Tankers

Houthis declare maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia

Move follows an escalating exchange of attacks last week after bombing of airport in Houthi-held territory

Yahya Saree is the Houthi group's military spokesman. Photo: Armed Forces of Yemen

Paul Peachey
TradeWinds correspondent | London

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Houthi forces in Yemen have declared a "maritime embargo" against Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea in a potential threat to the kingdom's oil trade.

Military spokesman Yahya Saree said the blockade was "effective immediately" and comes after a new flare-up in tensions between the two countries.

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Saudi Arabia has responded to the US-led war against Iran by redirecting millions of barrels of oil to its Red Sea coast via pipeline to avoid restrictions on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Houthis gave little detail about the embargo and whether it would include tankers hauling Saudi crude from the Red Sea port of Yanbu.

“The Yemeni Armed Forces declare a maritime embargo against the criminal Saudi enemy, based on the equation of ‘an eye for an eye’, effective immediately upon the issuance of this statement,” said Saree in a televised address.

The Houthi group has been approached for comment.

Most of Saudi Arabia's 4.5m barrels per day of oil exports shifted to Yanbu after the start of the attacks by the US and Israel on Iranian targets in late February.

Security analyst Vanguard said the announcement was likely to be interpreted as applying to Saudi-flagged, owned, managed or affiliated vessels as well as vessels calling at Saudi ports.

The prospects of a return to normality for Gulf oil exports were raised by a 60-day ceasefire agreed between the US and Iran in June.

But US President Donald Trump declared it over two weeks ago and attacks on ships and regional infrastructure have resumed.

Saudi Arabia led a regional coalition against the Houthis from 2015 after Yemen's civil war brought the rebel group to power over much of the country.

But the Saudis fell out with former allies the United Arab Emirates and failed to topple the rebel group.

It supports the internationally recognised government based in the southern port city of Aden.

A four-year ceasefire was threatened by this month's military exchanges and a rare Iranian flight into Houthi-held Sanaa airport to bring officials to the funeral of the assassinated Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The Saudis and allies claim the flight may have been carrying military experts as the Houthis gear up for a potential return to attacks against shipping in support of Iran.

The Houthis accused the Saudis of bombing the airport to prevent the aircraft from returning and fired missiles at Saudi Arabia in response.

The Houthis led a campaign against commercial shipping in the Red Sea for more than 18 months from November 2023. The regime said the attacks were in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

They have largely stayed out of the conflict triggered by US-Israeli attacks on Iran in late February, but had warned of closing the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which would add further pressure to shipping markets.

“The risk of Houthi re-engagement with Red Sea commercial shipping remains elevated,” said Pole Star Global in a briefing note before the announcement.

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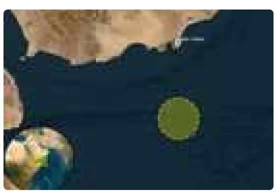

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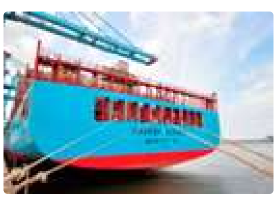

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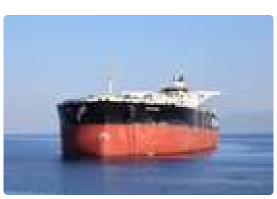

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