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Houthis warn shipping companies to avoid Saudi ports, email shows

By Jonathan Saul and Renee Maltezou

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A cargo ship sails in Saudi waters near the Dammam Port in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, May 17, 2026. REUTERS/Mohammed Benmansour/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

Summary

Companies

Houthis send warning to shipping companies by email

Houthis say companies may be targeted if they use Saudi ports

Houthis declared naval blockage against Saudi Arabia on Monday

Two tankers carrying Saudi oil made U-turns in Red Sea on Tuesday

LONDON/ATHENS, July 21 (Reuters) - Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi militia told shipping companies not to load or discharge cargo at Saudi Arabian ports or they may be targeted, according to an email the group sent to companies.

The Houthis on Monday declared a naval blockade against Saudi Arabia, opening a potential new front against the United States in its war with Iran and raising the threat to global energy supplies and trade beyond the Gulf.

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"Vessels are banned from loading or discharging cargo at or from any Saudi ports," the July 20 email said, which was received by multiple shipping companies.

"We strongly recommend that your company exercise due diligence and the utmost care in all its dealings," the email, seen by Reuters, said.

The new conditions came into force at 1201 GMT on Monday, according to the email.

"Any such activity would expose the violating vessels to sanctions," according to the email, which was sent by the Houthis' Sanaa-based Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center (HOCC).

"Furthermore, they may be subject to targeting in any location within the operational reach of the Yemeni Armed Forces."

A closure of the Red Sea's southern gateway would remove a critical alternative route for Saudi Arabia to the Strait of Hormuz and intensify fears of shortages.

Red Sea traffic has not fully recovered since Houthi attacks off Yemen's coast began in November 2023 in what the group said was solidarity with Palestinians in the Gaza war.

The HOCC was the main unit used by the Houthis to issue warnings to the shipping industry during its campaign of attacks on merchant shipping between 2023 and 2025, which only ended with the Gaza ceasefire last October.

"We believe (the email) acts as a reminder of their presence in the area," said one source at one of the companies that received the email.

Tankers operated by Saudi Arabia were already taking precautionary measures, including switching off their tracking transponders, sources told Reuters. Saudi state oil giant Saudi Aramco ([2222.SE](#)) [↗](#) declined to comment.

Saudi Arabia on Monday condemned allegations by the Houthis that the kingdom was besieging Yemen, and said Riyadh would take ["all necessary measures" to protect its ships](#).

TANKERS U-TURN

Two oil tankers loaded with Saudi crude for China and India made [U-turns](#) in the Red Sea on Tuesday, heading towards the Suez Canal rather than towards the Bab el-Mandeb strait, the southern gateway linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, following the Houthi warnings.

"The developments represent the first confirmed changes to commercial tanker routing following the (Houthi) embargo and are likely to increase disruption to Saudi crude exports and regional shipping patterns," British maritime risk management group Vanguard said on Tuesday after the tanker re-routings.

Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil exporter, has increased use of the Saudi port of Yanbu in the Red Sea since the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran began on February 28.

The Yanbu terminal was still operating to load oil onto ships that were already in the Red Sea or arriving via Suez, shipping sources said on Tuesday.

There were no confirmed attacks in the past 48 hours on any ships through the Red Sea, the U.S. navy-led Joint Maritime Information Center (JMIC) said in an advisory published on Tuesday.

Reporting by Jonathan Saul, Renee Maltezou and Ahmad Ghaddar; Editing by Louise Heavens and Susan Fenton

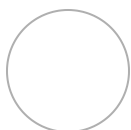
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Renee Maltezou has covered major news events from Greece, from devastating wildfires, riots and anti-austerity protests to snap elections and the 2016 migrant crisis. She reported from Athens and Brussels the twists in Greece's heated bailout negotiations with its international lenders during the country's decade-long financial meltdown and was a finalist with her Athens bureau colleagues for the Reuters Reporting Team of the Year in 2012 and Story of the Year in 2015. Today she covers mainly politics, crime, climate change and shipping, including Red Sea attacks. She read journalism at the City University in London and linguistics at the University of Athens and the Freie Universität Berlin.



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