# Republic of the Marshall Islands

## MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

11495 COMMERCE PARK DRIVE, RESTON, VIRGINIA 20191-1506
TELEPHONE: +1-703-620-4880  FAX: +1-703-476-8522
EMAIL: marsec@register-iri.com  WEBSITE: www.register-iri.com

**SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 01-24 (Rev. 1)**

**To:** **Owners/Operators, Masters, Company Security Officers, Recognized Security Organizations**

**Subject:** **THREATS TO SHIPPING IN THE SOUTHERN RED SEA, BAB-AL-MANDEB, AND GULF OF ADEN**

**Date:** **9 February 2024**

This Ship Security Advisory (SSA) should be expeditiously circulated to Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)-flagged vessels that are operating or intend to operate in the:

- Bab-al-Mandeb (BaM);

- Gulf of Aden (GoA); or

- Southern Red Sea (SRS).

Heightened military activity, geopolitical tensions, and conflict in these regions continue to pose serious threats to commercial vessels. Vessels transiting these areas should maintain a heightened level of vigilance.

**1.0  Updates**

1.1  The RMI Maritime Administrator (the "Administrator") has revised its required area for implementation of **Ship Security Level 3** to the SRS (south of 18°N), BaM, and GoA (west of 48°E) (*flag requirement*).

1.2  International shipping industry associations have published interim transit advice for the SRS and GoA, which is incorporated into this SSA.

1.3  This SSA has been tailored to focus only on the BaM, GoA, and SRS. A separate SSA has been issued to address the Arabian/Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea.

**2.0  Threat and Risk Considerations**

2.1  Adversarial forces continue to attack international shipping in the SRS, BaM, and GoA. **All** merchant vessels should remain vigilant.

This SSA is evaluated annually by the Administrator and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

2.2 The adversarial forces have claimed that they are only targeting vessels with links[1] to Israel, the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK) or trading at Israeli ports. However, there is potential for collateral damage from unintended strikes.

2.3 Although some incidents have targeted specific merchant vessels due to their association with certain countries, cargo, individuals, or companies, the potential remains for miscalculation or misidentification that could lead to aggressive actions against any merchant vessel.

2.4 Regional state and non-state actors in the SRS, BaM, and GoA have demonstrated the ability to harass, interdict, and attack commercial shipping. These groups track and monitor merchant ships using platforms such as coastal radar, naval vessels, patrol boats, repurposed commercial vessels, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Their demonstrated capabilities and tactics include:

.1 small boat operations involving attacking, harassing, or firing-upon;

.2 targeted vessels; helicopter assaults;

.3 UAV or anti-ship missile attacks;

.4 waterborne improvised explosive devices;

.5 the use of mines against ships in the vicinity of ports or while underway; and

.6 the placement of mines in or near strategic waterways.

## 3.0 Coalition Force Recommendations

3.1 Refer to Appendix A for a list of relevant naval coalition forces, their remits, and contact information.

3.2 Coalition forces have advised they regard the threat of attack on merchant ships to be greatest between latitudes 12°N and 16°N, especially if linked to Israel, the US, or the UK.

3.3 Coalition forces have also advised that adversarial forces have demonstrated an ability to target and attack ships in the GoA as far as 100 nautical miles from the coast.

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[1] This includes owners, operators, managers, charterers, cargo, and crew.

3.4    Ships that wait to assess the threats before transiting the area indicated in §3.2 are recommended to wait in the SRS north of 18°N or in the GoA east of 48°E.

3.5    Ships transiting through the affected area with the automatic identification system (AIS) switched off should provide position reports to UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) and US Navy Central Command (NAVCENT) Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) every 2-3 hours to ensure coalition military forces are aware of their presence and can assist in the event of an incident. However, turning off AIS alone will not prevent detection as vessels are tracked by multiple sources.

## 4.0    Non-coalition Forces

4.1    Non-state actors are known to masquerade as legitimate foreign military forces to compel merchant vessels to reduce speed or alter course into territorial waters.

4.2    Coalition forces have advised that if hailed via very high frequency (VHF) by the "Yemeni Navy" and instructed to change speed or alter course, the recommendations are to:

   .1    ignore the call and continue passage, if safe to do so.

   .2    contact coalition warships on VHF Channel 16, inform them of your position, situation, state your intentions, and seek advice.

   .3    report the incident to UKMTO and US Navy Central Command (NAVCENT) Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS)

## 5.0    Risk Mitigation Measures

5.1    When operating in the SRS, BaM, or GoA vessels should:

   .1    implement **Ship Security Level 3** (or equivalent security measures at port) in the SRS (south of 18°N), BaM, and west of 48°E in the GoA (*flag requirement*).

   .2    implement **Security Level 2** (or equivalent security measures at port) in the Northern Red Sea (north of 18°N).

   .3    review the Ship Security Plan and amend, if necessary, after performing the pre-voyage security threat and risk assessment.

   .4    review industry BMP[2] guidelines.

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[2]    *Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, GoA, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, 5th Edition* (BMP5).

.5 undertake a thorough pre-voyage threat and risk assessment.

.6 navigate with maximum feasible distance from the coast of Yemen.

.7 review the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) publication, *Loitering Munitions – the Threat to Merchant Ships.*

.8 conduct security and fire drills/exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk.

.9 maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch for approaching craft.

.10 monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels.

.11 follow the advice of coalition military authorities (UKMTO, Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), CMF, and US NAVCENT)).

5.2 For vessels using Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel, the rules for the use of force should be reviewed with the private maritime security company. A clear distinction must be made between suspected attackers with small arms and military forces with more advanced weaponry. Engagement with military forces is not advised as it may result in significant escalation.

5.3 In accordance with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea Regulation V/34-1, Masters shall not be prevented from using professional judgement to make decisions necessary for safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment. Master's discretion includes the ability to switch off the vessel's AIS if it is believed that doing so will reduce threats to vessel safety or security (refer to §22 of International Maritime Organization Assembly Resolution A.1106(29)).

## 6.0 Voluntary Reporting Schemes (VRS)

6.1 Vessels transiting the UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) are reminded to participate in the UKMTO voluntary reporting scheme:

.1 Register with MSCHOA upon entry into the UKMTO VRA.

.2 Report vessel position daily to UKMTO using their position reporting form.

## 7.0 Reporting an Incident or Suspicious Activity

7.1 For suspicious activity, contact **UKMTO.**

7.2    For an incident, immediately activate the Ship Security Alert System and contact **US NAVCENT Battle Watch** at +973-1785-3879.

7.3    All security incidents must be reported to the Administrator at: marsec@register-iri.com, dutyofficer@register-iri.com, and/or +1-571-441-1885.

**8.0    Supplemental Information**

8.1    The Maritime Global Security website offers industry issued best practices, including industry BMP guidelines, guidance to mariners by geographic region, and provides contact and subscription information for regional maritime security reporting centers. Industry BMP guidelines and the Maritime Global Security website should be consulted prior to operating in the above-listed geographic areas.

8.2    International shipping industry associations have published interim transit advice for the SRS and GoA.

8.3    Refer also to the Administrator's Maritime Security webpage.

# APPENDIX A: COALITION FORCES

| Coalition Force | Contact Information | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| MSCHOA | postmaster@mschoa.org<br>jocwatchkeeper@mschoa.org<br>+34-956-470-534<br>+34-661-442-365 | MSCHOA is an initiative established by the European Union Naval Forces (EU NAVFOR) in close cooperation with the shipping industry. MSCHOA manages EU NAVFOR's VRS for vessels transiting the UKMTO VRA. |
| UKMTO | watchkeepers@ukmto.org<br>+44-2392-222060 | A list of recent security incidents in the region can be found on the UKMTO website. |
| US NAVCENT NCAGS | **Primary**:<br>+973-1785-0033<br><br>**Alternate**:<br>m-ba-cusnc-ncags@us.navy.mil<br><br>**Contingency**:<br>+973-3940-4523 (mobile)<br><br>**Emergency**: **(NAVCENT Battle Watch)**<br>+973-1785-3879<br>cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil | US NAVCENT NCAGS provides a critical interface between the military and merchant shipping, providing information and guidance to assist masters and Company Security Officers with voyage threat and risk assessment. |