

## Chaotic scenes in the Red Sea as Israeli-linked ships are targeted

Sam Chambers November 27, 2023



US Navy

In chaotic scenes not seen since the 2011 peak of the Horn of Africa piracy crisis, global merchant shipping faced a weekend of terror wrought by Houthis, Iranians and the reemergence of pirates off Somalia.

At the centre of all attacks have been ships with links to Israel, and the incidents of the past 72 hours follow on from the capture of a ship – and its crew of 25 – belonging to Ray Car Carriers by Houthi militants eight days ago.

The [CMA CGM Symi](#), a 15,264 teu boxship controlled by Idan Ofer's Eastern Pacific Shipping, was hit by a suspected Iranian drone in the Indian Ocean on Friday morning.

Worse was to follow over the weekend. On Saturday in the southern Red Sea the Houthis instructed the *Central Park*, a 20,000 dwt product tanker belonging to Eyal Ofer's Zodiac Maritime, to divert to Hodeidah or else be attacked. The *USS Thomas Hudner*, an American destroyer, instructed the *Central Park* to continue at full speed and perform evasive manoeuvres.

Houthis are understood to have boarded the ship southwest of Aden on Sunday, by which time the crew had secured themselves in the ship's citadel. American naval assets, led by the *USS Mason* warship, were swiftly deployed to ensure the hijackers did not take the ship to Yemen, a fate suffered by the Ray Car Carriers-controlled [Galaxy Leader on November 20](#). The Zodiac Maritime tanker is now deemed safe with five of the attackers apprehended having tried to escape on a speedboat. The naval operation was aided by a Japanese destroyer and helicopter gunships.

"Maritime domain security is essential to regional stability," said General Michael Erik Kurilla, commander of US Central Command. "We will continue to work with allies and partners to ensure the safety and security of international shipping lanes."

The US said two ballistic missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled parts of Yemen towards the general direction of the *Mason* and *Central Park*, but they landed about 10 nautical miles away from them.

Also on Sunday, a team belonging to maritime security firm Ambrey aboard a Japanese-owned bulk carrier reported receiving instructions from an Iranian warship to adjust course. They did adjust course, and had no further communications. The Iranian warship was headed northbound.

To add to the heightened tension in the area, commercial shipping has been advised to stay outside of Somali waters due to the risk of "opportunistic armed robbery".

An Iranian-flagged fishing vessel, *Almeraj 1*, was hijacked last week by an armed Somali clan militia offshore Eyl, with demands of \$400,000 in ransom and threats to use the ship for additional hijackings if the payment is not made, according to local media.

"Merchant shipping is advised to avoid the area, to be vigilant in case of a sighting, and to implement counter-piracy Best Management Practices," Ambrey said in a note to clients on Friday.