

Current Situation

The United States has confirmed that four attacks against three separate commercial vessels operating in international waters in the southern Red Sea occurred on 3 December 2023. The destroyer *USS CARNEY* responded to the distress calls from the vessels and provided assistance. The incidents on Sunday are the latest to have taken place in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, with one vessel hijacked along with its crewmembers and taken to Yemen, and several other vessels targeted in recent week. Houthi rebels have previously warned that they will target vessels that have any links to Israel, calling them “legitimate targets.” Additionally, in the wider region in

waters off Somalia, Somali pirates are also attempting to benefit from the regional tensions stemming from the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, as witnessed in late November with the hijacking of a vessel.



Recap of Incidents on 3 December

As approximately 9:15 AM local time on Sunday, the *USS CARNEY* detected an anti-ship ballistic missile attack that had been fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen towards the Bahamas flagged M/V *UNITY EXPLORER*. The attack impacted in the vicinity of the vessel. The *USS CARNEY* was carrying out a patrol in the Red Sea when it detected the attack on the bulk cargo ship.

At approximately 12PM, while in international waters, the *USS CARNEY* engaged and shot down a UAV that had been launched from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. The drone was headed towards the *USS CARNEY* though its specific target remains unclear. The US has confirmed that at this time it has been unable to assess whether the destroyer was the intended target of the UAV. No damage to the vessel or injuries to its crewmembers was reported.

In a separate attack at approximately 12:35PM, *UNITY EXPLORER* reported that it had been struck by a missile fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. The US destroyer responded to the distress call. While assisting in carrying out an assessment of any damage, the *USS CARNEY* detected another inbound UAV. That drone was destroyed with no damage or crewmember injuries reported on the destroyer or *UNITY EXPLORER*, which had reported minor damage from the earlier missile strike.

At approximately 3:30 PM, the M/V *NUMBER 9* was struck by a missile fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. The incident occurred as the vessel was operating in international shipping lanes in the Red Sea. The Panama-flagged bulk carrier reported no vessel damage and no casualties to its crewmembers.

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At approximately 4:30 PM, the Panama-flagged M/V *SOPHIE II* sent a distress call indicating that it had been struck by a missile. The *USS CARNEY* responded to the distress call, reporting no significant damage. While en route to render support, the destroyer shot down a UAV that was headed in its direction.

Iranian-backed Houthis rebels have claimed that they targeted “two Israeli ships” in the Red Sea, stating that the Bahamian-flagged bulk carrier *UNITY EXPLORER* had been struck by a missile and that the Panama-flagged container ship *NUMBER 9* was hit by a naval drone. According to a statement released by the group, the vessel had “ignored warning messages from the Yemeni naval forces.” In a statement issued by Centcom, the US disclosed that it “...will consider all appropriate responses in full coordination with its international allies and partners.” In a separate incident on 2 December, the US Central Command reported that a US military had intercepted an Iranian drone “operating in an unsafe and unprofessional manner during aircraft carrier flight operations in the Arabian Gulf.”

Advisory

Activity in the southern Red Sea region has significantly increased over this past weekend and further such attacks are likely to continue to take place. While Houthi rebels have said that they will target vessels with links to Israel, **all commercial shipping passing through these waters could be targeted, regardless of their links to Israel.** Vessels transiting through this region, including waters off Somalia and in the Western Indian Ocean, are strongly advised to remain on high alert at all times, including remaining alert to drones, mines and potential piracy activity. Prior to entering these waters, rigorous security measures should be carried out; a pre-voyage risk and threat assessment should be carried out prior to entering this region, as well as a review of the vessel’s security plan. Security training and drills are advised to be carried out prior to entering any areas of increased risk and strict observance of any exclusion zones or guidance issued by coastal states is advised. When transiting this region, vessels are advised to ensure that AIS is always transmitting, except in extraordinary circumstances, and in accordance with the provisions of the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and should monitor VHF Channel 16. Vigilance is critical when transiting this region and vessels should pay careful attention to any small craft approaching the vessel; it should be noted that fishermen regularly operate in these waters and may attempt to protect their nets by aggressively approaching merchant vessels. Immediately report any incidents and/or suspicious activity.