

Malta-flagged cargo ship heading to Israel hit by missile in Red Sea

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Yemen's Houthi rebels say they fired missiles at the Zografia bulk carrier as it headed to Israel.

Sanaa, January 16 (RHC)-- A Malta-flagged cargo ship has been hit by a missile on the Red Sea, a maritime risk management company says as tensions in the key waterway ramp up.

"A Malta-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier was reportedly targeted and impacted with a missile while transiting the southern Red Sea northbound," Ambrey said in an alert on Tuesday.

The Houthis' military spokesperson, Yahya Sarea, said in a statement that the Yemeni rebels targeted the Zografia ship with naval missiles on Tuesday as it was heading to Israel, resulting in a "direct hit".

The ship, which has visited Israel since the war in Gaza began, was headed to the Suez Canal, changed course and headed to port after the incident, Ambrey said. The empty ship was sailing from Vietnam to Israel with 24 crew members on board, a source in the Greek Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy said.

The unnamed source told the Agence France-Presse news agency that the vessel "sustained limited damage ... but remains in navigable condition and is continuing its journey," adding that there were no injuries.

Houthis have attacked what they say are Israel-linked commercial vessels since November, disrupting maritime trade routes. The Houthis say the attacks are a response to Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

The group has threatened to expand the range of targets of its attacks in the Red Sea to include United States ships in response to American and British strikes on its sites in Yemen.

On Sunday, US forces shot down a Houthi cruise missile targeting a US destroyer, and on Monday, a U.S.-owned cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman was hit by a missile.

Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra said the tensions in the Red Sea could "degenerate into something bigger, particularly the potential of war for an Iranian-American confrontation in Yemen." "We're talking about an extremely delicate situation in the Red Sea," Ahelbarra said.

Earlier, Qatar's prime minister said liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments would be affected by Red Sea tensions and warned that the strikes on Yemen risk worsening the crisis. "LNG is ... as any other merchant shipments. They will be affected by that [exchange with the Houthis]," Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "There are alternative routes. Those alternative routes are not more efficient; they're less efficient than the current route," he added.

On Monday, the Bloomberg news agency reported that at least five LNG vessels used by Qatar had stopped on their way to the Red Sea.

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