

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

Between Larissa and Bab al Mandeb

Shaul Shay

(Senior research fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at the Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya and former deputy head of Israel's National Security Council)

Copyright: @ 2025 Research Institute for European and American Studies (www.rieas.gr) Publication date: 4 August 2025

Note: The article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily the views of the Research Institute for European and American Studies

Two Liberia-flagged, Greek-operated cargo ships, Magic Seas and Eternity C, sank off Yemen after repeated attacks by the Houthis. The strikes on the two vessels in July 2025 marked a resumption of attacks on shipping by the Houthis, who struck more than 100 ships between November 2023 and December 2024 in what they said was a show of solidarity with the Hamas in the war in Gaza.

ACLED data indicated that Houthi attacks targeted commercial vessels linked to over 50 nationalities. **The most frequently targeted were Greek-linked vessels (27%),** followed by those registered under Liberia (8%), Cyprus (7%), and Panama (5%).¹

The Houthis began attacking merchant vessels in November 2023, saying they were responding to Israel's military operation in Gaza. The Houthis said they are attacking vessels that are Israeli-owned or operated, or are heading to Israeli ports. However, many of the ships targeted had no connections with Israel.²

Greek Shipping Ministry said that following attacks on two Greek vessels by Yemen's Houthi militants in July 2025, Greece will deploy a salvage vessel in the Red Sea. Shipping Minister Vassilis Kikilias said the salvage vessel - called Giant and provided

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

by the Hellenic Association of Tugboat Owners - would "support, protect and assist Greek-owned vessels and Greek seafarers".³

Giant is manned by a specialist crew of 14 Greek sailors, has four engines with 16,000 horsepower, and can sail in the most adverse weather conditions. It can participate in search and rescue operations, with accommodation for 40 people, help prevent marine pollution and also has firefighting capacity, the Shipping Ministry said.⁴

In what they called phase four of their military operations, the Houthis said in July 2025, they would target any ships belonging to companies that do business with Israeli ports, regardless of their nationalities.⁵

The Aspides European Union naval mission

The European Union's Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) OPERATION ASPIDES is an EU defensive maritime security operation under the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).⁶ Operation Aspides acts in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2722, which calls for the total cessation of Houthi attacks against merchant shipping and recognizes the right of states to protect these vessels against unlawful attacks.

EUNAVFOR ASPIDES was established in February 2024 with the objective of restoring and safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf. The operation is headquartered in Larissa, Greece, and headed by Commodore Vasileios Gryparis, while the operation's forward-deployed flagship operates as Force Headquarters in regional waters.⁷

Forces from 21 of the 27 EU nations are participating in the mission but only 4 countries sent ships to take part in the operation. Aspides has three vessels – the Hellenic Navy HS Hydra, the Italian Federico Martinengo, and a French frigate – to cover a huge mission area extending into the north-west Indian Ocean.⁸

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

A German frigate ended its mission and left the operational area in the Red Sea in April 2024. The ship was deployed to the Red Sea in February 2024 to protect commercial ships from attacks by the Houthis. The German Defense Ministry said the ship safely escorted 27 commercial ships through the operational area and in four cases, Houthi drones and missiles were successfully repelled.⁹

Operation Aspides is supported by the European Union Satellite Centre and the EU's Intelligence Analysis Centre to gather information where required for the fulfilment of its tasks.¹⁰ Aspides forces are co-ordinate with the US-led military operation in the area, Operation Prosperity Guardian, to avoid friendly fire incidents and to preserve ammunition by not doubling up on responses to an incoming threat.

The operation is active along the main sea lines of communication in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as international waters in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf, and ensures an EU naval presence in the area where Houthi attacks have targeted international commercial vessels since October 2023.¹¹

Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council responded to the EU announcement of operation ASPIDES: "We say to the Europeans, don't play with fire, you don't need to back the US in protecting the occupying entity (in reference to protecting Israeli ships...any idiocy you commit will affect your ships and navigation (in the Red Sea), you are warned." Al-Houthi also said that "Your presence increases the militarization of the Red Sea, ... and will affect the chain of food supplies to the markets in your countries."¹²

Operation ASPIDES invites merchant vessels entering the Red Sea basin to request protection and receive navigational recommendations. The commander of the EU's Red Sea naval defense operation Admiral Gryparis said that in just over a year, the mission has helped the passage of more than 740 vessels, 440 of which were provided with close protection – a task that takes about three days per ship. It has intercepted 18 drones, two drone boats and four anti-ship missiles.¹³

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

The EU Council decided February 14, 2025, to prolong the mandate of the EU maritime security operation to safeguard freedom of navigation in relation to the Red Sea crisis (EUNAVFOR ASPIDES) until 28 February 2026, with a reference amount of over €17 million for the period. This decision was taken following the strategic review of the operation. ¹⁴

Furthermore, the Council decided that, in order to ensure maritime situation awareness in the area of operation, Operation ASPIDES should be able to collect information, in addition to data necessary to protect vessels, on arms trafficking and on shadow fleets with a view to sharing this information with member states, the European Commission, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).¹⁵

The attacks on the Greek ships in July 2025

Two Liberia-flagged, Greek-operated cargo ships, Magic Seas and Eternity C, sank off Yemen after repeated attacks by the Houthis. The strikes on the two vessels in July 2025 marked a resumption of attacks on shipping by the Houthis, who struck more than 100 ships between November 2023 and December 2024 in what they said was a show of solidarity with the Hamas in the war in Gaza.

All of the crew members from the Magic Seas were rescued by a passing ship. The crew of the Eternity C had to abandon the ship. Ten were rescued by a privately led mission, but five more are feared dead and the Houthis are holding another 10 crew members. Aspides, the European Union naval mission protecting shipping in the Red Sea, did not have assets in the area at the time of the incidents.

The Houthis released on, July 29, 2025 a six-minute video showing pictures of the 10 seafarers with some of them contacting their families. They also showed testimonies saying that the crew members were not aware of a maritime ban by Houthis against vessels sailing to Israeli ports. They said the vessel was heading to Israel's Eilat Port to load fertilizers.¹⁶

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

The United States and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have criticized the Houthis' actions. HRW stated the rebel group is "unlawfully detaining civilians," while US officials have accused the Houthis of "kidnapping" the missing seafarers in violation of international law.¹⁷

Houthi attacks on Greek ships (2024 – 2025)

The two ships sunk by the Houthis in July 2025 were not the only Greek-owned ships attacked by the Houthis. Since April 2024, the Houthis have been targeting ships owned and operated by Greece-based companies:¹⁸

On January 17, 2024, the Greek-owned, Malta-registered bulk carrier *Zografia* was sailing from Vietnam to Israel when it was attacked by the Houthis. The ship was empty and had 24 crew onboard. There were no reports of injuries. And it had suffered only minor damage. Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said the *Zografia* had been targeted by naval missiles, resulting in a "direct hit".¹⁹

On February 12, 2024, Houthis claimed responsibility for a double missile strike on the *Star Iris*, a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel, owned by a Greek company. The vessel, reportedly heading toward Iran, was targeted by two separate missile attacks while navigating the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The vessel sustained damage to its starboard side as a result of the attacks.²⁰

On May 23, 2024, the Houthis launched a missile against Malta-flagged bulk carrier *Yannis* in the southern Red Sea. The ship was en route from Russia to Kenya. The bulk carrier's beneficial owner is the Greece-based Thanassis Martinos group of companies, while the commercial operator is Greece-based Eastern Mediterranean Maritime Limited (EASTMED). The Houthi spokesperson justified the attack by saying the company had three vessels that visited Israel.²¹

On May 28, 2024, Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier *Laax* - was attacked in the southern Red Sea. Between four and five antiship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) and one other type of projectile targeted the bulk carrier, damaging it considerably, with one seafarer reportedly suffered a head injury. Despite the intensity of the attack, the ship was able to continue sailing. The bulk carrier's beneficial owner is Greece-based

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

Newport S.A., while the third-party operator is affiliate Greece-based Grehel Shipmanagement Company.²²

On June 13, 2024, the Houthis launched a drone boat attack against the Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier Tutor, southwest of the Houthi-controlled port city of Hodeida in the Red Sea. A crew member was killed in the attack and the drone boat caused severe flooding and damage to the engine room. The captain of the ship has reported the vessel was hit for a second time by an unknown airborne projectile.²³ The Tutor sank a few days after the attack.²⁴

Houthi spokesman, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, claimed responsibility for the attack. He described the attack as using a "drone boat," as well as drones and ballistic missiles.²⁵

On August 21, 2024, the Houthis launched a multi-layered attack on the MV Sounion, a Greek-owned tanker carrying 150,000 tons of crude oil. The vessel lost engine power and anchored in international waters in the southern Red Sea. Responding to the ship master's request for urgent assistance, Operation Aspides dispatched a French frigate to conduct an operation to rescue the ship's crew. The French warship successfully evacuated the crewmembers and transported them to Djibouti.²⁶

On August 23, 2024, Operation Aspides' assets surveilling the area spotted fires in several locations on the ship's main deck and in the superstructure where the navigation bridge and crew accommodation are located. The unknown origin of the fires became evident when the Houthi-controlled media accounts released footage showing the group's militiamen planting explosives over the hatches of the ship's oil tanks and detonating them, setting the tanker ablaze. With its cargo of nearly 1 million barrels of oil, the MV Sounion represented a major environmental hazard.²⁷

In April 2025, Malta-flagged *Cyclades*, bulk carrier came under an intense attack. The bulk carrier's beneficial owner is the Greece-based Thanassis Martinos group of companies, while the commercial operator is Greece-based Eastern Mediterranean Maritime Limited (EASTMED).

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece

Summary

Since mid-October 2023, the Houthi naval campaign in and around the Red Sea has severely disrupted navigation across a maritime artery connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the North-Western Indian Ocean, through which almost 14 percent of global maritime trade and 30 percent of global containerized trade passed before the current conflict erupted.

ACLED data indicate that Houthi attacks targeted commercial vessels linked to over 50 nationalities. **The most frequently targeted were Greek-linked vessels (27%),** followed by those registered under Liberia (8%), Cyprus (7%), and Panama (5%).²⁸

The Houthis did not provide explanations for the high number of attacks on Greek-owned vessels compared to ships from other countries. However, if the Houthis do give priority to Greek-owned vessels, this can be explained as follows:

- Greece is significantly involved in operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea, with the force headquarters located in Greece, the force commander being a Greek admiral, and a Greek frigate operating in the Red Sea to escort commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
- Greece is known for its good relations with Israel.

Greece is an example of how a small country can contribute to an international effort to protect freedom of navigation in the vital Red Sea shipping lane.

The scope of the operation ASPIDES force is too small (3 ships) and limiting its activities to defensive missions undermines its effectiveness. It seems that Western countries, led by the US and the EU, need to step up their efforts on lifting the naval blockade and the ongoing damage to the global economy by the Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist organization.

RIEAS@2025 Exclusive Analysis (www.rieas.gr) Athens, Greece**Notes:**

¹ A Red Sea Hall of mirrors: US and Houthi statements vs. actions, ACLED, June 26, 2025.

² Kathryn Armstrong, Red Sea attacks: Greek vessel hit by missile fired by Houthi rebels, BBC, January 17, 2024.

³ Greece to send salvage ship to Red Sea after latest Houthi attacks, Asharq Al Awsat, July 24, 2025.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Houthis released Houthis say they hold 10 crew from Greek-operated ship they sank off Yemen, Reuters, July 29, 2025.

⁶ The EU launched Operation Aspides – named after the Greek word for “shield.”

⁷ EUNAVFOR OPERATION ASPIDES, July 14, 2025.
<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eunavfor-operation->

⁸ We're not here to fight the Houthis, EU Red Sea commander says, The National, April 2025.

⁹ German Warship Ends Mission Against Houthis in the Red Sea, Yemen monitor, April 20, 2024.

¹⁰ Greece assumes command of Red Sea maritime security operation, Millet news, February 14, 2024.

¹¹ EUNAVFOR OPERATION ASPIDES, July 14, 2025.
<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eunavfor-operation->

¹² Houthis threaten to respond to any European 'idiocy' in Red Sea, AA, February 20, 2024.

¹³ We're not here to fight the Houthis, EU Red Sea commander says, The National, April 2025.

¹⁴ European Council extends ASPIDES for an additional year, safety4sea, February 19, 2025.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Houthis released Houthis say they hold 10 crew from Greek-operated ship they sank off Yemen, Reuters, July 29, 2025.

¹⁷ Houthis parade captive crew from sunken Greek ship in propaganda video, Splash 247.com, July 29, 2025.

¹⁸ Noam Raydan and Farzin Nadimi, Behind Houthi Attacks on Ships Operated by Greece-Based Companies, The Washington Institute, May 31, 2024.

Kathryn Armstrong, Red Sea attacks: Greek vessel hit by missile fired by Houthi ¹⁹ rebels, BBC, January 17, 2024.

²⁰ Greece-Owned vessel targeted by Iran's Houthi militia in double missile Strike, Iran international, February 12, 2024.

²¹ Greek-owned ship targeted by missile off Yemen: Security firms, Ahram online, May 23, 2024.

²² Greek-owned ship attacked by Yemen's Houthi rebels was full of grain bound for Iran, ekathimerini.com, May 30, 2025.

²³ Yemen's Houthi rebels launch boat-borne bomb attack against Greek-owned ship in Red Sea, euronews.com, June 13, 2024.

²⁴ Houthi attacks sink second Red Sea ship after mariner is killed, NBC News, June 19, 2025.

²⁵ Yemen's Houthi rebels launch boat-borne bomb attack against Greek-owned ship in Red Sea, euronews.com, June 13, 2024.

²⁶ The EU Moves to Counter Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea, Gulf international forum, September 14, 2024.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A Red Sea Hall of mirrors: US and Houthi statements vs. actions, ACLED, June 26, 2025.