

Type:	Threat	Version:	1.0	Classification:	Restricted
Created:	20240212			Status:	Live
Title	AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 12/02/2024				



# AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – HOUTHI TARGETING PROFILE

## Source:

This document has been approved for distribution by Ambrey Analytics Ltd.

## The following reports remain active:

Ambrey Threat Circular – US and UK strikes against Houthi military targets, 12 January 2024

Ambrey Threat Update – Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean, 2 February 2024

## A. Executive Summary

- The Houthis continue to target Israeli, American, and British-linked shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. So far in February, four vessels have been targeted by the Houthis, all with these affiliations.
- As well as the under-appreciation of historic links of vessels, there is a misperception in parts of the industry that having certain affiliations will altogether negate an attack.
- The broadening of Houthi targeting of Israeli-affiliations evidences that the target profiles are not fixed, and assessments should be revisited with every warning and event.
- Ambrey is performing an Ambrey Vessel Affiliation Check (AVAC) for every physical and digital transit and is delivering its Guardian services alongside every physical security transit.
- Ambrey is also receiving a record number of requests for support in settling charter-party disputes, many of which are *ex post facto*, indicating a need to engage such services earlier.

## B. Situation

In the latest event, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, the Houthis targeted a primarily Greece-owned bulk carrier, carrying cargo destined for Iran. The Marshall Islands-flagged bulker was targeted by the Houthis with two missiles in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The first struck the vessel on its starboard side, and the second detonated on the vessel's port side without causing further damage. The bulker's owner was Greece-owned but was also listed on the US stock market index, the NASDAQ. She was carrying corn from Vila do Conde, Brazil, and destined for Bandar Imam Khomeini, Iran, and displayed the same on her AIS transmissions. The Houthis issued a statement taking responsibility for the attack and characterised the vessel as 'American'.

## C. Threat Update

The Houthis have targeted merchant shipping affiliated with Israel since the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2023. These attacks were the Houthis' response to the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict. The Houthis broadened their initial targeting profile from Israeli-owned, -managed, and -operated vessels to include vessels destined for Israel and vessels whose companies have engaged in Israeli trade or who have worked with Israel-affiliated companies. This threat is assessed to persist. Since the first American and British airstrikes on Houthi military positions on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2024, the Houthis have targeted American and British-owned vessels. At the time of writing, they had targeted merchant vessels whose group owners were registered in or controlled by American and British companies. Affiliations with mainland China, with Iran and Russia have not altogether negated attacks either. In January, the Houthis targeted a container ship operated by a company cooperating with Zim and calling Israel, but which was owned by a Chinese company based in Shenzhen. The same month, the Houthis targeted a tanker with an outdated British affiliation carrying oil from Ust-Luga, Russia.

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**D. Mitigation**

Ambrey recommends an affiliation check is performed for Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Gulf voyages.

Ambrey is including its Guardian service with every physical security engagement. This includes the Ambrey Vessel Affiliation Check (AVAC), as a Voyage Risk Assessment must be informed by an affiliation check.

Ambrey can support charter-party disputes. Ambrey has seen a large increase in such requests. This speaks to the complexity and scale of the problem. Where possible, it is advised to engage independent advice ahead of making a decision.

To carry out the AVAC, Ambrey has compiled a list of independent variables that have been assessed to constitute affiliations and is monitoring others that could be considered affiliations.

It is assessed whether the variables are active/inactive, whether they are realistic worst-case, or whether they are dependent.

A vessel's current affiliations and past affiliations are considered using multiple industry-leading vessel databases and open-source research by Ambrey's analysts.

These generate a Strong, Medium, Weak, and Negligible affiliation assessment.

It is advised to conduct these before the transit but should be revisited closer to the time.

**E. Contact Information**

- Ambrey: +44 203 503 0320, [intelligence@ambrey.com](mailto: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](mailto:cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil).
- Fifth Fleet NCAGS: [cusnc.ncags\\_bw@me.navy.mil](mailto:cusnc.ncags_bw@me.navy.mil).
- IMSC: [m-ba-imsc-bwc@us.navy.mil](mailto:m-ba-imsc-bwc@us.navy.mil) or +973-1785-8412/8192/8193.
- UKMTO: [watchkeepers@ukmto.org](mailto:watchkeepers@ukmto.org) or +44 (0) 2392 222060. 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](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/contact/gps-problem-report) or +1-703-313-5900.

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