables from the ship. Crew and vessel were safe and proceeded to next port of call. The vessel had just left Aden and was en route to Djibouti.		
26 April	12:00 UTC	Crude oil tanker ANDROMEDA STAR struck by missiles
The ship sustained damage in two missile attacks while underway on a southbound transit. On first attack, a single missile missed. On second attack, two missiles struck the ship causing some damage. No injuries to the crew were reported and the ship proceeded on its voyage.		
26 April	22:00 UTC	Crude oil tanker MAISHA targeted
According to US CENTCOM the vessel was targeted by a Houthi missile during a northbound transit but was not hit. The incident has not been commented on by vessel owners.		

26 April	22:00 UTC	Container vessel MSC ORION struck
The ship reported a suspected attack by a UAV about 170 nm SE of Socotra. Debris from a possible UAV were found aboard the vessel. The ship sustained only minor damage and crew were unharmed. Vessel continued voyage to the next port of call.		

29 April	07:02 UTC	Bulk carrier CYCLADES struck
The ship was reportedly targeted by up to three projectiles, with subsequent reports indicating that an explosion took place near the vessel and then that the vessel had sustained some damage, but that the crew were safe and proceeding.		

Current situation

- US forces reportedly continued their targeting of missile and drone launch sites in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. Naval vessels from several countries also continued interceptions of aerial drones and missiles over the Red Sea.
- Over the past week, Houthis have conducted at least 6 strikes on civilian vessels, including in the Indian Ocean, with at least 3 strikes reported to have been successful. This indicates a sustained ability to strike targets, including at longer-than-usual ranges. The interruption in the lull of attacks comes following a pick up in transits throughout the region, perhaps shedding light on Houthi operational patterns in the future, although it is early to tell.
- Notably, the MSC ORION was struck in the Indian Ocean on 26 April, in accordance with the Houthi threat to strike vessels in the Indian Ocean if they fit within their targeting parameters. While the strike is a display of capability, its reportedly limited impact (if true) and the (so far) singular nature of the attack means that the deterrent effect observed in the Red Sea is unlikely to be achieved.

Military strikes against targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen have been conducted since January. Strikes have been carried out unilaterally by US forces and as joint strikes with the UK military, supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand. They are conducted under Operation Poseidon Archer. For political reasons, offensive actions are separate from the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian which is merely aimed at protecting commercial shipping.

Since the beginning of the Houthi campaign in November, the US and other governments have frequently stated that Houthi attacks against merchant ships have been 'indiscriminate'. This conclusion, however, has never been supported by available evidence. Houthi forces have publicly stated their targeting parameters and stuck to these announcements. Some attacks, however, were very likely carried out based on outdated information about individual ships.

Analysing all incidents since November and considering military strikes against the Houthis, the threat to merchant ships is closely linked to individual characteristics. This is broadly in line with the Houthis' announcements and their previous actions.

Houthi forces are very likely to continue selecting specific targets rather than widen their campaign to indiscriminate attacks against civilian shipping. It is possible, however, that they will widen their campaign to an extent to assert pressure on southern Yemen and to limit port calls in that part of the country, notably in Aden.

The lull in Houthi attacks was put to an end this week with at least 6 reported strikes, 3 of which were reported to have been successful. The strikes targeted a gamut of vessels fitting within previously announced targeting parameters. Of particular interest is the strike on the MSC ORION on 26 April. The container vessel was struck by what appears to be an UAV (or debris thereof) while transiting northbound in the Indian Ocean, 170 nm Southeast of the Yemeni island of Socotra. The Houthis had previously threatened on 14 March to strike vessels associated to Israel in the Indian Ocean but had until now not made good on their threat. The strike was also claimed by Houthi spokesman Yahya Saria'a. This comforts the Houthi efforts to maintain a reputation of acting on their threats as part of a larger effort to be perceived as a reliable actor, albeit bellicose.

The attack, if actually conducted by the Houthis, would display Houthi capability to target vessels in the Indian Ocean, although the limited impact of the strike, and the fact that only one attack appears to have been conducted in the Indian Ocean so far, means that traffic through the Indian Ocean is unlikely to be deterred to the same extent as in the Red Sea, something which the Houthis will likely recognise. The Houthis have yet to confirm their ability or intent to sustain a long-range campaign into the Indian Ocean. A single strike does not represent a pattern and is difficult to extrapolate. If the strike remains a singular occurrence, which is a possibility, or if strikes are not followed-up on in relatively short succession, it is likely that Indian Ocean strikes serve other purposes than to deter traffic to Israel. Such purposes would likely be to stretch the coalition anti-air bubble into the Indian Ocean, as well as generate propaganda for domestic and Arab audiences. Finally, it shuts down criticism as to the hereto unkept promise of Indian Ocean strikes.

There remains some doubt as to the Houthis' ability to effectively conduct such strikes at these ranges (roughly 1450 km from known Houthi launch areas) without Iranian assistance, especially on a moving target. Houthis have the capability to deliver ordnance at long ranges, as proven by strikes on targets as far north as Eilat, but with relatively low precision even against fixed targets. There is a distinct possibility of Iranian involvement in the strike, including in technical terms, which the Houthis can claim, fitting with previous behaviour.

Last week's strikes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden fit within what is now the norm for Houthi attacks in the region. It has already been noted here that with deterrence having been established around the Bab el Mandeb, the Houthis no longer need to sustain high volumes of fire to achieve their effect. The attack pattern seen this week seems to conform with the previously anticipated Houthi strategy: low volume of attacks throughout several weeks followed by a rush of strikes, to remind trade that the threat persists. This allows for preserving ammunition and capabilities while still benefitting politically from the campaign. It is possible that future strikes follow the same pattern. The latest strikes do not alter the threat levels as previously established.

Vessel type	Threat type	Threat level
Vessels specifically linked to Israel through ownership, port calls, trade with and/or commercial relationship between Israeli companies and owners/operators	Kinetic attack (missile, aerial/waterborne drone), possibly seizure and detention	Severe
Vessels linked to the United States, United Kingdom and other countries involved in Operation Poseidon Archer	Kinetic attack (missile, aerial/waterborne drone), possibly seizure and detention	Severe
Vessels linked to other countries participating in or supporting Operation Prosperity Guardian or Operation Aspides	Kinetic attack (missile, aerial/waterborne drone), possibly seizure and detention	Elevated
Other merchant ships in transit through the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden	Kinetic attack due to misidentification, potential proximity to the above threats ('collateral damage')	Elevated

Overall, the threat level to vessels directly owned by Israeli companies has been severe since the beginning of the Houthi campaign. Such vessels therefore largely stopped transiting the Red Sea, leading the Houthis to expand their potential targets to vessels trading with Israel. As mentioned above, some attacks were very likely carried out based on outdated information in publicly available databases, underlining the threat level for collateral damage.

Military action by the US and the UK led to another expansion of the Houthis' target pool which now includes merchant ships linked to both countries. This has resulted in a severe threat level for vessels directly linked to the US and the UK, highlighted by several attacks.

For other countries supporting military strikes under Operation Poseidon Archer, the threat level is the same. It should be noted, however, that the Houthis have not made specific threats against these countries.

Despite the limited number of attacks in recent weeks, Houthi forces remain capable of conducting attacks. In addition, these are not limited to the southern Red Sea where Houthi forces control a large portion of coastline. Several ships have also been struck in the Gulf of Aden.

Gradual degrading of the Houthis' missile launch capability may lead to an increase in the use of lower-level technology tactics such as firing rockets from skiffs or launching naval and aerial

drones. However, the actual impact of military strikes on Houthi capabilities cannot be assessed. Reports about strikes are solely based on military sources and not independently verified.

Any meaningful and sustainable reduction of the threat posed by the Houthis would very likely require a longer-term mission. The current casualty-averse approach limits greater damage to Houthi weapons stockpiles. At the same time, a shift in tactics would likely have a greater civilian impact on the ground, potentially provoking another escalation in maritime attacks.

For merchant ships linked to countries solely supporting Operation Prosperity Guardian or Operation Aspides which both have a defensive focus, the threat level is assessed as lower compared to countries participating in offensive military actions against Houthi forces. For all other commercial vessels, the same threat level applies.

For vessels related to countries taking part in Operation Prosperity Guardian or Operation Aspides, this is largely due to the potential for kinetic attacks in lieu of other potential targets for Houthi forces. However, considering their careful selection of targets – which is in line with broader political ambitions – this is currently unlikely.

For vessels not related to countries taking part in Operation Prosperity Guardian or Operation Aspides, this is largely due to the potential for merchant ships being targeted due to misidentification. Proximity to kinetic attacks or proximity to interceptions of drones and missiles by military forces could also lead to collateral damage.

Finally, it is vital to consider that this remains a dynamic situation. It is strongly recommended to closely monitor the situation. Updates regarding incidents as well as constantly updated assessments of current threat levels are available through the Risk Intelligence System.

Background

Starting with the seizure of the GALAXY LEADER on 19 November, Risk Intelligence has identified more than 50 targeted attacks by Houthi forces against individual vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This is slightly lower than the number of attacks stated by military sources which are not providing an overview to highlight which incidents were actually classified as 'attacks on commercial vessels'.

Interceptions of drones and missiles are likely counted as additional attacks by military forces, yet there is no further evidence available. Drones and missiles may have been used to target warships or merely used as a "show of force" in at least some of the interceptions.

Looking at all attacks in detail, no preference for attacks against ships in the southern part of the Red Sea or the western part of the Gulf of Aden can be identified. There have been more attacks in the Red Sea, with the difference growing in past weeks. However, it should be noted that attacks in the Gulf of Aden only started in January.

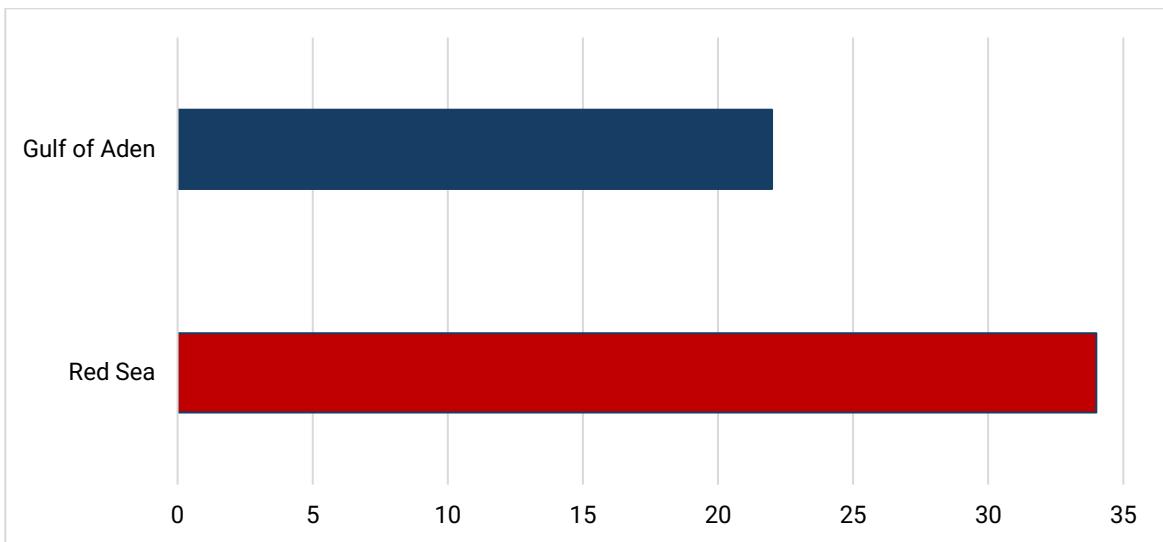


Figure 1: Number of attacks against merchant ships passing through the Red Sea/Bab el Mandeb/Gulf of Aden area since November 2023 (Source: Risk Intelligence)

Houthi attacks against maritime traffic have caused a significant decrease in ship transits through the Bab el Mandeb. It is unlikely that traffic will see a significant further decrease after the current traffic level has remained constant since late January, shown in Figure 2.

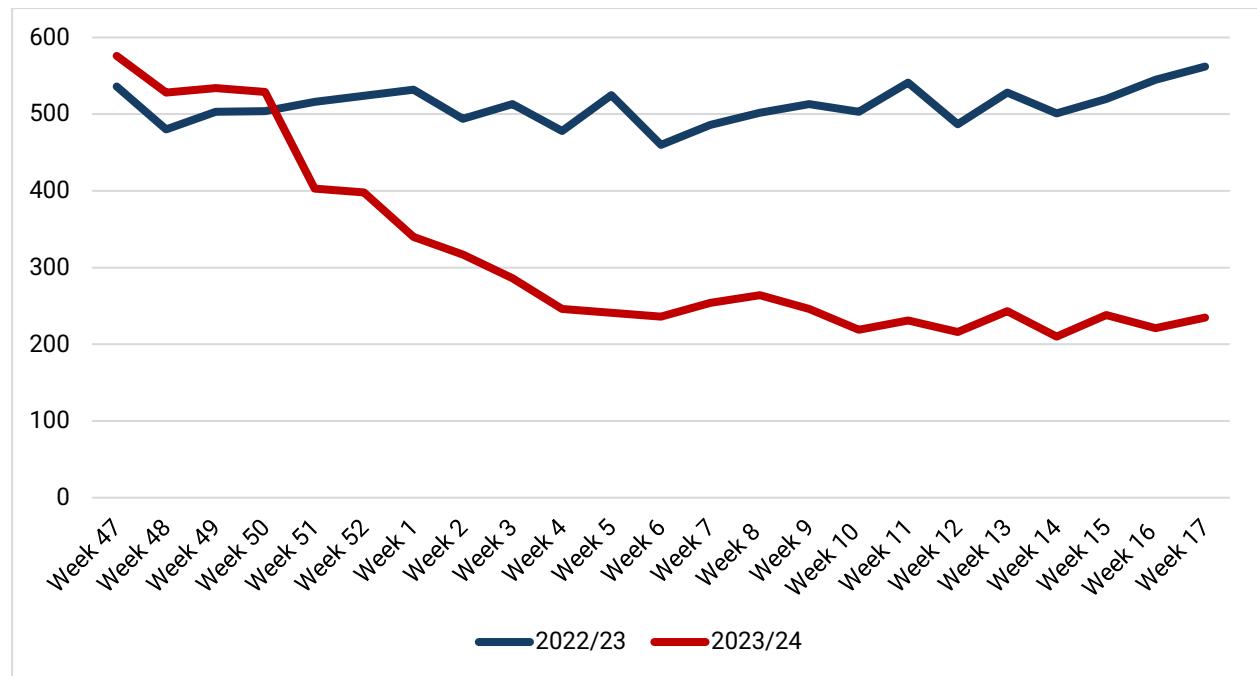


Figure 2: Number of Bab el Mandeb transits by merchant ships per week, including vessels without broadcasting on AIS (Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence/Seasearcher)

Since January, the number of Bab el Mandeb transits has consistently been between 50% and 60% lower than during the same timeframe in 2023, and the gap has remained relatively constant since late January. Less than 10% of ships passing the Bab el Mandeb are en route with AIS switched off (see Figure 3).

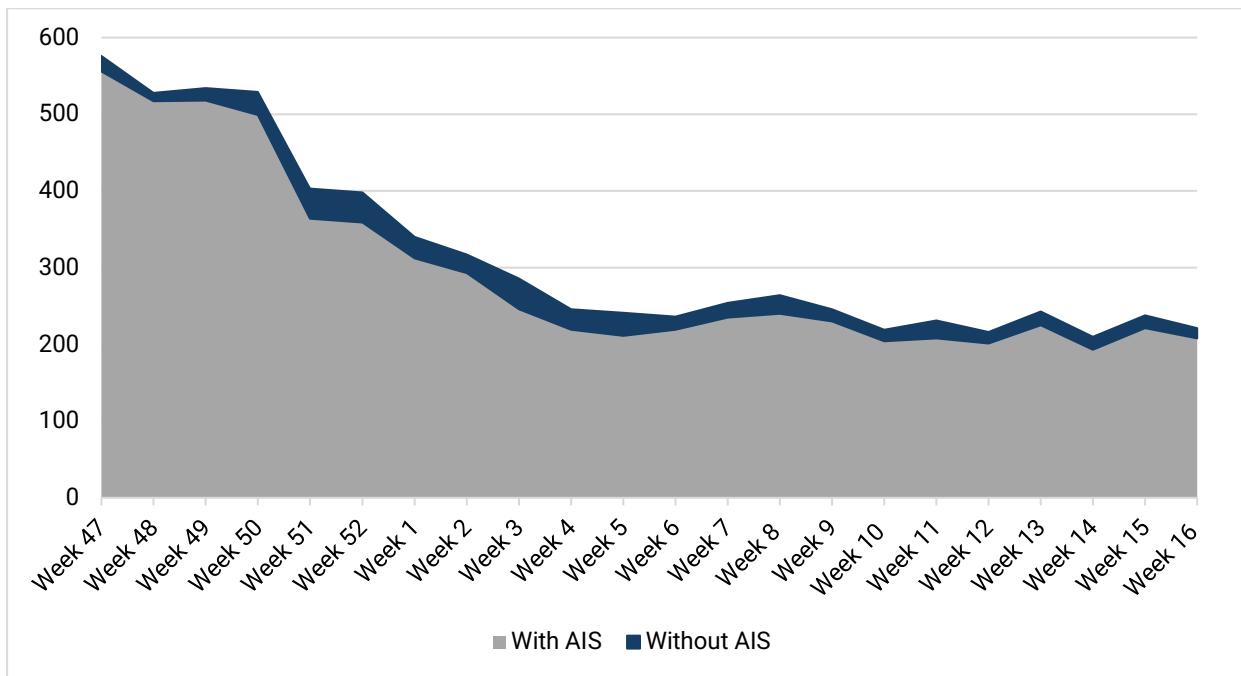


Figure 3: Number of Bab el Mandeb transits by merchant ships per week with and without AIS
(Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence/Seasearcher)

It will be important to monitor maritime traffic figures to see if and when commercial vessels are returning to this route in significant numbers. Any sustainable increase is likely to be a drawn-out process and different by ship types, similar to the drop in traffic which was sudden in the container sector but took much longer for bulk carriers as well as tankers (product and crude oil), shown in Figure 4.

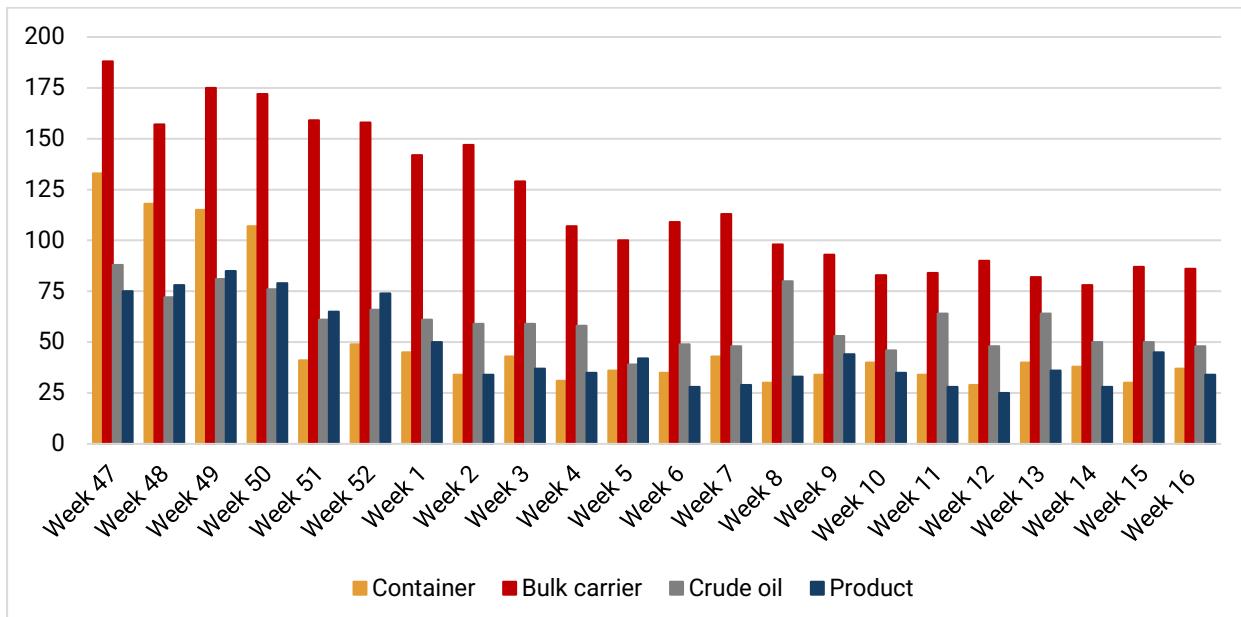


Figure 4: Weekly Bab el Mandeb transits by ship types (Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence/Seasearcher)

The current threats in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have also led to a noticeable increase in incidents that are perceived as suspicious by seafarers, including outside the immediate area. Reporting such incidents is strongly encouraged. At the same time, all reports must be thoroughly assessed to identify particular areas of concern.

The background to the current situation is the civil war in Yemen. Since 2015, the Houthis in the northern part of the country have fought against the Saudi and UAE-backed government in southern Yemen. Iran has supported the Houthis during the conflict. Houthi forces have previously targeted Saudi and UAE vessels in the Red Sea with anti-ship missiles and drones (aerial and waterborne). They have also attacked Saudi ports and naval vessels in the Red Sea as well as oil industry targets in southern Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The Saudis and the Houthis are involved in negotiations about a peace agreement that would very likely involve financial and economic concessions to the Houthis. Neither side wants to jeopardise a potential deal. Saudi Arabia has refrained from criticising the Houthis which is a noticeable difference from Saudi rhetoric in the past. Moreover, attacks against commercial shipping have not interrupted the negotiations although it is impossible to assess when a final agreement will be signed. Houthi forces are very likely to continue to engage in attacks on maritime traffic as long as they deem their attacks unlikely to scupper the ongoing talks.

Guidance on commercial operations

Ship transits

Several shipping industry organisations have published the "Interim Industry Transit Advice, Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden – 5 February 2024". Among other information, the document includes considerations about routing and vessel hardening. Combined Maritime Forces have also issued a guidance document on 23 December 2023.

Both documents are available via www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org.

Vessel registration and incident reporting

It is strongly recommended for all merchant ships transiting the Western Indian Ocean, the Somali Basin, the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea to register with UKMTO and the Maritime Security Centre - Horn of Africa (MSCHOA). Any incidents or suspicious activities should also be reported to UKMTO and MSCHOA.

Contact details UKMTO

Email: watchkeepers@ukmto.org

Phone: +44 2393 222060

Website: www.ukmto.org

Contact details MSCHOA

Email: postmaster@mschoa.org

Phone: +33 298 220 220 or +33 298 220 170

Website: www.mschoa.org

If a vessel is under attack, **US naval forces in Bahrain** are able to coordinate assistance.

Phone: +973 1785 3879

Email: m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil

Combined Maritime Forces also recommend ignoring VHF calls by "Yemeni navy" with instructions to alter course to Hudaydah or other locations in Yemen. When merchant ships are contacted, masters are advised to continue the voyage and call for a coalition warship on VHF Channel 16, stating current location, situation and intentions.

In addition, vessel operators are advised to contact the respective flag state for additional guidance or requirements regarding incident reporting procedures.

Mitigation measures

Risk Intelligence strongly recommends merchant ship operators to assess whether the respective vessel has been owned or managed by Israel-affiliated companies in the past. Such information may not have been updated in publicly available databases and could lead to misidentification of current commercial links with Israel.

Prior to voyages through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, ship operators should conduct a thorough ship and voyage-specific threat and risk assessment in line with shipping industry best practices. In addition, the following measures should be considered:

- Constant monitoring of the security situation, enabling vessels to avoid locations with recent or ongoing incidents.
- Introduction/update of contingency plans on the company level to address the possibility of seafarers being injured, killed or kidnapped during a security incident. The plan should include contingency and emergency plans; appropriate drills should be completed.
- Crew briefings and scenario drills based on a valid and relevant anti-attack plan to ensure that incidents are reported and alarm is raised without delay when required. Drills should include scenarios with major damage and casualties.
- Enhancement of firefighting, evacuation and damage control procedures, taking into account the possibility of significant damage as a result of direct targeting or collateral damage.
- Enhancement of medical equipment to deal with multiple casualties.
- Emergency contacts placed readily available on the bridge.
- Bridge team briefing regarding hailing/harassment via VHF, prepared responses and immediate contact with naval forces in the respective area. (Local authorities' calls on VHF may be an act of spoofing or even targeting, underlined by several incidents in recent days which involved self-proclaimed 'Yemeni authorities' or the 'Yemeni navy' ordering merchant ships to alter course.)
- Preparation of citadel with emergency provisions and functioning satellite phone.
- Depending on individual circumstances, embarkation of armed guards may be useful to mitigate specific risks, specifically in relation to the threat of boardings from small boats (e.g. Houthi forces, Somali piracy). However, the threat of direct targeting by missiles, aerial or naval drones used by Houthi forces in Yemen (southern Red Sea / Gulf of Aden) cannot be mitigated by embarkation of armed guards.

In general, existing BMP5 recommendations have been developed to deter piracy. While the guidance included in BMP5 is relevant to deter illegal boardings, it offers virtually no mitigation against current threats such as attacks by missiles, drones or – potentially – waterborne IEDs ('drone boats').

Ship operators should also consider to issue specific voyage guidance for transits through the Red Sea and/or the Gulf of Aden. This guidance should consider specific scenarios (e.g. aerial or waterborne threats, hailing on VHF) and include actions by the crew to minimise the impact of any security incident.

Red Sea – threat assessment (summary)

Following the incidents in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden related primarily to Houthi forces, there is now a significant threat to merchant ships linked to Israel through a variety of commercial relationships. Although threats will vary on a case-by-case basis, the overall threat level for these vessels is now assessed as severe for vessels linked to Israel through ownership and severe for vessels linked through other commercial relationships including port calls. Threats against vessels linked to the US and UK and other countries involved in direct military strikes against Houthi forces are severe.

This reflects the escalation in violence in early January, such as the launch of strikes on Houthi targets by the US-led Operations Poseidon Archer and Prosperity Guardian after 12 January 2024, which has expanded the scope of vessels considered as "legitimate targets" by the Houthis. The threat level for all remainder vessels, those not linked to Israel or nations directly involved in strikes against Houthi forces, is assessed as elevated. It is likely that the US and UK strikes are impacting the Houthis' missile launch capabilities, though the extent of that impact is difficult to assess.

The increased threat is a result of the Israel/Gaza conflict and Houthi actions, initially against Israel-linked vessels, but now against a broader spectrum of targets. Naval vessels have intercepted a number of drones and missiles intended for Israeli targets, or against the naval ships themselves. "Our eyes are open to constantly monitor and search for any Israeli ship in the Red Sea, especially in Bab al-Mandeb, and near Yemeni regional waters," Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi was reported saying in November 2023. On 9 December, a Houthi statement on social media said: "We warn all ships and companies against dealing with Israeli ports". The Houthis have since threatened to strike vessels in the Indian Ocean, even if they were transiting around Cape Good Hope. There is some doubt as to their ability to conduct such strikes autonomously.

The situation is evolving as the list of possible targets is expanding. Links to Israel may now be port calls by the respective vessel, owners/operators conducting trade with Israel in general or owners/operators being in commercial relationships with Israeli companies. While the threat level to vessels which are directly owned by Israeli companies is assessed as even higher, it should be noted that virtually no such vessels are currently transiting the Red Sea. Houthi forces have therefore significantly expanded their potential targets, including the categories mentioned above. What the Houthis consider to constitute a link strong enough to warrant a strike is variable and an internal Houthi decision.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the increased threat of collateral damage, particularly in the southern Red Sea with dense maritime traffic. It is very likely that Houthi forces have missed their intended targets on several occasions in recent days, increasing the potential for unintended strikes against other merchant ships. Moreover, this is a highly dynamic and evolving threat which must be monitored closely in light of ongoing incidents.

Maritime security in the southern Red Sea is also affected by the conflict in Yemen as some fighting between the Houthis and the rival government supported by the Saudi-led coalition continues. The maritime dimension to this conflict is limited. Ceasefire talks in 2022 saw a

substantial fall in cross-border attacks in Saudi Arabia, as well as an improved threat environment during transits through the Bab el Mandeb. Attacks have not taken place in 2023 or so far in 2024, likely due to progress in negotiations between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition. Both sides are unlikely to jeopardise a potential deal. The threat level for direct attacks against port and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE is therefore lower while talks are ongoing.

There is a dispute between Yemen and Eritrea in the Hanish Islands area, primarily due to fishing. In an incident in June 2021, there was a clash between coastguard/naval forces. In August 2021, several fishing vessels and three Yemeni crew were detained by the Eritrean coastguard near the Hanish Islands. Due to the irregular nature of Yemeni coastguard forces, or the difficulty in identifying Eritrean craft (which are small speedboats), there are problems with merchant vessels misidentifying small patrol craft from Yemen and Eritrea as pirate vessels. Aggressive enforcement by coastguard vessels, or local craft attempting to warn away merchant vessels, are possible threats in the area. The piracy threat is minimal, even in southern areas, as this area is now considered to be outside the operational range of Somali pirates. The fighting in Sudan is not expected to affect threat levels in the Red Sea.

Aggressive enforcement by coastguard vessels, or local craft attempting to warn away merchant vessels, are possible threats in the area. The piracy threat is minimal, even in southern areas, as this area is now considered to be outside the operational range of Somali pirates. The fighting in Sudan is not expected to affect threat levels in the Red Sea.

Threat levels

Refer to the section "Methodology / Definitions" for a detailed definition of the threat level. A concise assessment of all threats listed in the table can be found on the Risk Intelligence System.

Threat type	Threat level
Terrorism	Moderate
Piracy	Low
Insurgency and Military Operations	High
Cargo Theft	Moderate
Smuggling	Elevated
Stowaways and human trafficking	Low
Fraud and corruption	Low
Activism	Low

Indian Ocean – threat assessment (summary)

This area covers the western Indian Ocean (north of Madagascar, east towards India), including the Somali Basin, Gulf of Aden, and western Arabian Sea. Houthi operations targeting merchant ships in transit can take place in the western Gulf of Aden where threat levels are similar to the southern Red Sea. In the Indian Ocean, primary threats are piracy off Somalia and the conflict in Yemen which has some implications close to the Yemeni coast. There are possible drone threats to Israel-linked merchant ships in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

There is still a potential for pirate operations in the Somali Basin and the Gulf of Aden and the threat is elevated. Recent cases show that pirates still have boarding capabilities at significant distances off the coast: as far as 800 nautical miles from Somalia, but prefer to operate at around 400 nautical miles. The bulk carrier RUEN was hijacked about 400 nautical miles off Somalia on 14 December 2023, before being recaptured by Indian forces in March 2024. The 35 pirates on the ship surrendered, all 17 crew were freed. On 4 January 2024, the bulk carrier LILA NORFOLK was boarded by armed men around 460 nautical miles off Somalia before being assisted by the Indian Navy. The bulk carrier WAIMEA was also approached by skiffs on 27 January in what was possibly a boarding attempt some 800 nm off the coast. These targets might have been selected due to their vulnerability to boarding.

On 12 March 2024, a group of 15 to 20 Somali pirates hijacked the Bangladesh-flagged bulk carrier ABDULLAH and took its 23 crew members hostage. The ship was boarded from two boats when it was approximately 600 nautical miles off Somalia. The vessel was released on 14 April after a claimed \$5 million ransom was paid. The successful ransom has demonstrated that the piracy model still functions – that vessels can be held by pirates off the Somali coast and ransom payments received. This is likely to act as an incentive for future hijacking attempts, although this will be balanced by the deterrent effect of successful naval actions, such as the freeing of the RUEN and the LILA NORFOLK.

There have also been nine reported boardings of fishing dhows off Somalia since November 2023, although no cases have been reported in April 2024. These are likely linked to illegal fishing activity in the area, which is an ongoing issue and has been a focus for Somalia in expanding its maritime enforcement capabilities. Iranian vessels have been seized in the past and their crews held. The most recent incidents were an Iranian dhow that was hijacked just off Somalia but then freed by Indian naval forces, and a Sri Lankan fishing vessel hijacked farther out in the Indian Ocean that was freed by the Seychelles coastguard.

In general, merchant ships in transit should be aware of the potential to encounter small armed craft in this area, particularly in the Gulf of Aden. These might be fishermen, traders, smugglers, militia or irregular military forces, or military or coastguard patrol craft operating out of southern Yemen or northern Somalia. The boarding of the product tanker CENTRAL PARK in the Gulf of Aden on 26 November 2023 was very likely related to Houthi-led actions against Israel-linked vessels, even though it has been described as a 'piracy incident' by military sources.

In Yemen, multiple political factions operate their own militias in addition to security forces from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Terrorist groups have a limited presence. There have been no recent incidents, aside from those linked to Houthi operations. The situation in Yemen is primarily a consideration for operations close to the Yemeni coast or for port calls in the country.

Naval patrols operate in the area, such as EUNAVFOR's Operation Atalanta. Naval mandates include maritime crimes (such as drugs and arms smuggling) as well as countering piracy. The group transit scheme for the Gulf of Aden is still operational. National deployments are also ongoing, such as the Indian naval presence which has been effective in recent actions.

Shipping industry associations have published transit guidance for the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, emphasising the importance of thorough ship and voyage-specific threat and risk assessments before passing through the area. The shipping industry removed its high-risk area (HRA) designation for the Indian Ocean, effective 1 January 2023, although notes that: "Threat and risk assessments should still be carried out, and best management practices followed to continue to mitigate the risks presented in a changeable and often complex and potentially threatening environment."

UKMTO operates the Voluntary Reporting Area for the Indian Ocean, specifically the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Arabian Sea, administered by the Maritime Trade Information Centre (MTIC)/UKMTO (Dubai). UKMTO acts as the primary point of contact for merchant vessels and liaison with military forces in the region. Vessels are encouraged to report their positions while operating in the area. MSCHOA manages the EUNAVFOR (EU Naval Forces Somalia and Operation Atalanta) voluntary registration scheme for vessels transiting the area and administers an interactive website that enables EUNAVFOR to communicate counter-piracy guidance to the maritime industry, and for shipping companies and operators to register vessel movements through the region.

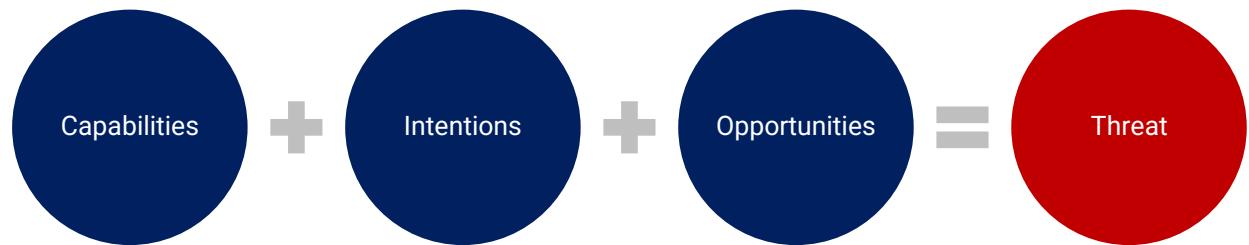
Threat levels

Refer to the section "Methodology / Definitions" for a detailed definition of the threat level. Concise assessments of all types of threats listed in the table below can be found on the Risk Intelligence System.

Threat type	Threat level
Terrorism	Moderate
Piracy	Elevated
Insurgency and Military Operations	Moderate
Cargo Theft	Low
Smuggling	Moderate
Stowaways and human trafficking	Low
Fraud and corruption	Low
Activism	Low

Methodology / Definitions

All threat levels are based on the likelihood of a threat type occurring, with generic consequences described in the relevant sections. All threat levels are based on an assessment of capabilities, intentions and opportunities of potential perpetrators, separated into different categories.



Maritime operators are typically unable to lower the threat level by influencing the underlying variables. However, all variables are subject to change over time, e.g. changes in the intentions or capabilities of potential perpetrators. They should therefore be re-assessed as required.

In an additional step, the threat levels assessed here can be used to identify the risk level for a particular type of operations. Determining the risk level also requires an assessment of the vulnerability and the potential consequence of a particular incident. Appropriate mitigation measures can then be implemented to lower the risk level.

Threat levels

All threat levels mentioned above are assessed based on the likelihood and consequence of a particular threat type occurring. The levels are:

- Low: Not expected in the operational area or in proximity.
- Moderate: Not expected in the operational area but possible in proximity.
- Elevated: Possible in the operational area or in proximity.
- High: Expected in the operational area or in proximity.
- Severe: Commonplace in the operational area or in proximity.

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