

# Republic of the Marshall Islands

## MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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### SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 01-25

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

**Subject: THREATS TO SHIPPING IN THE RED SEA REGION**

**Date: 9 January 2025**

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 el-Mandeb (BeM);
- 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 The Maritime Security Center Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) has been renamed Maritime Security Center Indian Ocean (MSCIO). This change, along with corresponding website and contact information, has been updated throughout this advisory and in related links.
- 1.2 Contact information previously located in Appendix A has been relocated to *Global Maritime Security Contacts* ([MARSEC-210](#)).

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Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

- 1.3 During the [52nd SHADE \(Shared Awareness and Deconfliction\) Conference](#) in Bahrain, held from 16-17 December 2024, it was agreed that United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) will now serve as the primary point of contact for merchant ship registration and reporting in the Red Sea Region (including the bodies of water listed above). The MSCIO will serve as a secondary point of contact in the region. This change is now reflected in §6.0.

## 2.0 Threat and Risk Considerations

- 2.1 Regional state and non-state actors in the Southern Red Sea (SRS), BeM, 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, BeM, and GoA. While less likely, attacks may also be attempted in the Northern Red Sea (NRS) 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 links<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes owners, operators, managers, charterers, cargo, and crew.

- 2.5 The Houthis have broadened their targeting beyond vessels they think 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.
- 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.
- 2.7 Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea Region continued through 2024, but with less frequency toward the end of the year. The Houthis also launched multiple missile strikes on Israel and US Naval assets throughout December 2024. In response, the US, the UK, and Israeli militaries have conducted multiple retaliatory strikes on Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen; particularly Sana'a and the port city of Hodeida. Vessels planning to call at the port of Hodeida should always maintain the highest level of vigilance.

### **3.0 Coalition Force Recommendations**

- 3.1 Refer to *Global Maritime Security Contacts* ([MARSEC-210](#)) for a list of relevant naval coalition forces 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 UKMTO, US Navy Central Command (US NAVCENT), and Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) every 2 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, BeM, or GoA vessels should:
  - .1 implement **Ship Security Level 3** (or equivalent security measures at port) in the SRS (south of 18°N), BeM, and west of 48°E in the GoA ([flag requirement](#));
  - .2 implement **Security Level 2** (or equivalent security measures at port) in the NRS (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](#))<sup>2</sup> guidelines;
  - .5 undertake a thorough pre-voyage threat and risk assessment;

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

- .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 Shipping Centre’s (NSC’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;
  - .11 monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels; and
  - .12 follow the advice of coalition military authorities ([UKMTO](#), [MSCIO](#), European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR), Combined Maritime Forces ([CMF](#)), and US NAVCENT).
  - .13 consider requesting protection from EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES assets by following the instructions published [here](#).
- 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 Scheme (VRS)

- 6.1 Vessels transiting the UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) are reminded to participate in the UKMTO VRS:
  - .1 Register and report to UKMTO (see [Reporting Formats](#)).

## 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](mailto:marsec@register-iri.com), [dutyofficer@register-iri.com](mailto: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, BeM, 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 [MSCIO](#) 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 Bridge Emergency Reference Cards for the Middle East region. The 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](#).