

Zim container ships divert as threat to Israel-linked vessels mounts

Container ship Zim Europe turns back, heads around Africa

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The U.S. Navy destroyer USS Mason rescued the Israel-linked product tanker Central Park on Sunday.

(Photo: U.S. Navy)

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6 min

Following three attacks on vessels linked to Israel, a container ship operated by Israeli ocean carrier Zim has changed course and is taking the long way around Africa rather than transiting the Suez Canal and passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen.

Ship position data from MarineTraffic shows that the Zim Europe, en route from Boston to Port Klang, Malaysia, passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and entered the Mediterranean on Friday. It continued due east until it was

between Oran, Algeria, and Cartagena, Spain, then did an about-face on Saturday afternoon.

The container ship — which has a capacity of 5,618 twenty-foot equivalent units — headed back out to the Atlantic and down the west coast of Africa. As of Monday, it had passed Casablanca, Morocco, and was headed south at 16 knots.



Ship position data on the Zim Europe over recent days. (Map: MarineTraffic)
The voyage from the Strait of Gibraltar to Port Klang via the Cape of Good Hope is 56% longer than via the Suez Canal.

“In light of the threat to safe transit of global trade in the Arabian and Red Seas, Zim is taking temporary proactive measures to ensure the safety of its crews, vessels, and customers’ cargo by rerouting some of its vessels,” the company confirmed on Monday.

“As a result of these measures, longer transit times in the relevant Zim services are anticipated, though every effort is being made to minimize disruptions.”

US Navy intervenes to rescue tanker

On Saturday, the product tanker Central Park was ordered by Yemen’s Houthi rebels to divert to Yemen’s port in Hodeida. The Central Park is

managed by Zodiac Maritime, a company headed by Israeli shipping magnate Eyal Ofer.

The Central Park was told by the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Thomas Hudner to ignore the demand and continue its voyage, according to security company Ambrey.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that on Sunday, the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Mason received a distress call from the Central Park, saying it was under attack.

“Upon arrival, coalition elements demanded release of the vessel,” [said CENTCOM](#). “Subsequently, five armed individuals debarked the ship and attempted to flee via their small boat. The Mason pursued the attackers, resulting in their eventual surrender.”

Early on Monday, “two ballistic missiles were fired from the Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen toward the general location of the USS Mason and Central Park,” said CENTCOM. “The missiles landed in the Gulf of Aden approximately 10 nautical miles from the ships.”

A new plot twist emerged later on Monday. [A Pentagon press spokesperson told reporters](#) that the five men who surrendered were not Houthis, they were Somali pirates.

This implies that either Somali pirates coincidentally hijacked a ship that was simultaneously being targeted by the Houthis due to its Israeli ties — or there is some other explanation, the most likely being that the Somali pirates planned to deliver the ship to the Houthis.

3 attacks so far

The boarding of the Central Park followed two other recent attacks on Israeli-linked vessels.

On Friday, the 15,264-TEU CMA CGM Symi was hit by an Iranian “kamikaze” drone in the Indian Ocean. [A U.S. official told The Associated Press](#) that there was damage to the ship but no injuries. The vessel is leased by French ocean carrier CMA CGM from Eastern Pacific, a company controlled by Israeli shipping billionaire Idan Ofer, Eyal Ofer’s brother.

On Nov. 19, [the car carrier Galaxy Leader was hijacked by paramilitary forces](#) descending from a helicopter. [Video of the assault was posted](#) on X, formerly Twitter, by Ahmed Saree, the spokesman of the Houthi army. The ship is now at anchorage off Hodeida.

The Galaxy Leader’s ownership is linked to Israeli businessman Abraham “Rami” Ungar. The ship’s 25 crewmembers — who are mainly Filipino — remain detained. Two other car carriers operated by Ungar’s Ray Shipping diverted their voyages after the Galaxy Leader hijacking, according to MarineTraffic.

Threat to Zim

On Saturday, the same day the Zim Europe changed course and headed around Africa, Saree [posted a cryptic one-word tweet](#): “ZIM.”

Zim (NYSE: [ZIM](#)), whose stock hit a new all-time low Monday, is the most visible of the Israeli shipping companies and the most closely connected with the government. The government of Israel has a “golden share” or “special state share” in the company that ensures the government’s access to Zim’s fleet “in a time of emergency or for national security purposes.”

Social media and the Arab press have featured numerous false reports of Houthi attacks on Zim vessels over recent days. “We have seen several fake reports on social media. All Zim vessels are safe and accounted for,” Zim spokesperson Avner Shats told FreightWaves.

The Israeli liner operator has three services that transit the Bab el-Mandeb Strait: ZIM India Israel (ZII), ZIM India Turkiye (ZIT) and ZIM Mediterranean Premium Service (ZMP).

The ZII service uses space aboard vessels of Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC). The ZIT service also uses space aboard MSC vessels, plus one CMA CGM ship.

The ZMP service is more problematic from a security perspective, as it uses multiple vessels with the word "ZIM" painted on the hull, including the Zim Europe. The ZMP service also uses chartered vessels that are not as easily identifiable as Zim tonnage, including one that was in the Red Sea and heading for the Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Monday.