OPTARUS RISK & INTELLIGENCE

FA-72-005

Red Sea Commercial Transit Risk Monitor

72-Hour Assessment | 27 September 2026

REPORTING CUT-OFF	PREVIOUS	STATUS	CYCLE
27 Sep 2026 | 12:00 BST (British Summer Time)	FA-72-004	OPEN-SOURCE ASSESSMENT	72H
REGION	**FOCUS**	**AUTHOR**	**METHOD**
Red Sea / Bab el-Mandeb / Hormuz	Commercial transit risk	Stephen J. Taylor	Analyst-led | artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted open-source intelligence (OSINT)

OVERALL RISK	DIRECTION	CONFIDENCE	COMMERCIAL PRESSURE
HIGH	DETERIORATING	MODERATE-HIGH	SEVERE

KEY JUDGEMENT

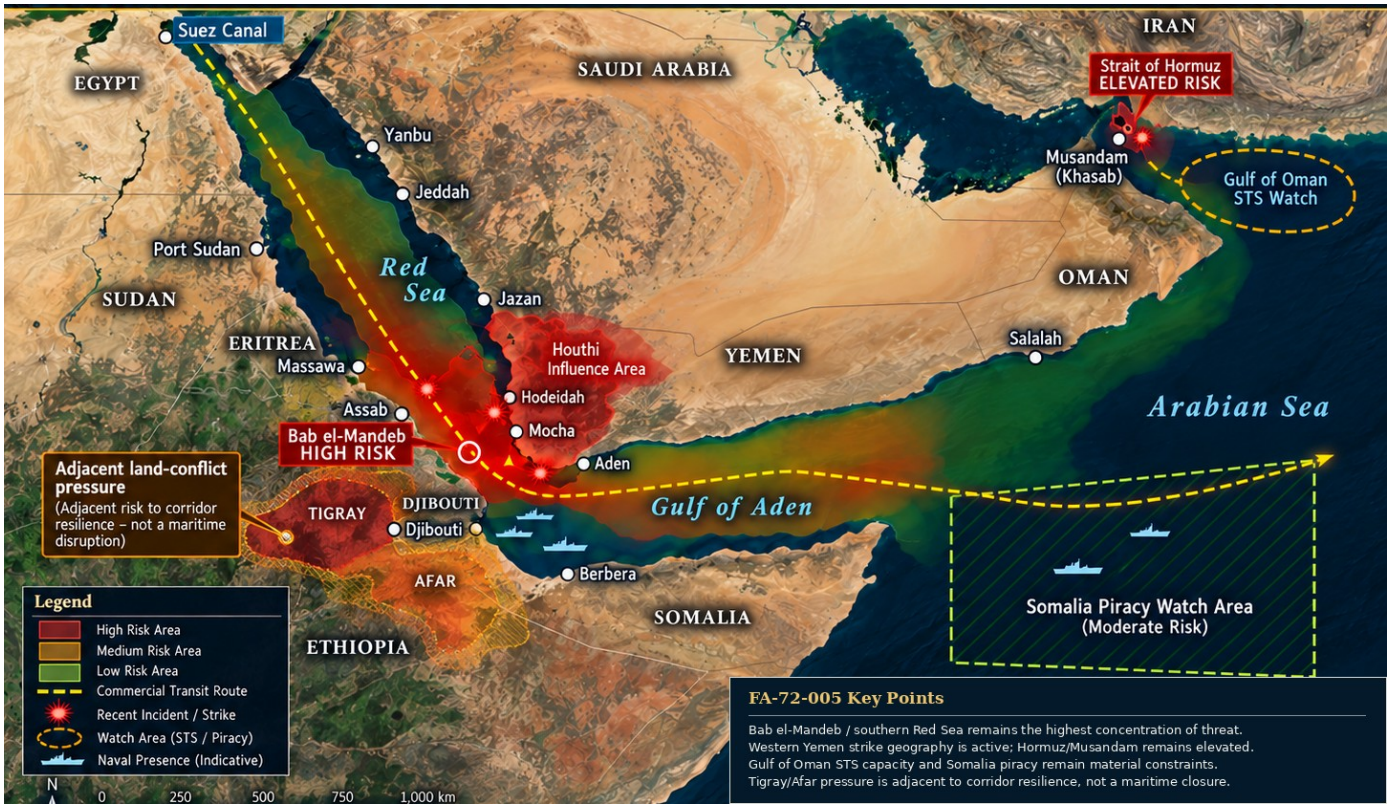
FA-72-005 assesses that the Red Sea-Hormuz transport system remains in a redundancy-consumption phase. The final 72-hour cycle shows deterioration at two nodes intended to provide mutual relief: Yanbu/Petroline has not yet demonstrated dependable tanker-loading continuity, while Gulf of Oman ship-to-ship (STS) operations are now reported at practical capacity limits. The CAPE DAO attack off Musandam adds a fatal commercial-shipping incident to an already severely constrained Hormuz environment. [6][14][23][24][27][49]

Bab el-Mandeb remains physically active rather than closed, but "open" should not be read as "normal". Tanker traffic remains below normal-risk patterns and local Yemeni reporting confirms continuing threat proximity on the western approaches. Counter-indicators remain material but mixed: major liner services are selectively returning to Suez/Red Sea routing; ASPIDES and coalition air-defence support continue; Türkiye-Pakistan-Saudi defence coordination has moved from consultation toward implementation language around intelligence sharing, military coordination and capability integration; Saudi and Yemeni commanders are coordinating force readiness; and Aramco is studying additional export routes and overseas storage. Oman-Iran engagement also keeps a navigation channel open, but no Hormuz access measure has been implemented after the U.S. rejection of Iran's seven-day proposal. These measures improve resilience but do not yet restore system redundancy. [2][17][18][25][40][41][42][54][55][59][61][67][70][71]

Distribution note. This assessment is for decision support. It does not designate safe routes or anchorages and is not navigational, legal, insurance or financial advice. Masters, operators, company security officers (CSOs), charterers and insurers should use current official maritime-security guidance and voyage-specific risk assessment.

Regional Operating Picture

The operating picture shows the principal commercial routes and nodes assessed in FA-72-005, together with verified threat, incident, STS, piracy and adjacent land-conflict overlays at the 12:00 BST cut-off. Map terminology: unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).



Map interpretation: red and amber overlays are Optarus analytical risk layers rather than navigation or exclusion zones. Adjacent Tigray/Afar shading reflects regional land-conflict pressure; no direct disruption of the Ethiopia-Djibouti commercial corridor was established at cut-off. [60]

Route & Node Risk Dashboard

This dashboard is deliberately geographic: it answers where cargo can move and the present condition of each principal route or support node. Threat mechanisms and mitigations are assessed separately below.

Route / node	Current condition	Direction	Decision relevance
Southern Red Sea / Bab el-Mandeb	HIGH / ACTIVELY TRANSITED	Stable-high	Transit continues, but tanker use remains below normal-risk patterns. Fighting and Houthi proximity on the western approaches compress warning time and route confidence. [1][12][17][18][25][38]
Strait of Hormuz / Musandam	SEVERELY CONSTRAINED	Volatile / partial recovery	The strait is physically navigable and crude flow has recovered selectively, but CAPE DAO and depressed broader traffic keep access incident-prone and commercially selective. [5][6][26][31][52]
Gulf of Oman / STS support chain	AT PRACTICAL CAPACITY LIMITS	Deteriorating	STS preserves export flow but queues, support-service constraints and longer lightering cycles consume tanker-days and reduce system redundancy. [24][29][49]
Yanbu / Petroline / Red Sea export route	PARTIAL / FRAGILE	Deteriorating	Pipeline redundancy exists, but sustained tanker-loading continuity remains unproven; missile pressure and elevated war-risk pricing constrain owner and insurer participation. [7][23][27][28][36]
Gulf of Aden / Somali Basin	ELEVATED / PIRACY WATCH	Parallel threat	SIBU 1 recovery is confirmed. Subsequent Puntland reporting indicates vessel-owner/company-linked armed personnel also participated alongside the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF); command responsibility remains unresolved. The recovery is positive, but repeated seizures, tanker exposure and the wide operating area keep piracy material. [3][4][21][32][73][74][75]
Suez / Northern Red Sea	SELECTIVE COMMERCIAL RE-ENTRY	Improving / conditional	Maersk and CMA CGM returns show increasing commercial risk acceptance, but viability remains dependent on southern Red Sea access and targeting/insurance assumptions. [1][41][42][72]

What Changed Since FA-72-004

This is the delta section. Detailed evidence is introduced here once; later sections focus on consequence, mitigation or decision relevance rather than repeating the same reporting.

Development	Assessment delta / why it matters
CAPE DAO - Musandam	On 23 September CAPE DAO was targeted about 2.5 nm off Musandam; an engine-room fire followed, one crew member died and 27 survivors were evacuated by the Royal Navy of Oman. Weapon type and attribution remain unconfirmed. The incident adds a fatal commercial-shipping event to an already constrained Hormuz environment. [6][14][15]
Yanbu loading and war-risk pressure	Kpler and Lloyd's List/Vortexa evidence shows crude-loading continuity at Yanbu has not yet been demonstrated after the 11 September halt; TradeWinds reported Saudi expectations of restart. Reuters market sources quoted war-risk premiums for Saudi-linked Yanbu calls around 3% of vessel value. Petroline therefore exists as physical redundancy, but dependable commercial redundancy remains unproven. [23][27][28][36]
Saudi strategic-depth attack tempo	Saudi reporting confirms six Houthi ballistic missiles toward Taif/Yanbu on 24 September and, on 26 September, two drones toward Riyadh and two ballistic missiles toward Khamis Mushayt were intercepted. No confirmed physical damage was identified in reviewed reporting. The development confirms continuing long-range pressure on Saudi energy/logistics geography. [7][16][37][56]

Development	Assessment delta / why it matters
Hormuz partial flow recovery	Kpler data reported on 25 September showed 33.7m barrels of crude moved through Hormuz during the week beginning 20 September on 19 tankers, including 17 very large crude carriers (VLCCs), mostly Saudi-linked. This is a meaningful oil-flow recovery indicator, but not normal commercial access: wider observable traffic remains depressed and recent attacks constrain owner, crew and insurer willingness. [5][6][26][31][52]
Gulf of Oman STS reaches reported practical limits	Trade sources and analysts reported on 25 September that Gulf of Oman STS transfers had reached their limits. Kpler had already identified record activity, stressed auxiliary services and a base-case requirement for 36-40 additional VLCCs if 3 mbd of Saudi crude is redirected; buyers are examining West Coast India and Malaysia alternatives. [24][49]
Iraq / Maysan strike vector	Iraqi authorities identified Maysan Province as launch geography for attacks on Saudi infrastructure and reported recovery of launch equipment. Security leadership was changed and an investigation remains active. Geography is demonstrated; attribution to a specific militia, Houthi element or unified Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) command chain is not. [45][46]
Defensive architecture broadens	France has indicated support around Yanbu; the UK added Royal Air Force (RAF) Voyager refuelling; Italy states its ASPIDES vessel movement is a rotation with replacements; and the Saudi-Türkiye-Pakistan Makkah framework moved into immediate cooperation planning covering intelligence sharing, coordination and capability integration. No public package yet quantifies additional merchant-shipping protection. [9][13][39][40][43][50][55][61][70]
Commercial re-entry and targeting carve-out	Maersk structurally returned four additional Gemini services to Suez, while Suez Canal Authority data show substantially higher Maersk/CMA CGM transits. Separately, the Financial Times reported a 10 September Houthi letter promising not to target European ships. The commercial return is observable; the targeting assurance is untested and does not supersede broader association screening. [1][41][42][72]
SIBU 1 recovery	Reuters confirmed the SIBU 1 recovery through Puntland Maritime Police Force reporting. Subsequent Puntland Post and Horseed Media reporting indicates vessel-owner/company-linked armed personnel also took part alongside PMPF, with the precise command relationship unresolved. Treat the recovery as a positive counter-piracy indicator, not evidence that the overall threat has reduced. [3][32][73][74][75]
AI-assisted weapons engineering	Anthropic identified a northern-Yemen engineering cell using Claude Code across guided-rocket, multi-stage ballistic-missile and R2000 development work, including guidance software, simulation and failed-test diagnosis. Anthropic found no operational device and did not identify the cell as Houthi; the Critical Threats Project/Institute for the Study of War (CTP/ISW) assesses a likely Houthi linkage. This is an iteration-speed/capability-development indicator, not evidence of an AI-developed maritime weapon in service. [62][63]
Claimed Hodeidah loitering missiles	Yemeni government reporting alleges Iranian-origin air-defence weapons were modified into loitering missiles and launched from Hodeidah toward international air routes. Claimed IRGC involvement, thermal-seeker behaviour, endurance and any civilian-aircraft engagement remain independently unverified; retain as a high-priority cross-domain capability indicator. [64]
global navigation satellite system (GNSS) interference	Royal Institute of Navigation (RIN) and International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) reporting confirms persistent GNSS interference as a maritime-safety and data-confidence problem, including a Red Sea case with a large false position shift on the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS) and abnormal speed derived from the Global Positioning System (GPS). Automatic Identification System (AIS) and position anomalies therefore require independent cross-checking before being interpreted as deliberate vessel behaviour. [65][66]
Aramco future redundancy	Aramco says it is studying a fourth and fifth crude-export route and expanded overseas storage, including in Japan. This is strategically important resilience planning but remains engineering/feasibility-stage optionality and does not relieve present chokepoint or STS constraints. [54]

Threat Drivers & Capability Development

Targeting logic, association screening and coercive control

U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) Advisory 2026-013 treats Israeli, U.S., UK and Saudi association - including fleet-level Saudi port-call history - as a higher-risk screening characteristic. The reported Houthi assurance to the European Union (EU) that European ships would not be targeted is potentially risk-reducing but remains operationally untested, and no public definition of "European-linked" shipping was identified. Flag, beneficial ownership, management, charterer, cargo, current/recent port calls and fleet trading patterns therefore remain relevant screening inputs without implying that every link is used by Houthi targeting cells. [1][72]

Maritime coercion is not limited to missile impact. MARAD reporting of attempted diversion means boarding, detention or inspection can impose delay, liability, crew-security and insurance effects even where a ship is not physically damaged. [1]

Long-range strike geometry: Yemen and Iraq

Houthi missile/unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reach remains extended and strategic-depth attack tempo remained active through 26 September. The Maysan finding adds a demonstrated Iraq-based launch geography against Saudi infrastructure, but does not establish who ordered the attack. FA-72-005 therefore separates demonstrated geography and capability from lower-confidence attribution to any Iraqi faction, Houthi element or unified Iranian command architecture. [7][16][37][45][46][56]

Western approaches: from coastal access to potential maritime persistence

The distinction between geography and fielded capability remains critical. Local/regional reporting confirms Houthi gains or presence around Mokha, Dhubab and Mayyun/Perim, reducing geographic separation from the shipping lane; this can improve surveillance opportunities and make shorter-range UAVs, artillery, small craft, boarding assets or uncrewed surface vessel (USV) / uncrewed underwater vehicle (UUV) systems more relevant, but specific forward maritime-control systems remain incompletely verified. [17][18][33][34]

Evidence layer	Assessment	Confidence
Confirmed	Local/regional reporting confirms Houthi gains/presence around Mokha, Dhubab and Mayyun/Perim, materially reducing geographic separation from the shipping lane. [17] [18]	HIGH
Assessed	Closer positions can improve surveillance and enable shorter-range UAV, artillery, small-craft or boarding options; specific forward systems remain unverified. [33][34]	MODERATE
Unverified / collection	Formal coast-guard structures, persistent maritime sensing installations or IRGC-assisted forward surveillance remain insufficiently corroborated for treatment as established capability.	LOW-MODERATE

The explosive-craft/USV baseline remains elevated, but no new independently confirmed tanker-specific USV engagement was established in this reporting window. The assessment should rise only on verified forward staging, engagement or persistent coercive-control capability.

Emerging capability development

AI-assisted engineering may shorten design and troubleshooting cycles inside an already capable northern-Yemen missile/UAV ecosystem. Anthropic directly observed software-development, simulation and post-test-analysis use but did not establish an operational device or publicly attribute the actors to the Houthis; CTP/ISW provides the higher-confidence analytical linkage. [62][63]

The separate Hodeidah loitering-missile allegation remains a claimant-sourced capability lead. The Iranian origin, IRGC conversion role, thermal-seeker characteristics, endurance and any operational engagement with civilian aircraft require independent confirmation before being treated as fielded capability. [64]

GNSS interference and navigation/data confidence

Persistent GNSS jamming and spoofing are a non-kinetic navigation and collision hazard and a confidence limitation for AIS-derived traffic, STS and anomaly analysis. The documented IMCA case shows why abnormal position or speed data cannot automatically be interpreted as vessel intent or deliberate AIS-dark behaviour. [65][66]

Piracy: Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin

Piracy remains a parallel threat stream rather than an extension of Houthi command-and-control. Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Operation ATALANTA, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and Puntland reporting show sustained seizure activity, a broad operating geography and material tanker exposure; direct Houthi financing, training or tasking remains unproven. [3][4][21][32]

Observed factor	Evidence	Commercial relevance
Sustained seizure stream	RUSI records six commercial seizures since late April; ATALANTA separately counted seven piracy cases since April after GLAMOR. SIBU 1 was later recovered; subsequent local reporting indicates a combined PMPF and vessel-linked security role, with command attribution unresolved. [3][32][73][74][75]	Confirms continuing kidnapping/hijack exposure while showing some attacks can be disrupted or reversed.
Geographic split	Three seizures occurred off Puntland and three on the Yemeni side of the Gulf of Aden; all were subsequently held off Puntland. [32]	Extends exposure across both sides of the Gulf rather than a narrow Somali coastal strip.
Tankers overrepresented	Four of six seized commercial vessels were tankers. [32]	Energy cargoes face a second threat stream distinct from Houthi missile/UAV risk.
Protective posture	RUSI notes none of the six seized vessels carried armed security. [32]	Supports vessel-specific review of protective posture; decisions remain with owner/Master.
Houthi linkage unproven	RUSI describes direct support claims as circumstantial; ATALANTA/CMF do not establish Houthi tasking. [3][4][32]	Do not merge piracy and Houthi command chains for attribution or underwriting without corroboration.

Network overlap remains a useful hypothesis rather than a command claim: longstanding Yemen-Somalia routes for food, livestock, khat, weapons and contraband may allow shared captains, brokers, shore facilitators or logistics to increase the effectiveness of multiple actors without proving organisational merger. [32]

Mitigation & Resilience

Risk reduction is assessed from observable capacity and effects, not announcements alone. The factors below are genuine counterweights to the threat picture, but each has limits.

Mitigation / resilience factor	Current assessment and limit
ASPIDES and naval protection	ASPIDES continues successful close-protection activity, but the EU has acknowledged force-generation below stated requirements. Protection is a selective voyage mitigation, not route-wide risk removal. [2][8]
Saudi air-defence and partner support	UK support is deployed; France has indicated Yanbu support; Italy says its ASPIDES rotation will be replaced without reducing commitment. The decision variable is deployed coverage, sustainability and whether assets release protection capacity elsewhere. [9][13][39][40]
Saudi-Türkiye-Pakistan defence coordination	The Makkah framework has moved into implementation planning around intelligence sharing, military coordination and capability integration. No public deployable package yet permits a quantified reduction in merchant-shipping risk. [43][50][55][61][70]

Mitigation / resilience factor	Current assessment and limit
Commercial re-entry / reported targeting carve-out	Maersk/CMA CGM Suez returns show selective commercial risk acceptance. The reported European-shipping assurance is potentially helpful but untested and does not replace vessel/fleet association screening. [1][41][42][72]
Counter-piracy response	GLAMOR demonstrated the value of citadel procedures and rapid multinational response. SIBU 1 shows that a successful seizure can be reversed, but subsequent local reporting indicates vessel-owner/company-linked personnel participated alongside PMPF, so the recovery should not be attributed solely to Puntland forces. Coverage remains uneven across a large operating area. [3][4][21][73][74][75]
Iraqi state counter-pressure	Baghdad recovered launch equipment, changed Maysan security leadership and is pursuing an investigation; a phased militia-weapons process has been publicly set out. Iranian-flight restrictions show compliance pressure, but no evidence yet proves dismantlement of the strike network. [45][46][47][58]
Yemeni government counter-pressure	The Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) has called for mobilisation and offered future amnesty; Saudi/Yemeni commanders are coordinating readiness and government forces report pressure on Houthi supply lines around Taiz/Dhubab. Battlefield degradation remains only partially verified. [57][67][68][69]
Hormuz diplomacy	Iranian proposals, Qatar/Pakistan mediation and Oman-Iran engagement keep a diplomatic channel open, but no navigation measure was implemented by the cut-off and the U.S. rejected the seven-day proposal in its current form. [44][51][59][71]

Route Adaptation & Redundancy

The system is still moving cargo, but each workaround transfers rather than eliminates exposure. This table focuses on what each pathway preserves and what new constraint it introduces; detailed incident evidence is not repeated here.

Pathway	What preserves flow	New or retained exposure	Current assessment
Petroline -> Yanbu -> Suez/Med	Avoids Hormuz; shortens westbound path	Requires dependable Yanbu loading; missile/war-risk pressure; Red Sea/Suez exposure	PARTIAL / FRAGILE
Petroline -> Yanbu -> Bab el-Mandeb -> Asia	Avoids Hormuz	Requires dependable Yanbu loading plus southern Red Sea transit under high Houthi threat	HIGH THREAT
Ras Tanura -> Hormuz -> Sohar STS -> Asia	Preserves eastern export flow with shuttle tonnage	Hormuz incident risk; STS capacity/queue constraint; counterparty/insurance exposure; tanker-days	FUNCTIONAL / CAPACITY-LIMITED
Ras Tanura direct long-haul	Reduces transfer complexity	Requires willing long-haul tonnage to enter/exit Hormuz; high freight and security exposure	TONNAGE-CONSTRAINED
Egypt / Sidi Kerir substitution	Can support Mediterranean supply chains	Requires upstream feed and available terminal/tanker capacity; does not solve Gulf access	SUPPORTING ROUTE
Additional Aramco export routes / overseas storage	Could add future optionality and inventory buffers	Routes/capacity undisclosed; feasibility stage; no near-term relief	STRATEGIC / NOT YET AVAILABLE [54]

Commercial Consequences

The commercial value of the assessment is in the interaction between route availability, effective tonnage, insurance/compliance, crew exposure and contractual consequences. The evidence below is translated into decision variables rather than repeated as incident reporting.

System pressure	Commercial consequence
STS / tanker productivity	Practical STS limits, queueing and longer or more distant lightering reduce effective tanker productivity even when nominal fleet size is unchanged. Kpler estimates a 3 mbd Saudi redirection could require roughly 36-40 additional VLCCs; Reuters market analysis has cited Gulf-China freight above $30/bbl. [24][35][49]
Yanbu loading / war-risk	The central commercial test is sustained loading plus owner, crew and insurer participation. Elevated additional premium and wider protection and indemnity (P&I) measures can make physical pipeline capacity commercially unusable or intermittent even without fresh infrastructure damage. [23][27][30][36]
Houthi association screening	Fleet-level association, flag/ownership/management, charterer, cargo and port-call history can affect perceived exposure. The reported European carve-out is untested; association screening should not be treated as a deterministic targeting rule. [1][22][72]
Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) compliance	The PGSA lists 77 vessels and has warned insurers, P&I clubs, class societies and cooperating STS/transshipment vessels. Lloyd's List found 21 of the 77 continued Hormuz transits and attacks affected non-listed vessels: compliance exposure and physical attack risk overlap but are not the same. [5][31][48][53]
Qatar liquefied natural gas (LNG)	QatarEnergy says LNG cannot simply be rerouted by pipeline. Limited carrier movements demonstrate selective access, not normalised export capacity; repeated ballast entry, loading and laden exit remain the operational test. [10][38]
STS concentration / operational liability	Repeated lightering concentrates high-value vessels and cargoes, increasing collision, pollution, cargo-handling, waiting, demurrage and contractual exposure even absent hostile action.
Crew / human performance	High-threat transits, extended waiting, route changes, GNSS interference and piracy watchkeeping increase fatigue and decision load; voyage planning should account for human-performance limits alongside physical threat. [65][66]

Stakeholder decision prompts

Stakeholder	Exposure requiring closer review
Shipowners / operators	Fleet association; willingness of crew/principals; voyage delay and waiting; naval liaison/close protection; piracy/boarding contingencies; GNSS resilience.
Charterers / traders	Route nomination/substitution; STS approval; counterparty/vessel compliance; destination change; laytime/demurrage and documentation effects after transfer/reroute.
P&I / hull and machinery (H&M) / war-risk	Association criteria; Yanbu additional premium; Hormuz incidents; piracy/kidnap and ransom (K&R); collision/pollution aggregation around STS; detention/seizure and actual voyage behaviour versus cover assumptions.
Refiners / national oil companies (NOCs)	Delivery reliability by destination, not aggregate export volume alone; Europe-facing term disruption versus Asia-facing Gulf exports; alternative grades and inventory requirements.
Banks / lenders / reinsurers	Exposure of financed vessels/cargoes to Iranian non-compliance listings, unusual STS chains, sanctions and route changes that alter trading warranties or risk assumptions.

Outlook & Decision Thresholds

These are observable conditions that would change the assessment, not predictions or routing instructions.

Pathway	Indicators	Commercial effect if it develops
Fragile stabilisation	Consecutive Yanbu loadings; easing war-risk pricing; no further Yanbu/Hormuz incidents; repeated laden Hormuz exits; sustained Suez/Red Sea liner use; replacement/added defensive assets operational; tangible Hormuz de-escalation.	Restores some routing optionality and can release STS/tanker pressure before the threat environment fully normalises.

Pathway	Indicators	Commercial effect if it develops
Redundancy failure	Further Yanbu strike/disruption while Hormuz remains constrained; another Musandam/Hormuz casualty; owner/insurer refusal; worsening STS queues or failed displacement.	Disproportionate effect because spare route, tanker, transfer and protection capacity is already committed.
Targeting broadens	Confirmed attacks consistent with wider U.S./UK/partner association; repeated diversion/boarding; new declared Houthi criteria.	Expands fleet-level exposure and propagates war-risk/charterparty effects beyond Saudi-linked cargoes.
Persistent Bab el-Mandeb control	Verified forward radar, electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR), artillery, tactical UAV/USV, coast-guard or inspection capability in newly held positions.	Shifts risk from episodic long-range attack toward persistent surveillance, coercion and shorter-warning control.
Piracy-security compression	Another successful seizure plus diversion of naval assets toward chokepoints; or corroborated Houthi support to pirate action groups.	Raises K&R, crew and loss-of-hire exposure and further stretches shared protection capacity.

Assessment-changing indicators

Deterioration indicators	Risk-reducing indicators
Failure to establish consecutive Yanbu loadings; new physical damage; continued Saudi energy/logistics strikes; premiums remain elevated.	Multiple Yanbu loadings to more than one destination, rising throughput, easing premium and operational defensive support.
Further Hormuz/Musandam attacks, persistently low crossings or greater owner/crew/insurer refusal.	Repeated crude/commodity exits with broader owner participation and implemented navigation/de-escalation measures.
Verified forward Houthi surveillance/short-range coercive capability near Bab el-Mandeb.	Sustained liner use of Suez/Red Sea without coercive interference and no expansion of targeting criteria.
STS queues/waiting lengthen; displacement to distant hubs worsens tanker/freight pressure.	Shorter waiting, additional verified transfer capacity, lower reliance on shuttle/STS and improving VLCC availability/freight.
Another pirate seizure or corroborated Houthi financing/training/launch support.	Repeated successful interdictions or recoveries, no new seizures and sustained naval/local protection would be risk-reducing; SIBU 1 is an initial positive indicator, with its precise operational attribution still partly unresolved. [73][74][75]

Priority Intelligence Requirements - Forward Watch

- Track whether Yanbu tanker crude loadings resume after the cut-off, including vessel names, destinations, owner acceptance and whether European term flows recover.
- Confirm physical effects, if any, from the 24 September Houthi-claimed Yanbu attack and track Saudi attack tempo after the 26 September interceptions; do not equate interception reports or claims with infrastructure damage. [56]
- Update CAPE DAO status, weapon assessment and attribution; identify any additional Hormuz/Musandam incidents and owner/insurer response.
- Update Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb traffic counts against moving averages, separating AIS-dark caveats from observed movements.
- Track GNSS interference separately from deliberate AIS-dark behaviour; cross-check position/speed anomalies against independent navigation and vessel-flow sources. [65][66]
- Track Yanbu war-risk pricing, prompt VLCC fixtures, Gulf-China freight, Gulf of Oman STS waiting/dwell time and displacement toward West Coast India/Malaysia; distinguish nominal volume from effective support capacity.
- Confirm operational status of French Yanbu support, Italian replacement units, ASPIDES hull/air assets and any deployable Makkah-framework air-defence, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), refuelling or naval support. [55][61][70]

- Verify forward Houthi radar/EO/IR, artillery, tactical-UAV, USV/UUV, coast-guard or inspection capability around Dhubab, Mocha, Perim/Mayyun and Kahboub.
- Track operational fielding or measurable guidance/accuracy improvement associated with the northern-Yemen AI-assisted engineering cell and independently test linkage to Houthi operational units. [62][63]
- Verify the claimed Hodeidah loitering-missile capability, including launches, engagements, seeker/endurance characteristics, proximity to civilian air routes, IRGC involvement and any maritime adaptation. [64]
- Monitor diversion, boarding, detention or inspection activity by entities claiming Yemeni authority.
- Track Qatar LNG through repeated ballast entry, loading and laden exit rather than isolated vessel appearances.
- Test direct Houthi-piracy financing, training, equipment, intelligence or launch-support claims; do not infer unified command from shared routes or geography.
- Track post-recovery SIBU 1 / SEAMULL status, remaining held vessels and further pirate action groups; clarify the command, coordination and legal/status relationship between PMPF and reported vessel-owner/company-linked personnel involved in the recovery. [73][74][75]
- Track the Maysan investigation, arrests or launch-platform discoveries and test implementation of announced militia-control measures; distinguish sanctions pressure from actual militia-logistics disruption. [58]
- Track Qatar-Pakistan and Oman-Iran mediation for implemented Hormuz navigation measures, sanctions/blockade changes or verified traffic effects. [59][71]
- Test whether Yemeni mobilisation/amnesty and Saudi-Yemeni force coordination produce verified defections, sustained territorial loss, disrupted supply lines or unit fragmentation around western Bab el-Mandeb approaches. [57][67][68][69]

Adjacent Watch - Reviewed but Not Promoted

Issue	Audit decision
Sudan / Eritrea / Western Red Sea	Retained as a collection line. No sufficiently corroborated new operational node in this cycle changes merchant-shipping risk enough to enter the core judgement.
Ethiopia / Tigray / Afar	Tigrayan forces seized Mekelle, Shire and Axum airports and fighting spread into Afar/Amhara during 23-26 September. Regional instability is materially higher, but no demonstrated Ethiopia-Djibouti corridor disruption was established. Promote only if Semera/Djibouti access, Assab/Red Sea logistics or commercial flows are affected. [60]
Berbera / United Arab Emirates (UAE)-Israel activity	Current reporting does not establish a permanent Israeli, U.S. or UAE military deployment at Berbera. Promote only on confirmed deployment, ISR/air-defence/access change or direct transit-risk effect.
Somalia militant overlap	The enabling-environment hypothesis remains relevant, but direct Houthi command of pirates or Al-Shabaab is not established.
Alternative African fuel corridors	Strategically relevant for longer-horizon Regional/Maritime Insight work, but not a 72-hour Red Sea transit-risk delta at cut-off.
Djibouti / Obock spillover	Djibouti reporting records more than 3,400 Yemenis arriving around Obock in 48 hours and bombardment audible at Moulhoulé. Treat as corroborating conflict-intensity/proximity evidence, not a direct commercial-shipping threat metric. [19][20]
SIBU 1 / remaining held vessels	SIBU 1 recovery is confirmed and is a positive response indicator, not evidence the overall piracy threat has fallen. Post-cut-off local reporting indicates vessel-owner/company-linked armed personnel participated alongside PMPF; the precise command and coordination relationship remains unresolved. [73][74][75]
Iran Janfada / civilian mobilisation	Broader escalation context only. No direct, corroborated Hormuz/Gulf of Oman/shipping-security consequence was established.
Reported Saudi-Israel/U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) assistance	Credible reporting exists but is insufficiently confirmed for a core judgement. Retain as a protection/intelligence PIR until operational support and material transit-risk effect are independently established.

Evidence Boundaries

FA-72-005 does not infer unified Iranian command-and-control across Yemen, Iraq and the Horn. It distinguishes Iranian support/alignment, Houthi autonomous decision-making, Iraqi armed-group activity, piracy and transactional smuggling networks. Maysan is demonstrated launch geography, while attribution to a specific militia, Houthi element or unified IRGC command chain remains unresolved. Iraqi flight restrictions are compliance pressure, not proof of militia-logistics disruption; Yemeni mobilisation/amnesty is prospective counter-pressure, not evidence of Houthi fragmentation; CAPE DAO weapon type and attribution remain unconfirmed. [6][45][46][57][58]

The 26 September loitering-missile report originates with the Yemeni government side. Claimed Iranian origin, IRGC conversion, thermal-seeker behaviour, endurance and any actual engagement of civilian aircraft remain independently unverified. [64]

Anthropic directly observed the northern-Yemen cell using Claude for weapons-development work but did not identify it as Houthi. The Houthi linkage is an analytical attribution; no operational AI-developed device, AI-enabled maritime attack or replacement of Iranian technical support is established. [62][63]

The Houthi claim of attacks on Yanbu Aramco facilities is separated from Saudi official interception reporting; no infrastructure damage is asserted without corroboration. Defensive commitments are treated as risk-reducing only when deployed capability and effects are observable. SIBU 1 recovery is confirmed; subsequent Puntland reporting indicates vessel-owner/company-linked armed personnel participated alongside PMPF, while the precise command relationship remains unresolved. Reported Saudi-Israel/CENTCOM assistance remains a collection item. [7][13][37][39][43][50][70][73][74][75]

Assessment Confidence

Judgement	Confidence	Basis
Red Sea-Hormuz redundancy remains under severe pressure	HIGH	Shipping/market data and official incident reporting converge on constrained Hormuz access, STS at practical limits and incomplete Yanbu restoration; counter-indicators remain partial. [23][24][26][27][49][52]
CAPE DAO was targeted near Musandam with one fatality and 27 evacuated	HIGH	Oman operational reporting plus two local Omani outlets confirm location, fire, fatality and evacuation; weapon and attribution remain unconfirmed. [6][14][15]
Yanbu faces renewed strategic-depth missile pressure	HIGH	Saudi Press Agency (SPA) and Saudi reporting confirm missile interceptions; separate Houthi facility-attack claims are not evidence of physical effect. [7][16][37]
Bab el-Mandeb remains high risk but actively transited	HIGH	Visible daily traffic continues, weekly tanker traffic is lower and local Yemeni sources confirm high-threat proximity. [1][17][18][25][38]
French / wider partner support will materially improve protection	MODERATE	Political commitments are real, but scale, integration, deployment and coverage require confirmation before quantifying commercial effect. [13][39][55][70]
Direct Houthi operational control of Somali piracy	LOW / NOT ESTABLISHED	Operational/local piracy reporting supports shared geography/enabling routes, not a proven unified command structure. [3][4][21][32]
Iraq is a demonstrated launch geography for attacks on Saudi infrastructure	HIGH geography / LOWER attribution	Iraqi authorities report Maysan launch geography, recovered equipment and investigation; no specific militia or unified Iranian/Houthi chain is established. [45][46]
Risk-reducing counter-indicators are real but insufficient to lower overall HIGH risk	MODERATE-HIGH	Carrier returns, protection continuity, wider Saudi defence coordination, counter-piracy action and mediation improve resilience, but STS capacity, Yanbu continuity and active threat vectors remain constraining. [2][40][41][42][44][49][51][73]

Method, Collection Architecture and Legal-Risk Editorial Pass

This assessment uses multi-source open-source collection and cross-validation across official maritime advisories, naval/mission reporting, government statements, local and local-language reporting, vessel-flow and market data, industry/commercial sources, specialist analysis and reputable international reporting. A final no-orphan-intelligence reconciliation was completed across Intelligence Desk and automation/watch streams, carry-over PIRs and separately routed Optarus material before the 12:00 BST cut-off.

To reduce repetition and preserve analytical traceability, incoming material is classified by primary analytical function: Route/Node; Delta/What Changed; Threat Driver; Mitigation/Resilience; Route Adaptation/Redundancy; Commercial Consequence; Outlook/Threshold; or PIR/Adjacent Watch. Each development has one primary evidential home; other sections state its implication rather than restating the underlying reporting.

Pre-distribution screening covers attribution and defamation risk; public-source personal information and UK data-protection considerations; sanctions/designation status; current-versus-historical checks; and UK Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) relevance. Material allegations are attributed and confidence-bounded. Data minimisation is applied, and no controlled technical data or instructions facilitating attacks, sanctions evasion or evasion of maritime-security measures are included.

Post-cut-off correction. Before publication, later Puntland reporting was used solely to qualify attribution of the SIBU 1 recovery: the recovery remains confirmed, but available evidence indicates vessel-owner/company-linked armed personnel participated alongside PMPF and the precise command relationship remains unresolved. This correction does not change the piracy rating or overall FA-72-005 judgement. [73][74][75]

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