Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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SHIP SECURITY ADVISORY No. 11-22

To:	**Owners/Operators, Masters, Company Security Officers, Recognized Security Organizations**
Subject:	**THREATS TO COMMERCIAL SHIPPING IN THE PERSIAN GULF, STRAIT OF HORMUZ, GULF OF OMAN, ARABIAN SEA, GULF OF ADEN, AND RED SEA**
Date:	**25 October 2022**
References:	1. Best Management Practices 5th Edition (BMP5)
	2. United States (US) Maritime Advisory #2022-008
	3. Shipping Industry Guidance, *Industry update following incident in the Persian Gulf*

Operators of Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) flagged vessels transiting the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea are requested to circulate this Ship Security Advisory (SSA) to their ships by the most expeditious means possible. This SSA supersedes SSA No. 06-22.

1.0 ISSUE

Heightened military activity and geopolitical tensions in these regions continue to pose serious threats to commercial vessels. Associated with these threats is the potential for miscalculation or misidentification, which could lead to aggressive actions. In response, the IMSC has been established to maintain freedom of navigation, international law, and free flow of commerce to support stability and security of the maritime commons in the Persian/Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and the Bab al Mandeb (BAM). For further information and important guidance, please review the IMSC brochure and IMSC Bridge Reference Cards.

2.0 THREATS

While some recent incidents in this region may have targeted specific merchant vessels due to their association with certain countries, cargo, individuals, or companies, the potential remains for miscalculation or misidentification that could lead to aggressive actions against any merchant vessel. The RMI Maritime Administrator (the "Administrator") views the following to be the most pressing threats to merchant vessels in these areas:

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is evaluated annually by the Administrator and expires one year after its issuance or renewal unless otherwise noted, superseded, or revoked.

2.1   Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs):

.1   Explosive UAV or "drone" attacks on merchant vessels in the listed areas represents a growing threat. On 30 July 2021, a Liberian-flagged tanker was attacked by an explosive UAV while transiting through international waters in the Arabian Sea resulting in the death of two crewmembers. The explosive detonation following the UAV impact created an approximately 6-foot diameter hole in the topside of the pilot house and badly damaged the bridge interior. This attack followed two unsuccessful UAV attacks on the vessel on 29 July, both of which impacted the sea near the vessel.

.2   If RMI-flagged vessels observe or hear a potential UAV, they should immediately inform the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. Crewmembers not needed for the safe navigation and operation of the vessel are advised to be restricted to a safe location on the vessel until the potential threat has passed.

2.2   Boarding/Detention/Seizure by Foreign Military Forces:

.1   Multiple commercial vessels transiting through the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman have been boarded and detained or seized by foreign military forces over the past several years. Incidents include the seizure or detention of a South Korean-flagged tanker, which was boarded in 2021 while transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, and a UK-flagged tanker, which was boarded in 2019 also while transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Local military forces have utilized small boats and/or helicopters during boarding operations and have attempted to force merchant vessels into their territorial waters.

.2   If hailed by foreign military forces, RMI-flagged vessels should provide the vessel name, flag State, and affirm that they are 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 the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch.

.3   If foreign military forces seek to board an RMI-flagged vessel navigating these waters, the ship's Master should, if the safety of the ship and crew would not be compromised, decline permission to board, noting that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law, as reflected in UNCLOS, and immediately inform the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch.

.4   If foreign military forces board an RMI-flagged vessel, the vessel should immediately contact the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. The crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

2.3   Limpet Mines:

   .1   Limpet mines have been used to damage merchant vessels on multiple occasions over the past several years and are primarily a threat to merchant vessels in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman. Limpet mines, or similar improvised explosive devices, can be attached to vessel hulls, above or below the waterline, via swimmers or small boats, while a vessel is berthed, at anchor, or underway.

   .2   When operating in these areas, RMI-flagged vessels should maintain a close lookout and remain vigilant for suspicious activity to include the approach of swimmers or small boats. Close attention should be given to the vessel's waterline, especially at slow speeds, at anchor, and when moored.

   .3   If crewmembers believe a mine has been, or was attempted to have been, attached to their vessel, they should immediately inform the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. Crewmembers not needed for the safe navigation and operation of the vessel are advised to be restricted to a safe location on the vessel until the threat has passed.

2.4   Water-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIEDs):

   .1   WBIED attacks are a known threat to merchant vessels operating in the Red Sea, BAM, and the Gulf of Aden. Vessels in these areas have reported explosions believed to have been caused by WBIEDs, both in port and underway.

   .2   When operating in these areas, RMI-flagged vessels should always maintain a vigilant lookout for small boats operating in a suspicious manner, and additional precautions should be taken to ensure small boats are always kept at a safe distance.

   .3   If crewmembers believe an attempted explosive boat attack is underway, or was attempted, they should immediately inform the Administrator and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. Non-essential crew are advised to be restricted to a safe location on the vessel until the threat has passed.

2.5   Navigation or Communication Disruptions:

   .1   Vessels operating in these areas may encounter Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)/Global Positioning System (GPS) interference, Automatic Identification System (AIS) spoofing, bridge-to-bridge communications spoofing, and/or other communications jamming with little to no warning. Vessels have reported bridge-to-bridge communications from unknown entities falsely claiming to be US or coalition warships.

.2   In addition to risks to navigation, confusion from such disruptions could be leveraged by bad actors to facilitate additional kinetic actions. Additional precautions should be taken if your vessel, or other vessels in the vicinity, experience such disruptions.

.3   If an RMI-flagged vessel suspects it is being hailed from a source falsely claiming to be a US or coalition naval vessel or is being asked for positions or info on coalition military vessels or aircraft operating in the area, the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch should be immediately informed.

.4   Maritime GNSS/GPS disruptions or anomalies should be reported to the Administrator immediately at marsec@register-iri.com.

3.0   Risk Mitigation Measures

3.1   Shipowners and operators are advised to always exercise a high level of vigilance in this area. The Administrator highly recommends vessels take precautions as described below when operating in the area:

.1   Implement security measures equivalent to **Ship Security Level 2** (*flag requirement*).

.2   Review Section 2 of *Best Management Practices 5th Edition (BMP5)*.

.3   Undertake a new ship and voyage-specific threat assessment before entering any region where there has been an incident or if the threat has changed.

.4   After performing the risk assessment, review the Ship Security Plan and amend if necessary.

.5   Ensure ISPS access control measures are strictly in place.

.6   Ensure AIS and Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) systems are switched on and functional.

.7   Consider transiting at full speed whilst ensuring this is only done where it is commensurate with safe speed, safe navigation and maneuvering permits.

.8   Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) should <u>not</u> be used as a risk mitigation measure in the northern Gulf of Oman, Strait of Hormuz or Persian Gulf. Consider the use of extra unarmed lookouts in addition to any contracted security the vessel may have hired for HRA transits, (note the northern part of the Gulf of Oman is not part of the industry-designated HRA for piracy).

.9   Ensure watch officers save Voyage Data Recorder (VDR / SVDR) data in the event of an attack or suspicious event.

.10   Consider if a Day/Night transit is appropriate to the threat posed.

.11   Conduct Security Training/Exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk.

.12   Tankers in ballast condition should consider purging cargo tanks of hydrocarbons prior to entering the region to reduce the risk of explosion.

.13   Strictly observe any promulgated exclusion zones or guidance issued by coastal states.

.14   Consider implementing unmanned machinery spaces (UMS) through confined straits if navigationally safe to do so.

.15   Maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch. Place additional lookouts to the navigation team and bridge wings with a specific remit to maintain visual watch for small craft approaching.

.16   Ensure the lookouts are briefed on maintaining a clear watch astern and over the side.

.17   If a mine-related threat is announced during transit, move all crew to above the waterline.

.18   Maintain use of night vision binoculars and consider carrying more onboard.

.19   Maintain a dutiful watch and establish communication with all nearby vessels.

.20   Rig outboard lighting where possible, provided they do not interfere with keeping a safe lookout, particularly over the stern, and use searchlights if available.

.21   Monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels.

.22   Ensure watertight integrity whilst underway or at anchorage.

.23   Check all fire-fighting equipment is available for immediate use. Make sure the emergency fire pump is available if any maintenance is being undertaken.

.24   Vessels should follow the advice of coalition military authorities/CMF.

.25   Review OCIMF's *Ship Security: Hull Vulnerability Study*.

.26   Review NATO ATP2: NCAGS' *Guide to Owners, Operators, Masters and Officers Edition A Version 1,* Annex D to Chapter 4.

3.2   Visual check of the hull:

    .1   Undertake a visual search from the deck, all around the vessel to check for anything attached to the hull of the vessel. Particular attention should be paid to the hull at the waterline.

    .2   Conduct regular rounds and search the upper deck.

    .3   If a vessel detects anything unusual attached to the hull, it should contact UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch, and the Administrator immediately (see *Contact Info* section below). All crew should be evacuated from the immediate area and mustered in a safe place.

3.3   Additional measures to consider whilst at anchor:

    .1   Rotate the propeller continuously or at short, irregular intervals.

    .2   Operate bow and stern thrusters at zero (0) thrust.

    .3   Turn the rudder frequently.

    .4   Switch the echo sounder to transmit counter/combat swimmer/diver threat.

4.0   Guidance

4.1   The Maritime Global Security website at www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org offers industry issued best practices, including BMP5, and guidance to mariners by geographic region and provides contact and subscription information for regional maritime security reporting centers.

4.2   Answer all VHF calls professionally. DO NOT IGNORE.

4.3   All vessels should be aware that US and other coalition naval forces may conduct maritime awareness calls, queries, and approaches to ensure the safety of vessels transiting the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea. If an RMI-flagged vessel suspects it is being hailed from a source falsely claiming to be a US or coalition naval vessel, UKMTO and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch should be immediately informed.

4.4   If hailed by non-coalition forces, provide vessel name, flag state, and affirm that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention. The master should immediately inform UKMTO and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. Please also refer to the IMSC brochure and IMSC Bridge Reference Cards for additional guidance and suggested standard responses.

4.5   If non-coalition forces seek to board an RMI-flagged vessel navigating these waters, the ship's Master should, if the safety of the ship and crew would not be compromised, decline permission to board, noting that the vessel is proceeding in accordance with international law, as reflected in UNCLOS, and immediately inform UKMTO and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch.

4.6   If non-coalition forces board an RMI-flagged vessel, the vessel should immediately contact UKMTO and the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch. The crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

   .1   Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea (BMP5), and the Maritime Global Security website should be consulted prior to operating in the above listed geographic areas.

5.0   Reporting

5.1   RMI-flagged vessels operating in these areas are advised to report any incidents or suspicious activities to US or Coalition Naval Vessels on VHF Channel 16. In addition:

   .1   Simultaneously register with both the UKMTO and the US Naval Forces Central Command Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NAVCENT NCAGS) Watch 24 hours prior to entering the Indian Ocean Voluntary Reporting Area by sending **UKMTO and NAVCENT NCAGS**, via a single e-mail, the Initial Report from Annex D of Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Safety in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea (BMP5). Utilize other reports included in Annex D of BMP5 as necessary, including both UKMTO and NAVCENT NCAGS on each of these reports.

   .2   Include the estimated times of arrival at the **Suez Canal, BAM, and Strait of Hormuz (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.).

   .3   In the event of an incident or suspicious activity, call UKMTO or the US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch and activate the Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) immediately.

   .4   Vessels operating in this area are advised to establish contact with both UKMTO and the NAVCENT NCAGS Watch, and to include both on all update or incident report emails, as detailed above. By including both as addressees on each email, awareness will be enhanced without creating an additional reporting burden.

   .5   All security incidents must be reported by RMI-flagged vessels to the Administrator.

6.0   CONTACT INFORMATION

.1   IMSC: M-BA-IMSC_-_MTO@me.navy.mil
                                      +973 8439 8193

.2   NAVCENT NCAGS: cusnc.ncags_bw@me.navy.mil
                                      +973 1785 2983 or +973 1785 0084

.3   UKMTO: watchkeepers@ukmto.org
                                      +44 (0) 2392 222060
                                      UKMTO advisories and warnings www.ukmto.org

.4   US Fifth Fleet Battle Watch: +973 1785 3879
                                      cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil

.5   RMI Maritime Administrator: dutyofficer@register-iri.com
                                      marsec@register-iri.com
                                      +1 571 441 1885

Supplemental information may also be found on the RMI Maritime Security web page.