

Houthi threaten shipowners carrying US crude in the Red Sea

The Houthi forces in Yemen say they will prohibit shipping companies carrying US crude exports in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and other areas where its forces are active.

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May 4, 2025



The Houthi strike on the tanker Sounion last yearCredit: Ambrey

The Houthi's Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center (HOCC) said that it was prohibiting the movement of [US](#) exports of [crude oil](#) in response to attacks on Houthi controlled territory in Yemen, including oil ports.

In a letter sent to shipowners, operators and managers the HOCC said, "The export, re-export, transfer, loading, purchase, or sale of US crude oil (HS Code 2709.00) from US ports is prohibited, whether directly or indirectly, this prohibition includes ship-to-ship (STS) transfers, whether in whole or in part, including through third parties."

The sanctions which would see the targeting of vessels by the Houthi from companies listed as carrying US Crude in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab, Gulf of Aden, extending into the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean from 00:01 hrs local time on 17 May, corresponding to 16 May 2025 at 21:01 (UTC).

The HOCC said the decision to bar shipowners and operators whose fleets carrying US Crude was in response to American attack territory it controls including the 17 April attack on Yemen Ras Issa oil port in Al-Hudaydah Governorate which it said targeted targeting civilian facilities, workers, and staff members. The attacks destroyed fuel terminals at the port.

On 9 April the US State Department said: "The United States will not tolerate any country or commercial entity providing support to foreign terrorist organizations, such as the Houthis, including offloading ships and provisioning oil at Houthi-controlled ports. Such actions risk violating US law."

Related: [Houthi issue threat to ships carrying weapons for Israel](#)

The Trump Administration has sharply stepped-up attacks on the Houthi since March in response to the Yemeni Armed Forces attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and surrounding region from November 2023, disrupting trade and causing a large scale rerouting of vessels via the Cape of Good Hope.

The HOCC urged shipping companies to scrutinise all their transactions to ensure that there is no direct, indirect, or third-party involvement in any transaction involving the export of US crude.

“The existence of any such involvement would expose your company and fleet to sanctions, and, in the event your company is listed on the sanctions list, its fleet will be prohibited from transiting the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean,” the HOCC said.

“Furthermore, the company's fleet will be subject to targeting wherever reachable by the Yemeni Armed Forces.”

While attacks on merchant shipping caused widespread chaos through late 2023 and much of 2024, attacks by the Houthi in more recent months have been largely limited to US navy vessels in the region. However, uncertainty has meant shipowners, operators and manager that had taken the decision to reroute via the Cape of Good Hope have largely continued to do so.