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The 50,448-dwt True Confidence (built 2011) burns in the Gulf of Aden after a Houthi missile attack on Wednesday. Photo: US Central Command


Death toll rises as Houthis inflict first fatal missile strike

Three crew members die and others are in critical condition as Yemen rebels target ship formerly linked to US fund manager

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By [Paul Peachey](#), [Harry Papachristou](#) and [Jonathan Boonzaier](#) in [London](#) and [Athens](#)

Houthi rebels have struck their first fatal blow in their months-long campaign against commercial shipping after a missile strike started a fire on board a bulk carrier in the Gulf of Aden.

US Central Command confirmed late on Wednesday that the death toll had risen to three crew members after the attack on the Barbados-flagged, 50,448-dwt True Confidence (built 2011).



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A joint statement sent to TradeWinds by the vessel’s owner and manager on Thursday morning said that as a result of the missile attack, one Vietnamese and two Filipino crew members were killed. A further two Filipinos crew members have suffered serious injuries.

“Owners and Managers offer their heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of those who have lost their loved ones in this tragic attack and wish for a speedy and full recovery of those who are in hospital,” the statement said.

The ship itself suffered “significant damage” after being hit by a single anti-ship ballistic missile at about 7.30 GMT.

Crew and armed guards took to lifeboats to escape the burning ship. They were rescued by an Indian warship and taken to Djibouti, where the injured were transferred to hospital.

On Thursday morning, the vessel was drifting well away from land and salvage arrangements are being made, according to its owners.

The True Confidence was attacked following a change of course after the master was contacted over the radio by someone claiming to be from Yemen’s navy.

The tactic is a known Houthi move to single out ships for targeting with missiles in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

The Houthis’ military spokesman Yahya Saree said in a separate statement on Wednesday that the “American” ship had “rejected warning messages”.

Security firm Diaplous said that nearby ships reported a loud bang and a large plume of smoke from the stricken ship.

Muddled ownership

The True Confidence appears to have been targeted because of links to US-based Oaktree Capital Management.

The investment giant had previously controlled the vessel but no longer has any association after refinancing, databases show. The statement issued by the owners and managers also denied any current connections with any US entity.

The ship was under the ownership of a Liberian single-ship company True Confidence Shipping from late February, according to Equasis, and is operated by Greece-based minor player Third January Maritime Ltd, which manages a fleet of three vessels.


TradeWinds understands that even though the company is registered in Piraeus, the interests behind it are Middle Eastern.

The True Confidence was struck 50 nautical miles (93km) south-west of the port city of Aden on Wednesday morning.

It was on a passage from China to Saudi Arabia and Jordan with a cargo of steel products and trucks, according to the owner and manager of the vessel.

On board was a crew of 20 including one Indian, four Vietnamese and 15 Filipinos. A Nepalese and two Sri Lankan armed guards were also on board, the owner said.

The ship was seen to turn around and head south-east before drifting early on Wednesday when it stopped transmitting its position, Ambrey said. Nearby vessels reported an explosion in the area.



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An Indian naval vessel and a US warship were in the area to help with the rescue operation after the crew abandoned the ship, according to the owner.

The attack marks the latest grim milestone during a Houthi campaign that has continued for more than three months and seen attacks targeting more than 70 ships.


Until Wednesday, damage has been relatively light with the first ship, the 32,300-dwt Rubymar (built 1997), sinking at the weekend, 13 days after it was hit.



The 32,300-dwt Rubymar goes down in the Red Sea on 2 March. Photo: US Central Command

The attack was relatively close to the latest known position of the alleged Iranian spy ship, the 23,176-dwt multipurpose vessel Behshad (built 1999), which has moved from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, UK security company EOS Risk Group said.

Security officials have claimed the spy ship is likely to be providing the Houthis with intelligence and targeting information for attacks on vessels.



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The attempt to reroute naval vessels comes after the Iran-backed Houthi regime, which controls large parts of the country, said that ships had to obtain permits before entering its waters.

Houthi telecommunications minister Misfer Al-Numair told a television channel this week that the regime was “ready to assist requests for permits and identify ships with the Yemeni Navy, and we confirm this is out of concern for their safety”.

The US Central Command said that on Thursday, in the Asian morning hours, it conducted self-defence strikes against two unmanned aerial vehicles in a Houthi controlled area of Yemen that presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and naval ships in the region.

International condemnation

The attack on the True Confidence has drawn strong condemnation from the US and UK governments.

US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the Houthis “continue to carry out these reckless attacks with no regard for the well-being of innocent civilians who are transiting through the Red Sea, and now they have, unfortunately and tragically, killed innocent civilians”.

Miller added the US will “continue to hold the Houthis accountable for their attacks, which have not just disrupted international commerce, not just disrupted the freedom of navigation and international waters, and not just endangered seafarers but now tragically killed a number of them.”

British Foreign Minister David Cameron said he was “appalled” by the death of the seafarers.

“We condemn the Houthis’ reckless and indiscriminate attacks on global shipping and demand they stop. We will continue to stand up for freedom of navigation and back our words with actions,” Cameron said.

The attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden have forced operators to reroute their vessels via the longer Cape of Good Hope route.

Shipping travelling via the Suez Canal was down 56% year on year in February, said PortWatch, an IMF and Oxford University monitoring service. [\(Copyright\)](#)

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