

Containers

# IMO halts Strait of Hormuz exodus after Evergreen container ship attacked

Attack on ship close to Oman side of the strait came as hundreds of vessels started to leave the region



Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman. Photo: Scanpix

**Paul Peachey**

TradeWinds correspondent | London

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The International Maritime Organization has put its plan to usher hundreds of ships through the Strait of Hormuz on hold after an attack on a container ship

close to Oman.

Secretary general Arsenio Dominguez announced a “temporary pause” after the 8,508-teu Ever Lovely (built 2015) was struck on the starboard side 7.5 nautical miles (14 km) south-east of Dahit, Oman.

Dominguez said the ship was not transiting as part of its programme that aims to move up to 600 ships and nearly 11,000 seafarers out of the region.



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Ship tracking shows that the Evergreen Marine-owned ship had left the Middle East Gulf and was following the route set out on Tuesday by the IMO.

The attack came after the numbers of vessels leaving the Middle East Gulf hit the highest level since the signing of a fragile peace deal that was supposed to end attacks on shipping passing through the key maritime chokepoint.

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Under the IMO programme, ships were told to wait at a mustering point close to the western side of the strait before moving through with positioning systems switched on.

The IMO said that it had secured the “necessary safety guarantees” from coastal states for the transits. But Iran on Thursday warned vessels against using the exit

routes, saying that safe passage was possible only on Iranian terms, according to domestic news agencies.

Dominguez said: “I have been informed of an attack today in the Gulf of Oman on a vessel which passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

“This vessel did not transit under IMO’s evacuation framework. I have always reiterated that the safety of the seafarers remains paramount.

“Therefore to ensure a coordinated approach and navigational safety, the evacuation plan will be paused under further clarity is obtained.”

The attack on Thursday damaged the bridge of the Ever Lovely but caused no injuries or environmental damage, according to naval information service UK Maritime Trade Operations.



The transit route in red as defined by the IMO on Tuesday Photo: IMO via Claude

Other ships were reported to have reversed course while using the exit route close to Hormuz, before the attack on the Ever Lovely.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps earlier ordered a product tanker to abort a transit through the Strait of Hormuz on a second exit corridor close to the Iranian shoreline.

Ambrey Analytics reported that the Panama-flagged ship was instructed to divert course while under way 13.8 nautical miles (26 km) south of Sirik, Iran.

It was en route southbound from Mesaieed in Qatar to Karachi in Pakistan when it was hailed over VHF at 2:35 pm local time (11:05 GMT).

The tanker was instructed to halt its transit, divert course to the “north of Larak Island” and “stop here and wait for permission”.

The ship was told: “You are in range of my missiles and maybe fire on you.”

The attack on the Ever Lovely came shortly before Dominguez was about to hold a briefing and reveal the numbers of transits through the strait since the United Nations’ shipping regulator’s plan came into force.

The briefing was cancelled but he said later that “several vessels” have already been evacuated under the programme.

Insurance sources told TradeWinds that cover was being offered for ships transiting on the Iran and Oman corridors and under US protection. It was not known what assurances the Ever Lovely had secured.

The attack has stifled optimism that limits on international shipping through the key strategic chokepoint could be coming to an end.

Data provider AXSMarine said it measured 62 transits through the strait on Wednesday, the highest single-day count since the start of the conflict.

That represented about half of the traffic recorded on the same day last year, but was still significantly higher than the 4.5 per day in early June, before the signing of the interim peace deal between the US and Iran.

The interim peace deal allowed for the resumption of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz while talks continue for 60 days on other issues, notably the future of Iran's nuclear programme, an area where major differences remain between the two sides.

Iran has also said that it will not demand any "tariffs" for passing through the strait but signalled that it would try to do so after the 60-day period.

The agreement has not been universally welcomed.

The fallout from the deal has seen Arab allies of the US express concerns to visiting US secretary of state Marco Rubio that Iran had secured too much from the talks.

Republican senator Bill Cassidy has recounted how he had an angry exchange with US President Donald Trump over the conduct and outcome of the war, highlighting splits within the president's own party.

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