

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016

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## Intelligence Report: Missile attack on USS MASON off Yemen on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 16



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### Background

USS MASON, an Arleigh Burgh class guided missile destroyer, was reportedly targeted by two missiles, while patrolling off the coast of Yemen on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October. It is believed she was patrolling along the coast adjacent to Hodeidah and Mocha, though this has yet to be confirmed. The US Navy stated that the USS MASON was operating off the coast of Yemen, north of the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, which makes her position consistent with her being in the same area as the HSV-2 when she was struck by a missile on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October.

USS MASON is one of several US and coalition warships to have reinforced the Saudi-led coalition maritime operations off Yemen following the attack on the HSV – 2 last week.

To read MAST's Intelligence Report of the HSV-2 incident [click here](#).

It was reported that the total length of the engagement was over a period of 60 minutes. It is assumed that the USS MASON was being targeted by the surveillance and targeting radar associated with the surface to surface missile system during this period. At some point two missiles were fired and both reportedly fell short of the vessel. The vessel sustained no damage or casualties and did not fire any of her hard kill weapon systems against the missiles.

The Houthi's have released a statement denying responsibility.

### Assessment

Given the sophistication of the Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) systems fitted to USS MASON, it is unlikely that the report of the attack is spurious or based on a misidentification of events. We believe that the attack will have unfolded much as the US Navy has stated.

The attack is most likely to have occurred in the Hodeidah to Mocha area where the Houthis are sufficiently in control that they are able to transport and position these surface to surface missile systems.



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The missile used was possibly the same type as that used on the HSV-2, which was believed to have been a Chinese made C-704 sea skimming missile.

As was the case for the HSV – 2 attack, this was a military on military engagement and it supports MAST’s earlier assessment that future attacks would involve the deliberate targeting of vessels associated with the Saudi-led maritime operations off Yemen.

We believe that the targeting of a US vessel was particularly foolish of the Houthis as by doing so they will gain the direct enmity of the US. It is therefore no surprise that they have denied the attack. However, given the nature of the operations in the southern Red Sea, it is difficult to see who else could have been involved in the attack. This incident may have exposed that by firing on a US warship the Houthi’s have a targeting process which is not that sophisticated and that they were unable to distinguish between the USS MASON and Saudi / UAE vessels in the area.

The US and Saudi-led coalition have already increased their presence in the area and are likely to step up their Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) systems to identify and locate the Houthi weapon systems.

Given the logistical demands of getting weapons into Yemen and safeguarding them once there, we believe the Houthis and their Iranian sponsors, are unlikely to have sufficient quantities of missiles to maintain a stream of attacks, though further attacks are a possibility. Positioning the missiles for subsequent firings will become increasingly difficult for them as the US and Saudi-led coalition increase their surveillance and counter-targeting efforts.

We believe further attacks will be mounted against military targets. The indications so far are that the Houthis are capable of a targeting solution (through use of AIS) that positively identifies military targets from commercial. Furthermore, attacks are likely to be conducted in the area between Hodeidah and Mocha and they are therefore unlikely to seek to engage targets further out in the shipping lanes.

As well as conducting operations to identify and interdict the missile batteries ashore, the US and Saudis will be able to establish a cordon of naval patrols that will be effective in isolating the shipping lanes from shore based attacks.

For the present, MAST believes that the risk of a missile attack against a commercial vessel in the southern Red Sea or Straits of Bab el Mandeb remains LOW. We strongly recommend that vessels transmit on AIS and maintain a steady course to make it clear the vessel is transiting in the shipping lane. Routing should, so far as the traffic separation schemes allow, be on the SW side of the Red Sea as close to the coast of Eritrea as possible.



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