

Type:	Threat	Version:	1.0	Classification:	Restricted
Created:	20240614			Status:	Live
Title	AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 14/06/2024				



AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – FIRST CONFIRMED RC-WBIED IMPACT SINCE NOVEMBER 2023

Source:

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The following reports remain active:

Ambrey Threat Circulares dated 12th of January, 2nd of February, 12th of February, 7th of March, 15th of March, 9th of April and 13th of April remain active.

A. Executive Summary

- On the 12th of June the Houthis damaged a merchant vessel with a Remote Controlled-Water Borne Improvised Explosive Device (RC-WBIED).
- This was the first time they had successfully hit a merchant vessel with an RC-WBIED since they began targeting merchant shipping in November 2023.
- The merchant ship was a single-hulled bulk carrier. The hit caused the engine room to flood and reportedly resulted in a crew fatality.
- The Houthis have used RC-WBIEDs and purpose-built Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs) for years but their primary *modus operandi* since November 2023 has been to use missiles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles against merchant shipping.

B. Situation

On the 12th of June, a Liberia-flagged bulk carrier was impacted by an RC-WBIED southwest of Hodeida, Yemen. The vessel was transiting with AIS off and west of the main shipping lane. The single-hulled vessel had last called Aqaba, Jordan, however, she had ceased AIS transmissions after exiting the Suez Canal southbound. The impact caused the engine room to flood. The vessel was subsequently declared “not under command” and “dead in the water”. Three hours thereafter, the vessel was targeted with a missile. One crewmember was reportedly killed following the attack, making this the second incident with crew fatality. At the time of writing, it was understood that the crew was abandoning the ship. The RC-WBIED was described as a 5-7m long white-hulled boat “manned” with two dummies. This description aligns with Yemeni fishing boats. Ansar Allah (“the Houthis”) have maintained an elevated level of operations since an Israel Defense Forces incursion into the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip appeared imminent. In the week leading up to this Threat Circular, the Houthi claimed six operations against merchant shipping. Four of those targeting attempts resulted in physical damage, marking a significant increase in effectiveness. On the 3rd of May, the Houthis issued a “ban” (internationally unrecognised) on companies conducting Israel port calls. All mentioned targeting operations were conducted against vessels whose companies had called Israel since the 3rd of May.

C. Threat Update

The Houthis successfully targeted military and merchant shipping with RC-WBIEDs during an earlier phase of the Yemeni Civil War. However, this is the first confirmed impact since the Houthi commenced targeting merchant vessels in November 2023. Before this incident, US Central Command repeatedly announced the destruction of USVs and, in January 2024, an assessed RC-WBIED washed up in the Bab al Mandeb Strait. Inspectors found three electronic switches connected to 25kg of C4 explosives (approximately 33.5kg of TNT equivalent) and 50kg of TNT. The switches seen have been pressure contact switches and, in the past systems, these have been facing forward-, starboard- and port-facing. In this case, and the case in January, the RC-WBIEDs were fishing-types, which are typically fibreglass or wooden. The use of dummies was significant. This *modus operandi* has been seen before. This can disguise the nature of the threat and can draw defensive fire toward the ‘operator’. In previous incidents, a second skiff has been seen within 2NM. From this second skiff, the operators have radio-controlled the unmanned devices. At the time of writing, no second skiff had been reported. The Houthis have the proven capability to track these modified vessels using GPS and to utilise a video feed. It is assessed possible that this was controlled remotely from land.

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D. Mitigation

Ambrey recommends a thorough affiliation check as part of a transit risk assessment is performed for all Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Arabian/Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean voyages. This is being performed as a matter of course for all Ambrey tasks.

Vessels assessed to be at high risk are advised to re-consider their voyage, which could include re-routing.

Note that the Houthi target profile could change during a voyage. This should be regularly checked and managed with an intelligence provider.

The embarkation of PAST should be considered for transits through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. For those assessed to be at heightened risk, an increased team size should be considered and the PAST ought to be equipped to destroy RC-WBIEDs and USVs, whilst at all times following Rules for the Use of Force.

A Safe Muster Point (SMP) should be designated. The SMP should be well above the waterline, centralised within the accommodation block, as far away from external walls as possible.

AIS transmissions and other signal emissions ought to be immediately stopped if suspicious activity is encountered. Irregular and frequent course and speed alterations also are assessed to reduce the likelihood of damage.

All deck movements should be halted where possible when transiting heightened-risk areas. Bridge manning should be reduced to a minimum.

E. Contact Information

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- 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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