



Houthi missile damages MSC container ship in Gulf of Aden

By: Alex Longley, Mohammed Hatem and Louise Moon | Mar 05 2024 at 08:53 AM
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Houthi militants attacked and damaged a Swiss-owned container vessel on Monday in the Gulf of Aden, as the Iran-backed group continues to roil shipping in the region.

The MSC Sky II, managed by MSC Mediterranean Shipping Co., was about 90 miles southeast of the Yemeni city of Aden when a blast occurred. The Houthis fired two missiles, one of which hit the ship, according to the US military.

“Initial reports indicate there were no injuries,” US Central Command said on X. “The ship did not request assistance and continued on its way.”

MSC confirmed in a statement that the ship was attacked on Monday while sailing near the Bab el-Mandeb strait toward Djibouti from Singapore.

“The missile caused a small fire that has been extinguished while no crew were injured,” it said. “She is currently continuing her journey to Djibouti and will arrive today for further assessment.”

The Houthis claimed the attack.

Earlier, security company Ambrey Analytics said the explosion damaged an accommodation block as well as one other part of the ship.

The Houthis have been attacking merchant and military ships in and around the southern Red Sea since mid-November, ostensibly in support of Hamas as it wages war against Israel in Gaza. The group has said it won’t back down from hitting vessels until Israel stops fighting.

The Houthis have withstood several rounds of airstrikes on their positions in Yemen from US and UK forces. The shipping assaults have caused thousands of miles worth of diversions for merchant vessels — forcing them to sail around southern Africa instead of through the Red Sea and Suez Canal — and sent freight rates soaring.

Many oil companies have also diverted their cargoes. In a note to clients on Monday, Goldman Sachs Group Ltd. said that nearly half the respondents in a recent survey it did “do not expect normalization of the flows this year.”

Over the weekend, another merchant ship called the Rubymar sank about two weeks after being hit by a Houthi missile. It marked the first vessel the Houthis have sunk, and highlighted the environmental risks that the incidents pose.

The militants are still holding a Japanese-chartered car carrier called the Galaxy Leader that was hijacked in November.

The US military reported two other incidents on Monday. It said the Houthis fired a ballistic missile that landed in the Red Sea without damaging any vessels. Later on, American forces struck two anti-ship cruise missiles that "presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region."