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## **SEPTEMBER 2024 – INTERIM INDUSTRY TRANSIT ADVICE,**

### **SOUTHERN RED SEA AND GULF OF ADEN**

(for reading in conjunction with latest version of BMP)

#### **SITUATION IN GENERAL**

Since November 2023, Houthi forces in Yemen have continuously attacked international shipping in the Southern Red Sea, the Bab el Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden. Consequently, many owners and operators decided to take alternative routes.

The Houthi attacks have drawn an increased number of naval forces to the region to defend merchant shipping. Some navies operate independently, whilst others have organised in multinational groups

#### **THREAT DESCRIPTION**

The Houthis have broadened their threats beyond vessels they believe have links with Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom to include the whole fleet of those companies some of whose ship(s) may have previously called at Israeli ports one or two years ago. The information used by the Houthi forces is of uncertain accuracy, and collateral damage from erroneous attacks has occurred.

An area of high maritime threat has been established by the coalition navies. The northern boundary of this area is parallel 17°30' N in the Red Sea, and the boundary to the southeast is in the Northwest Indian Ocean at parallel 10°00' N and longitude 056°00' E.

Threats to ships include:

- Houthi forces masquerading as Yemeni Coastguard or Navy officials and attempting to coerce merchant ships to sail to Yemeni ports.
- Anti-ship cruise missiles. These missiles have sophisticated terminal guidance typically by means of radar and/or electro-optics.
- Anti-ship ballistic missiles. These missiles are typically aimed at a geographical coordinate or have only basic, unreliable terminal guidance.
- Water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED) also known as Uncrewed Surface Vessel (USV). Typically, skiffs occasionally mounted with dummies, fitted with an impact fuse and laden with explosives.
- Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, or drones) are occasionally used.
- Crewed skiffs using RPGs and small arms.

- Uncrewed undersea vehicles have been reported, but no vessel has been attacked using these.
- Mines are near entrances to Houthi-controlled ports, and on rare occasions, mines have become detached from their tether and have drifted into the traffic lanes.
- Houthi hijack/kidnap teams in skiffs.
- Houthi hijack/kidnap teams in helicopters. Although the possibility of an airborne attack from helicopters during darkness exists, it is more significant during daylight hours.

Attacks using surface- and air drones and missiles have been conducted during daylight as well as during hours of darkness.

### **VOYAGE PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

It is recommended to follow the instructions in the latest version of BMP for registration with authorities, i.e. EUNAVFOR and UKMTO, which whilst aimed at piracy, will also cover most recent threats. Some flag state authorities may also require national registration with navies operating independently in the area.

As BMP highlights, ships planning 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 JMIC, MSCHOA and UKMTO. Additional information such as operational specifics, shipping associations guidance, ownership details, and ship's trading history over the ship in the last 3 years should also be considered.

Ship operators who have called, or plan to call, at Israeli ports should limit information access. Published information could be used by Houthi forces as part of their targeting process. Companies experiencing incidents on their ships, should CONSIDER the likelihood the Houthis may target their ships in the future.

### **ROUTING CONSIDERATIONS**

The Bab el Mandeb Strait is a narrow passage, and when ships are traveling northbound within the Traffic Separation Scheme, they may be as close as seven nautical miles from the Yemeni coastline.

Spacing between vessels needs careful consideration, attacks intended for one vessel have, due to poor targeting, may result in another vessel close by being hit.

The Maritime Security Transit Corridor (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. Collation warships operating in the area focus on the MSTC.

### **SHIP HARDENING**

Ship hardening measures are described in the latest version of BMP found on the website [www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org](http://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org). The company risk assessment and planning process should identify the location of security muster points within a ship. These will vary depending on the threat i.e. threat from piracy (citadel), threat from WBIED/UAV (above waterline). Use of these secure locations provide valuable time for naval ships within the area to provide assistance.

A Security Muster Point is a designated area providing maximum physical protection for the crew. It should be located above the waterline if there's a risk of hull breach. The central stairway and cross alleyways, protected by the accommodation block and above the waterline, is often suitable. When selecting the location, consider potential blast paths from explosive devices. An armour-plated door at the bottom of the central stairwell will reduce the effect of blast for example from a WBIED.

Consideration of PPE for the crew is essential. PPE available at the security muster point may be considered, including a fireman's outfit.



In the event of an imminent explosion, the crew should adopt the Brace Position with arms/legs bent, hands holding onto something solid, and feet firmly planted on the deck, to protect personnel from shock waves.

Use of citadel requires thorough preparation and understanding of advantages and disadvantages. Prior to entry into the threat area, the crew should be very familiar with the alarms to be used as a different one for the security muster point must be used compared with the general emergency alarm.

### **AIS CONSIDERATIONS**

Ships with AIS switched 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 Organisation (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. It is however likely ships are tracked by multiple sources and turning off AIS alone will not prevent detection by the Houthis. Limiting AIS data to the mandatory fields and omitting the next port of call (NPOC) could be considered. However, by having AIS switched on, the Houthis can gain the definitive position of the ship in real-time.

Ship owners and operators who have recently acquired a ship should ensure system data fields, e.g.: AIS, properly reflect updated information. Outdated information has resulted in ships being attacked.

Ships transiting with AIS switched off through the affected area 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.

If AIS is turned off, consider altering course and speed to hamper route predictability by dead reckoning. Dead reckoning is used by the Houthis especially when deploying ballistic antiship missiles, which have poor terminal guidance and are largely aimed at a geographical coordinate. To the same end, avoid loitering when transiting the threat area.

#### **OTHER PRECAUTIONS DURING PASSAGE**

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 e.g. turning off radars to reduce identifiable electronic emissions should be carefully assessed.

Maintaining lookouts during the entire passage of the region, regardless of timing, is necessary. Visually detecting and classifying small contacts at night, such as a WBIED/USV, remains a challenge.

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 as well their ability to counter a USV threat.

#### **NAVAL PROTECTION OF SHIPPING**

Two naval formations are conducting naval operations in the area to protect merchant shipping against the Houthi threat: EU Naval Forces' Operation Aspides and Combined Maritime Forces' Operation Prosperity Guardian (Task Force 153). Both operations conduct patrols and, on a case-by-case basis, also offer close protection of shipping. Individual nations may also offer protection to ships within their own scope of interest.

Furthermore, a Joint Maritime Information Centre (JMIC) has been established by CMF, to Provide accurate incident information to enable risk assessment by the shipping industry to support operational planning and decision making.

More details can be found in the respective websites of the authorities:

EUNAVFOR Operation Aspides: <https://on-shore.mschoa.org/eu-navfor-aspides/>

Task Force 153/JMIC (via UKMTO): <https://www.ukmto.org/partner-products/jmic-products>

#### **MILITARY RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING SUSPICIOUS COMMUNICATIONS**

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.
- Provide a detailed description of the incident in your movement report to UKMTO, and US NCAGS.

If contacted by any organization not officially recognized, report back to your company security officer and validate the source before responding. Any response should be carefully considered. Statements by Houthi forces to encourage merchant shipping to engage with the Houthi's Humanitarian Operations Coordination Centre (HOCC), or Yemeni Navy, should be disregarded.

#### **INCIDENT AND POST-INCIDENT REPORTING**

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

- Report any suspicious activity or concerns to the UKMTO at [watchkeepers@ukmto.org](mailto:watchkeepers@ukmto.org) **+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, 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](mailto:m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil) or **+973-1785-0033**

***The Master retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring ship safety and security!***

This advice will be updated on a regular basis.

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