



RiskIntelligence

Red Sea / Gulf of Aden: Weekly Intelligence Report

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Red Sea / Gulf of Aden: Weekly Intelligence Report

This report provides an overview of the situation in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden including an assessments of threat levels for attacks against different types of merchant ships operating in these areas.

Time of latest intelligence included in this report: 28 May 2025, 08:00 UTC.

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Recent incidents (Red Sea / Gulf of Aden)

No incidents which have directly affected merchant ships in the southern Red Sea, the Bab el Mandeb or the Gulf of Aden have been recorded on the Risk Intelligence System during the past 30 days.

Comprehensive descriptions for previous incidents can be found on the Risk Intelligence System. Detailed statistics of attacks against commercial shipping which have been carried out by Houthi forces since November 2023 are available on the Risk Intelligence System.

Current situation

The situation in the Red Sea has remained stable since the US-Houthi ceasefire was announced in early May. Both sides appear to have refrained from conducting strikes on each other's assets. Meanwhile, the Houthis have continued their attacks on Israel as this aspect was deliberately excluded from the deal with the US. The Israeli military carried out retaliatory airstrikes against the airport in Sana'a on 28 May.

The Houthis have also announced a "maritime blockade" on the port of Haifa in Israel. While this announcement has not changed the threat situation in Haifa, it still allows the Houthis to conduct strikes against commercial ships when the respective owners are also calling at Haifa with other vessels in their fleet.

US forces have carried out military strikes against targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen between January 2024 and January 2025. An intensified US campaign was then carried out from March to early May 2025. The strikes were conducted both unilaterally and as joint strikes with the UK military, supported by several other countries.

US-coordinated offensive military actions have been conducted under Operation Poseidon Archer. For political reasons, these were 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 2023, Houthi forces have largely stuck to publicly announced targeting criteria. Some attacks during the early stages of the campaign apparently relied on outdated information about individual ships. No such incidents have been reported since the second quarter of 2024. Overall, Houthi attacks against merchant ships have not been 'indiscriminate' despite widespread claims by the US and other Western governments.

Red Sea campaign's status

The Red Sea campaign has effectively been paused since 19 January 2025. Currently, the Houthis have banned "Israeli vessels" from transiting the Bab el Mandeb.

On 6 May, US President Trump announced that a ceasefire deal had been reached with the Houthis. In return for a halt of US airstrikes, the Houthis would stop their attacks against US naval forces and "US vessels". While there is only limited information available regarding the content of this deal, there have been no US strikes or Houthi claims about attacks against US-linked assets since then. At the same time, the cycle of retaliation between Israel and the Houthis is expected to continue, as it serves the political goals of both entities' leaderships.

The Houthis have repeatedly signalled that they did not intend to relaunch the campaign against merchant ships, with the US ceasefire essentially irrelevant to the general situation. The Houthis will likely continue to focus on occasional attempts to strike Israeli territory, as demonstrated by continued strikes over the past week.

This assessment does not preclude a resumption of strikes against commercial ships, which remains subject to Houthis' political goals, especially if the volume of maritime traffic in the Red Sea resumes to a level that undermines claims that an effective embargo has been implemented.

There has been an increase in concerns about interference of navigational systems in the Red Sea, harming civilian maritime traffic. These issues are most likely due to electronic warfare systems operated by military forces, both from the region and from various Western countries operating in the region. The Houthis are believed to possess only limited capabilities at the moment. The cessation of Western bombing campaigns may allow them to rebuild the destroyed capabilities – a progress which is likely to be slowed if Iran and US can negotiate a nuclear agreement.

No breakthrough in US-Iran talks

The fifth round of US-Iran nuclear negotiations, held in Rome and mediated by Oman, ended with "some but not conclusive progress," according to Omani officials and multiple sources. Both sides remain far apart on key issues, especially uranium enrichment. No date has been set for a sixth round of talks. Iran is awaiting further communication from Oman, the main intermediary.

Both Washington and Tehran have taken tough public stances. The US, under President Trump, has called for "complete dismantlement" of Iran's nuclear programme, though some US officials suggest a civilian programme might be acceptable. Iranian officials have called US demands "excessive and outrageous," reiterating that Iran will not accept limits on its right to peaceful nuclear technology.

Gulf states continue to play a key mediating role, and there are concerns that failure in talks could trigger further regional escalation, including the risk of Israeli military action against Iranian nuclear facilities. Both the US and Iran are under domestic and international pressure to achieve progress, but neither appears willing to make major concessions on core issues. In the current situation, a significant escalation by the Houthis is unlikely.

Threat levels

In the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, Houthi forces have expanded their list of potential targets several times since November 2023. Some attacks were likely carried out based on outdated information in publicly available databases, underlining the threat level for collateral damage.

Current threat levels reflect both the enduring status quo and shifting Houthi rhetoric, which appears to be focusing more on attacking Israeli territory than vessels while not announcing any suspension of its maritime efforts. Likewise, the deal announced by the US and Oman may be the prelude to a reduction of threat levels to some vessel categories.

Overall, US and Western European vessels are exposed to an intrinsically higher threat level than vessels from other countries – a consequence of the perceived alignment of European foreign policy on US goals, including their support for Israel. The absence of recent maritime attacks should not be interpreted as a cessation of hostilities by the Houthis, but rather a reflection of their success. Virtually none of their preferred targets are currently passing through the region.

Potential targets	Threat type	Threat level
Merchant ships 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
Merchant ships 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	Elevated
Merchant ships linked to 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')	Moderate

The Houthis are expected to continue targeting vessels which are owned by companies that are trading with Israel, meaning a continued severe threat level for these ships. They are likely to show more constraint in targeting US/UK ships, following the deal announced on 6 May 2025. This is not tantamount to the elimination of the threat, as neither the US nor the Houthis are certain to keep their word in terms of striking hostile targets.

Despite multiple military operations, Houthi forces remain capable of conducting attacks. These are not limited to the southern Red Sea where they control a large portion of coastline. Several ships have also been struck in the Gulf of Aden. Attacks by drone boats, however, are very likely limited to the southern Red Sea.

While the Houthis' capabilities to launch missiles have been likely degraded by military strikes, the strikes' actual impact cannot be assessed. Moreover, reports about military actions are solely based on military sources and not independently verified. Any meaningful and sustainable reduction of the threat posed by the Houthis would require a longer-term mission.

For merchant ships linked to countries solely supporting the US-led and EU-led naval operations with a defensive mandate, the threat level is assessed as lower compared to countries participating in offensive military actions. For all other commercial ships, the same threat level applies.

Vessels not related to countries taking part in naval operations may be targeted due to misidentification. Proximity to kinetic attacks or to interceptions of drones and missiles by military forces could also lead to collateral damage.

Finally, it is vital to consider that the situation remains dynamic and requires close monitoring. 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 2023, Risk Intelligence has identified dozens of attacks by Houthi forces in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The number of attacks against merchant ships has been limited since September 2024, due to the limited number of potential targets and the fact that the Houthis have firmly established the threat.

This analysis is supported by traffic figures which suggest that the shipping industry has adapted to the situation. Even when no attacks had been conducted by the Houthis for several weeks, maritime traffic did not increase. At the same time, clusters of attacks have not caused a further decrease in traffic either (see Figure 1).

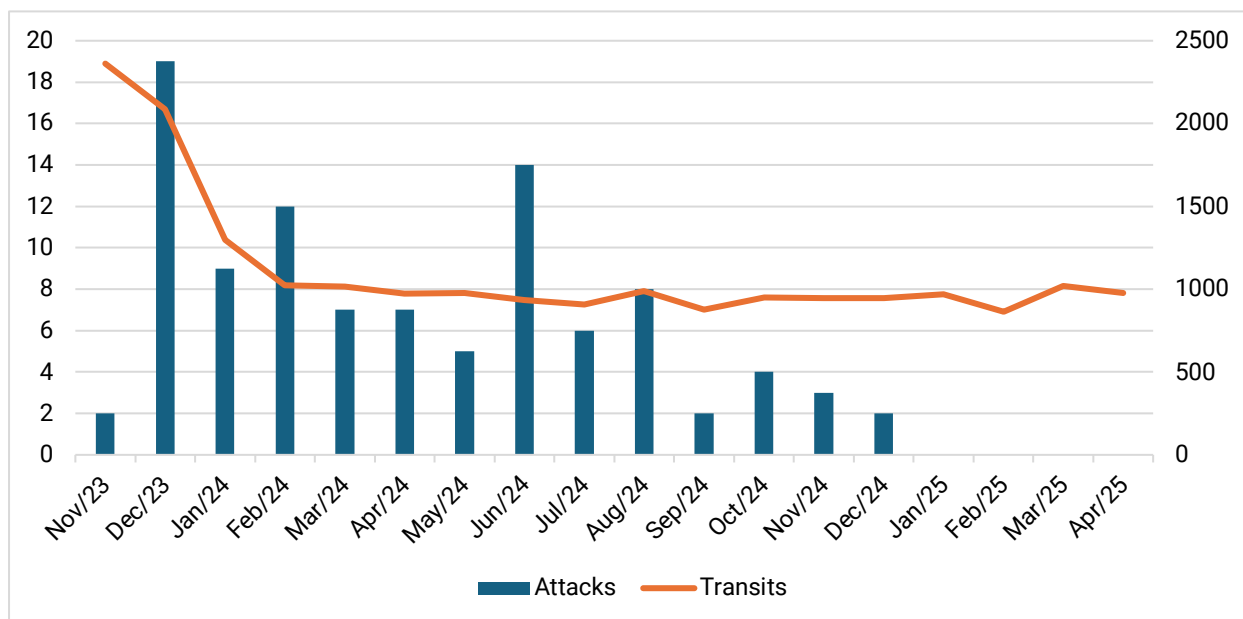


Figure 1: Attacks against merchant ships per month (blue columns) and number of monthly Bab el Mandeb transits by merchant ships >10,000 dwt (red line) (Source: Risk Intelligence System / Lloyd's List Intelligence/Seasearcher)

Note: Detailed statistics about Houthi attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since November 2023 are also available on the Risk Intelligence System.

Figure 1 indicates that the Houthis have reached their goal and are more likely to be reacting to political events than to maritime activity in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The amount of maritime traffic in this area has remained steady since February 2024, regardless of attack levels.

The decision to return to the Red Sea will very likely be determined by economic factors, e.g. insurance premiums or pressure from charterers, possibly supported by political declarations that would placate the Houthis.

Figure 2 below indicates that the shipping industry in general is still adopting a "wait-and-see" attitude regarding a potential return to Red Sea transits.

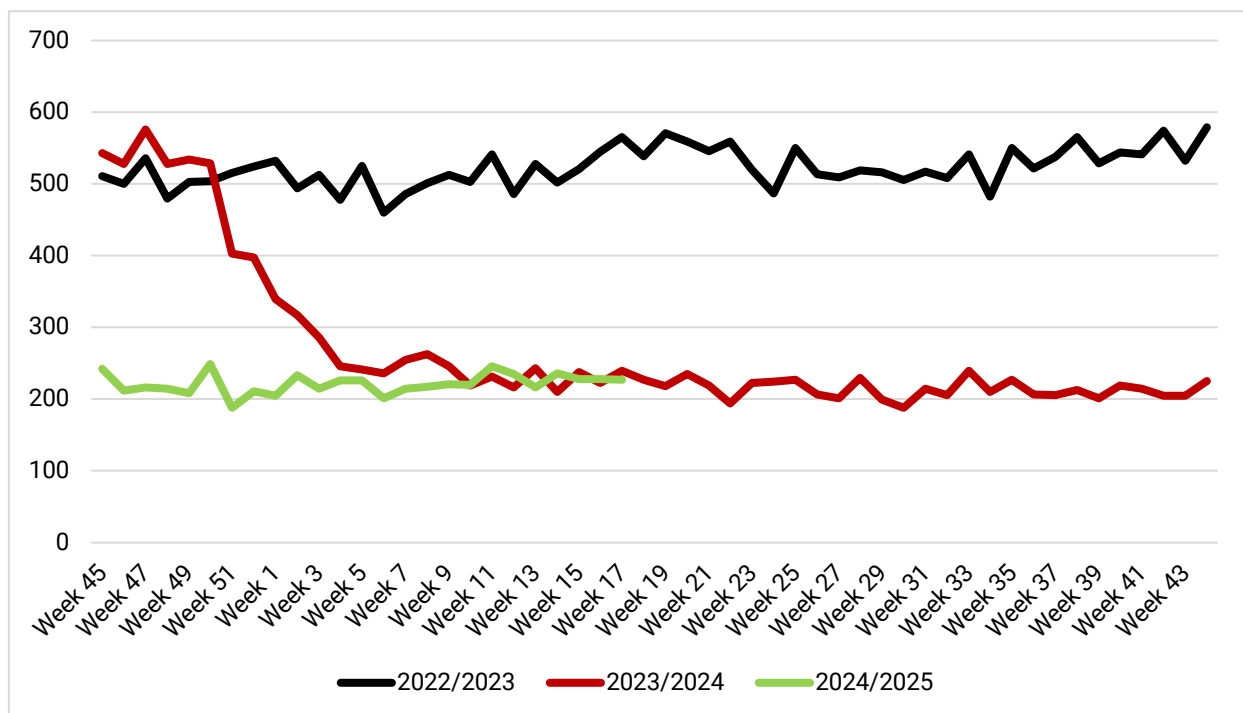


Figure 2: Suez Transits Year on Year comparison, indicating a sustained decrease to the new normal, even with several months without attacks by the Houthis. (Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence/Seasearcher)

Ongoing military operations have not lowered the threat level for commercial shipping substantively. For transits through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, it should be noted that naval recommendations to switch off AIS are not based on credible figures. Both the EU-led and the US-led military operations have published data about the targeting of merchant ships transiting the area with or without AIS on.

These statistics, however, do not align with each other. Raw data used for the analysis has not been made public. The results are therefore at least questionable, underlined by misleading public statements from EU naval officers which have claimed that no ship with AIS off has been successfully targeted by the Houthis.

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that switching off AIS lowers the chances of vessels being targeted. It may limit the success rate for missile attacks in particular, but this does not necessarily apply to attacks conducted by aerial or naval drones. Moreover, not broadcasting AIS may complicate efforts to support a ship after an attack. Less than 10% of merchant ships transiting through the Bab el Mandeb are conducting their voyages without AIS. This figure has not changed significantly during the Houthi campaign.

Guidance on commercial operations

Ship transits

Several shipping industry organisations have published the "Interim Industry Transit Advice, Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden – September 2024". Among other information, the document includes considerations about routing and vessel hardening. The Joint Maritime Information Centre has also issued bridge emergency reference cards in October 2024. Finally, a new "BMP Maritime Security" document was released in March 2025, with updated security and mitigation measures applicable to Red Sea transits.

All 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 Indian Ocean (MSCIO). Any incidents or suspicious activities should also be reported to UKMTO and MSCIO.

Contact details UKMTO

Email: watchkeepers@ukmto.org

Phone: +44 2393 222060

Website: www.ukmto.org

Contact details MSCIO

Email: postmaster@mscio.eu

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

Website: www.mscio.eu

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.

New and reinforced BMP "Maritime Security" guidelines were published in March 2025, offering guidance in mitigating current threats such as attacks by missiles, drones or waterborne IEDs ('drone boats') as well as pirates. The new and updated guidelines reflect the current threats faced by vessels navigating through the Bab el Mandeb and provide a firm starting point for mitigation measures to be conceived and implemented. Vessel-specific considerations are still recommended.

Ship operators should also consider developing adapted procedures 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 incidents.

Red Sea – threat assessment (summary)

There is a high threat of insurgency operations carried out by Houthi forces in Yemen affecting merchant traffic in the southern Red Sea. It is unlikely that the Houthis will resume their widespread campaign of drone and missile strikes against ships, which was formally paused on 19 January 2025. Certain ships, such as those linked to Israel by Houthi determination, might be targeted if such vessels are in the area. The primary threat currently is from collateral damage as Houthi forces engage with US naval assets in the area.

On 6 May 2025, US President Trump and the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Houthis had agreed to cease targeting US vessels in exchange for a cessation of the US bombing campaign. However, this announcement has not significantly altered the threat level. It is uncertain whether the agreement will hold, notably with the Houthis having vowed to continue attacks against Israel. Both Israel and the Houthis are engaged in a cycle of retaliation which maintains a high threat level in the southern Red Sea. Furthermore, it is unclear to which group of vessels the announced ceasefire deal applies, though it does not appear to extend beyond US vessels. There is substantial uncertainty about the exact terms of the deal.

On 12 March 2025, the Houthis had threatened to resume strikes against “Israeli vessels” in the Red Sea, whereas these were already “banned” under Houthi policy. It is unclear which new vessels are encompassed by the threat, and the Houthis have rhetorically allowed themselves the space not to attack individual ships. It is uncertain whether the Houthis will strike vessels in the short to medium term under current circumstances. Houthi attempts at missile and drone strikes against Israel are expected to continue in the medium term.

The Houthis had announced a pause in their Red Sea campaign on 19 January 2025, positively acknowledging the ceasefire deal in Gaza at the time. In their announcement, the Houthis stated that trade through the Red Sea would re-open for all categories except Israeli-flagged vessels or vessels directly owned by Israeli entities. There have been no maritime attacks since the cessation of the campaign was announced, indicating that the Houthis currently have little intention of resuming maritime strikes.

Overall, while the conditions for a return of shipping have begun to appear, there is still some way to go before a return to the pre-campaign normal. The shipping industry must be convinced that the current lull in attacks is not just temporary. Notably, political considerations in Yemen must favour a continued cessation of Houthi strikes at sea. The latest progress may easily be inverted, particularly given political pressure in Israel to continue the fighting in Gaza.

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 as diplomacy continues. The threat level for direct attacks against port and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE is moderate while talks continue.

There is a dispute between Yemen and Eritrea in the Hanish Islands area, primarily due to fishing. 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.

Threat levels

Refer to the section "Methodology / Definitions" for a definition of threat levels. 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, there is an elevated threat of piracy off Somalia and a moderate drone threat to merchant ships in the Somali Basin, Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The drone threat is currently moderate following the Houthi announcement on 19 January that trade through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden would re-open for all categories except Israeli-flagged vessels or vessels directly owned by Israeli entities. A re-start to the Houthi campaign is possible, based on Houthi perceptions of Israeli actions, but is unlikely in the short term for the Indian Ocean.

The threat of pirate operations in the Somali Basin and the Gulf of Aden is elevated. Recent cases show that pirates retain boarding capabilities at significant distances offshore, as far as 800 nautical miles from Somalia. Pirate activity declined through 2024, and activity has been reported infrequently in recent months. This might be due to a perception by the pirates that the risk vs reward calculation for targeting merchant vessels has changed. As such, the threat trend is downward.

There have been several reported boardings of fishing dhows off Somalia since November 2023, which continued through 2024 and into 2025. These boardings were 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. Most current pirate activity is focused on these operations close to the Somali coast.

Merchant ships in transit should be aware of the potential to encounter small armed craft in this area, particularly the Gulf of Aden. These might be fishermen, traders, smugglers, militia or irregular military forces, or military or coastguard patrols operating out of southern Yemen or northern Somalia. Such craft might manoeuvre close to merchant ships while not presenting a threat.

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. 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 primary point of contact for merchant vessels and liaison with military forces in the region. Merchant vessels are encouraged to report positions while operating in the area.

MSCHOA (now renamed as Maritime Security Centre Indian Ocean, MSCIO) manages the EUNAVFOR (EU Naval Forces Somalia and Operation Atalanta) voluntary registration scheme for ships transiting the area and communicates EUNAVFOR counter-piracy guidance to the maritime industry.

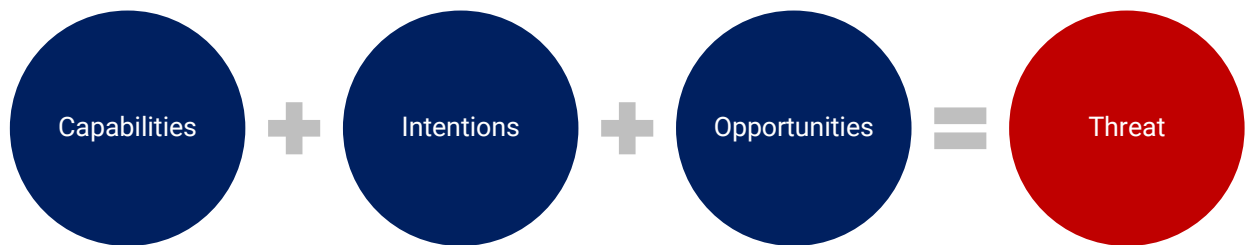
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Threat type	Threat level
Terrorism	Moderate
Piracy	Elevated
Insurgency and Military Operations	Moderate
Cargo Theft	Low
Smuggling	Moderate
Stowaways and human trafficking	Low
Fraud and corruption	Low
Activism	Low

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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