

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 01-24 (Rev. 4)

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

Subject: THREATS TO SHIPPING IN THE RED SEA REGION

Date: 14 October 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:

- Arabian Sea;
- Bab-al-Mandeb (BaM);
- Eastern Mediterranean Sea (EMED);
- Gulf of Aden (GoA);
- Northwestern Indian Ocean; or
- Red Sea.

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 Section 2.1 (Threats and Risk Considerations) has been revised for clarity;
- 1.2 New shipping industry interim transit advice is now linked in [§8.2](#).
- 1.3 Links have been added to [§8.5](#) for new Bridge Emergency Reference Cards for the Middle East region published by the Joint Maritime Information Center (JMIC).

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Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

2.0 Threat and Risk Considerations

- 2.1 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 attacks, and harassment of merchant vessels;
 - .2 helicopter assault and vessel seizure;
 - .3 UAV / unmanned surface vehicle (USV) or anti-ship missile attacks;
 - .4 waterborne improvised explosive devices; and
 - .5 the use of naval mines against ships.
- 2.2 Adversarial forces continue to attack international shipping in the SRS, BaM, and GoA. While less likely, attacks may also be attempted in the Northern Red Sea, Arabian Sea, Northwestern Indian Ocean, and EMED. All merchant vessels are advised to remain vigilant in these areas.
- 2.3 The Houthis originally claimed that they were only targeting vessels with links¹ 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 to any ship transiting the region. Although some incidents have targeted specific merchant vessels due to their association with certain countries, cargoes, individuals, or companies, the potential remains for miscalculation or misidentification that could lead to aggressive actions against any merchant vessel.
- 2.4 On 3 May 2024, the Houthis announced their intention to “immediately” target any vessel within range that plans to call in Israel from the Mediterranean Sea. While a variety of security sources have assessed that Houthi missiles and drones have adequate range to reach the EMED from Yemen, they have also assessed that coalition and local military forces possess adequate air defense systems to counter this proposed activity.
- 2.5 The Houthis have broadened their targeting beyond vessels they believe have links with Israel, the US, and the UK to include the entire fleets of Companies whose ship(s) have previously called at Israeli ports within the past two years. The information used by Houthi forces is of uncertain accuracy, and collateral damage from erroneous attacks continues.

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

- 2.6 On 29 September 2024, Israel launched significant retaliatory strikes on the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida, Yemen. This is likely to escalate the conflict and may put merchant ships at an even greater risk of further attacks in the SRS, GoA, and Israeli territorial waters.

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 the vessel has links (past or present) to Israel, the US, or the UK. This is considered the high threat area (HTA).
- 3.3 Coalition forces have also advised that Houthi forces have demonstrated an ability to target and attack ships in the GoA as far as 170 nautical miles from the Yemeni coast.
- 3.4 Ships that wait to assess the threats before transiting the area indicated in §3.2 are recommended to wait in the Red Sea north of 18°N or in the GoA east of 48°E.
- 3.5 Coalition forces strongly advise that ships switch off the automatic identification system (AIS) while transiting the HTA, unless the vessel's Master assesses that doing so would compromise the safety of the vessel.
- .1 Vessels with AIS switched off should provide position reports to UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), US Navy Central Command (US NAVCENT), and 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. Switching off AIS alone may not fully prevent detection as vessels are tracked by multiple sources.
 - .2 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 assessed that doing so will reduce threats to vessel safety or security (refer to §22 of International Maritime Organization Assembly Resolution [A.1106\(29\)](#)).

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; and
 - .3 report the incident to UKMTO and US NAVCENT 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 best management practice ([BMP](#))² guidelines;
 - .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) publications entitled [Loitering Munitions – the Threat to Merchant Ships](#) and [Ship Security: Hull Vulnerability Study](#);
 - .8 review Chapter 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Shipping Centre’s [ATP-02.1 NCAGS Guide to Owners, Operators, Masters and Officers](#);
 - .9 conduct security and fire drills / exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk;
 - .10 maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch for approaching craft;

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

- .11 monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels; and
 - .12 follow the advice of coalition military authorities (UKMTO, Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), and US NAVCENT).
- 5.2 For vessels using Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel, rules for the use of force should be carefully 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.

6.0 Voluntary Reporting Schemes (VRSs)

- 6.1 Vessels transiting the [UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area \(VRA\)](#) are reminded to participate in the UKMTO VRA:
- .1 Register with [MSCHOA](#) upon entry into the UKMTO VRA. To request information or assistance from EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES, follow the instructions published [here](#).
 - .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 emergency incident, immediately activate the Ship Security Alert System and contact **US NAVCENT Battle Watch** at: +973-1785-3879.
- 7.3 All security incidents and suspicious activity 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, BaM, and GoA.

- 8.3 The latest security incident information, bulletins, and advice from relevant coalition military forces (including CMF Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN and EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES) are posted on the [UKMTO](#) and [MSCHOA](#) websites.
- 8.4 The JMIC has been established to share accurate and timely information relating to the Houthi attacks on merchant vessels. Multiple military stakeholders participate in JMIC to fuse open-source, unclassified information into a messaging service. [JMIC products](#) are posted on the [UKMTO](#) website.
- 8.5 The JMIC has published new Bridge Emergency Reference Cards for the Middle East region. The new bridge cards are available in printable and digital reading formats:
- .1 [Printable Format](#) – JMIC Bridge Emergency Reference Cards – Middle East
 - .2 [Digital Format](#) – JMIC Bridge Emergency Reference Cards – Middle East
- 8.6 Refer also to the Administrator’s [Maritime Security webpage](#).

APPENDIX A: COALITION FORCE CONTACTS

Coalition Force	Contact Information	Comments
<p><u>MSCHOA</u></p> <p><i>EUNAVFOR Operation</i> <i>ASPIDES</i></p>	<p>postmaster@mschoa.org jocwatchkeeper@mschoa.org</p> <p>+34-956-470-534 +34-661-442-365</p>	<p>MSCHOA was established by the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) in close cooperation with the shipping industry. MSCHOA manages EUNAVFOR's VRS for vessels transiting the UKMTO VRA. Incident information and additional advice from EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES can be found on the MSCHOA website.</p>
<p><u>UKMTO</u></p> <p><i>CMF Operation</i> <i>PROSPERITY GUARDIAN</i></p>	<p>watchkeepers@ukmto.org +44-2392-222060</p>	<p>Guidance and information on recent security incidents in the region can be found on the UKMTO website.</p> <p>The UKMTO website also hosts JMIC and CMF products.</p>
<p><u>US NAVCENT</u> NCAGS</p>	<p>Primary: +973-1785-0033</p> <p>Alternate: m-ba-cusnc-ncags@us.navy.mil</p> <p>Contingency: +973-3940-4523 (mobile)</p> <p>Emergency: (NAVCENT Battle Watch) +973-1785-3879 cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil</p>	<p>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.</p>