



Houthi strikes force crew to abandon ship for first time

By: Omar Tamo, Mohammed Hatem and Alex Longley | Feb 19 2024 at 11:28 AM | [Maritime](#)

The crew of a commercial ship in the Red Sea abandoned the vessel following a Houthi attack — the first such evacuation since the militant group began menacing trade in the vital waterway late last year.

The strikes on the Rubymar, a relatively small cargo ship, were on the engine room and at the front of the vessel, a company official at GMZ Ship Management Co. in Lebanon said by email. There have been no reports of injuries to the crew, who are being taken to Djibouti, the official said. The UK Navy said the ship is continuing to receive military assistance.

The ship-abandonment is a milestone in the violence that has swept through the Red Sea since November, when the Iran-backed Houthis escalated their attacks with a barrage of missiles and drone strikes on the merchant fleet. A tanker carrying Russian fuel was set ablaze in January.



The Houthis say they are targeting ships with links to Israel, the US and UK — their response to the war in Gaza and western airstrikes that have sought to quell the attacks. However, the number of possible targets has been falling as ships avoid the waterway. The Rubymar's registered owner is in Southampton, England, according to the Equasis international maritime database.

Also on Monday, another ship reported a nearby explosion, but it continued to its next port of call. Maritime intelligence company Ambrey described the ship as a Greece-flagged bulk commodity carrier.

A significant percentage of the world's oil and gas carriers, bulk commodity ships and container vessels are now sailing thousands of miles around Africa, adding to voyage times and boosting costs to world shipping, in order to avoid the attacks.

The European Union formally launched a defensive naval operation Monday aimed at protecting commercial vessels from Houthi attacks. The mission, commanded by Greece, will accompany some ships and protect them against attacks from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the Persian Gulf.

Over the weekend, the US said it conducted five self-defense strikes against the Houthis, including one against an underwater vessel. Central Command said it was the first observed deployment of subsea attack capability since the attacks began.