

Shipping giant Maersk to avoid Red Sea routes for foreseeable future

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Container vessel Maersk Hangzhou sails in the Wielingen channel, Westerschelde, Netherlands
[File: Rene van Quekelberghe/Handout via Reuters]

Copenhagen, January 5 (RHC)-- Container shipping giant Maersk has announced it will divert all vessels around Africa instead of using the Red Sea and the Suez Canal for the “foreseeable future”.

Maersk said on Friday that the decision was due to the volatile situation in the Red Sea as Yemen’s Houthis continue to attack vessels that pass through the busy waterway.

“We have therefore decided that all Maersk vessels due to transit the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden will be diverted south around the Cape of Good Hope for the foreseeable future,” the Danish company said.

The trip around Africa can add about 10 days to journey times and requires more fuel and crew time, increasing shipping costs. “The situation is constantly evolving and remains highly volatile, and all available intelligence at hand confirms that the security risk continues to be at a significantly elevated level,” Maersk added.

The Houthis have said they are targeting vessels linked to Israel in the Red Sea shipping lane in solidarity with Palestinians who are facing relentless bombardment in the ongoing war on Gaza.

On Tuesday, Maersk said it would pause all vessels that would cross through the Red Sea following an attack on one of its ships, the Singapore-flagged Maersk Hangzhou, by Houthis, and has since begun redirecting ships.

The company also rerouted four out of five southbound container vessels already passing through the Suez Canal back north for the long journey around Africa on Thursday.

“While we continue to hope for a sustainable resolution in the near future and do all we can to contribute towards it, we do encourage customers to prepare for complications in the area to persist and for there to be significant disruption to the global network,” Maersk said.

Since November, at least 25 commercial vessels operating in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have been attacked.

Last month, the United States launched a multinational operation to safeguard commerce in the Red Sea. However, due to continued attacks, many shipping companies are still diverting vessels around Africa.

On Wednesday, a coalition of 12 countries, led by the US, issued a statement calling on the Houthis for an “immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews”, and warned of “consequences”.

The waterway is the main route for about 12 percent of world trade, according to the International Chamber of Shipping. The Red Sea connects the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and Europe to Asia.

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