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Maritime Security – Western Indian Ocean



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Maritime Security – Western Indian Ocean

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Introduction

Piracy off Somalia was a significant issue during the early 21st century during the second phase of the Somali civil war. Between 2005 and 2010, the area of reported attacks extended from the Gulf of Aden and Somali coast, out to the Arabian Sea and large portions of the Western Indian Ocean.

Since then attacks have become less frequent due to military and governmental intervention. As such, in January 2023 the high risk area for the region was removed all together.

Despite this, the risk of attack remains and vessel owners and masters should be cautious when transiting the area.

This briefing provides some background on both the organisations and their roles in combatting piracy in the region. It also provides information on the tactics being employed by the pirates.

Also it outlines how owners and Masters can participate in the regional initiatives and schemes to enhance vessel safety whilst operating in the region.

This briefing should be read in conjunction with the Loss Prevention Briefing, Maritime Security – General Recommendations which can be found here:

www.nepia.com/latest/publications

For a glossary of the abbreviations used in this briefing, see Appendix 2 [here](#).

Security organisations

NATO and the Allied Maritime Command (The NATO shipping centre)

NATO's focus within the Western Indian Ocean Region and the Gulf of Aden started with Operation Ocean Shield. However this operation concluded on 15th December 2016.

NATO still has other initiatives in place to assist vessels counter the threat of piracy in the area which are covered in more detail here:

NATO Shipping Centre (NSC)

The NSC was established in 1999 to enhance communications between NATO and commercial shipping.

The NSC is located at Allied Marine Command HQ in Northwood UK. It serves as a go between for NATO and worldwide commercial shipping and exists to share information and guidance on maritime risks to merchant shipping on potential risks and support NATO military operations.

Further details on the NSC can be found here:

www.shipping.nato.int/nsc.aspx

NCAGS and AWNIS

In order to maintain security at sea, and reduce any impact between the military and commercial shipping, NATO developed the NCAGS concept.

Merchant vessels can voluntarily participate in NCAGS and the military may request voyage and vessel details from the ship owner. In turn NCAGS will provide the Master and ship owner with security information. This ranges from basic briefings through to advisory routing.

Further details and guidance on the NCAGS initiative can be found here:

www.ncags.com/home

AWNIS sends mariners up to date information on security and safety related matters for a particular region. This is done through the Worldwide Navigational Warning Service (WWNWS).

European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR)

Due to the impact on international trade and maritime security in certain areas of the Western Indian Ocean, the European Ocean launched the European Union Naval Force ATALANTA (EU NAVFOR). EU NAVFOR's members also include Non-EU Members such as Norway, and South Korea.

This initiative patrols the Southern Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and large areas of the Western Indian Ocean. Included in their patrols is the IRTC in the Gulf of Aden and the MSTC extending into the Red Sea up to the Hanish Islands.

Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa, (MSCHOA)

Part of EU NAVFOR, MSCHOA provides 24 hour manned

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monitoring of vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden. It allows ship owners to register their vessels with the MSCHOA and communicates the latest anti-piracy guidance through an interactive website. It allows the ship owners and operators to give notification of their vessels movements through the Gulf of Aden.

The MSCHOA identifies the more vulnerable vessels and coordinates with these ships as required.

The initiative organises group transits of the IRTC allowing military vessels to easily assist the passage.

MSCHOA contact details are as follows:

Email: postmaster@mschoa.org

Tel: +33(0)2 98 220 220 or +33(0)2 98 220 170

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

The CMF is a multinational naval partnership. Comprising of 31 member nations, it operates in the Western Indian Ocean Region. It focuses on defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation and promoting a safe maritime environment. It comprises of three task forces:

CTF 150 – Maritime security

The aim CTF 150 is to promote maritime security in order to counter terrorist acts and related illegal activities, used by terrorists to fund or conceal their movements.

Maritime Security Operations help develop security in the maritime environment. CMF intercept vessels that are suspected of links to terrorist activity or maritime crime. This is intended to detect, deter and deny terrorists or criminals the illegal use of the maritime environment.

CTF 151 – Counter piracy

The mission is to disrupt piracy and armed robbery at sea, and to engage with regional and other partners to build capacity and improve relevant capabilities in order to protect global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation.

CTF 151 working alongside NATO and EU NAVFOR to help patrol the IRTC and the MSTC in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea areas.

CTF 152 – Gulf maritime security

CTF 152 vessels operate in the Arabian Gulf where they coordinate Theatre Security Cooperation (TSC), activities with regional partners, conduct Maritime Security Operations (MSO), and remain prepared to respond to any crisis that may develop.

During transit through the Western Indian Ocean Region, ships may be approached and hailed by CMF ships. This is part of an

on-going effort to provide assistance to the maritime community and to deter illegal activity. Ships should be prepared to respond with flag and vessel registration details as well as routine information concerning cargo, port of origin and intended destination.

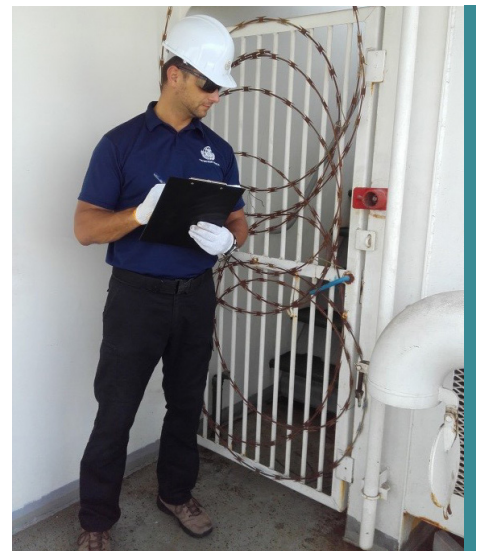


Image courtesy of CSO Alliance

Participation to the scheme is entirely voluntary, however North members are recommended to assist the CMF whenever requested.

Further information on the CMF can be found here:

<https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/>

UK Maritime Trade Operations, (UKMTO)

Operating in the Western Indian Ocean Region, the UKMTO is a Royal Navy sector that provides information to commercial maritime vessels.

As well as this function, they operate voluntary reporting areas to assist in maintaining maritime security. Ship Operators are strongly encouraged to take part in this voluntary reporting scheme.

The UKMTO coordinate with a wide variety of regional maritime operations centres, and as such are able to send reliable information to vessels that are taking part in the scheme.

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The work of the UKMTO includes:

- To provide warnings to vessels on maritime incidents that may affect them.
- Receive reports of maritime security incidents and suspicious activity from any reporting vessels.
- Share information provided by reporting vessels in to the appropriate authorities within the region.
- Inform reporting vessels about suspect activity in the VRA.
- Assist with other information enquiries from any reporting vessels.

Whilst the UKMTO is in contact with the military resources in the area, it is not a military coordinator.

UKMTO reporting requirements are found on UKHO chart Q6099. The UKMTO reporting area covers the Red Sea from the exit to the Suez Canal, to 10 South and 78 East. Reporting involves an Initial report, Final Report, and in between a daily report which should be transmitted at 0800 UTC daily.

Best Management Practice edition 5 which is addressed later in this briefing, lists the UKMTO as a favoured primary contact point. As such North recommends vessels transiting this area follow the information contained in UKHO chart Q6099.

Further information on the UKMTO can be found here:

www.ukmto.org/indian-ocean

UKTMO Contact Numbers are as follows:

Email: watchkeeper@uktmo.org

Telephone +44 2392 222060 or +971 50 552 3215

BMP5

Best management practice to deter piracy and enhance maritime security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea

BMP5 was produced to assist ships plan their voyage, detect, avoid, deter, delay and report attacks in the region. Previous editions of BMP have been aimed at piracy based in Somalia, however BMP5 is aimed at all security threats in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and up into the Arabian Sea.

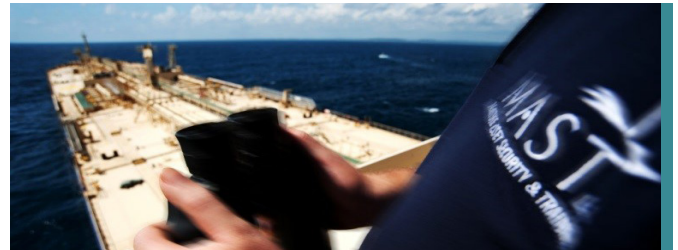
The document is targeted at seafarers and with this in mind the document has been produced as a pocket-sized booklet and clearer format that includes illustrations and a small chart of the region.

BMP5 contains further advice on ship protection measures.

BMP5 also encourages post-incident reporting to MSCHOA and UKMTO and additionally to the relevant Flag State.

It is recommended that Members distribute BMP5 among their Masters and crew and it can be downloaded here:

https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/media/1037/bmp5-low_res.pdf



Global counter piracy guidance for companies, Masters and seafarers

As well a general advice in relation to all forms maritime security, the Global counter piracy guidance for companies, Masters and seafarers contains regional specific advice for the Western Indian Ocean region as well. This includes reporting, information on transit corridors and important contact details.

It is recommended that Members distribute the guidance among their Masters and crew and it can be downloaded here:

www.ocimf.org/media/91171/Global-Counter-Piracy-Guidance-For-Companies-Masters-and-Seafarers.pdf

Maritime global security site

The site provides guidance and information for companies and mariners seeking on a wide range of Maritime Security Issues.

This includes regions specific links to the military supporting the region and well as BMP5.

The maritime global security website can be found at the following link:

www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/media/1037/bmp5-low_res.pdf

Regional specific security guidance

Piracy tactics

The three main tactics employed in the region are as follows:

- Pirates favour the use of high speed skiffs, usually two skiffs are used for approach.
- Sometimes open top whalers are used carrying fuel and stores towing the high speed attack skiffs.
- It is also common to use mother ships. Often the mother ships are previously hijacked merchant or fishing vessels, and are used to increase the pirate's range of operation.

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Pirates often use small arms fire, and sometimes rocket propelled grenades to intimidate Masters of vessels into slowing their vessels allowing boarding.

Boarding techniques once alongside often involve the use of lightweight ladders, long poled hooks and knotted ropes.

Once on board the pirates primary focus will be to access the bridge. They may slow the vessel to allow more pirates to board.

Attacks have occurred at any time of the day, however there is a preference shown for attacking in the early morning at first light.

Other security threats

Other threats in the region include the use of:

- Missiles.
- Sea mines.
- Water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED).

These threats are most notable in the Bab El Mandeb area.

Therefore BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping and Intertanko have published interim guidance on maritime security in the Red Sea and Bab El Mandeb.

This guidance can be read here:

www.nepia.com/industry-news/red-sea-and-bab-el-mandeb-%C2%96-interim-security-guidance/

High risk area (HRA)

The Indian Ocean High Risk Area was removed on 1 January 2023.

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has announced that after more than a decade of effective threat-reducing counter-piracy operations, the shipping industry has removed the 'Indian Ocean High Risk Area' (HRA).

The area being removed is the "High Risk Area" previously shown on UKHO Chart Q6099.

The joint industry initiative that includes BIMCO advise on what not will change:

- The Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) administered by UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) has not changed.
- Ships entering the VRA are encouraged to report to the UKMTO and register with the Maritime Security Centre for the Horn of Africa in accordance with Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea (BMP 5).
- The presence of international navies and the naval missions of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) has not changed.

- A thorough threat and risk assessment should continue to be conducted for all voyages for the threats identified in section 2 of BMP5. The risks these threats pose to merchant ships will be dependent on the particulars of the vessel, the owners, the cargo, and its voyage.

Voluntary reporting area (VRA)

UKMTO reporting requirements are still found on UKHO chart Q6099.

The UKMTO reporting area covers the Red Sea from the exit to the Suez Canal, to 10 degrees South Latitude and 078 degrees East Longitude.

Reporting involves an Initial report, Final Report, and in between a daily report which should be transmitted at 0800 UTC daily.

Reporting forms can also be located on the UKHO website:

www.admiralty.co.uk/maritime-safety-information/security-related-information-to-mariners

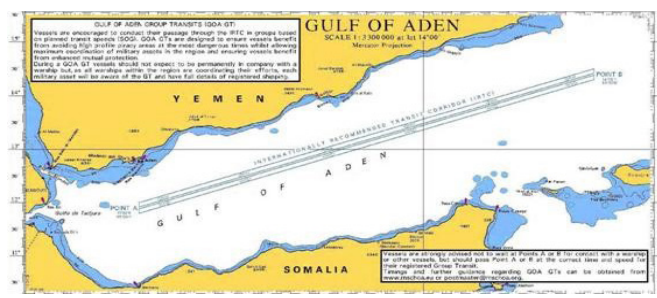
Voluntary registration to the MSCHOA is encouraged for vessels transiting the WIO, after registration reporting forms can also be located on the website.

Registration can be completed here:

www.mschoa.org/on-shore/register

EU NAVFOR is still encouraging merchant vessels to conduct their passage through the IRTC, despite the removal of the high risk area. When vessels take part in the reporting they will be instructed about transit times.

Participating vessels should pass through the east and west extremities of the IRTC Points (Alpha 11 50 N – 45 00 E) and (Bravo 14 28 N – 53 00 E).



However it is recommended that vessels do not stop and wait at points Alpha or Bravo, they should adjust their ETA to arrive on time for the group transit. This is not a convoy system, but designed to ensure ships avoid areas of high piracy activity at certain times and to allow groups to be more easily monitored by security forces in the area.

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In September 2017 the CMF established the Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC). The MSTC consists of the IRTC through to the areas joining the traffic separation schemes of Bab El Mandeb and West of the Hamish Islands in the Red Sea. The purpose of this route is so naval forces can be used efficiently to monitor traffic transiting the areas. See Appendix 1 for more detail of the MSTC.

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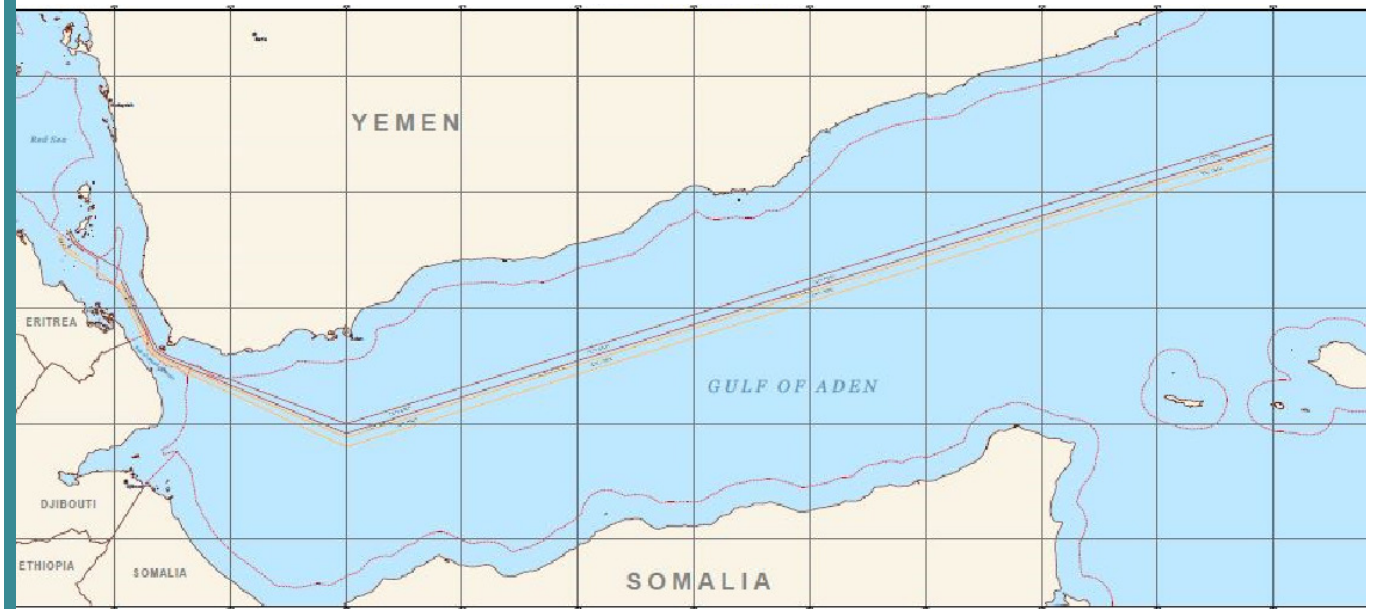
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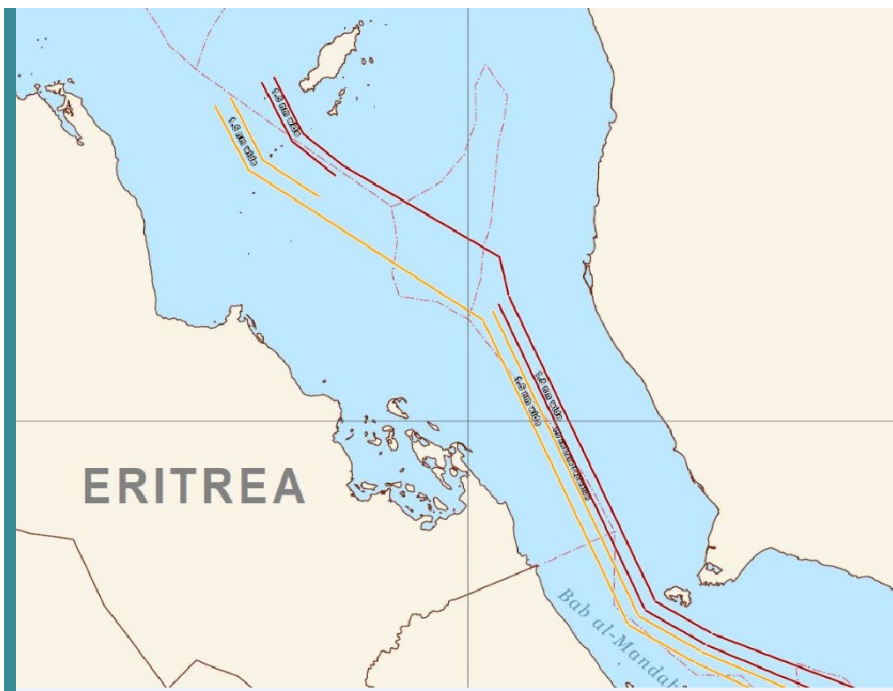
Published January 2023.

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APPENDIX 1: MARITIME SECURITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR



Above: Chart showing the MSTC which incorporates the IRTC, Bab El Mandeb TSS and the TSS West of the Hanish Islands.



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APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWNIS:	Allied Worldwide Navigational Information System
BMP:	Best Management Practise
CMF:	Combined Maritime Forces
EU NAVFOR:	European Union Navigation Force
GOA:	Gulf of Aden
HRA:	High Risk Area
IMO:	International Maritime Organisation
IRTC:	Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor
MSCHOA:	Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa
MSTC:	Maritime Security Transit Corridor
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCAGS:	Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping
NSC:	NATO Shipping Centre
UKHO:	United Kingdom Hydrographic Office
UKMTO:	United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations.
VRA:	Voluntary Reporting Area
WBIED	Water-borne improvised explosive devices
WIO:	Western Indian