

10 January 2025

“Ambrey confirms the successful salvage of MT SOUNION following attack by Houthi militants.”



On 21 August 2024 the Greek owned, laden oil tanker MT SOUNION was targeted by Houthi militants in the southern Red Sea. Strikes from anti-ship missiles destroyed critical control systems and the vessel lost propulsion. On August 22, following an urgent distress call from the ship's Captain, the European Naval Force (EUNAVFOR), Operation “ASPIDES”, swiftly dispatched a naval asset (a French frigate) to execute a rescue operation of the crew. Despite continued attacks by Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), all 29 crew members were safely evacuated by ASPIDES’ asset.

On 23 August 2024 the Houthis boarded the vessel before detonating explosive charges on the main decks and bridge which started 19 fires and breached her cargo tank tops. A film released online by the Houthis was then widely circulated in international media. The SOUNION was stricken 58 miles off the Yemeni coast, under close watch by Houthi mother ships and in easy range of all their weapon systems.

A commercial salvage operation was launched by the vessel insurers, which was led by Ambrey. Major diplomatic efforts were required to support the necessary military, security, salvage and logistics efforts to rescue the vessel before her structural integrity succumbed to the heat of the fires raging onboard, or she continued dragging her anchor and ran aground. On 24 August the US State Department issued a statement claiming the vessel risked an oil spill into the Red Sea ‘four times the size of the Exxon Valdez disaster’.

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The extensive firefighting mission required to make the vessel safe could not be undertaken in her initial location. However, a tow of a laden tanker whilst on fire was not something that had ever been undertaken at this scale before. Salvage operations could only begin once explosive ordnance disposal experts had inspected the vessel and cleared it of any unexploded ordnance or improvised explosive devices, her anchor raised, and a primary towing tug put in position.

The availability of advanced salvage and firefighting equipment within the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden is extremely limited. The scale and complexity of what had happened meant that specialist tugs were mobilised from Greece and firefighting equipment flown in on chartered aircraft, along with specialists from around the world. Circumventing normal customs lead times to enable critical equipment to reach the SOUNION in time took diplomatic engagement at the highest levels. The specialists required for the salvage, firefighting and oil spill response had to be prepared to conduct their already difficult and dangerous tasks in the midst of a war zone.

In mid-September, a flotilla of seven salvage vessels supported by three EUNAVFOR ASPIDES' naval assets and close air support successfully reached SOUNION and towed her to a safe and secluded location 150 miles to the north. The protection provided by EUNAVFOR was critical in providing the security required. Firefighting faced huge challenges with the heat and humidity of the Red Sea, meaning operations were primarily conducted at night. Over three challenging weeks, the fires were extinguished, cargo tanks patched and pressurised with inert gas, and the vessel declared safe. In early October, she was towed north to Suez for removal of her cargo, which has now been successfully completed.

The project to save the SOUNION was a complex salvage operation inside a sensitive military and security operation.

"Ambrey pays tribute and is grateful to all the brave military and civilian partners, suppliers, and crew members involved in this complex salvage operation. The collaboration and dedication from all parties enabled us to collectively prevent an environmental catastrophe, save the vessel, and keep all involved safe. This project is a testament to the true purpose of all those who contributed."

Christopher Crookall - Ambrey CEO

Deployed operational partners included:

Megatugs Salvage & Towage, Diaplous, Offmain, Fire Aid, Pro Liquid, and Ambipar Response – over 200 specialists and crew assembled to secure, tow, and extinguish the fires, allowing for the safe removal and transfer of her cargo. This project undoubtedly prevented a major environmental disaster.



Notes to editors:

About Ambrey

Ambrey is a global leader in maritime security, intelligence, insurance and risk management, offering a comprehensive range of services to protect vessels, crews, and cargoes across the world. With a team of experienced professionals and a commitment to innovation, Ambrey delivers solutions that enhance the safety and security of maritime operations saving lives, time and money for our clients.

Ambrey – For Every Seafarer, Every Vessel, Everywhere.

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