



**INTERNATIONAL MARITIME
SECURITY WORKING GROUP**

Securing Vital Sea Lanes:

Threats to Global Maritime Commerce

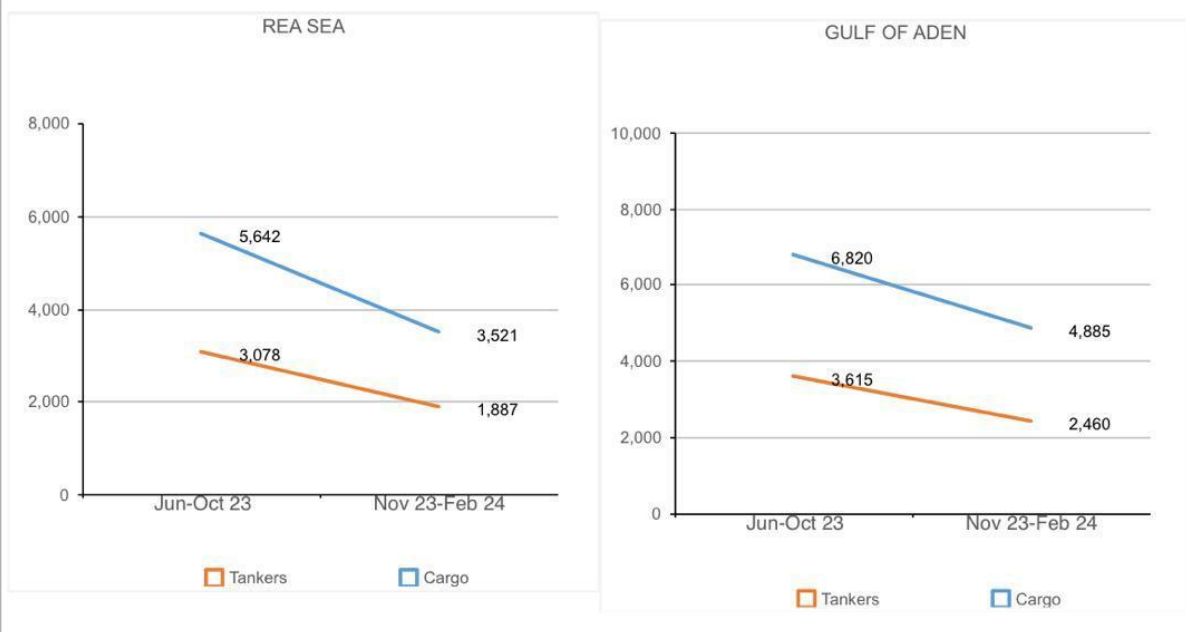
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Virtual: Zoom**



SECURING VITAL SEA LANES: THREATS TO GLOBAL MARITIME COMMERCE

The crisis unfolding in the Red Sea region over the past 5 months has brought to light a multitude of complex challenges threatening global maritime commerce. The attacks orchestrated by Iran-backed Houthis from mid-November 2023 till date have showcased a disturbing array of tactics, including, physically seizing vessels, the use of UAVs, UWCs, missiles, and loitering drone munitions, prompting a swift and forceful response from international forces such as the US carrier group and the UK, among others. This has created a volatile sea region for shipping vessels leading to significant decreases in maritime activities in the region impacting local economies.

Decline in Marine Traffic from June 2023- February 2024



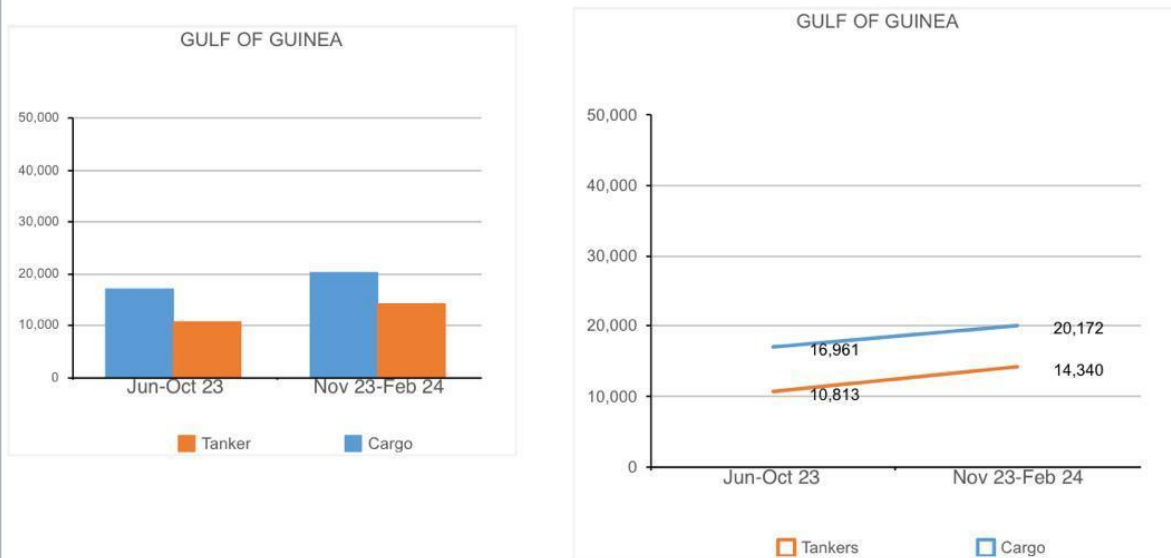
Data Source: Ghana Navy monitoring. Excludes vessels with AIS switched off or dark vessels.

This escalation of hostilities has had a profound impact on shipping activities in the Red Sea, with vessels opting to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Gulf of Guinea as a longer but safer alternative.

A careful analysis points to the strategic shift leading to a surge in vessel traffic in the Gulf of Guinea while also raising concerns about the potential resurgence of piracy in the region which has largely been suppressed for the past 3 years. The heightened risk of piracy poses a significant threat to the

security of vital sea lanes and necessitates proactive measures to mitigate these risks effectively.

Increase in Maritime Traffic in GoG from June 2023- February 2024



Data Source: Ghana Navy monitoring. Excludes vessels with AIS switched off or dark vessels.

Amidst the security challenges brought about by the rerouting of vessels, there exists a silver lining for coastal authorities in the Gulf of Guinea. The increase in vessel transit through the region presents a unique economic opportunity, as ports stand to benefit from additional business in terms of vessel refuelling, crew changes, and supplies. This economic boost has the potential to stimulate local economies and foster growth in the maritime sector.

However, the looming question persists; will the cycle of attacks in the Red Sea cease? The ongoing military responses by the US-led maritime security task force, EU naval task force, and the Indian navy task force signal a deep-rooted conflict that goes beyond mere security concerns. Furthermore, the spill over effect resulting in an uptick of the prevailing insecurity in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean underscores the complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics and maritime security impacting global maritime commerce.

The intricate geopolitical dynamics at play, particularly in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, underscore the necessity of a political solution to effectively address the underlying issues driving the tensions in the region. In

the end, what is likely to happen? The root cause of the current situation in the Red Sea is fundamentally a political problem that demands a political solution. As Carl Von Clausewitz stated, war is an extension of politics, and this is evident in the ongoing tensions between the US-backed Israel and Palestinian group Hamas.

To bring an end to the conflict and address one of the key root causes, a roadmap that will see Israel and Palestine coexist as two states cannot be overemphasised. In the short to medium term, a total cease-fire needs to be sanctioned by the UNSC and implemented by all parties focusing on humanitarian relief operations.

In navigating the complexities of securing vital sea lanes amidst these escalating tensions, a comprehensive approach integrating robust security measures with diplomatic initiatives is imperative. By addressing the socio-political complexities driving conflicts and fostering dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders, a sustainable framework for safeguarding global maritime commerce can be established, ensuring stability and prosperity for all involved.



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