

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 01-24

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

Subject: THREATS TO COMMERCIAL SHIPPING IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AND RED SEA REGIONS

Date: 17 January 2024

This Ship Security Advisory (SSA) supersedes SSA No. 03-23.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) requests shipowners and operators to circulate this advisory expeditiously to their RMI-flagged vessels that are operating in or intend to operate in the Middle East region, including the following bodies of water:

- Arabian/Persian Gulf;
- Arabian Sea;
- Bab-al-Mandeb (BaM);
- Gulf of Aden;
- Gulf of Oman;
- Strait of Hormuz (SoH); or
- Red Sea.

Heightened military activity and geopolitical tensions 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 Contact details have been updated for the United States Navy Central Command (US NAVCENT) Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS). See Appendix A for details.

2.0 Threat and Risk Considerations

2.1 Adversarial forces have claimed they are only targeting vessels with links to Israel (e.g., owner(s), operator(s), manager(s), charterer(s), cargo, or crew) or trading at Israeli ports. However, recent incidents have shown that this is not always the case. While vessels linked to Israel are assessed to be at greatest risk of attack, harassment, or seizure, these threats and the risk of collateral damage remains high for **all** merchant vessels operating in the Southern Red Sea, BaM, and Gulf of Aden.

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2.2 Regional state and non-state actors in the Southern Red Sea, BaM, and Gulf of Aden have demonstrated the ability to harass, interdict, and attack commercial shipping. These actors can employ platforms, such as coastal radar, naval vessels or patrol boats, repurposed commercial vessels, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), to track and monitor merchant ships. Demonstrated capabilities and tactics include small boat operations, possibly involving attacking, harassing, or firing upon targeted vessels; helicopter assaults; UAV or missile attacks; water-borne improvised explosive devices; the use of limpet mines against ships in the vicinity of ports or while underway; and the placement of mines in or near strategic waterways.

3.0 Seizures by Foreign Military Forces or Non-state Actors/Forces

3.1 Commercial vessels transiting through the Arabian/Persian Gulf, SoH, and Gulf of Oman have been boarded and detained or seized by foreign military forces over the past several years. They include the following seizures:

2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Panama-flagged tanker	Two Greek-flagged tankers	Panama-flagged tanker	Dominica-flagged tanker	United Kingdom (UK)-flagged tanker
RMI-flagged tanker		South Korea-flagged tanker	Liberia-flagged tanker	
Bahamas-flagged car carrier		Vietnam-flagged tanker		

3.2 Foreign military forces and non-state actors/forces have utilized small boats and/or helicopters during boarding operations and have attempted to force merchant vessels into their territorial waters. Although some incidents may 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.

4.0 Coalition Forces

4.1 A listing of naval coalition forces, their remits, and contact information is included in [Appendix A](#).

4.2 Vessels should be aware that the US and other coalition naval forces may conduct maritime awareness calls, queries, and approaches to ensure the safety of vessels transiting the Arabian/Persian Gulf, SoH, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea. If a vessel suspects it is being hailed from a source falsely claiming to be a US or coalition naval vessel, UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) should be immediately informed.

- 4.3 Vessels operating in these areas are advised to establish contact with both UKMTO and the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), and to include both on all updates or incident report emails (see §6.0 on Voluntary Reporting Schemes and Appendix A for contact details). By including both as addressees on each email, awareness will be enhanced without creating an additional reporting burden. If the vessel also has links to a European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH) member State (as listed in Appendix A), EMASoH should also be included in all email communications.

5.0 Non-coalition Forces

- 5.1 If hailed by non-coalition forces, provide the vessel name and flag State, and affirm that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Master should immediately inform UKMTO, and EMASoH (if applicable). Refer also to www.imscentinel.com and [IMSC Bridge Reference Cards](#) for additional guidance and standard responses.
- 5.2 If non-coalition forces seek to board a vessel or persuade it to change course/speed, the ship's Master should decline, noting that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law, as reflected in UNCLOS, and immediately inform UKMTO.
- 5.3 If non-coalition forces board a vessel, the vessel should immediately contact UKMTO. The crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

6.0 Risk Mitigation Measures

- 6.1 Vessels should take the following precautions when operating in the area:
- .1 Implement **Ship Security Level 3** (or equivalent security measures at port) in the Southern Red Sea, BaM, and Gulf of Aden (*flag requirement*). **Security Level 2** (or equivalent security measures at port) must be maintained in the Northern Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, SoH, and Arabian/Persian Gulf.
 - .2 Review [BMP5](#)¹
 - .3 Undertake a thorough pre-voyage threat and risk assessment.
 - .4 Consider transiting the BaM and SoH at night if possible.
 - .5 Navigate with maximum feasible distance from the coasts of Yemen and Iran.
 - .6 Review the Ship Security Plan and amend if necessary, after performing the pre-voyage security threat and risk assessment.

¹ *Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, 5th Edition* ([BMP5](#)).

- .7 Review the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) publication entitled [*Loitering Munitions – the Threat to Merchant Ships*](#).
 - .8 Vessels utilizing Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) are advised to reassess rules for the use of force with their 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. PCASPs are not recommended as a risk mitigation measure in the northern Gulf of Oman (north of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates), SoH, or Arabian/Persian Gulf.
 - .9 Conduct security and fire drills/exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk.
 - .10 Maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch for small craft approaching.
 - .11 Monitor relevant very high frequency and other communication channels.
 - .12 Vessels should follow the advice of coalition military authorities (UKMTO, Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), CMF, IMSC, and/or EMASoH).
- 6.2 In accordance with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) 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 (IMO) Assembly Resolution [A.1106\(29\)](#)).

7.0 Voluntary Reporting Schemes

- 7.1 In the Gulf of Oman, SoH, and Arabian/Persian Gulf, vessels are reminded to:
- .1 Participate in all available and applicable voluntary reporting schemes to ensure communication is maintained directly with coalition forces in the region.
 - .2 Simultaneously register with both **UKMTO** and **IMSC** 24-hours prior to entering the UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA), as defined in [Maritime Security Chart Q6099](#), by sending UKMTO and IMSC, via a single e-mail, the Initial Report from Annex D of [BMP5](#). Include the estimated times of arrival at the Suez Canal, BaM, and SoH in line 10 of the report and add a line 14 for comments as needed (e.g., speed restrictions or other constraints; anticipated time of entering/exiting the SoH Traffic Separation Scheme; an outline of the navigation plan for operating in the SoH and Persian Gulf, etc.). Utilize other reports included in Annex D of BMP5 as necessary.

- .3 Report the vessel's position daily to UKMTO using their [position reporting form](#).
 - .4 Vessels with links to **EMASoH** member States (e.g., owner(s), operator(s), manager(s), charterer(s), cargo, or crew) should also participate in the [EMASoH voluntary reporting scheme](#).
- 7.2 Vessels transiting the [UKMTO VRA](#) are reminded to participate in the BMP5 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](#).

8.0 Reporting an Incident or Suspicious Activity

- 8.1 In the event of an incident or suspicious activity, contact **UKMTO**.
- 8.2 In the event of an emergency incident, immediately activate the Ship Security Alert System and contact US Navy Central Command (**US NAVCENT**) **Battle Watch** at +973 1785 3879.
- 8.3 All security incidents must be reported to the Administrator at: marsec@register-iri.com, dutyofficer@register-iri.com, and +1 571 441 1885.

9.0 Supplemental Information

- 9.1 The Maritime Global Security website at www.maritimeglobalsecurity.com offers industry issued best practices, including [BMP5](#), guidance to mariners by geographic region, and provides contact and subscription information for regional maritime security reporting centers. BMP5, and the [Maritime Global Security](#) website should be consulted prior to operating in the above listed geographic areas.
- 9.2 International shipping industry associations have published [transit advice](#) to accompany the coordinates of a new [voluntary transit corridor](#) for merchant ships navigating the SoH region (including the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman). Using this transit corridor may enable Coalition Forces to more effectively allocate resources to monitor and assist vessels in the SoH Region.
- 9.3 Refer also to the [Administrator's Maritime Security webpage](#).

APPENDIX A: COALITION FORCES

Coalition Force	Contact Information	Comments
EMASoH	ctf474-emasoh.vra.fct@def.gouv.fr +39 0187024 (DIAL 2 FOR ENGLISH) 7566903	EMASoH was established under Operation AGENOR by European nations (including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Norway).
IMSC	m-ba-imsc-bwc@us.navy.mil +973 8439 8193	<p>IMSC was established to maintain freedom of navigation, international law, and free flow of commerce to support stability and security of the maritime commons in the Persian/Arabian Gulf, SoH, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and the BaM.</p> <p>Members of IMSC include Albania, Bahrain, Estonia, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, the United Arab Emirates, UK, and US.</p> <p>For further information and important guidance, review the IMSC brochure and IMSC Bridge Reference Cards.</p>
MSCHOA	postmaster@mschoa.org jocwatchkeeper@mschoa.org +34 956 470 534 +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 voluntary registration scheme (VRS) for vessels transiting the UKMTO VRA.
UKMTO	watchkeepers@ukmto.org +44 (0) 2392 222060	A list of recent security incidents in the region can be found on the UKMTO website .
US NAVCENT NCAGS	<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>	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.

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