

Houthis Renew Attacks Targeting MSC and Maersk US-Flagged Containership



EU NAVFOR Aspides proving protection to merchant ships (Aspides)

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After a lull in documented attacks in the early part of July, there are fresh reports of attacks coming from the Houthi militants in Yemen. This comes as the U.S. and EU NAVFOR Operation Aspides both reported increased efforts in the past few days and successfully stopped threats coming from the Houthi.

There was an explosion reported today, July 9, 180 nautical miles east of Nishtun, Yemen in the eastern reaches of the country and the Gulf of Aden. The attack appears to again show the expansion of the Houthis' range and area of threat.

Maersk confirmed to Reuters that the master aboard its vessel *Maersk Sentosa* (87,600 dwt) reported an explosion close to the vessel while it was underway. It sails under the American flag operated by the subsidiary Maersk Line,

Ltd., which often transports cargo for the U.S. military and other government agencies. The vessel's AIS shows it had come around South Africa sailing from Spain and is due to arrive today in Oman. The master reported being targeted by a "flying object."

Late today the Houthis' spokesperson released a message claiming two other attacks. Yahya Saree claimed they targeted a Malta-flagged containership *Marathopolis* (70,461 dwt) run by Greece's Costamare Shipping with drones for violating their ban on Israeli ports. He said the vessel was in the Arabian Sea with the AIS signal showing it was traveling from Kenya to Oman. Yahya Saree said they also targeted the *MSC Patnaree III* (35,746 dwt) a Liberian-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Aden. The AIS data shows the vessel traveling from Somalia to Sri Lanka but the Houthi called it an "Israeli vessel," as they have done with other MSC ships.

The previous confirmed attack on a vessel was June 28 when the UK Maritime Trade Operations received a report of five missiles fired at a vessel in the Red Sea. The vessel was in a position 150 nautical miles northwest of Hodeidah, Yemen at the time. There also was a suspicious approach on June 30 but no direct interaction with the merchant vessel.

Both U.S. Central Command and Aspides reported downing aerial drones on July 7. The Greek frigate *HS Psara* was operating an escort in the Gulf of Aden. It was the vessel's second operation in recent days following an escort of a Linea Messina containership shown in Aspides photos on July 3.

According to the Greek media, the *Psara* was warned of approaching drones by the Dutch frigate *Karel Doorman* which was also in the Gulf of Aden. The Greek frigate tracked the drones and opened fire with several weapons systems including its cannon. Two of the drones were reported downed while two others withdrew from the area.

CENTCOM said U.S. forces also took down two additional aerial drones on July 7. So far in July, CENTCOM reported destroying two drone boats on July 4. In the first days of July, they also destroyed three ground radar sites in Yemen and two additional drone boats.

Reports are also indicating that after weeks of uncertainty, the bulker *Verbena*, which had been attacked on June 13 has finally been salvaged. Reuters is reporting that the vessel has been towed out of the threat zone and is being taken to a port. The Houthis hit the vessel with multiple missiles critically injuring one seafarer and starting fires which the crew was unable to contain. The ship had been abandoned in the Gulf of Aden with multiple threats from the Houthi that they were going to sink the ship with follow-up attacks similar to the *Tutor* and *Rubymar* which they boarded after

the ships were abandoned in the Red Sea. These are the only two ships the Houthis have sunk, although they now claim more than 150 attacks.