



# ST KITTS & NEVIS INTERNATIONAL SHIP REGISTRY

## MARITIME CIRCULAR – MC 126 23

### THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTHERN RED SEA AND THE GULF OF ADEN

#### 1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this Maritime Circular is to advise Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators and Recognised Security Organisation of St. Kitts and Nevis flag ships that all ships that are currently operating in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden should exercise increased caution and vigilance.

#### 2. Application

2.1. The ongoing conflict in Yemen and recent developments in the region, since the start of the Israel-Gaza conflict, negatively impacted the maritime security situation in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Recent incidents have demonstrated that the Houthis, a Yemen-based rebel group, have capability to disrupt maritime operations, and the threat of attacks on commercial shipping remains high in the area.

2.2. The entire Yemeni coastline is considered a high-risk area, and there is a general sea mine threat south of Hodeidah along the coast of Yemen in the southern part of the Red Sea that may affect merchant vessels.

2.3. The current maritime security level in the Gulf of Aden is MARSEC/ISPS level 2; in the southern Red Sea is MARSEC/ISPS level 3.

#### 3. Recommendations

3.1. St. Kitts and Nevis flag ships operating in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are advised to maintain the utmost vigilance and increase security conditions aboard in order to protect the vessel and its crew.

3.2. Shipowners, Ship Managers and Ship Operators are recommended to follow the below listed:

- Undertake a new ship- and voyage-specific threat risk assessment before entering any region where there has been an incident, or the threat has changed.
- After the risk assessment, review the Ship's Security Plan.
- Review section 2 of BMP5, which outlines non-piracy threats and the Global Counter-Piracy Guidance.
- Maintain a full and vigilant bridge watches; Note: at night, slow small boats with no wake are difficult to spot on radar.
- Maintain a strict communication watch and establish communication with all vessels coming close. Do not allow small boats to approach or to come alongside. Use a searchlight for identification at night.
- Ensure strict boarding controls in place.

- Only lower accommodation gangways or ladders when necessary.
- Rig outboard lighting where possible provided when they do not interfere with keeping a safe lookout, particularly over the stern and rig/use searchlights if available.
- Monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels.
- Check all fire-fighting equipment available for immediate use. Make sure the emergency fire pump is available if any maintenance is being undertaken.
- Keep the Automatic Information System (AIS) on. There is no need to complete the field stating the last or next port of call.

3.3. Special entry conditions still apply to ships calling at Yemeni ports and it is advised to regularly confirm a port's status and condition with local sources of information. Ships calling at ports that are under the control of the Government of Yemen must continue to apply for entry permissions through the Yemeni Ministry of Transportation and follow the instructions provided by the local authorities.

3.4. This Administration recommends that all ships follow the instructions of the local authorities regarding the transit of the crew in port areas. Review your communication security plan on board, in case of an unforeseen incident.

3.5. Shipowners, ship operators, ship managers, and crew should regularly evaluate the risks to their ships, including navigation and collision avoidance, and plan routes accordingly.

#### **4. Security Guidelines by Shipping Associations**

4.1. In addition, this Administration would like to inform that shipping associations BIMCO, ICS, CLIA, IMCA, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO and OCIMF have published security guidance which is applicable to navigating in the Southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

4.2. The *Interim industry transit guidance for Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden* dated 15 December 2023 is appended to this Circular. Alternatively, it could be downloaded from BIMCO website following this link <https://www.bimco.org/insights-and-information/safety-security-environment/20231219-updated-security-transit-guidance-southern-red-sea-and-gulf-of-aden>

4.3. The guidance emphasises the importance of conducting a thorough ship and voyage-specific threat and risk assessment considering any additional advice from the ship's flag state before passing through the area in question.

If you have any questions, please contact this office at [mail@skanregistry.com](mailto:mail@skanregistry.com)

Yours truly,

Liam Ryan  
International Registrar of Shipping and Seamen



International  
Chamber of Shipping  
Shaping the Future of Shipping



**INTERCARGO**  
International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners



## **INTERIM INDUSTRY TRANSIT ADVICE, SOUTHERN RED SEA, AND GULF OF ADEN – 15 DECEMBER 2023**

### **SITUATION**

Houthi rebels in Yemen have continued to attack international shipping.

After the Houthi forces hijacked a car carrier on 19 November 2023, further attacks by armed skiffs, drones or anti-ship missiles have occurred. Houthis have demanded vessels to head for the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeida where hijacking and hostage-taking might follow. Military sources indicate that Houthi have also been masquerading as Yemeni Coastguard officials.

It had appeared that Houthis are threatening vessels they believe as having direct affiliation / links with Israel, Israeli nationals or ships directly associated with the Saudi-led coalition involved in the Houthi conflict with the Yemeni government. However, information related to vessels involved in more recent attacks did not indicate any immediate affiliation with Israel, Israeli nationals, nor links to the conflict.

The Houthi's information source and accuracy is not known, ships should maintain a heightened awareness for potential collateral damage when transiting the region and disregard Houthi demands to divert course.

Ships with AIS switched on and off have been attacked. Switching 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 ultimately prevent an attack. Limiting AIS data to the mandatory fields and omitting the next port of call (NPOC) could be considered.

## **THREAT CONSIDERATIONS**

In the past, Houthi forces have attacked merchant shipping using antiship missiles, water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Furthermore, they have laid mines to protect port entries for ports under their control, and on rare occasion such mines have become detached from their tether and have drifted into the traffic lanes.

The current maritime threat from the Houthi forces is greater in vicinity of the Yemeni Red Sea coastline where they are present.

While the airborne threat from helicopters cannot be ruled out during hours of darkness it is probably greater during daylight hours where targets are more easily identified and attacked/boarded. The challenge of visually detecting and classifying small contacts at night, such as a water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED), remains.

Recent attacks using drones and anti-ship missiles have also been carried out during hours of darkness. Maintaining lookouts during the entire passage, regardless of timing, is necessary.

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

As per BMP 5, 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 a specific update with input from official sources such as UKMTO for the period of operation, the latest update from relevant shipping associations, ownership details, and trading history of the ship in the last 3 years.

## **ROUTING CONSIDERATIONS**

Ship owners, operators, managers, and staff should regularly evaluate the risks to their ships, including navigation and collision avoidance, and plan routes accordingly.

**The Master retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring vessel safety and security.**

Note that the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is narrow and when passing north bound, ships within the Traffic Separation Scheme will be no more than approximately 7 nautical miles from the Yemeni coastline.

The industry recommendation to use the Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC) remains unchanged in light of the recent attack. 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.

## **VESSEL HARDENING CONSIDERATIONS**

Hardening measures are described in BMP5 and advice on the website [www.maritimelobalsecurity.org](http://www.maritimelobalsecurity.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 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.

## **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](mailto:watchkeepers@ukmto.org) **+44 2392 222060**
- If under attack, please contact US Naval Forces in Bahrain directly on **+973 1785 3879**

This advice will be updated.

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