



WEEKLY INTELLIGENCE REPORT | ISSUE NO. 22 (03 JUNE 2026)

Middle East



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About the report

This report provides an overview of the current maritime security situation in different parts of the Middle East, notably the southern Red Sea/Gulf of Aden and the Persian Gulf/Gulf of Oman areas. It is primarily aimed at assessing the threat of attacks against different types of merchant ships operating in these areas.

Comprehensive descriptions for individual incidents as well as statistics about attacks against merchant ships are available on the Risk Intelligence System.

Time of latest intelligence included in this report:
03 June 2026, 10:00 UTC.

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Current situation

Summary

- US and Iran exchange strikes as talks are “suspended”, again confirming that both sides are entrenched in their positions.
- Israel continues its operations in Lebanon, with very little changing on the ground despite media reports to the contrary.
- US behaviour with regards to Israel and Iran is increasingly reminiscent of Russian policies in the post-Soviet sphere.

The US conducted a series of strikes on Iranian facilities and claimed to have fired a Hellfire missile at a steaming vessel in breach of the US naval blockade on Iran. This prompted a retaliation by Iranian forces across the region, which led to airspace closures.

The strikes followed a series of statements by both the US and Iran suggesting that the negotiations had been suspended. It is unlikely that either the US or Iran had engaged seriously with the talks. However, despite the headline-grabbing events, very little in the strategic picture has changed.

This week saw a series of strikes conducted by the US and retaliatory strikes by Iran as both sides traded blows, again belying any notion of diplomatic progress in the conflict. The US claimed to have launched a hellfire missile from an aircraft against the engine room of a vessel suspected to be breaching the US naval blockade on Iran. The US also struck targets on the Island of Qeshm, now famous for its role in the new “Iranian TSS” passing between Qeshm and Laraq Islands. The military strikes appear to have been an attempt to dissuade vessels from complying with the Iranian diktats on transit through the Strait of Hormuz.

In retaliation, Iran struck a number of targets throughout the Persian Gulf, including US military bases and ports housing US facilities. It also struck Kuwait’s international airport, leading to some damage and Kuwaiti airspace closure. Likewise, Iran claimed to have attacked several vessels, including at least two from Italian giant MSC, operating in the region. MSC issued a statement attempting to distance itself from US-Israeli affiliation, by claiming that the Swiss-based company was founded by an Italian citizen and run by his Italian children. This

attempt at distancing itself from the “imperialist-zionists” will at best appear disingenuous to Iranian forces.

Overall, this escalation does not change the situation, with the on-again off-again conflict with Iran no more or less likely to be resolved. US leadership appears to be at a loss for what to do next, whereas the new Iranian leadership sees no incentive to surrender its maritime gains or the power it seized thanks to the US’s attack. This is no change from the past two months.

There has been substantial media reporting about an alleged “dressing down” of Israeli PM Netanyahu by US President Trump, during which Trump appears to have demanded that Israel delay its assault further north into Lebanon and Beirut proper.

The delay of an Israeli assault on Beirut may be linked to Trump’s efforts to appease the Iranians, who have been demanding a ceasefire in Lebanon as a condition for a broader ceasefire, though that is difficult to ascertain. Likewise, some of the US strikes on Iran may have been an effort to appease the Israelis.

Regardless of the minor operational change in plans, whether to attack Beirut now or eventually later, this does not change the dynamic. There are no serious limits on Israel’s use of force to achieve its objectives. The Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory continues. Israeli evacuation orders continue as well as systematic efforts to empty southern Lebanon from its population, under claims of creating a security buffer, north of the existing security buffer. In parallel, Israel has ordered that the IDF increase its occupation of Gazan territory to 70%, up from 60%.

It should be noted that there is a remarkable parallel between the current US approach to the Iran/Israel dossier and that of Russia in the post-soviet space. Having lost the ability to exert full control over its former sphere of influence, Russia’s policies have maintained a glacis of unresolved conflicts (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Central Asian wars). Russia has essentially leveraged its escalation dominance and ability to shield itself from serious retaliation by much weaker states to preserve a modicum of influence in the degraded countries.

This approach discards any goodwill and relies on force and the exploitation of dependencies developed over the course of decades of domination – legacy weapon systems, treaties, economic holdings. Occasional (and moderately credible) claims of being an arbiter in the post-soviet conflicts it largely shaped underline Russia’s new status: powerful enough to prevent peace, too weak to achieve it.

Red Sea situation and 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 in the early phase of their campaign 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 the Houthis' ability to maintain pressure on the shipping industry.

Overall, US-linked merchant ships are exposed to a higher threat level than vessels from other countries as a result of the Iran war. The threat level for ships linked to Western European ownership is also somewhat higher than for other vessels, a consequence of the perceived alignment of European foreign policy with the US and continued European support for Israel.

In case of renewed attacks, the Houthis are expected to once again target vessels owned by companies that are trading with Israel, resulting in a severe threat level for these ships.

Potential targets	Threat type	Threat level
Merchant ships linked to Israel through ownership, port calls, trade with and/or commercial relationship	Kinetic attack (missile, aerial/waterborne drone), possibly seizure and detention	Severe
Merchant ships linked to the US through ownership or registration	Kinetic attack (missile, aerial/waterborne drone), possibly seizure and detention	High
Merchant ships linked to countries participating in or supporting defensive naval operations	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

Military operations against the Houthis have not lowered the threat level for merchant ships. 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 somewhat degraded by military strikes throughout 2025, the strikes' actual impacts have been impossible to assess with certainty. Furthermore, reports about military actions were solely based on military sources and could rarely be independently verified. Overall, there has been no meaningful and sustainable reduction of the threat posed by Houthi forces towards merchant ships.

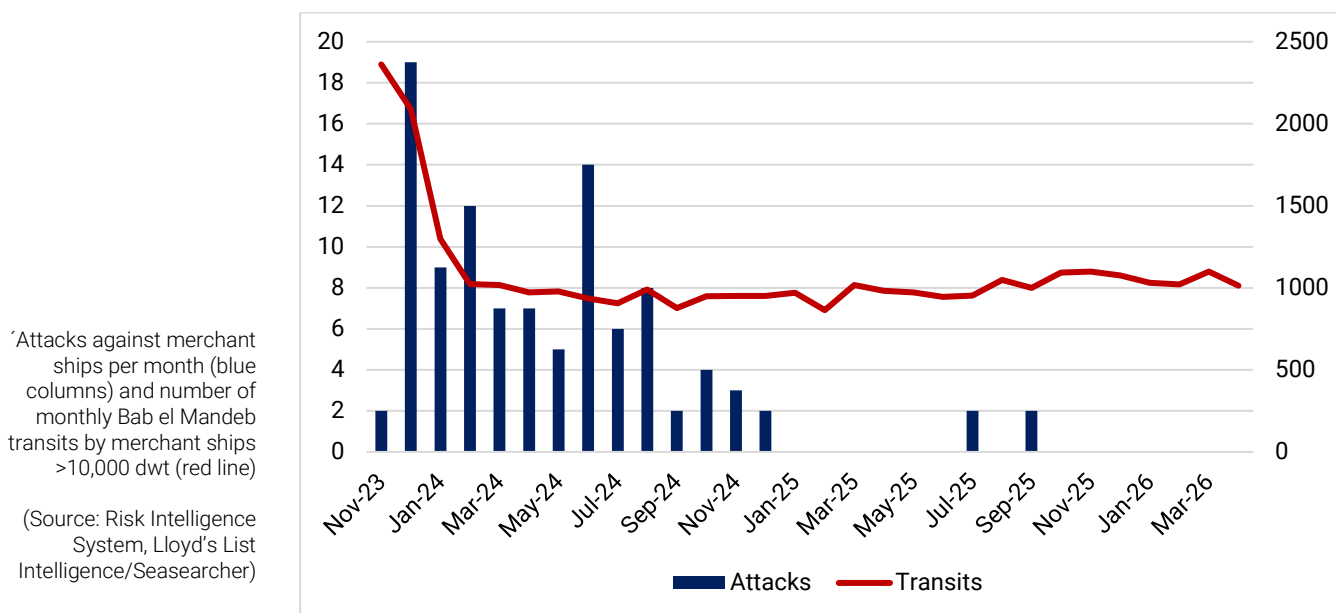
Vessels not related to countries taking part in naval operations may be targeted due to misidentification. Proximity to kinetic attacks or to interceptions of drones

and missiles by military forces could also lead to collateral damage. Moreover, 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.



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.

The graph above 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 has remained at virtually the same level since February 2024, regardless of attack levels.

Overall, the decision to return of commercial shipping 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. Overall, the shipping industry is still adopting a "wait-and-see" attitude

regarding a return to Red Sea transits, particularly in the currently volatile environment across the Middle East.

Military operations against the Houthis have not lowered the threat level for commercial shipping. 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 verifiable figures.

There is no evidence to suggest that switching off AIS lowers the chances of vessels being targeted. It may in some cases 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 since the beginning of the Houthi campaign.

Red Sea: Threat assessment (summary)

There is at least an elevated threat of attacks by Houthi forces in the southern Red Sea as part of their campaign to control maritime traffic. The Houthis' maritime campaign started in November 2023 in reaction to Israel's military operations in Gaza and has not been declared over. Threat levels are determined by commercial links and are higher for entities linked to the US or Israel, including for companies having made Israeli port calls. There have been no recent attacks, but the Houthis retain the intentions and capabilities to continue their campaign as needed to meet their domestic and regional political goals.

The Houthis have used airborne and waterborne drones, missiles, and small boat operations to threaten vessel traffic. Attacks are typically clustered off Yemen but have included areas farther north off the Saudi coast and in the western Gulf of Aden. Vessels have also been targeted as far north up as Yanbu, but such attacks are likely to remain rare. Targets are typically selected based on their commercial links but there is the potential for misidentification or for collateral damage in proximity to attacks.

After a lull in operations, there was an uptick in the middle of 2025 when the bulk carriers MAGIC SEAS and ETERNITY C. were attacked on 6 and 7 July respectively. Both attacks involved small craft as well as more heavy ordnance, though limited airborne means. Both vessel owners had called Israeli ports with other ships in their respective fleet. The attacks upended a slight increase in traffic and talks of renewed transits through the Red Sea.

Overall, maritime traffic in the Red Sea has been at a level of 40-50 percent compared to the pre-campaign level since February 2024. No significant increase has been recorded since then. Notably, political considerations in Yemen favour a cessation of Houthi strikes at sea. The Houthis have expressed opposition to the US and Israeli attacks on Iran but have only responded directly against Israel rather than shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis are assessed to be either deterred, undecided or unconvinced internally as to whether to resume attacks against shipping, though the discussion is highly likely ongoing within their leadership.

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 Saudi Arabia continues. The maritime dimension to this conflict is limited as diplomacy is ongoing behind the scenes. The threat level for direct attacks against port and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia is moderate while talks are ongoing.

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, though increased and indiscriminate jamming in the waters between Port Sudan and Jeddah pose a threat to navigation.

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

Persian Gulf: Threat assessment (summary)

Merchant ships wanting to transit the Strait of Hormuz are currently affected by Iran's de facto control of the strait and the blockade of Iranian ports by the US. The threat of direct targeting by Iranian or US ordnance or aggressive approaches by either side is currently high, including possible vessel seizures. Collateral damage from other military strikes is another concern, similar to potential mines in the strait area.

Iran has continued to assert its control with attacks on merchant vessels despite a ceasefire in the wider conflict and initiatives by the US to open the strait. The situation remains in flux, with erratic statements and behaviour by the US, and an Iranian commitment to assert control of the Strait of Hormuz against existing conventions. The conflict oscillates between periods of largely performative "negotiations" between both parties, punctuated by mutual threats, and surges of violence with strikes against economic or military targets, including vessels and port facilities. There is no indication of diplomatic progress for the time being, and no indication that either side has the political will to reach a negotiated outcome. Both US and Iranian forces have attacked vessels at sea, with at least 11 seafarers reported killed by Iranian strikes and 44 reported killed by US strikes.

JMIC has advised the following: "Vessels choosing to transit the Strait of Hormuz should consider routing via Oman territorial waters south of the Traffic Separation Scheme. Due to anticipated traffic volume, coordination with Oman authorities via VHF channel 16 is advised to maintain safety of navigation." Nonetheless, it appears that any traffic given permission by Iran to transit will be subject to Iran's new self-declared northward route outside the pre-existing TSS. Enforcement by Iran of its route is expected to continue. According to Iranian statements, merchant ships require clearance from Iran's IRGC-Navy to transit, which will determine which vessels can transit and under what conditions. Iran has also said that it will only enter into substantive negotiations once the US blockade of Iranian ports and associated vessel traffic is lifted.

President Trump has said that the US blockade of Iranian ports – which started on 13 April – would remain in place until a deal with Iran was reached. The blockade is said to be enforced "against vessels of all nations" entering or

departing Iranian ports and coastal areas, including all Iranian ports on the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz between non-Iranian ports will not be affected. Enforcement has been taking place, with some vessels being turned back and one container ship even fired upon and seized.

The ceasefire agreed on 8 April under Pakistani mediation remains in force, in theory, despite the numerous violations. Ongoing negotiations will have to deal with difficult questions. Iran has strengthened its negotiating position with control of the Strait of Hormuz, and it is likely that Iran will remain a necessary interlocutor for future transits. There is a possibility of transits increasing in volume gradually as soon as Iran feels the terms of any deal, as it understands them, are upheld. US-Iran negotiations are also expected to focus on control of the Strait of Hormuz, but outcome and timeline are unclear.

Previously, Iran had declared the Strait of Hormuz closed to traffic on 3 March. "The strait (of Hormuz) is closed. If anyone tries to pass, the heroes of the Revolutionary Guards and the regular navy will set those ships ablaze," Ebrahim Jabari, a senior adviser to the IRGC commander-in-chief, said in remarks to state media. Several strikes were subsequently conducted to enforce the closure as part of wider military actions. About 20 ships were affected. Prior to this announcement, GNSS disruption had already been recorded and was ongoing during the war.

Vessels still operating in the region are advised to strengthen protective measures. Crews may have to be prepared to deal with possible missile or drone strikes by taking actions to limit the risk of collateral damage and increase operational resilience. Vessels might also need to be prepared to respond to aggressive enforcement by Iran of any transit rules it wants to implement.

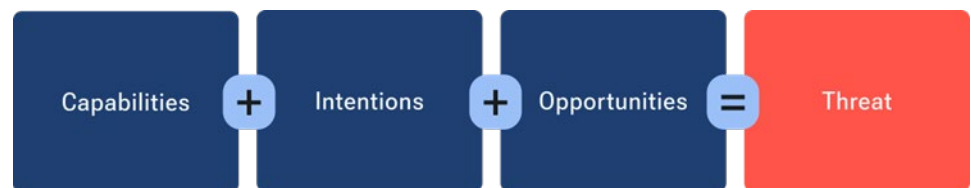
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Methodology/Definitions

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.

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.



Knowing Risk



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