

Security Advisory: Hodeidah Port, Yemen

Executive Summary

- **Saudi Arabian Television has announced that the battle for Hodeidah has begun.**
- The port is the final maritime stronghold for the Houthi rebels, who failed to meet a Coalition deadline to hand over control.
- MS Risk advises extreme caution at the port and in the waters around Hodeidah Port.



13 June— This morning, troops backed by the Saudi-led coalition began their assault on Hodeidah, the final maritime stronghold for the Houthi rebels. The long-anticipated battle is the culmination of Operation Golden Spear, a coalition campaign to wrest control of Yemen’s western shoreline from the rebels. The battle for Hodeidah is likely to be the biggest fight in the war between the Arab coalition and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who wrested control of Yemen’s capital and large swathes of the country in 2015.

Earlier this week, after years of failed attempts at peace negotiations, the United Arab Emirates set a 48-hour deadline for the United Nations to convince the Houthis to evacuate and return control of Hodeidah to the internationally recognised Yemeni government. UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, said, “We gave U.N. special envoy Martin Griffiths 48 hours to convince the Houthis to withdraw from the port and city of Hodeidah[...] These 48 hours expire during the night of Tuesday and Wednesday [...] If the Houthis don’t get out of Hodeidah city and the port, the UAE will start a military operation against the rebels in Hodeidah.”

In a statement carried by Yemeni state-run media, the Yemeni government said, “The liberation of the port is the start of the fall of the Houthi militia and will secure marine shipping in Bab al-Mandab strait and cut off the hands of Iran, which has long drowned Yemen in weapons that shed precious Yemeni blood.”

Currently, the Houthis have two critical strongholds: Hodeidah Port, and Yemen’s capital, Sanaa. In recent months, coalition forces have rapidly moved northward along Yemen’s coastline to fortify maritime control of the region. Simultaneously, the Yemeni army, backed by coalition forces, have severed many Houthi supply lines as part of their surge to recapture these two strategic locations. In February, Yemeni and coalition forces cut off the route that links Taiz province with Hodeidah. In March, the Houthi supply route connecting fighters in the Al Jawf province was secured by Yemen-coalition forces. By April, coalition forces had cut most the supply lines that extend into the Hodeidah, forcing the Houthis to rely on mountain and desert routes to transfer personnel and supplies.

The battle for Hodeidah is the first attempt to capture a major city in Yemen. The coalition seeks to box the rebels into Sanaa, forcing them to negotiate a peace agreement. The UN and international governments have raised concerns that a battle at Hodeidah port could have extreme ramifications of the people of Yemen. Hodeidah is a lifeline to the country; attacks at the port could impede access to medicine, food,

and fuel, raising concerns that the battle could further exacerbate what has become the world's most critical humanitarian crisis. The coalition has argued that the Houthi rebels are using the port to smuggle weapons for Iran, some of which have been used to conduct missile strikes inside Saudi territory.

Conditions at Hodeidah Port

WARNING: conditions around Hodeidah are a high security risk.

Thus far, all parties in the war have carefully sought to ensure the security and functionality of the port. However, there is no guarantee that conditions at the port will remain secure. As MS Risk has previously warned, if the Houthis sense they are losing control of Hodeidah, the group could deliberately target the port and its infrastructure, or target vessels in the area to impede access to the port. It is unlikely that the port will come under the security of the United Nations.

Ship owners and shipmasters are urged to consider conditions around Hodeidah port. Vessels in the area are urged to remain constantly vigilant and aware of the risk of both deliberate and inadvertent attacks. There is elevated security in the water around Hodeidah port, and in the territorial waters on the Red Sea, extending to the Bab al Mandab Strait. Masters are advised to stay abreast of current information through local media sources, and to follow guidelines in accordance with the United Nations, the Saudi Coalition, and port authorities. Vessels are warned to proceed with extreme caution in the areas surrounding Hodeidah port. Remain vigilant of remote-controlled drone boats or rocket launchers. Commercial shipping vessels may be mistaken for a Saudi-led coalition vessel and hit by a water borne improvised explosive device or hit by a stray anti-ship cruise missile.

Security checks and offloading remain considerably slowed at Hodeidah Port. Wait times and inspection procedures in cooperation with the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism are lengthy. Cargo offload is slower than it was prior to the war. The port's five gantry cranes were destroyed by coalition air strikes in 2015. The port now operates with four temporary truck-mounted cranes that have a maximum offloading capacity of 60 tonnes. The cranes cannot always reach container ships, as the old cranes are now obstacles to movement at the port. This has considerably slowed the offloading of shipping containers. As an alternative to Hodeidah port, the Yemeni government has begun efforts to restore Mokha port, 89 nautical miles south of Hodeidah.

Yemen Port Guidance

MS RISK CONTINUES TO ADVISE EXTREME CAUTION FOR VESSELS TRAVELING THROUGH BAB AL MANDAB, THE GULF OF ADEN, AND THE INDIAN OCEAN.

As MS Risk had assessed, the conflict in Yemen has introduced maritime security threat vectors in the Southern Red Sea. Attacks from ship-to-shore or vice versa could cause damage to vessels or disruption to shipping routes. Commercial vessels may not be deliberately targeted, however there is a risk of misidentification or collateral damage to commercial vessels operating in the region. As a result, on 25 January BIMCO, ICS and INTERTANKO published an Interim Guidance on Maritime Security in the Southern Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb, to provide guidance for conducting proper risk assessments prior to entering the region. The guidance is complementary to and should be applied in conjunction with the application of the BMP4.

The interim guidance advises company security officers and shipmasters to do the following:

- Obtain the most up to date and reliable security information available;
- Assess the current security situation, conduct a pre-voyage risk assessment and incorporate appropriate protective measures into vessel's security plans;
- Register with the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) and where applicable, report to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) prior to entering the region;
- Use the Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC), which is a military established corridor upon which naval forces focus their presence and surveillance efforts;
- Designate a safe onboard location for the crew in the event of a threat of an external explosion
- Report suspicious activity to the UKMTO and MSCHOA. You can find their contact details in Annex A to the interim guidance.

UNITED NATIONS INSPECTIONS

The UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) is operational for commercial imports to Yemen.

Shipping companies or owners delivering to ports not under the control of the Government of Yemen must apply for permits upon departing from the port of origin of their cargo. Yemen-based importers/traders are required to submit this notification form. More information about the UNVIM program is available here: <https://www.vimye.org/home>.

Vessels applying to go to ports under the control of the Government of Yemen need obtain permission for entry from the Yemeni Ministry of Transport. This should be done through the ship's agent and/or receivers prior to the vessel's arrival. The form should be completed by the ship's master and sent directly to the Ministry of Transport.

SAUDI COALITION INSPECTIONS

All vessels calling at Yemeni ports will only be allowed to enter Yemeni territorial waters following an inspection by the Saudi Arabian coalition forces. Upon arrival outside Bab Al-Mandab, the shipmaster should call the naval forces of the Saudi Arabian coalition by VHF on channel 16 for the arrival registration, and indicate his location (ideally three miles from Bab Al Mandab). Coalition authorities will advise on the

anchor position until they provide final approval to enter the port. This procedure will not take more than 48 hours.

Coalition inspectors do not conduct investigation with the crew; contact will be with the ship's master or Chief Officer about the cargo and documents. Once the vessel is permitted into Yemeni ports, the Master will be required to call port control by VHF on channel 14 or 16 for the arrival registration. The shipmaster will be advised the anchor position until the Harbour master confirms berthing prospects.

Coalition forces require AIS to be kept on at all times. The situation is subject to change and vessels should check frequently with local sources for any changes.