

Type:	Threat	Version:	1.0	Classification:	Restricted
Created:	20231214			Status:	Live
Title	AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 14/12/2023				



AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – INDIAN OCEAN REGION INSECURITY

Source:

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A. Situation

Since the 14th of November, Ansar Allah (the 'Houthis') have threatened to attack Israel-affiliated merchant shipping. This followed ballistic missile and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) launches toward Israeli territory, most of which were intercepted or missed targets. The switch to merchant shipping in the Red Sea was likely due to their failure to make a meaningful contribution to the Eastern Mediterranean theatre. The Houthis have attempted to cajole merchant shipping to divert to the port of Hodeida and have threatened to "attack" and "destroy" civilian ships should the crews refuse. The Houthis are likely utilising small boats, and port infrastructure to assist with the targeting. They have damaged merchant vessels and put ordinary seamen's lives at risk in the process. On the other side of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran has targeted Israel-affiliated merchant shipping for years and has continued to do so, also using UAVs and missiles. Amidst this, political instability in the northeastern-most region of Somalia resulted in the recent hijacking of two dhows, and there was a possible associated risk of a re-emergence of piracy.

B. Threat Update

The Houthis have broadened their target profile of what constitutes 'affiliated' from flag, ownership, operatorship, and management, to include the destination of Israel. It should also be noted that they, and their Iranian backers, have mistakenly targeted vessels that were no longer associated with Israel. In one of the more recent attacks, they appeared to target a company with a weaker Israeli stake. A speedboat approached at high speed. A Private Armed Security Team (PAST) followed the Rules for the Use of Force by displaying weapons, and the speedboat opened fire. The PAST returned fire and repelled this attack; the speedboat disengaged. It is also assessed likely they may target vessels whose parent companies have co-operated with Israel. This means the threat is no longer transit-specific (linked to a particular vessel and its port calls). As some affiliated merchant shipping diverts from the area, the Houthis are assessed to maintain their broadened scope of potential targets. The insurance industry has responded with markedly higher rates across the board. Despite the stated intent to disrupt Israeli commercial trade, the risk of collateral damage from debris among the wider shipping community persists when transiting the region. There has been an increased military presence in the Red Sea which has led to the interception of many missiles and UAVs, but the presence has been uneven, meaning ship hardening and protection measures remain important to mitigate the associated risks of transiting the area.

The threat realised offshore Somalia has so far been targeted at Iranian dhows, who were licensed by the incumbent Government of Puntland. However, there is

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assessed to be a possible criminal and opportunist risk that could extend beyond this affiliation. One of the hijacked dhows towed skiffs behind it and returned to Somalia when they were lost in adverse weather. The group threatened that if they were not paid a ransom, they would target other vessels. The criminal actors could take advantage of the erosion in the counter-piracy security architecture as permission to operate in territorial waters has been restricted and there has been a reduction in armed security presence. At the time of writing a boarding of a bulk carrier had been reported in the Indian Ocean.

C. Mitigation

Private Armed Security Teams (PAST) have successfully repelled attacks by both Houthis in a recent incident and Somali pirates in the past. It is assessed that they remain effective against waterborne assaults, provided their team size and weapons composition is calibrated to the threat. Companies may wish to review RUF accordingly. Teams may also aid with watchkeeping and drilling crew members to mitigate some of the risks associated with aerial threats.

Ambrey strongly advises to conduct a thorough pre-voyage check of the vessel's affiliations and ship hardening measures. Ambrey has provided the following advised mitigation measures:

- 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.
- 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.
- Evasive manoeuvres and propulsion should be tested before entering the region.
- 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 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. Even vessels without an assessed Israeli affiliation should consider this due to the risk of collateral damage.

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- Emergency communications in the event of harassment, boarding, or an attack are documented and practiced. These should include military liaison, and designated crisis response coordinators, such as Ambrey. These can be added to the Ship Security Alert System emergency broadcast recipients.
- Vessels should proceed with increased awareness of military asset communications, including UKMTO, IMSC, EUNAVFOR, and independently deployed.
- Private Maritime Security Teams are advised to not escalate RUF against aerial threats, but they are advised to enhance Best Management Practices, by improvising measures, running drills, and supporting with lookouts and advice to the bridge team.

D. Contact Information

- Ambrey: +44 203 503 0320, intelligence@ambrey.com. Ambrey advisories are available to Sentinel subscribers and digital operations support is available through the Guardian service. Contact your Account Manager for further information.
- Fifth Fleet Battle Watch: + 973-1785-3879, and email details to: cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil.
- Fifth Fleet NCAGS: cusnc.ncags_bw@me.navy.mil.
- IMSC: m-ba-imsc-bwc@us.navy.mil or +973-1785-8412/8192/8193.
- UKMTO: watchkeepers@ukmto.org or +44 (0) 2392 22060. UKMTO advisories and warnings are available at <https://www.ukmto.org/>.
- U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center: +1-800-424-8802.
- USCG NAVCEN: www.navcen.uscg.gov/contact/gps-problem-report or +1-703-313-5900.

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