



# Ships hauling US government cargo in Red Sea turn back after explosions nearby

By: Sanne Wass | Jan 24 2024 at 08:01 PM | [Maritime](#) | [Liner Shipping](#)

Two A.P. Moeller-Maersk A/S container ships that were hauling US government cargoes into the southern Red Sea performed u-turns after a navy escort intercepted nearby attacks.

The failed attacks took place while the vessels were being escorted by the US Navy on Wednesday, Maersk said in a statement. The Danish shipping giant immediately suspended transits in the region for all its subsidiary firms, including the one that controls the two US-flagged carriers.

Yemen's Houthis have said they will target ships with US, UK and Israeli interests.

The Maersk Detroit and the Maersk Chesapeake were due to transit through the Bab el-Mandeb strait, Maersk said in an emailed statement. The waterway is a narrow maritime choke point linking the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal further north.

"While en route, both ships reported seeing explosions close by and the US Navy accompaniment also intercepted multiple projectiles," Maersk said. "The crew, ship, and cargo are safe and unharmed."

The US Navy turned both ships around and is escorting them back to the Gulf of Aden, Maersk said. The two ships are operated by Maersk Line Ltd., a US subsidiary of the Danish firm.

US Central Command said in a statement that "Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists fired three anti-ship ballistic missiles from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen" toward the Maersk Detroit. It said one missile fell in the sea and the other two were shot down by the USS Gravely, a guided-missile destroyer, with no reported injuries or damage.

By contrast, the Houthis issued a statement saying that they scored "a direct hit on an American vessel" during a clash lasting more than two hours between "a number of American warships" that were "protecting two American commercial ships."

Earlier in January Maersk said it would avoid the region "for the foreseeable future" because of how dangerous it has become. But vessels operated by its US subsidiary haven't been covered by that policy until now.

The vessels carry cargo belonging to the Defense Department and Transportation Department, and other US government agencies and are therefore "afforded the protection of the US Navy for passage through the strait," Maersk said.

The shipping giant is now suspending transits in the region for all its subsidiaries, including those run by Maersk Line Ltd., until further notice and is "developing network contingencies."

The US has previously said vessels carrying its flag should stay away from the southern Red Sea until further notice, though the decision to sail rests with individual firms.