

Yemen's Houthis fire missiles at British oil tanker bound for India

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Sanaa, February 18 (RHC)-- Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group has claimed a new missile attack on Western interests amid Israel's war on Gaza, this time on a British oil tanker that the United States identified as a Panamanian-flagged vessel carrying crude oil bound for India.

Yahya Saree, the group's military spokesperson, said in a televised statement on Saturday that a "large number of appropriate naval missiles" were used to target the Pollux tanker in the Red Sea in "accurate and direct" hits.

"The Yemeni armed forces will not hesitate to implement and expand their military operations in defence of beloved Yemen and in confirmation of continued practical solidarity with the Palestinian people," he

said. Saree did not say how much damage the tanker sustained, or provide further details.

Late on Friday, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) confirmed an incident at 13:31 GMT about 70 nautical miles (130km) northwest of al-Mukha (Mocha), a port city southwest of Yemen's capital, Sanaa.

The "vessel was attacked by a missile and reports an explosion in close proximity. Military authorities are responding," it said, adding that the crew and vessel were reported to be safe.

The U.S. Department of State said on Friday that the Pollux, which it identified as a Panamanian-flagged oil tanker bound for India, was struck on its port side by a missile fired from Yemen. "This is yet another example of the lawless attacks on international shipping which continue after numerous joint and international statements calling the Houthis to cease," a State Department spokesperson was quoted as saying by the Reuters news agency.

The Houthis have been disrupting trade through the Red Sea since mid-November, promising their attacks will continue until Israel's war on Gaza is halted and aid reaches besieged Palestinians. The latest Houthi missile strike comes as British Foreign Minister David Cameron asked China to take action.

The UK Foreign Office said in a statement that Cameron asked his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference on Friday to use Beijing's influence on Iran to pressure the Houthis over their Red Sea attacks.

Houthi assaults have spread to warships and vessels belonging to the US and UK after the Western allies started bombing multiple governorates across Yemen earlier this year.

The U.S. has also been separately launching attacks from fighter jets and warships on Yemen to attack Houthi positions, with the US Central Command (CENTCOM) calling them "self-defence strikes." Its latest announced attack came on Thursday, when the US military claimed strikes on three mobile antiship cruise missiles that it said were being prepared for launch against ships in the Red Sea.

"These actions will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for US Navy and merchant vessels," it said.

Washington is preparing to send thousands more bombs and weapons to Israel even as it has opposed Tel Aviv's plans for a ground invasion of Rafah in southern Gaza, where more than 1.4 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced.

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