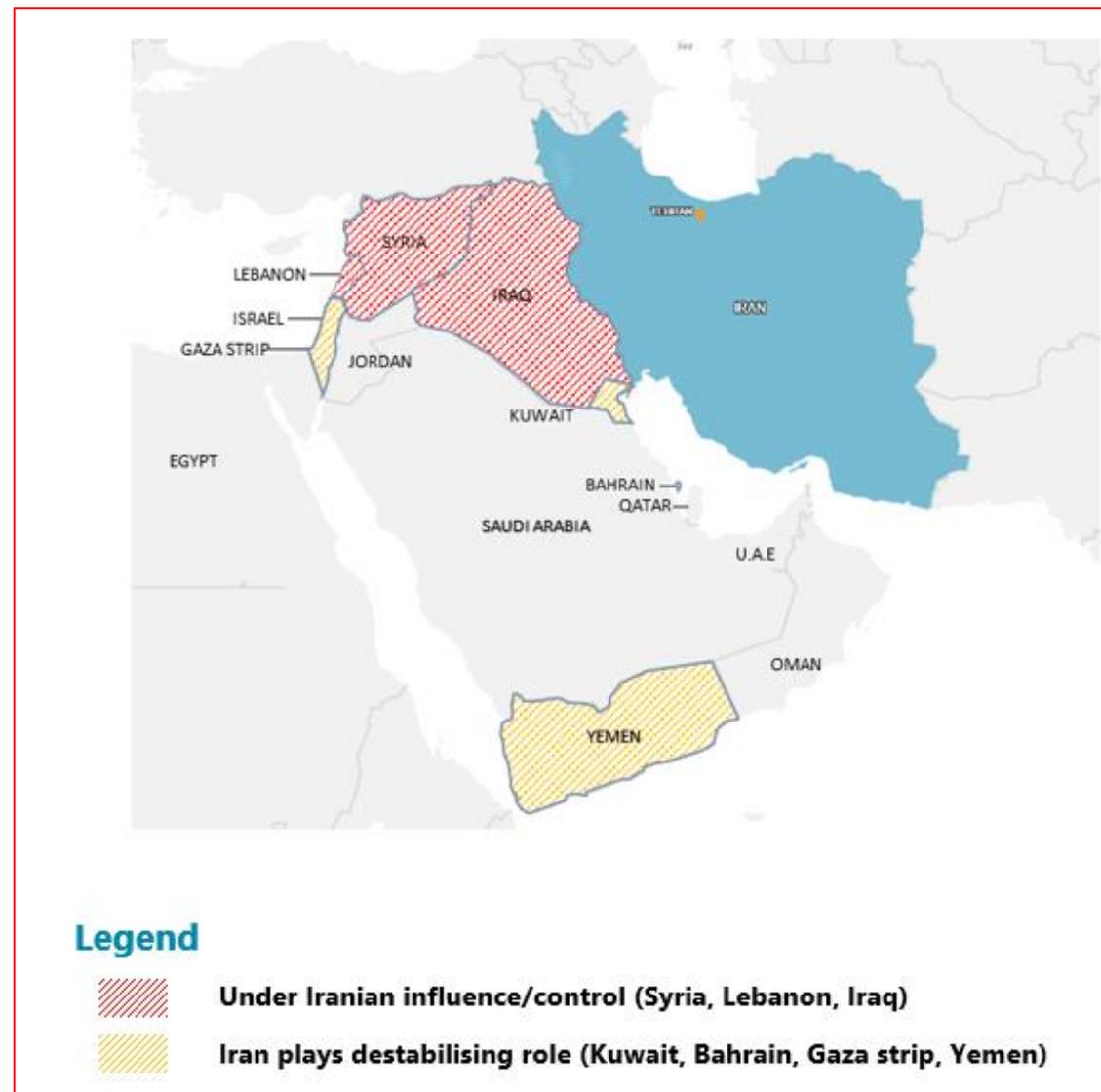


Situation Overview

Geollect Comment: The current situation in the Middle East has been rapidly developing and ever evolving. Tensions have increased as a result of the death of Qasem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force, on 3 January 2020. This event has created high levels of unification within the Iranian regime, as well as the wider region and external militias aligned to Iran. Western concerns are now ultimately centred around 3 factors:

- Iran 's potential for nuclear weapon production.
- Iran's Ballistic Missile Programme.
- Any future usage of Iranian sponsored proxy militant groups in the region.

A unified front has been portrayed in the region from Iranian proxies based in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen in the aftermath of Soleimani's death, they have all vowed revenge against the US. In Yemen, the Houthi movement have mobilised thousands of people in protest against the killing. **Geollect Comment Ends.**

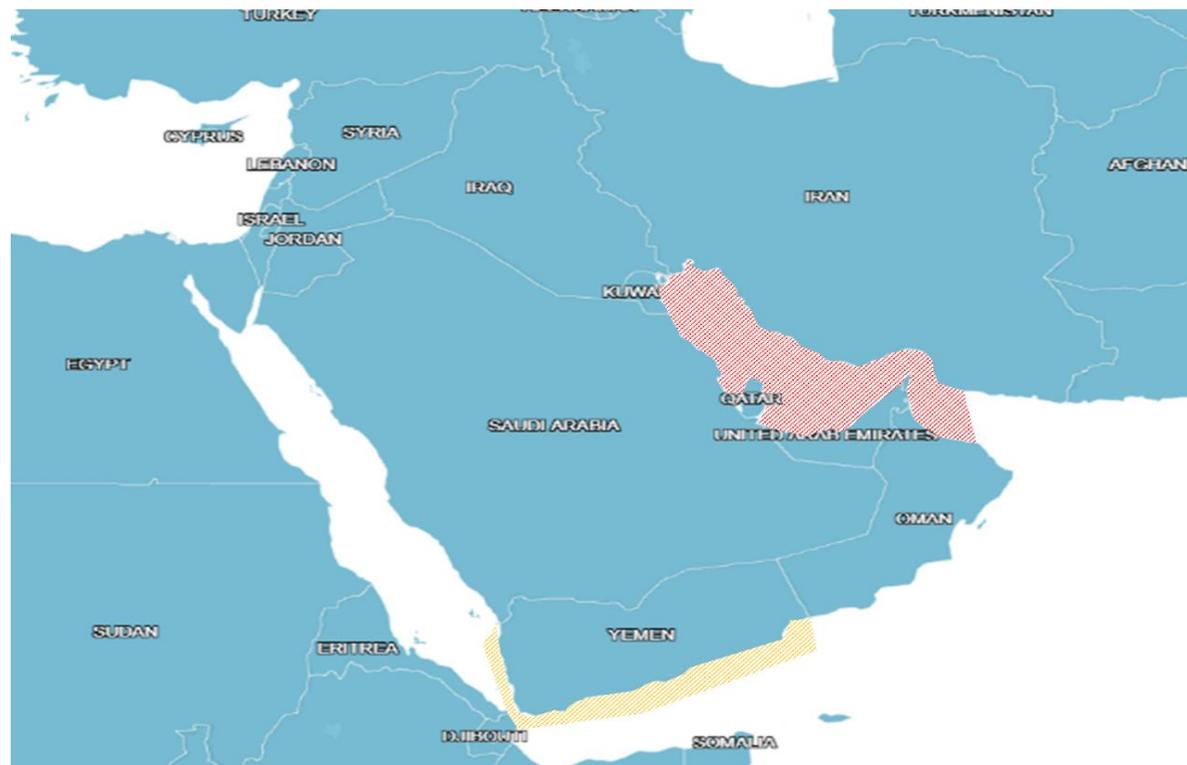


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Geollect Assessment: The Iranian Ballistic Missile strike on 8 January 2020 into Iraq targeted at US targets, highly likely indicates the end of an overt phase of the retaliation. Iranian intent was to act in a proportionate manner to the US drone strike and message the Iranian public. It is likely that the emphasis will now switch to a more long-term strategy, making use of Iranian sponsored proxies to facilitate attacks, that enables a level of plausible deniability. This could have a significant affect in the maritime domain.

The graphic highlights a continued high risk to vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz chokepoint, a known Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy operating area, well within Iran's sphere of influence. Attacks on merchant vessels have been conducted recently in this region, the threat is highly likely to remain. Increased tensions also offer a realistic possibility of Iran orchestrating attacks in the Gulf of Aden, Bab Al Mandeb Strait and Red Sea as an ideal means of achieving strategic gain. It enables the targeting of Persian Gulf traffic, with plausible deniability outside of their (TTW / EEZ) immediate sphere of influence.

The Red Sea and Bab Al Mandeb Strait have been common operating areas for the Houthi movement. Attacks have been launched previously against merchant vessels; the Iranians could plausibly influence this targeting towards US flagged vessels or beneficiaries and vessels of US allies.



Legend

-  Probable Increased Threat to US Flagged Tankers and US Allied Vessels
-  Possible Increased Threat from Pro-Iran Groups

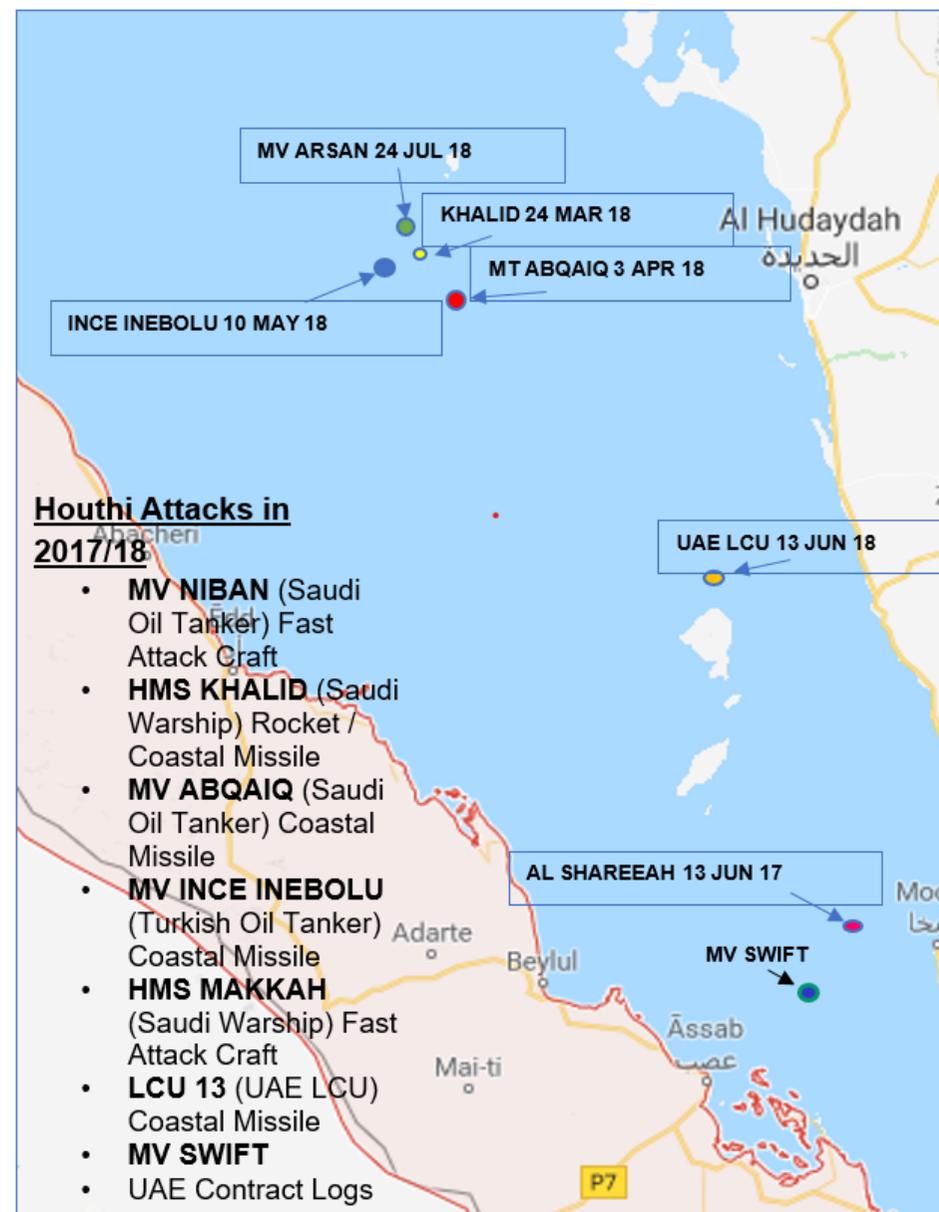
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Houthi Overview

Geollect Comment: Houthi attacks in the Southern Red Sea have included fast attack craft, coastal missiles and water borne improvised explosives. The Houthi strategy relies on attacks against maritime targets from areas of the Yemen coast that they control. It is likely that they are using AIS and shore-based commercial navigation radars, combined with small power-driven vessels. Primary targets have traditionally been Saudi, and UAE flagged vessels, however, with recent events affecting regional stability, a shift of focus could move to US flagged vessels or beneficiaries and vessels of US allies.

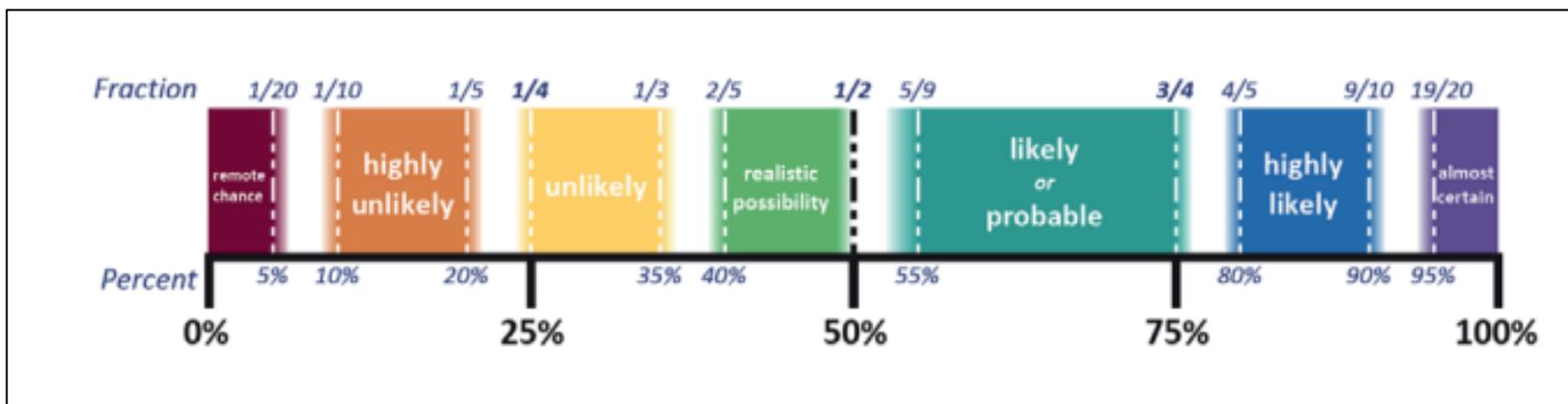
A new and innovative tactic is the use of remote controlled explosive laden small boats known as Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIEDs). Sea mines have also been deployed previously in an attempt to deter and deny Saudi forces. It is assessed that these are less likely to pose a significant threat to civilian traffic using recognised transit routes. **Geollect Comment Ends.**

Geollect Assessment: Historically, the greatest threat to non-associated civilian traffic has been collateral damage or mis-identification; however, recent events are likely to make the maritime threat environment more dynamic. It is recommended to follow conventional shipping lanes through the Bab Al Mandeb Strait and Red Sea and avoid routes close to the Yemeni coastline. Vessels should consider the use of embarked security teams, although this is at own vessel discretion IAW with their passage plan..



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Almost all Intelligence assessments contain a degree of uncertainty. In order to avoid any misinterpretation, these intelligence assessments are categorised using the terms outlined in the image below, instead of using numerical probabilities. Throughout all Geollect products the scale of probability is split into these seven categories. The use of this standard ensures analysts can make reliable judgments and avoid inappropriate use of terms.



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