

Circular From: NorthStandard**Date: 15 December 2023**

Red Sea Security Threat To Shipping

Regional conflicts in the Middle East raise the security risk to merchant shipping, in particular vessels transiting the Red Sea.

11 December 2023

Yemen's Houthi forces have announced that they will widen their targeting of vessels transiting the Red Sea to include any Israel-bound ship, regardless of its flag.

A statement by Houthi official Mohammed Ali al-Houthi was posted on X (Twitter) on Saturday, announcing that they will "prevent the passage of ships [of any nationality heading to Israel] if they do not enter the Gaza Strip where they need food and medicine", adding that such vessels "will become a legitimate target for our armed forces,"

4 December 2023

Regional conflicts in the Middle East raises the security risk to merchant shipping, in particular vessels transiting the Red Sea.

Following the recent intensification of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the Iran-backed Yemeni Houthis have publicly threatened to attack vessels that they believe have some affiliation with Israel.

Following the attack on a vehicle carrier by Houthis on 19 November and an oil tanker on 25 November, the situation escalated on 3 December 2023 when, according to U.S. Central Command, three bulk carriers were targeted on that day.

The U.S. Navy destroyer CARNEY provided support to these vessels and shot down several UAVs launched from Houthi controlled areas in Yemen.

United States guidance

MARAD released alerts to US vessels on [19 November](#) and [27 November](#) following maritime security

incidents in the Red Sea – the alerts contain [a link to their Advisory](#)

Ambrey threat assessment

Maritime risk management experts Ambrey issued a ‘threat circular’ following the threat to the Liberia-registered oil tanker CENTRAL PARK on 25 November 2023.

Ambrey advises that Israel-affiliated merchant shipping is at heightened risk. Israel-affiliated means vessels that are flagged Israeli or owned/managed by an Israel-owned or -based company. This definition extends to vessels flagged, owned, or managed as defined above within the past year as Iran may use outdated information and has mistakenly targeted vessels before.

Ambrey advises Company Security Officers to assess whether their vessel was owned or managed by an Israel-affiliated company within the last year. If the vessel is, it would be advised to:

- Assess the vessel’s route, particularly proximity to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iranian Navy assets, and Houthi-controlled sites. It is advised to consider the predictability of the route.
- Identify the vessel’s planned ETA to those sites, and the position relative to other potential targets. A schedule adjustment might be recommended. The use of UAS in direct attack is deliberate and intelligence-led. Avoid predictable routing behaviour. Adjust routing, even by small margins, and avoid contested waters and higher risk areas.
- It is advised to consider the electronic signals policy, including information and minimisation days before entry to the Red Sea, the Bab el Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden.
- Bridge teams must be briefed and practiced on how to handle maritime harassment, including pre-prepared responses. If the vessel is exposed to an increased level of risk to UAS attack on a particular voyage, or a particular passage of that voyage, manning levels on the bridge should be kept to a minimum for the duration of the increased risk.
- Evasive manoeuvres and propulsion should be tested before entering the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden.
- The merchant vessel is hardened according to Best Management Practices to delay boarding and slow access to crew areas and control systems onboard the vessel.
- Crew members should be briefed on what to do in the event of boarding, including a policy on whether to disable the vessel’s navigation in busy shipping areas and the designation of a hardened Citadel/Safe Muster Point with control of fire suppression systems and independent communications systems.
- Crew are advised where possible, to adopt ballistic protection measures. Stand-off bar/cage/slat solutions are available and could help mitigate risk to key areas. Other measures include the designation of Safe Muster Points, and the minimisation of crew movements on deck, and in areas with external

walls.

[Our thanks to Ambrey for allow us to share their threat assessment, which can be read here >](#)

Industry associations' guidance

Following the recent series of threats and attacks, shipping associations BIMCO, ICS, CLIA, IMCA, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO and OCIMF have come together to publish security guidance applicable to navigating in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The guidance emphasises the importance of conducting a thorough ship and voyage-specific threat and risk assessment considering any additional advice from the ship's flag state before passing through the area in question. The guidance highlights that the maritime threat from the Houthi forces is greater in the vicinity of the Yemeni Red Sea coastline, where they are occasionally present.

The Houthi threat is assessed to be directed mainly against ships identified by the Houthis as having links to Israel or Israeli nationals or ships directly associated with the Saudi-led coalition involved in the Houthi conflict with the Yemeni government.

The full guidance is available below.

Maritime security resources

Security advice can be downloaded from the shipping industry's [Maritime Global Security website >](#)

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) website maintains a summary of the [latest incidents in the region >](#)

Source of Information: The NorthStandard P&I Club