

Maritime Incident Summary

UKMTO has confirmed an attack on a vessel transiting the Gulf of Aden region. On Friday 26 January, an oil tanker caught fire after a missile attack by Houthi militants.

UKMTO has reported that the incident occurred 60 nautical miles south-east of Aden, Yemen in position 120410N – 0454400E. Authorities have been informed and are responding to the latest strike. A statement released by the vessel's owner, Trafigura, has disclosed that firefighting equipment on board the vessel was being deployed to control the



flames, adding that the safety of the crewmembers was its “foremost priority.” A spokesperson for the company said that “earlier on 26 January, the *MARLIN LUANDA*, a petroleum products tanker vessel operated on behalf of Trafigura, was struck by a missile as it transited the Red Sea.” The spokesperson went on to say that “firefighting equipment on board is being deployed to suppress and control the fire caused in one cargo tank on the starboard side,” adding that “we remain in contact with the vessel and are monitoring the situation carefully. Military ships in the region are underway to provide assistance.” US officials have reported that a nearby naval ship has responded to the vessel’s distress signal and that there have been no injuries reported. Officials add that the oil tanker was hit by an anti-ship ballistic missile. Reports indicate that the vessel is carrying Naptha jet fuel on board, which is highly flammable. Any potential oil spill could threaten the ecological stability of the region. In the event that this vessel sinks because of the strike, it would be the first vessel to be sunk by the Houthi strikes.

Houthi militants have confirmed that they targeted the *MARLIN LUANDA* on the evening of Friday 26 January. Houthi military spokesman Yaha Sarea said that the group had used “a number of appropriate naval missiles” and that Friday’s strike was “direct.”

This is the latest attack on commercial shipping by the Houthi rebels in and around the Red Sea. Earlier in the day, the *MARLIN LUANDA* had relayed information on an earlier attack, reporting that an explosion had occurred in the air approximately 200 to 300 metres above the waterline of another tanker, the Panama-flagged *ACHILLES*. That explosion occurred one nautical mile away from the tanker, and the projectile did not make contact with either vessel. A French warship was reported to be patrolling in the area at the time of the incident. This earlier incident occurred in the same area as the successful strike on the *MARLIN LUANDA*, 60 nautical miles south-west of Aden, in position 121200N – 0441200E.

Advisory

The Combined Maritime Forces, which represents 39 navies including the US and UK, continues to advise all civilian shipping to stay well clear of the Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea. In recent days, the US has carried out further strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen and further such strikes cannot be ruled out. Tensions have

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significantly increased in the wake of these bombings over Houthi warnings that they will strike back. There is currently a heightened risk that Houthi forces may seek immediate retribution for those strikes by targeting accessible vessels within their vicinity. While the threat level for vessels transiting the region remains high, it is severe for those vessels with specific links to Israel, the United State, the United Kingdom and any other countries that are involved in the direct military strikes.

Since initial strikes were launched earlier this month by the US and UK on Houthi targets, additional strikes have been carried out. These strikes have further raised tensions in the region and increases the risk of additional attacks on vessels. Possible attacks targeting commercial shipping in the region could include deliberate sinkings, damage to vessels or seizure of vessels; hazards to safe navigation in shipping lanes; helicopter attacks; aerial threat and indirect fire risks from drones, missiles, ship and shore launched rocket systems; helicopter borne capture parties; small craft attacks and capture parties; sea drones and sea mines; state boardings and seizures (by Iran or other state actors); non-state actor boarding and capture of vessels (by Houthis and other non-state actors); pirate attacks and hijacking by Somali-based pirates. While initially, the Houthis stated that they would target Israeli-shipping, vessels with no links to Israel have been targeted, and in the wake of the US and British airstrikes, all vessels transiting this region are now at risk of being targeted.

Any vessels operating in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb at this time are advised to exercise caution at all times. 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 and should 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 strongly 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 ships. Vessels are advised to immediately report any incidents and/or suspicious activity.

In addition to the heightened security situation in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb, there is also a risk of piracy in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden off Somalia. Since late November 2023, Somali pirates have been implicated in three incidents that have targeted commercial shipping in the area – two hijackings in the Arabian Sea and one boarding in the Gulf of Aden. Additionally, a number of Iranian fishing vessels operating in the area have also been targeted and at least five Iranian fishing vessels have been hijacked. These attacks are allegedly in response to illegal Iranian fishing in Somali waters, which has threatened the livelihoods of local fishermen. Somali pirates have also threatened to use these hijacked vessels as motherships to target other vessels transiting this region.