

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 03-26

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

Subject: THREATS TO SHIPPING IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

Date: 13 March 2026

This Ship Security Advisory (SSA) supersedes SSA No. 01-26, SSA No. 02-26, and SSA No. 03-25 (Rev. 2) in their entirety. It should be expeditiously circulated to all Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)-flagged vessels operating in or intending to transit the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb (BeM), Gulf of Aden (GoA), Arabian/Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman (GoO), Strait of Hormuz (SoH), or North Arabian Sea.

1.0 SITUATION OVERVIEW

On 28 February 2026, the United States (US) and Israel launched coordinated military strikes against Iran ("Operation EPIC FURY"), targeting Iranian military infrastructure, missile systems, naval assets, and nuclear-related sites across multiple locations. Iran has commenced retaliatory missile, drone, and asymmetric operations against Israeli territory and US military installations throughout the region. Attacks on merchant vessels have been indiscriminate to-date.

US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) has established a Maritime Warning Zone (MWZ) encompassing the Arabian Gulf, GoO, North Arabian Sea, and SoH, advising that it cannot guarantee the safety of merchant vessels within the designated area. Commercial transit through the SoH has collapsed to single-digit daily figures against a historical average of approximately 138 transits per day. Automatic identification system (AIS)-derived data indicates between zero and four commercial transits were recorded per day from 2 – 12 March 2026, with tanker transits reduced to zero on multiple reporting days.

The Joint Maritime Information Center (JMIC) assesses the regional maritime threat environment as **CRITICAL**. This assessment applies across all bodies of water addressed in this SSA.

In light of these developments, the RMI Maritime Administrator (the "Administrator") has raised the required Ship Security Level (SSL) for all RMI-flagged vessels throughout the MWZ and adjacent High-threat Areas¹ (HTAs). Full details are provided in §2.0 below.

¹ Adjacent HTAs include the GoA and the Red Sea.

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Administrator (the "Administrator") and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.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

2.1 Required SSL

2.1.1 RMI-flagged vessels are required to operate at SSL 3 (or equivalent security measures at port facilities, while still allowing for cargo operations if assessed safe) in the following areas ([flag requirement](#)):

- .1 Red Sea;
- .2 BeM;
- .3 GoA;
- .4 Arabian/Persian Gulf;
- .5 GoO;
- .6 SoH; and
- .7 North Arabian Sea.

2.2 War Risk Insurance

The Joint War Committee (JWC) has expanded its Listed Areas (JWLA-033)² to include the Arabian Gulf, GoO, and adjacent waters, triggering voyage declarations and Additional Premium (AP) negotiations under most Hull War policies. Insurance market conditions reflect a tightening underwriting posture consistent with a CRITICAL threat environment. Cover reportedly remains available but may act as a practical transit gating factor. Operators should engage their P&I clubs and war risk underwriters well in advance of any planned transit of the MWZ or adjacent HTAs.

3.0 REGIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

The threat assessments below are organized by maritime area. All areas addressed herein fall within the JMIC CRITICAL-level assessment as of 9 March 2026. Area-specific assessments reflect the predominant threat actors, assessed activity levels, and current transit conditions for each maritime zone.

² JWLA-033 applicable as of 1 March 2026.

3.1 Red Sea (Southern and Northern Sectors)

THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL

The Red Sea remains the primary Houthi attack corridor and constitutes the most persistently active threat environment for commercial shipping in the region. The Southern Red Sea (SRS), defined broadly as the area south of approximately 20°N, concentrates the highest density of recorded attacks. The Northern Red Sea (NRS) presents a lower but non-negligible threat from both Houthi long-range strike assets and Iranian-directed surrogates.

Houthi forces have employed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), anti-ship cruise missiles, naval mines, small boat swarms, and unmanned surface vessels (USVs) against commercial and naval vessels in this area. The group has demonstrated persistent intent and residual capability to threaten all transiting vessels, with enhanced focus on vessels meeting Israeli or US targeting criteria. The potential for misidentification or miscalculation resulting in attacks against non-targeted vessels remains assessed as **HIGH**.

Coalition forces advise that the threat of attack on merchant ships is greatest between latitudes 12°N and 16°N (the Houthi HTA). The most recent reported attacks have been concentrated within this corridor. Vessels should note that Houthi ASBM capability provides a strike range of approximately 1,700 km, which encompasses the entirety of the Red Sea.

3.2 BeM

THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL

The BeM constitutes the principal maritime chokepoint between the Red Sea and GoA and represents one of the highest-risk transit corridors globally. The narrow navigable width significantly restricts evasive maneuvering capability and concentrates vessels within range of Houthi shore-based and airborne weapons systems.

Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) interference has been documented in the vicinity of the BeM, creating navigational hazards that compound the security threat by degrading positional accuracy and increasing the risk of misidentification and grounding. Vessels transiting the BeM should maintain heightened electronic navigation vigilance and cross-reference Global Positioning System (GPS) with radar ranges and visual bearings.

Masquerade operations by Houthi forces, including false claims of authority over the strait and deceptive Very High Frequency (VHF) communications mimicking legitimate naval or coast guard traffic, have been documented in this area. Mariners who receive instructions from unverified authorities to alter course or reduce speed should not comply and should report immediately to United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO).

3.3 GoA

THREAT LEVEL: HIGH

The GoA has become an increasingly active attack zone as Houthi forces extend operational reach beyond the SRS. The three most recent confirmed Houthi attacks prior to the 7–8 March 2026 operational pause were concentrated within the SRS and GoA corridor, confirming a geographic expansion of targeting activity.

Houthi forces have demonstrated the ability to track and target vessels up to 315 km from the Yemeni coast using a combination of coastal radar, naval vessels, patrol craft, repurposed commercial vessels, and airborne Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. UAV and USV attacks are the primary threat vectors within the GoA, supplemented by the residual risk of ASBM strikes. Vessels should maintain maximum feasible distance from the Yemeni coast when transiting the GoA.

Coalition naval forces, including EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) under Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN, maintain a presence in the GoA and provide escort coordination. Vessels should register with UKMTO prior to entering the GoA and comply with all JMIC and coalition guidance.

3.4 Arabian Sea (Northwestern Sector)

THREAT LEVEL: HIGH

The northwestern Arabian Sea represents an extension of the Houthi threat vector and has been the site of occasional ASBM and UAV attacks against vessels at greater standoff distances from the Yemeni coast. While attack frequency is lower than in the SRS and GoA, the risk is non-negligible given demonstrated Houthi long-range strike capability. Vessels should not assume reduced threat exposure simply by virtue of transiting further from the Yemeni littoral.

In the context of the ongoing US-Israel-Iran military conflict, the northwestern Arabian Sea also presents an elevated collateral damage risk from military operations conducted by NAVCENT and Iranian naval assets. Vessels should maintain significant standoff distance from all naval vessels and avoid areas with known concentrated military activity.

NAVCENT advises a minimum standoff of 30 nautical miles (NM) from US naval vessels operating in the region. Vessels should not approach or interact with US or coalition warships without prior coordination via established communications channels.

3.5 SoH

THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL

The SoH represents the highest-consequence transit environment in the Middle East maritime region. The SoH is the principal entry and egress point for the Arabian/Persian Gulf and constitutes a strategic chokepoint through which approximately 20% of global oil supply transits under normal conditions. Commercial transits have effectively ceased as of early March 2026, with AIS data confirming a near-complete collapse of commercial traffic since the commencement of hostilities on 28 February 2026.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Navy (IRGC-N) and Iranian regular naval forces (IRIN) are the primary threat actors in this area. Iran has historically employed and has a demonstrated doctrine for asymmetric naval operations within the SoH, including fast attack craft (FAC) harassment, vessel seizure by armed boarding party (helicopter and small boat), limpet mine attachment, and VHF deception operations. Under current conflict conditions, these capabilities are assessed as actively postured and ready for employment.

Naval mine employment in the SoH and Arabian Gulf approaches are assessed as a low-probability but high-consequence threat. Iran possesses a demonstrated historical capability for mine warfare and the strategic motivation to employ mines to interdict commercial traffic in extremis. Suspicious small-boat activity near hull or keel areas should be treated as a potential pre-attack indicator. Operators are reminded that even a limited mine threat in the SoH creates an acute insurance market and maritime safety constraint on transit decisions.

GNSS warfare originating from Iranian facilities near Bandar Abbas has been documented, with more than 600 GNSS disruption events per 24-hour period recorded in the SoH operational area since 28 February 2026. Effects include positional offsets, AIS anomalies, and intermittent signal degradation affecting several hundred maritime assets. Mariners must cross-check GPS against radar and visual bearings, validate the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS) with secondary navigation systems, and increase bridge manning in constrained waters.

Commercial operators are advised against transiting the SoH until the operational situation stabilizes and authoritative advisory feeds (UKMTO, JMIC, NAVCENT) indicate conditions are conducive to safe passage. The Administrator will issue an updated SSA when sufficient stability has been established to permit static written guidance for transit decisions.

3.6 GoO

THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL

The GoO is the primary maritime approach and departure area for the SoH and has been the site of multiple Iranian vessel seizures and harassment incidents since 2019. Documented incidents have involved vessels flagged with the RMI, Panama, South Korea, Vietnam, Dominica, Liberia, Madeira, Greece, and the UK.

Under current conditions, the IRGC-N fast attack craft and IRIN surface forces are assessed as actively operating throughout the GoO in support of the broader Iranian military response. The threat of vessel seizure, particularly targeting US- or Israel-affiliated vessels, is assessed at its highest level since 2020. Iranian forces have utilized small boats and helicopters during boarding operations and have attempted to force merchant vessels into Iranian territorial waters.

Non-US/non-Israel-affiliated vessels operating in the GoO remain exposed to Iranian hybrid tactics, including FAC harassment, threatening VHF communications, and close-proximity maneuvering by military vessels. Collateral damage from ongoing military operations in the SoH and broader GoO area remains a continuous risk regardless of vessel affiliation. Vessels in the vicinity of military operations should take all practicable measures to increase standoff distance.

The IRGC-N is known to conduct deceptive VHF communications, masquerading as legitimate naval authorities to compel vessels to alter course or reduce speed. Masters should refer to the response procedures in §6.0 if subject to such communications.

3.7 Arabian/Persian Gulf

THREAT LEVEL: CRITICAL

The Arabian/Persian Gulf presents an elevated threat environment characterized by Iranian military activity, proximity to Iranian territorial waters and naval bases, and ongoing kinetic military operations. The confined geography significantly limits evasive routing options and creates multiple areas of vessel vulnerability, particularly at anchor off major ports and at the northern approaches to the SoH.

Recent incidents confirm that the Iranian threat extends beyond mobile vessel targeting to encompass fixed regional energy infrastructure, including offshore platforms and port facilities. Operators of vessels conducting port calls within the Arabian Gulf should incorporate this threat dimension into their pre-voyage security risk assessment.

Several confirmed attacks since 1 March 2026 have resulted in unexploded ordnance (UXO) remaining aboard affected vessels. Mariners should treat any suspected unexploded projectile as extremely hazardous and avoid any attempt to move, disarm, or jettison it. Reference Best Management Practice ([BMP-MS](#)) guidance (page 44) for post-incident procedures. Vessels providing salvage or assistance to recently struck vessels may face elevated risk of follow-on strikes.

Privately contracted armed security personnel (PCASP) are not advised for operations north of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, in the GoO, SoH, or Arabian Gulf region, due to the legal constraints associated with the transit of armed teams through the territorial waters of states bordering the Arabian Gulf.

4.0 THREAT ACTORS AND ASSESSED CAPABILITIES

4.1 Houthi Forces (Ansar Allah)

4.1.1 Houthi forces maintain demonstrated capability and intent to target commercial merchant shipping. Their targeting criteria principally encompass vessels with links to Israel or the US, as defined below. However, the persistent risk of miscalculation and misidentification means that all vessels transiting Houthi threat areas face residual risk regardless of affiliation.

- .1 Targeting Criteria: Houthi forces will most likely target vessels with links to Israel or the US, including vessel owners, operators, managers, charterers, cargo, and sister ships that have called at an Israeli port. The UK is no longer an actively declared Houthi targeting criterion, though the risk of unintended targeting persists.
- .2 Fleet-wide Assessment: The Houthi definition of "Israeli ship" may include any vessel within an owner's wider fleet, including sister vessels, time-chartered assets, and vessels under common beneficial ownership or technical management that have called at an Israeli port. Operators are advised to conduct a thorough audit of all Israeli port calls fleet-wide, including those of affiliated vessels.
- .3 Demonstrated Capabilities: Small boat operations (small arms, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs)); helicopter assault and vessel seizure; UAV/loitering munition attacks; USV employment; cruise and ASBMs (ASBM, range up to ~1,700 km); and naval mines.

4.2 Iranian Military Forces

4.2.1 In response to the 28 February 2026 US-Israeli strikes, the IRIN and IRGC-N are assessed as actively postured for asymmetric and direct action against commercial and naval targets in the SoH, GoO, and Arabian Gulf. Assessed Iranian tactics and capabilities include:

- .1 Vessel seizure or boarding by IRGC-N FAC or IRIN helicopter-borne boarding parties, targeting US- or Israel-affiliated vessels as priority.
- .2 UAV and ASM strikes targeting US- or Israel-affiliated vessels.
- .3 Limpet mine attachment to hull in the Arabian Gulf and GoO (assessed as the most likely kinetic method for non-affiliated vessels in these areas).
- .4 Naval mine employment in the SoH and Arabian Gulf approaches. Iran possesses demonstrated historical capability. Mine employment would require pier-side assembly and vessel loading and would be subject to counter-mine response from opposing forces; however, the threat cannot be discounted. Mariners should maintain vigilance for suspicious small-boat activity near hull or keel areas.
- .5 Aggressive VHF communications and deceptive masquerade as legitimate naval authorities to compel vessels to alter course or enter Iranian territorial waters.
- .6 GNSS warfare and electronic warfare from facilities near Bandar Abbas, creating navigational hazards across the SoH, GoO, and adjacent areas.
- .7 Collateral damage from ongoing military operations, including errant missile or drone strikes. The risk of collateral damage applies to all vessels regardless of flag State or affiliation.

5.0 RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

5.1 Pre-voyage Measures

5.1.1 Prior to operating in or transiting any area addressed in this SSA, operators and Masters should:

- .1 conduct a thorough audit of all Israeli port calls within the owner's wider fleet, including those made by sister vessels, time-chartered assets, and vessels under common beneficial ownership, technical management, and Classification Society affiliation;

- .2 review the vessel's digital footprint, including AIS transmission logs, vessel-tracking platforms, and public maritime databases, to assess any linkage that could be interpreted as grounds for targeting;
- .3 reinforce cybersecurity and information control protocols, particularly concerning voyage routing, port call data, and ownership/management affiliations available through open-source intelligence methods;
- .4 review and amend the Ship Security Plan as necessary following a pre-voyage security threat and risk assessment calibrated to current conditions;
- .5 review industry [BMP-MS](#)³ and OCIMF publications on loitering munitions and hull vulnerability;
- .6 review Chapter 4 of the NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) ATP-02.1 US NAVCENT Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) prior to entry into the MWZ; and
- .7 engage war risk underwriters and P&I clubs to confirm coverage validity, applicable exclusions, and any voyage declaration requirements prior to transit.

5.2 Underway Measures

- .1 Navigate with maximum feasible standoff from the coasts of Yemen and Iran.
- .2 Maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch. Assign specific lookout responsibility for coordinated multi-platform attacks involving small boats, RPGs, UAVs, USVs, and missiles.
- .3 Conduct security and fire drills prior to entering areas of increased risk, including specific drills for coordinated multi-platform attack scenarios.
- .4 Monitor VHF Channel 16 and other designated communications channels. Do not comply with instructions from unverified authorities to alter course or reduce speed.
- .5 If operating with AIS switched off in the Houthi HTA, provide position reports to UKMTO, US NAVCENT NCAGS, and coalition forces every two hours. AIS deactivation may be authorized at the Master's discretion in accordance with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, Regulation V/34-1 and International Maritime Organization (IMO) Assembly Resolution [A.1106\(29\)](#) if it is assessed that doing so will reduce threats to vessel safety or security.

³ BMP MS / Maritime Security Threat Overview (MISTO):
<https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/geography/global/>.

- .6 Maintain awareness of the degraded GNSS environment. Cross-check GPS position against radar ranges and visual bearings. Validate ECDIS with secondary navigation systems. Increase bridge manning when operating in constrained or high-traffic waters.
- .7 Treat any suspected UXO aboard as extremely hazardous. Do not attempt to move, disarm, or jettison. Refer to BMP-MS (page 44) for post-incident procedures.
- .8 Maintain a minimum standoff of 30 NM from US naval vessels. Do not approach or interact with coalition warships without prior coordination.

5.3 Private Armed Security Considerations

- .1 For vessels employing PCASP, rules for the use of force should be carefully reviewed. A clear operational distinction must be maintained between suspected non-state attackers employing small arms and military forces employing more advanced weapons systems.
- .2 Engagement with military forces is not advised and may result in significant escalation. Security teams should have contingency plans for USV deterrence, crew evacuation, and anti-boarding procedures.
- .3 PCASP are not advised for operations north of Fujairah, UAE, in the Arabian Gulf, GoO, and SoH region.

6.0 COMMUNICATIONS AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES

6.1 UKMTO

- .1 UKMTO is the primary point of contact for merchant vessels operating in the UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA). Vessels should register with UKMTO prior to entry into the VRA and submit position reports in accordance with the UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Scheme. UKMTO contact information and reporting formats are available at: <https://www.ukmto.org/> | Reporting Formats: <https://www.ukmto.org/reporting-formats>.
- .2 For suspicious activity, including approaching small boats, drones, or unusual activity near the vessel, contact UKMTO immediately on VHF Channel 16 or by telephone/email as listed in Global Maritime Security Contacts ([MARSEC-210](#)).

6.2 JMIC

- 6.2.1 JMIC has been established to fuse unclassified information from multiple military stakeholders into timely maritime threat messaging. JMIC products (including Advisory Notes, threat assessments, and Bridge Emergency Reference Cards) are posted on the UKMTO website at: <https://www.ukmto.org/indian-ocean/jmic-products>.

6.2.2 Bridge Emergency Reference Cards for the Middle East region are available in the following formats:

- .1 [Printable Format](#)
- .2 [Digital Format](#)

6.3 US NAVCENT Battle Watch

- .1 For emergency incidents, or in the event of boarding by non-coalition forces, immediately activate the Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) and contact US NAVCENT Battle Watch at +973-1785-3879.
- .2 Vessels operating in the Arabian Gulf, GoO, or SoH are advised to establish contact with both UKMTO and US NAVCENT NCAGS and to include both on all registration and position report communications (see [MARSEC-210](#) for contact details).

6.4 Response to Non-coalition Force Communications

- .1 If hailed by a vessel claiming to be the "Yemeni Navy" or other non-coalition force and instructed to change speed or alter course: ignore the call and continue passage if safe to do so; contact coalition warships on VHF Channel 16; report the incident to UKMTO.
- .2 If hailed by Iranian naval forces or vessels claiming to exercise authority in the SoH, GoO, or Arabian Gulf: provide vessel name and flag State; affirm that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law as reflected in UNCLOS; immediately contact UKMTO and US NAVCENT Battle Watch.
- .3 If non-coalition forces seek to board the vessel or compel it to change course or speed: decline; state that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with UNCLOS; immediately contact US NAVCENT Battle Watch (+973-1785-3879). Crew should not forcibly resist boarding parties. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent to the boarding.
- .4 Coalition forces may conduct maritime awareness calls and approaches to vessels. If a vessel suspects it is being hailed by a source falsely claiming to be a US or coalition naval vessel, immediately contact UKMTO.

7.0 VOLUNTARY REPORTING SCHEME (VRS)

7.1 UKMTO VRS – Mandatory Participation

Vessels transiting the UKMTO VRA are required to participate in the UKMTO VRS. Operators and Masters should register with UKMTO and submit regular position reports in accordance with published reporting formats. UKMTO registration and reporting formats are available at: <https://www.ukmto.org/reporting-formats>

7.2 NAVCENT NCAGS Dual Registration

Vessels operating in the Arabian Gulf, GoO, or SoH are additionally advised to register with US NAVCENT NCAGS and to include NCAGS contact details on all position report communications alongside UKMTO (refer to [MARSEC-210](#)).

8.0 REPORTING AN INCIDENT OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY

8.1 Suspicious Activity

For suspicious activity, including approaching small boats, drones, or unusual vessel behavior, contact UKMTO immediately via VHF Channel 16 or the contacts listed in [MARSEC-210](#).

8.2 Emergency Incidents

For emergency incidents, immediately activate the SSAS and contact US NAVCENT Battle Watch at +973-1785-3879. Maintain communications with coalition forces and request immediate assistance.

8.3 Mandatory Reporting to the Administrator

8.3.1 All security incidents and suspicious activity must be reported to the Administrator:

- .1 marsec@register-iri.com; and
- .2 dutyofficer@register-iri.com; or
- .3 +1-571-441-1885.

9.0 SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Resource	Description / Link
UKMTO	Position reporting, VRS, JMIC products, incident reporting https://www.ukmto.org/
JMIC Products	Advisory Notes, threat assessments, Bridge Cards https://www.ukmto.org/indian-ocean/jmic-products
MSCIO / EUNAVFOR ASPIDES	EUNAVFOR Op ASPIDES updates; escort request at https://mscio.eu/reporting/support-request/ https://mscio.eu/
BMP-MS	Industry Best Management Practice for maritime security https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/media/lx4jmieu/bmp-ms-2025-final-hi-res.pdf

Resource	Description / Link
IMO	
Maritime Global Security	Industry BMP guidelines, MISTO, geographic guidance https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/
MARSEC-210	RMI Global Maritime Security Contacts https://www.register-iri.com/wp-content/uploads/MARSEC-210.pdf
Administrator Security Webpage	Administrator advisories, SSA Index, bridge cards https://www.register-iri.com/maritime/maritime-security/
OCIMF: Loitering Munitions	Threat guidance on loitering munitions for merchant ships https://www.ocimf.org/document-library/854-loitering-munitions-the-threat-to-merchant-ships-1/file
OCIMF: Hull Vulnerability Study	Hull vulnerability and limpet mine countermeasures guidance https://www.ocimf.org/publications/information-papers/ship-security-hull-vulnerability-study
ATP-02.1 NCAGS Guide	NATO Shipping Centre guidance for owners, operators, and masters https://www.register-iri.com/wp-content/uploads/ATP-02.1_NCAGS_Guide-SSA-01-24.pdf
Industry Transit Advice (SRS/GoA)	Interim industry transit advice for SRS, BeM, GoA https://www.register-iri.com/wp-content/uploads/2024-09-24-INTERIM-INDUSTRY-TRANSIT-ADVICE-SRS-GoA-SSA-01-24.pdf

Queries regarding this SSA should be sent to: marsec@register-iri.com.