



Shell suspends Red Sea shipments amid attack fears

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Body

British oil major Shell has suspended all shipments through the Red Sea indefinitely after US and UK strikes on Yemen's Houthi rebels triggered fears of further escalation, according to sources.

The West's targeting of the Iranian-ally militia came after the Houthis launched dozens of missiles and drones at commercial vessels around the Red Sea and the nearby Bab el-Mandeb. The militia has said the attacks are in response to the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

About 12 per cent of total global seaborne oil trade goes through the Red Sea. Last month, a tanker chartered by Shell to move Indian jet fuel was targeted by a drone in the Red Sea and harassed by Houthi boats, according to shipping officials.

Shell declined to comment on the suspension of transit and the attack. But the company last week halted all crossings over concerns that a successful -attack could trigger a massive spill in the region, as well as present risks to the safety of crews on the ships, sources said.

Shell joins other global shippers in deciding to avoid the Red Sea, including other energy companies.

BP last month said it would pause all shipments through the key shipping lane, and Qatar Energy did the same this week.

Qatar, which has acted as a mediator for the Houthis in the past, halted the use of the Red Sea route for its liquefied natural gas exports for fear of being caught in the conflict, according to a Qatari energy official and shipping trackers.

Recent Houthi attacks, initially directed against Israeli-linked vessels, have rattled global markets, upended international shipping routes and become more indiscriminate. The rebels have attacked vessels from containerhips to tankers moving sanctioned Russian oil, as the global shipping nexus complicates their ability to identify specific targets.

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They have vowed to continue their campaign against US and international targets in the region in response to Israel's actions in Gaza. "Anyone attempting to hinder us from doing so will fail," a Houthi official said on Monday. After the US-led strike, several captains of chartered vessels heading for Europe via the Suez Canal have refused to enter the Red Sea, forcing them to sail through a lengthy route around southern Africa. The Singapore ship registry and Intertanko, an industry lobby group, said the waterway should be avoided.

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