

Tonne-miles leap as shipping battles peak disruption

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French Navy

Shipping is facing peak disruption at present as it takes evasive action in the Red and Black Seas as well as shunning the parched Panama Canal.

The average haul of global seaborne trade increased last year from 4,943 to 5,036 miles, the third largest annual increase this century and six times times the average, new data from Clarksons Research shows.

“Though major shifts in trade patterns are not often repeated, the growing complexity of seaborne trade (including geopolitics) is an increasingly important trend for shipping,” the latest weekly report from Clarksons observed.

The disruption evidenced in the past month around the Red Sea has seen Clarksons estimate that total tonne-miles will increase by another 2.4% this year, noting: “Trade distance and tonne-miles are once again an important factor in 2024, in another example of shipping managing disruption.”

As well as Houthi attacks from Yemen, shipping is having to contend with the return of piracy off Somalia. A bulk carrier came under fire over the weekend from a skiff, while Sri Lankan authorities reported a Sri Lankan fishing vessel had been hijacked by Somali pirates.

A UK warship repelled a drone attack by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea on Saturday, while Trafigura, the charterer of the [Marlin Luanda](#) product tanker, has hailed the crew’s “exceptional dedication and bravery” in extinguishing a [fire that broke](#) out on the starboard of the laden ship (pictured) after it was hit by a missile on Friday night. In terms of container shipping, which was the first sector to move en masse away from the Red Sea to southern Africa, analysts at liner consultancy have argued in their latest weekly report that the sector is currently witnessing its peak disruptive impact from the Red Sea crisis and conditions for shippers will improve somewhat in the time ahead as southern African services become the norm.

Nevertheless, when combined with the unstable security situation in the Black Sea and the limited traffic going through the drought-hit Panama Canal, shipping is facing disruption on a scale rarely witnessed before, something noted by the United Nations.

The UN’s trade and development body, UNCTAD, has raised what it described as “profound concerns” over escalating disruptions to global trade.

UNCTAD's head of trade logistics, Jan Hoffmann, outlined the organisation's detailed analysis of the situation at the UN's daily press briefing on Friday.

"Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to these disruptions, and UNCTAD remains vigilant in monitoring the evolving situation," Hoffmann said.