

Type:	Threat	Version:	1.0	Classification:	Restricted
Created:	20250120			Status:	Live
Title	AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 20/01/2025				



AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – HOUTHI SPECIFY INTENT

Source:

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A. Executive Summary

- The Houthi announced the cessation of hostilities toward most shipping in response to the Israel-Hamas ceasefire.
- Israel-owned and -flagged shipping continues to be banned from transiting the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
- Merchant vessels continue to be at risk due to fragility of the ceasefire and potential for Houthi subjectivity resulting in singular attacks.
- This cessation of hostilities relies on the US and UK stopping military operations against the Houthi in Yemen – this is dependent on Houthi operations against Israel, naval assets, and merchant shipping.
- A reduction of risk to shipping is assessed almost certain to occur gradually as the Houthi intent is supported by actions – i.e. no military operations against shipping.

B. Situation

On the 19th of January 2025, the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect with the release of 3 female Israeli hostages. The Houthi leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, announced the groups' willingness to honour the ceasefire in a speech given on the 16th of January 2025. On the 19th of January, the Houthi-aligned Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center (HOCC) issued an email to stakeholders in the shipping industry announcing that the Houthi would cease military operations against merchant shipping in line with the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Israel-owned or -flagged vessel were explicitly exempted from this cessation of hostilities. A full halt of all activity against shipping was foreshadowed for when Israel and Hamas had implemented 'Phase 2' of the ceasefire agreement, the full terms of which were yet to be negotiated. The statement further read, that any 'aggression' against the Houthi would be met with the resumption of operations to prevent free passage through the Bab el-Mandeb. In a speech on the 20th of January 2025, al-Houthi, stated that the Houthi "are in constant readiness for immediate intervention at any time the Israeli enemy returns to escalation." He further stated that the Houthi "are ready and working continuously to prepare for the inevitable upcoming rounds" previously saying "there must certainly be upcoming rounds".

C. Threat Update

This constitutes the Houthi intent at least until Israel and Hamas reach agreement on the terms of 'Phase 2' of the ceasefire and commence its implementation. 'Phase 1' is set to last 42 days from the 19th of January 2025, with an agreement on 'Phase 2' to be reached by week 5. The coming weeks will provide the proof of whether the Houthi follow suit with their stated intent. During this period, the threat to all shipping is reduced apart from Israel-owned and -flagged vessels. However, this is subject to flashpoint escalation if the Houthi consider Israel in breach of the ceasefire agreement.

Ambrey assesses shipping with links to Israel and Israeli trade to be at greater risk than US- and UK-owned shipping as the ceasefire remains fragile and secondary negotiations continue. Houthi military action in response to a perceived breach of the ceasefire agreement by Israel remains possible and would highly likely impact Israel-affiliated shipping first. The original US and UK response on the 11th of January 2024 was preceded by attacks on shipping trading with Israel and could well lead to further US and UK military operations against the Houthi.

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The Houthi did not specify how they intend to prevent an Israel-owned or -flagged vessel from transiting the Bab el-Mandeb. The attack of such as vessel, or a flashpoint escalation, is assessed possible to result in an Israeli airstrike against the Houthi.

There is a probability for the US to launch airstrikes in response to Houthi military action against merchant shipping or naval assets, raising the risk for US and UK-owned shipping. The Joint Maritime Information Centre (JMIC) issued the warning: “Maritime industry should be skeptical of recent Houthi claims.” The JMIC further stated that the threat to shipping associated with Israel, the US, or UK would “remain high”. The US has not yet offered statements of intent in response to the Houthi declaration. The threat to US and UK shipping originated as a stated consequence of joint US/UK airstrikes on Houthi military positions. These airstrikes, in turn, were initiated in response to the rising threat to maritime trade through the southern Red Sea. If the Houthi were to completely cease their operations, the US may no longer assess a requirement for airstrikes. However, any further US or UK military action against the Houthi would highly likely cause the reemergence of the threat to US- or UK-owned vessels.

A return of shipping to the region is almost certain to occur gradually, provided the ceasefire holds. The threat to shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden continues to be conditional and future escalation beyond the present conditionality of the ceasefire may occur.

D. Mitigation

- Affiliation checks against the Houthi target profile: Ambrey recommends a thorough affiliation check as part of a transit risk assessment is performed for Red Sea and Gulf of Aden voyages. Ambrey has adjusted this to reflect the stated intent.
- Ship Security Assessments: Merchant shipping assessed to be at heightened risk is advised to carry out Ship Security Assessments tailored to the threat, and to implement recommended and proportionate ship protection measures before sailing.
- Physical security: Private Armed Security Teams can be highly effective against certain threat vectors. Ambrey continues to recommend considering increased team sizes with appropriate armament.
- Bridge support: Private Armed Security Teams to prepare and reassure crew and assist with military liaison. Digital operations can also support with route planning and keep the bridge and shore staff informed of any changes in risk while enroute.

E. Contact Information

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