

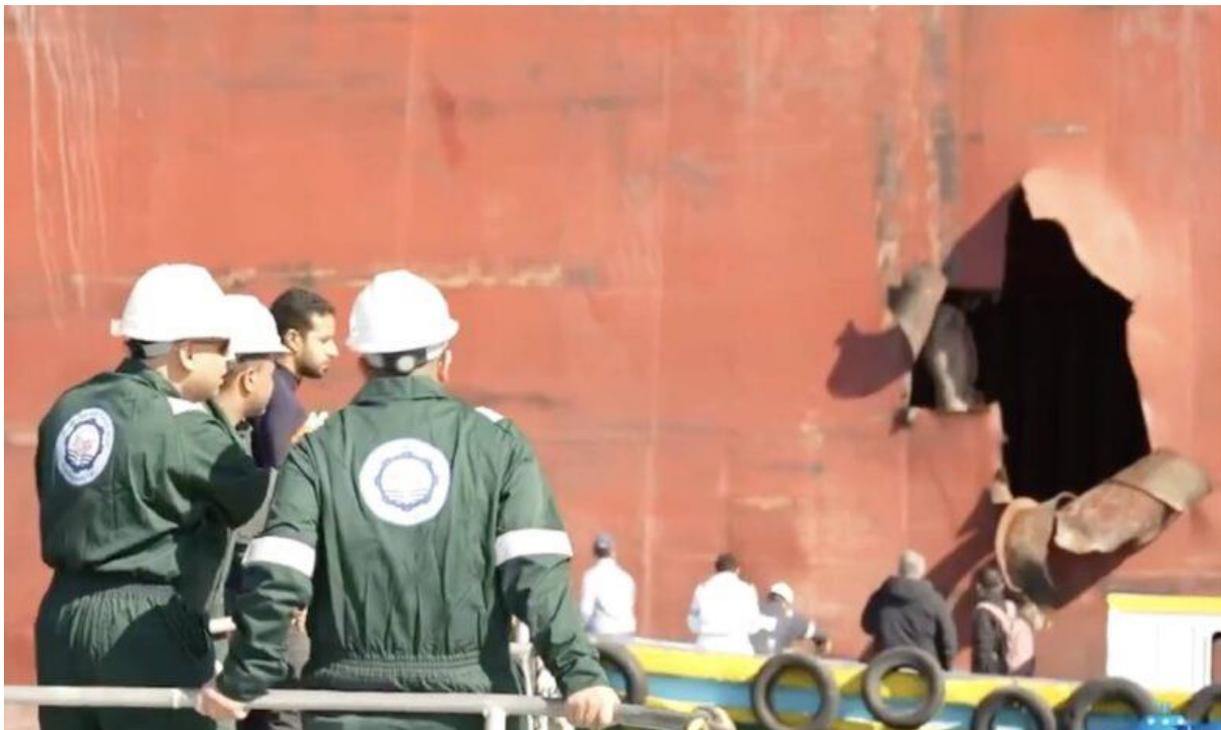
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Industry heavyweights weigh in on Red Sea security solutions for shipping

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Suez Canal Authority

Arsenio Dominguez, the new secretary-general of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), has called for a “multi-faceted” solution to the ongoing Red Sea shipping crisis.

Assuming the top post at the London United Nations body at the start of this month, Dominguez has been thrust into an international shipping crisis on the scale of the pandemic straight away.

Interviewed by *Splash*, Dominguez said the volatile situation in the Red Sea where Houthis from Yemen have attacked around 40 merchant ships in recent months needs to be resolved swiftly.

“Shipping needs to trade. The freedom of navigation is paramount,” Dominguez said, adding: “The solution has to be multi-faceted: enhanced ship security; a cessation of hostile activity which targets innocent seafarers; and regional and international efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the problem.”

The solution has to be multi-faceted

Dominguez said he is actively engaging with member states, industry stakeholders and the UN Security Council to work out a way to resolve the maritime emergency unfolding in the Middle East.

Kuba Szymanski, the secretary-general of InterManager, a global shipmanagement association, endorsed his IMO counterpart’s assertion that merchant ships should not be victims of geopolitical unrest and must be allowed to trade freely and safely.

“The safety of seafarers is paramount. We are finding that proactive shipowners are rerouting their ships to avoid the Red Sea area while risk to human life exists. Shipmanagers are in discussions with their principals to advocate for this option too,” Szymanski told *Splash*.

Bjorn Hojgaard, who heads up Anglo-Eastern, the world’s largest shipmanager, said he saw little chance of ships being able to receive proper protection when transiting the Red Sea anytime soon.

“My guess is this will persist for some time, and Red Sea/Suez Canal traffic will dry up. Another new normal,” Hojgaard said.

John Stawpert, senior manager for environment and trade at the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), a leading global shipowning organisation, said the US-led Operation Guardian Prosperity naval operation in and around the Red Sea has

successfully interrupted attacks, providing much needed security and reassurance to shipping.

“Cooperation between Operation Prosperity Guardian and other non-coalition forces deployed to the region remains strong, ensuring effective defence for merchant shipping across the area of the attacks, and the anticipated European operation in the region will increase this protection,” Stawpert said.

Salvatore Mercogliano, an associate professor of history at Campbell University, agreed with the ICS viewpoint, telling *Splash* the best protection for shipping in the Red Sea would be a continuation of the current naval and military deployments. As it stands, the US and UK navies provide the primary defence with their anti-air destroyers in gatekeeper positions between the coast of Yemen and the shipping channels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, Mercogliano explained. Other navies provide direct support and escort for high value ships or ones with the greatest chance of attack.

The underlying solution remains the resolution of the conflict in Gaza

Backing them up is the American carrier strike group built around the *USS Dwight Eisenhower*, along with drones from Djibouti and air force elements from bases in the region.

“As reinforcements from other nations arrive, they will receive and shore up the forces of Prosperity Guardian,” Mercogliano said.

Late last night the US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported a US Navy warship shot down an anti-ship missile fired from Yemen toward the Red Sea.

According to CENTCOM, the missile was shot down by *USS Gravelly* and no injuries or damage were reported.

Corey Ranslem, the CEO of Dryad Global, a well-known maritime security brand, said his company has recommended to all of its clients to avoid the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden for the foreseeable future.

"There are a number of military assets operating within the region, however, there are currently no formal escort plans in place. The best protection against the drone and missile threat is to avoid the area," Ranslem advised.

Splash's lead columnist Andrew Craig-Bennett has [made calls for a convoy system](#) to be put in place. "It is the only thing that works, and we know it works," he wrote in an article published last week.

Michael Grey, another well-known industry commentator, concurred, particularly for the southbound ships coming through the Suez Canal which are already organised into convoys.

"I think the real concern is that so much public opinion is revolving around the delays to the supply lines, and almost no attention is being paid to the very real risks to the crews of ships," Grey said in conversation with *Splash*, noting how two recent attacks in particular – aimed at the *Genco Picardy* bulk carrier and then the *Marlin Luanda* product tanker – had come "very close" to killing crewmembers.

"Owners have just no business exposing their – albeit casual – employees to these risks, especially as the Houthis' aim is clearly improving with practice," Grey said.

Latest results from the Seafarers Happiness Index reflect how growing security threats are impacting life at sea.

"It is clear that the escalating risks to seafarer safety from piracy, terrorism and war risks are having an impact on crew welfare. It is also adding to the workload burden on seafarers, due to the ramping up of security duties in higher risk waters," the survey highlighted, going on to raise the importance of war-like operations area payments.

Ultimately, however, the solution for the Red Sea shipping crisis lies on land, a point stressed by Campbell University's Mercogliano.

"The underlying solution remains the resolution of the conflict in Gaza," he said, pointing out how the anti-piracy patrols against Somalia in the first two decades of the century demonstrated that while naval forces can minimise threats, they cannot totally eliminate them.