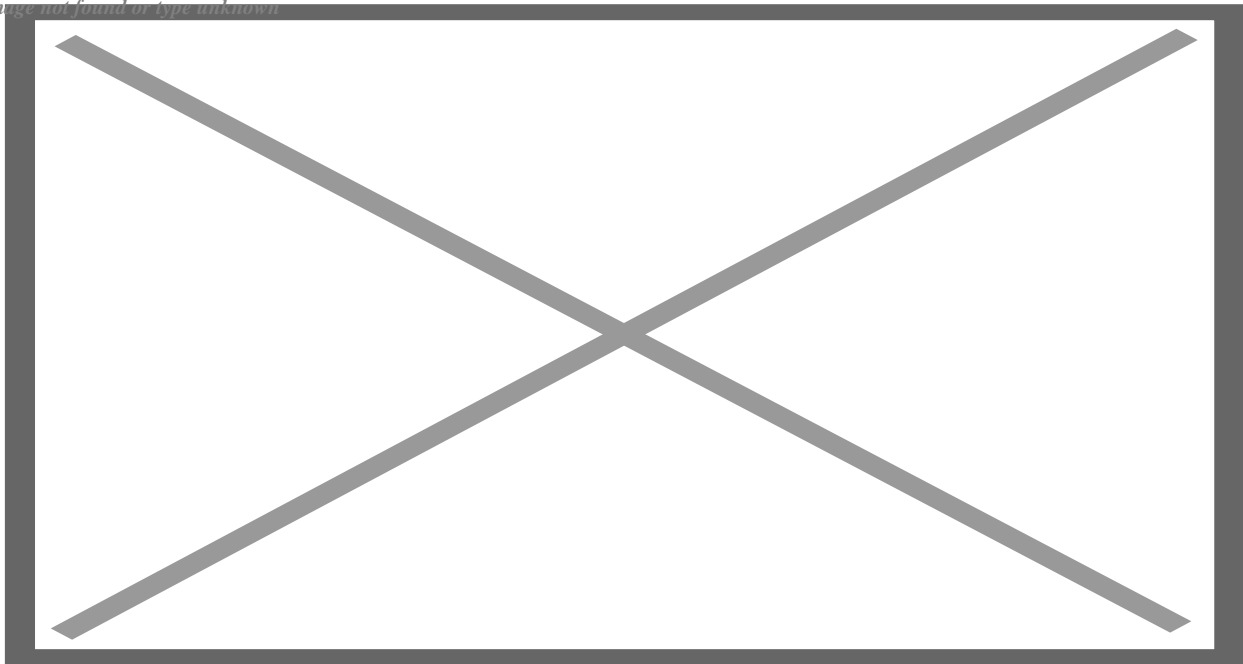


U.S. military reports Houthi rebels attack two ships simultaneously in the Red Sea

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Washington, December 22 (RHC)-- The commercial ship Swan Atlantic, which was targeted in the Red Sea on Monday, "was attacked by a one-way attack drone and an anti-ship ballistic missile launched from a Houthi-controlled area in Yemen," according to U.S. Central Command.

The chemical/oil tanker, a Cayman Islands-flagged ship, called for assistance after the attack and the USS Carney, the closest US warship, responded to assess damage, CENTCOM said Monday night. A second commercial ship in the Red Sea was targeted by Houthi militants around the same time as the attack on the Swan Atlantic, CENTCOM said.

The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack on the Swan Atlantic and on a second ship. The group claimed that both were linked to Israel and that the crews refused to respond to calls from the Houthis. The Norwegian owner of Swan Atlantic denied the vessel had any connection to Israel.

The attacks follow a string of others in recent days by Houthi forces on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

The latest attacks came as U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was in the region for meetings with senior Israeli officials in Tel Aviv amid ongoing violence between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

Earlier this week, Austin announced he would convene a meeting with other Middle East defense ministers to discuss the attacks on ships in the Red Sea and he announced a multinational security initiative focusing on “security challenges in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.” Led by the United States, the multinational initiative includes the United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.

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