Maritime

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Strait of Hormuz Alert: Authorities confirm sinking of two vessels on October 13-14 amid uptick in Iranian maritime attacks; underscores continued volatility of waterway, heightens risk of regional escalation

Current Situation:

Confirmed Vessel Sinkings in Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman

- On October 14, Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) confirmed that the Singapore-flagged GFS Pride had sunk after being struck by an unidentified projectile while transiting the Strait of Hormuz on October 13. The MPA added that all 21 crew members were evacuated and no one was wounded.
- The MPA additionally announced that the Singapore-flagged GFS Giselle was struck by an unknown projectile in the Strait of Hormuz on October 14 (Singapore time). The vessel sustained hull damage but reached safe anchorage under its own propulsion, and all 22 crew members were reported safe.
- Data from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) updated on October 13 confirmed that the Antigua and Barbuda-flagged bulk carrier MV Cape Dao had sunk, reportedly in the Gulf of Oman. The vessel had previously been struck in the Strait of Hormuz on September 23.

Iranian Claims

- According to October 14 reports, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC-N) claimed that an unidentified vessel carrying over 2,500 containers had struck a naval mine in the southern Strait of Hormuz, which the IRGC-N reportedly described as an "unauthorized and dangerous route."
- The IRGC-N reportedly added that the vessel subsequently caught fire and sank.

Additional Maritime Attacks

- On October 14, the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that a 50,000-ton container ship was struck by an unknown projectile while transiting outbound through the Strait of Hormuz on October 13.
- The UKMTO also reported that a 19,000-ton container ship was struck by an unknown projectile while transiting outbound through the Strait of Hormuz on October 13.
- According to the UKMTO, both vessels sustained minor damage but reported no casualties and continued their journeys.
- On October 13, the UKMTO also reported two incidents in which a tanker and a container ship were struck by projectiles in the Strait of Hormuz at an unspecified time.

US Military Activity

- On October 14, US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that US forces had destroyed an Iran-affiliated dhow in the Gulf of Oman on October 6. CENTCOM claimed that the vessel had been conducting surveillance and targeting operations against US Navy ships.

Source: MPA; IRNA

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The latest incidents come amid a marked uptick of attacks against commercial shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz. This is underscored by the surge in UKMTO-reported attacks in the past two weeks, increasing from 12 throughout September, of which six recorded in the last two weeks of the month, to 23 in the first two weeks of October. Against the backdrop, the sinking of GFS Pride following an October 13 strike, as well as the sinking of MV Cape Dao after it was struck on September 23, represents a qualitative escalation in the threat to commercial shipping. This is because they demonstrate that such attacks are not only limited to disrupting transit but are liable to result in the complete loss of commercial vessels.
2. Iran's claim that an unidentified vessel sank after striking a naval mine suggests an attempt to capitalize on the latest incidents to undermine US assurances regarding the security of maritime transit through the Strait. This is particularly given Washington's de-mining operations and efforts to demonstrate that Iranian mines no longer pose a significant threat to commercial shipping. It also mirrors Iran's September claims that the Panama-flagged vessel El Gaia struck a mine, which CENTCOM denied. Regardless, the attribution of a vessel sinking to a mine serves Tehran's broader effort to challenge US assurances of freedom of navigation and will discourage commercial traffic from transiting the Strait.
3. More broadly, the intensification of maritime attacks highlights Iran's efforts to impose its authority over the Strait of Hormuz, as evidenced by the IRGC's as October 7 threat that it would close "illegal routes" through the Strait, referring to the southern corridor near Oman. This reflects Tehran's continued use the Strait as the main lever of pressure against the US amid Washington's ongoing blockade on Iranian ports and expansion of sanctions under Operation Economic Outcast. This is because repeated attacks against commercial vessels enable Tehran to impose economic

costs on regional and international shipping and raise global energy costs while remaining below the threshold of direct, large-scale conflict with the US.

4. In this context, the timing of the escalation reflects Tehran's assessment that it currently has greater latitude to apply such pressure without triggering a major US military response. This is underpinned by US President Donald Trump's October 8 indication that the US is unlikely to launch strikes against Iran before the November 3 midterm elections, which emphasized Washington's reduced appetite to renew hostilities ahead of the vote. The maritime escalation also comes amid the continued diplomatic impasse between Tehran and Washington, as evidenced by Iran's characterization of the latest US counterproposal as "insufficient" on October 11. These factors reinforce Iranian attempts to strengthen its negotiating leverage by intensifying global energy and supply chain costs on the US.
5. **FORECAST:** Iranian attacks against commercial shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz will persist over the coming days and weeks. Further projectile strikes and attempted interceptions will recur, together Iranian claims regarding the continued presence of naval miles, sustained elevated threat perceptions. This will further increase operational and financial risks for shipping operators and discourage or slow commercial transit through regional waterways. This will be viewed as a success for Tehran, thereby incentivizing Iran to sustain its attacks.
6. **FORECAST:** The continued intensification of attacks will increase the risk of a regional escalation. Washington will likely strengthen naval protection around the Strait and may consider strikes against Iranian military infrastructure enabling attacks on commercial shipping, as it did after previous Iranian attacks in July. While the risk of Iranian retaliation will constrain the scale of any initial US response, these dynamics and further incidents are liable to trigger a broader cycle of escalation.

Recommendations:

Maritime arena:

1. Avoid maritime travel through the **Strait of Hormuz** and take precautions in the **Persian Gulf** and **Gulf of Oman**, given the risk of attacks on vessels in these waterways.
2. Those operating vessels through the **Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb,** and the **Gulf of Aden** are advised to remain cognizant of elevated risks to shipping and take precautions, given the risk of attacks on vessels in these waterways in light of the Houthi-proclaimed naval blockade on Saudi Arabia.
3. Remain apprised of UKMTO and US DOT Maritime Administration-issued notices, as well as being aware of NATO Shipping Center alerts.

MENA:

1. Throughout the region, conduct timely risk assessments, refresh security protocols and business contingency plans (BCPs) for short-notice escalation scenarios, and continuously confirm travel itineraries.
2. Avoid all travel to **Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria,** and **Iraq** at the current juncture.
3. Conduct only essential business travel to **Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Jordan,** and **other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states** at the current juncture and reconsider the necessity of currently planned trips.
4. In **Jordan**, avoid all travel near military bases and Aqaba, amid Iranian attacks against these areas.
5. Remain cognizant of elevated risks to airports in the region. Conduct repeated, timely risk assessments before using commercial airports in these countries.
6. Continuously monitor official alert systems.
7. Avoid all travel to military installations in the region, especially those hosting US personnel.
8. Avoid all travel to major energy and heavy-industry facilities (particularly petrochemical facilities),

as well as major ports across the region, and implement precautions at such sites due to the continued threat to this infrastructure posed by Iran.

9. Avoid travel to US-linked diplomatic and academic institutions in the region amid Iranian threats to target such locations.
10. Avoid disseminating picture material and footage of interceptions, falling debris, and military assets on social media, as the circulation of such info is often illegal in Gulf states and may lead to prosecution.
11. **MAX Security has strong on-the-ground capabilities across several arenas in MENA, including secure transportation, the provision of safe havens, and contingency consultation and planning. Contact us at** operations@max-security.com **or +44 20-3540-0434.**