

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 02-24 (Rev. 1)

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

Subject: THREATS TO SHIPPING IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ REGION

Date: 17 May 2024

This Ship Security Advisory should be expeditiously circulated to Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)-flagged vessels that are operating or intend to operate in the:

- Arabian/Persian Gulf;
- Arabian Sea;
- Gulf of Oman (GoO); or
- Strait of Hormuz (SoH).

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 Coalition force contacts have been updated throughout the Advisory and in Appendix A.
- 1.2 Appendix B has been updated and customized for RMI-flagged vessels.

2.0 Threat and Risk Considerations

- 2.1 Seizures by Foreign Military Forces
 - .1 Commercial vessels transiting through the Arabian/Persian Gulf, SoH, and GoO have been boarded and detained/seized by foreign military forces over the past several years. Incidents have included:

This SSA is evaluated annually by the Administrator and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
RMI-flagged tanker	Panama-flagged tanker	Two Greek-flagged tankers	Panama-flagged tanker	Dominica-flagged tanker	United Kingdom (UK)-flagged tanker
Madeira-flagged containership	RMI-flagged tanker		South Korea-flagged tanker	Liberia-flagged tanker	
			Vietnam-flagged tanker		

.2 Foreign military forces have utilized small boats and/or helicopters during boarding/seizure operations and have attempted to force merchant vessels into their territorial waters. Harassment and aggressive maneuvers are applied in these types of scenarios.

2.2 Other Threat Types

.1 Threats involving mines (sea and limpet), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), water-borne improvised explosive devices, anti-ship missiles, and small arms fire should not be ruled out in this region, particularly in the GoO and Arabian Sea.

3.0 Coalition Forces

3.1 Refer to [Appendix A](#) for a list of naval coalition forces, their remits, and contact information.

3.2 Vessels should be aware that the United States (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, immediately inform United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO).

3.3 Vessels operating in these areas are advised to establish contact with both UKMTO and US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) and to include both on all registration and position report emails (see [§6.0](#) on Voluntary Reporting Schemes and [Appendix A](#) for contact details). By including both addresses on each email, awareness will be enhanced without creating an additional reporting burden.

4.0 Non-coalition Forces

- 4.1 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. Refer to [Appendix B](#) for additional guidance and standard responses.
- 4.2 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 (refer to [Appendix B](#)), and immediately inform UKMTO.
- 4.3 If non-coalition forces board a vessel, the vessel should immediately contact US NAVCENT Battle Watch. The crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

5.0 Risk Mitigation Measures

- 5.1 When operating in the area vessels should:
 - .1 implement **Security Level 2** (or equivalent security measures at port) while transiting the GoO, SoH, or Arabian/Persian Gulf ([flag requirement](#));
 - .2 review and implement (as practicable) industry BMP guidelines;¹
 - .3 undertake a thorough pre-voyage threat and risk assessment;
 - .4 review the Ship Security Plan and amend, if necessary, after performing the pre-voyage security threat and risk assessment;
 - .5 navigate with maximum feasible distance from the coast of Iran;
 - .6 review the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) publications entitled [Loitering Munitions – the Threat to Merchant Ships](#) and [Ship Security: Hull Vulnerability Study](#);
 - .7 review Chapter 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Shipping Centre's [ATP-02.1 Naval NCAGS Guide to Owners, Operators, Masters and Officers](#);
 - .8 conduct security and fire drills/exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk;

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](#)).

- .9 maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch for approaching craft;
 - .10 monitor relevant very high frequency and other communication channels; and
 - .11 follow the advice of coalition military authorities (UKMTO, European Union Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR), MSCHOA, CMF, and US NAVCENT).
- 5.2 Vessels are not advised to use privately contracted armed security personnel (PCASP) north of Fujairah, UAE.
- 5.3 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 thought that doing so will reduce threats to vessel safety or security (refer to §22 of International Maritime Organization (IMO) Assembly Resolution [A.1106\(29\)](#)).

6.0 Voluntary Reporting Schemes

- 6.1 Vessels transiting the [UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area \(VRA\)](#) are reminded to participate in the UKMTO 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](#).
- 6.2 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 **US NAVCENT NCAGS** 24-hours prior to entering the UKMTO VRA, as defined in [Maritime Security Chart Q6099](#). UKMTO and US NAVCENT NCAGS should be sent the Initial Report from Annex D of [BMP5](#) via a single email. 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 vessel position daily to UKMTO using the [position reporting form](#).

7.0 Reporting an Incident or Suspicious Activity

- 7.1 For suspicious activity, contact **UKMTO**.
- 7.2 For an emergency incident, immediately activate the Ship Security Alert System and contact **US NAVCENT Battle Watch** at: +973-1785-3879.
- 7.3 All security incidents must be reported to the RMI Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) at: marsec@register-iri.com, dutyofficer@register-iri.com, and/or +1-571-441-1885



8.0 Supplemental Information

- 8.1 The [Maritime Global Security](#) website offers industry issued best practices, including industry [BMP](#) guidelines, guidance to mariners by geographic region, and provides contact and subscription information for regional maritime security reporting centers. Industry BMP guidelines, and the Maritime Global Security website should be consulted prior to operating in the above-listed geographic areas.
- 8.2 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 GoO). Using this transit corridor may enable coalition forces to more effectively allocate resources to monitor and assist vessels in the SoH Region.
- 8.3 Refer also to the Administrator’s [Maritime Security webpage](#).

APPENDIX A: COALITION FORCE CONTACTS

Coalition Force	Contact Information	Comments
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 +44-2392-222060	A list of recent security incidents in the region can be found on the UKMTO website .
US NAVCENT NCAGS	Primary: +973-1785-0033 Alternate: m-ba-cusnc-ncags@us.navy.mil Contingency: +973-3940-4523 (mobile) Emergency: NAVCENT Battle Watch +973-1785-3879 cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil	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.

APPENDIX B: BRIDGE REFERENCE CARDS

Republic of the Marshall Islands
BRIDGE REFERENCE CARD

If Hailed by Vessels or Aircraft Exhibiting Threatening or Harassing Behavior Response

This card should be read in conjunction with industry best practice guidance.
The Master retains full responsibility for the vessel's actions.

Hailed by unknown vessel or aircraft exhibiting threatening or harassing behavior.

↓

USE RESPONSE 1
Repeat and continue to repeat until no longer tenable.

↓

Hailed with demands to prepare to be boarded.

↓

USE RESPONSE 2

↓

Unknown authorities continue their approach or are close to boarding.

↓

USE RESPONSE 3

RESPONSE 1

This is merchant vessel *****. This vessel is engaged in lawful transit. I am navigating as permitted by international law and request you do not impede my safe passage. Over.

RESPONSE 2

This is merchant vessel *****. This vessel is engaged in lawful transit. Request you maintain a safe distance and not impede our transit. All your actions are now being **recorded** and reported to the **United States Navy**.

This vessel has not experienced a navigational incident and has conducted itself lawfully throughout the voyage.

My flag State is the **Republic of the Marshall Islands** and you should contact my flag State or **[Company Name]** if you require any further information. Over.

RESPONSE 3

This is merchant vessel *****. Your actions are impeding the safe navigation of this vessel and may endanger my vessel and crew.

We are in contact with our flag State. I repeat your actions are being reported to the **Republic of the Marshall Islands** and the **United States Navy**.

I formally request you cease impeding this vessel's safety and interrupting its lawful transit. Over.

UKMTO: +44-2392-222060 / watchkeepers@ukmto.org
US NAVCENT NCAAGS: +973-1785-3879 / cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil
RMI DUTY OFFICER: +1-571-441-1885 / dutyofficer@register-iri.com



Recommended Actions if Unknown Vessel is Impeding Safe Navigation

*This card should be read in conjunction with industry best practice guidance.
The Master retains full responsibility for the vessel's actions.*

If unknown vessel(s) are impeding safe navigation and attempting to deviate the vessel from international waters.

Contact UKMTO and US NAVCENT NCAGS.
Provide regular updates. Provide crew details.

Respond on VHF professionally. You should not ignore hails.
(Refer to *If Hailed by Unknown Vessels or Aircraft Exhibiting Threatening or Harassing Behavior Bridge Card*)

Check vessel position by multiple methods before confirming.

Contact CSO.

If possible, live stream VDR / Upload VDR to DPA / CSO at 10 minute intervals.

Head to nearest friendly territorial waters / warship
at best possible speed if safe to do so.

If boarding is attempted, best practice is to:

- Maneuver away from danger
- Report to flag State, UKMTO, and US Navy
- Use of the citadel within constrained waters should be carefully considered