

Interim Industry Transit Advice, Southern Red Sea/Gulf of Aden – 5 February 2024

The Joint Industry Security Group (JISG) of industry associations (BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping, CLIA, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO, OCIMF and IMCA) has issued the following UPDATED interim industry transit advice relating to the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.



SITUATION

Houthi forces in Yemen have continued to attack international shipping in the Southern Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden.

Since Houthi forces hijacked a car carrier on 19 November 2023, they have committed further attacks on shipping. The Houthi forces continue to demand vessels to steer for the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida where hijacking and hostage-taking might follow. Vessels should use extreme caution when considering these demands and resist the request to divert course.

The Houthi forces appear to be threatening vessels they believe have affiliation / links with Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

The accuracy of information used by the Houthi forces is uncertain, and links between attacked vessels and the states they claim to target is unclear. All ships transiting this area should remain vigilant, as there is potential for collateral damage from unintended strikes.

Military sources advise Houthi forces may also masquerade as Yemeni Coastguard officials.

THREAT CONSIDERATIONS

Threats to vessels include anti-ship missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED), and drones. Mines are near entrances to Houthi controlled ports, and on rare occasions, those mines that have become detached from their tether, have drifted into the traffic lanes. Most recently, unmanned undersea vehicles have been reported, but no vessel has been attacked using these.

The current maritime threat is greater where Houthi forces are present, in the vicinity of the Yemeni Red Sea coastline. However, it should be noted that Houthi forces have demonstrated their ability to target and attack ships in the Gulf of Aden as far as one hundred nautical miles from the coast. The threat level to ships with Israeli, United Kingdom and United States interests remains high. However, all owners, operators, and crews should be cognisant that their vessel could be misidentified and understand their risk of collateral damage.

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Visually detecting and classifying small contacts at night, such as a water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED), remains a challenge. Attacks using drones and anti-ship missiles have been conducted during hours of darkness. Maintaining lookouts during the entire passage, regardless of timing, is necessary.

Although the possibility of an airborne attack from helicopters during darkness exists, it is more significant during daylight hours.

VOYAGE PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Ship operators which have called, or plan to call, at Israeli ports should limit information access. Published information could be used by Houthi forces.

Ship owners and operators who have recently acquired a vessel from an Israeli-associated company should ensure vessel systems (e.g. AIS) properly reflect updated information. Outdated information has caused vessels to be attacked.

As explained in BMP5, ships planning a passage through the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden should conduct a thorough ship and voyage-specific threat and risk assessment considering any additional advice from their flag State. These assessments should include input from official sources, such as UKMTO, and relevant information such as operation specifics, shipping associations guidance, ownership details, and trading history of the ship in the last 3 years that could impact decision making.

Ships with AIS powered on, as well as off, have been attacked. Turning off AIS makes it marginally more difficult to track a ship but may also hinder the ability of the military to provide support or direct contact. International Maritime Organization (IMO) Circular A1106(29) para 22 outlines the use of AIS. It states that, *“If the master believes that the continual operation of AIS might compromise the safety and security of his/her ship or where security incidents are imminent, the AIS may be switched off.”* Limiting the information in AIS data fields or switching off AIS could make a ship harder to locate but it is unlikely to prevent an attack. Limiting AIS data to the mandatory fields and omitting the next port of call (NPOC) could be considered.

ROUTING CONSIDERATIONS

It should be noted that the Bab el Mandeb Strait is narrow and when passing north bound, ships within the Traffic Separation Scheme could be no more than seven nautical miles from the Yemeni coastline.

The Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC) remains unchanged. The MSTC is the amalgamation of the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), the Bab el Mandeb Traffic Separation Scheme and the Traffic Separation Scheme West of Hanish Islands, and a two-way route directly connecting the IRTC and the Bab el Mandeb Traffic separation Scheme.

Ship owners, operators, managers, and staff should regularly evaluate the risks to their ships, including navigation and collision avoidance, and plan routes accordingly. The consequences of turning off sensors such as AIS, LRIT, and especially radars should be carefully assessed.

MILITARY RECOMMENDATIONS

US Naval Forces, Central Command (NAVCENT) and the Combined Maritime Forces overseeing Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN have advised they regard the threat from attack by Houthi forces to merchant ships in Southern Red Sea between latitudes 12° N and 16° N to be very high, especially to ships with affiliation / links with Israel, US, and UK.

Ships who decide to wait to assess the threats before transiting the area indicated above are recommended to wait in the Southern Red Sea North of 18° N or in Gulf of Aden East of 048° E.

If contacted on VHF by “Yemeni Navy” and instructed to alter course to Al Hudaydah or another location on the NW coast of Yemen:

- ◆ Ignore the VHF call and continue passage if safe to do so.
- ◆ Call for coalition warship on VHF Channel 16, inform them of your location, situation, state your intentions and seek advice.
- ◆ Describe incident in movement reporting to UKMTO and NAVCENT NCAGS.

Ships transiting with AIS powered off through the affected area (see “Routing Considerations”) should provide position reports to NAVCENT NCAGS and UKMTO every 2-3 hours to ensure the military forces are aware of their presence and can assist in the event of an incident. However, it is likely vessels are tracked by multiple sources and turning off AIS alone will not prevent detection.

VESSEL HARDENING CONSIDERATIONS

Hardening measures are described in BMP5 and advice on the website www.maritimoglobalsecurity.org can be applied in areas of the ship where insertion of armed men by helicopter may be likely. The use of citadels / safe areas has proven to be successful in preventing the hijackers from taking over the control of the ships. This has also provided valuable time for the Naval vessels within the areas to arrive for assistance. Use of citadel requires thorough preparation and understanding of advantages and pitfalls – the guidelines in BMP5 applies.

Tankers should ensure that the inert gas systems are available for immediate use.

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ARMED GUARDS

Complete a thorough risk assessment when considering the use of armed guards. Caution should be taken when managing their employment and rules of engagement should consider the risk of escalation.

REPORTING

In the event of any incident, suspicious activity, or concern:

- ◆ Report any suspicious activity or concerns to the UKMTO at watchkeepers@ukmto.org or **+44 2392 222060**.
- ◆ If under attack, please contact US Naval Forces maritime operations centre in Bahrain directly on **+973 1785 3879**.

When transiting the high threat area, please consider including NAVCENT NCAGS in your positional reporting, more especially when increasing reporting to hourly.

NCAGS may be reached at m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil or **+973-1785-0033**.

The Master retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring vessel safety and security!

REFERENCES

BMP5 Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea