Merchant Marine Circular

Panama Maritime Authority
General Directorate of Merchant Marine
Control and Compliance Department

MERCHANT MARINE CIRCULAR MMC-230

To: Masters, Ship-owners, Operators, Company Security Officers, Ship Security Officers, Panamanian Merchant Marine Consulates, Legal Representative of Panamanian Flagged Vessels, Recognized Organizations (RO's) and Recognized Security Organizations (RSO's) of Panama Flag Vessels.

Subject: Ship Protection Measures to Pirates Attacks.

Reference: Law No. 38 June 4th, 1995 UNCLOS 1982.
Law No. 78 November 15th, 2010 - SUA 2005 and SUA PROTOCOL.
IMO Resolution - A.1026 (26) adopted on December 2, 2009.
IMO SN.1/Circular.281 - Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), August 3, 2009.
IMO MSC.1/Circ.1339 - Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy.
IMO MSC.1/Circular.1334 - Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships.
Resolution No. 106-62-DGMM of May 31th, 2020.
MMC-123 - International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code)
MMC-133 - Ship Security Alert System (SSAS).
MMC-195 - Long Range Identification and Tracking of Ships (LRIT).
MMC-245 - Use of Armed Security Personnel on board Panama Flagged Vessels transiting High Risk Areas (**online application**).

This Merchant Marine Circular supersedes **MMC-208, MMC-238, MMC-320, MMC-327, MMC-349, MMC-358** and **MMC-363.**

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this circular is to establish recommendatory measures for Panamanian-registered ships that transit through high-risk areas or areas where robberies and pirate attacks are taking place.

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1. Description of High-Risk Areas (HRA).
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3. Best Management Practices (BMP).
4. Security Measures in West Africa (GOG), Nigerian Waters, Southern Red Sea and
5. Reporting and Emergency Centers

1. Description of High Risk Areas (HRA):

1.1 The High-Risk Area (HRA) is an area within the UKMTO designated as the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) where it is considered there is a higher risk of piracy and within which self-protective measures are most likely to be required.

1.2 According to the Merchant Marine Circular MMC-245, the Panama Maritime Authority defined HRA in point 2.1 “An area as defined in the BMP unless otherwise defined by the Flag State”.

1.3 All Panamanian vessels, with or without armed or unarmed security personnel, must prior to the entry into the High-Risk Area, have their crew fully briefed on the preparations and a Piracy drill should be conducted.

1.4 The Security drill should be reviewed and all personnel briefed on their duties, including familiarization with the alarm signifying a piracy attack, and are all clear with the appropriate response to each.

1.5 We remind all our users that MMC-195 and MMC-133, states that allPanamanian flagged vessels, under SOLAS V/19-1 regulations are required to comply with LRIT requirement. The LRIT System and the SSAS onboard has been correctly set up and working properly in order to accomplish the Best Management Practices (BMP) and the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) established in this Circular below. This ensures the possibility to track vessels and will allow detecting any unexpected change of course or any other suspicious situation.

1.6 From **January 01, 2023** the Indian Ocean High Risk Area (HRA) for piracy has been removed. The Best Management Practices 5 (BMP5) will continue to provide the necessary guidance for shipping to ensure threat and risk assessments are developed for every voyage to mitigate the risks presented by remaining security threats in the region.

1.7 The shipping industry will continue to monitor and advise on maritime security threats to assist the safe transit of vessels and the seafarers who crew them. Pre-voyage threat and risk assessments should consider the latest maritime security information from organizations supporting the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA).

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1.8 The Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) administered by 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 (MSCHOA) in accordance with industry BMP (Best Management Practices).

1.9 The new coordinates of the HRA are:

From position A (Latitude of 01 30'S on the Somali coast), a line to:

- Position B (01° 30' S – 046° 00' E), a line to
- Position C (01° 00' N – 049° 30' E), a line to
- Position D (09° 00' N – 055° 00' E), a line to
- Position E (14° 20' N – 057° 30' E), a line to
- Position F (the Yemen coast at longitude 053° 00' E), then
- Follow the Yemeni coast westwards and northwards, to
- Position G (the Yemeni Red Sea coast at latitude 15° 00' N), then a line to
- Position H (the Eritrea territorial sea border at latitude 15° 00' N), then
- Follow southwards first Eritrea's and then Djibouti's territorial sea borders, to
- Position I (the coastal border point between Djibouti and Somalia), then
- Follow the Somali coast eastwards and then southwards, to Position A

1.10 From **January to June 2026** five locations contributed to 84% of the total of 38 incidents reported: Singapore Straits, Philippines, Indonesia, Gulf of Aden and Somalia. The Panama Maritime Authority encourages to all Ship-owners/Operators and Masters to take the proper maritime security measurements in order to reduce and minimize the risks associated.

1.11 For this reason and taking in consideration the last incidents reports, all the Panamanian flagged vessels, must to maintain strict anti-piracy watch and measures and report all incidents and suspicious sightings to the local authorities and the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre as per MSC.1/Circular.1334.

Given the aforementioned, this Administration consider the following, as High-Risk Areas:

S.E. ASIA AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Indonesia: Belawan, Dumai, Nipah, Tanjung Berakit/Bintan, Tanjung Priok, Gresik, Taboneo, Tanjung Butan, Muara Berau, Balikpapan, Lubuk Gaung, Batam, Jakarta.
Philippines: Manila, Celebes Sea, In/off Sibutu passage, off Sibutu Island, Tawi Tawi, Sulu Sea, off Eastern Sabah.
Bangladesh: Chattogram/Chittagong anchorage.

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Singapore Straits
South China Sea: Off Tioman, Off Pulau Aur, Off Anambas, Natuna, Mangkai Islands, Subi Besar, Merundung areas, off Kuantan, Off coast of Mlaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and in the South China Sea area.

AFRICA AND RED SEA

Somalia waters–Eastern and Northeastern Coast.
Ghana: Takoradi anchorages, Accra, Off Anloga.
Angola: Luanda
Equatorial Guinea: Off Bioko Island, Off Bata, West of Bata.
Guinea: Gulf of Guinea, Conakry
Benin: Cotonou
Off Yemen / Gulf of Aden / Southern Red Sea / Bab El Mandeb
Arabian Sea
Indian Ocean
Gabon: Port Gentil / Owendo anchorage, Libreville
Cameroon: Douala
Gabon: Port Gentil, Owendo anchorage.
Dem. Rep. of Congo
Ivory Coast: Abidjan, at anchorage.
Nigeria: Lagos, Apapa, Off Bayelsa, Brass, Off Brass, Bonny Island, Port Harcourt., Off Nigeria.
Togo: Lome, at Togo anchorage.
Straits of Hormuz / Gulf of Oman / Off Iran
The Congo: Off Pointe Noire, Pointe Noire anchorage, Off Point and Northern Somali Coast in the Gulf of Aden and Southern Red Sea in the Bab El Mandeb.
Sao Tome & Principe
Red Sea / Gulf of Aden / Off Somalia / Arabian Sea / Indian Ocean
Off Yemen / Gulf of Aden /Southern Red Sea / Bab El Mandeb
Straits of Hormuz / Gulf of Oman / Off Iran
Sierra Leone: Off Turtle Islands.

SOUTH, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN WATERS

Colombia : Cartagena
Haiti: Port Au Prince, Lafiteau
Venezuela: Puerto Jose, Puerto La Cruz, Guanta
Brazil: Macapa
Peru: Callao Anchorage
Ecuador: Guayaquil
Mexico: Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of Campeche, Tabasco, Puerto Dos Bocas

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1.12 All Panamanian flagged vessels must take precautionary measures and follow all recommended guidelines published in www.panamashipregistry.com when transiting the following areas:

Eastern Europe: International conflict between Ukraine and Russia, not related to piracy. Mines reported in the Black Sea and drone attack in Ukraine. Follow the instructions published in MMN-03/2022.

Middle East: International conflict between Israel and Hamas, not related to piracy. Follow the instructions published in MMN-08/2023 and MMN 04/2025.

Vessel transiting in / Off Yemen / Gulf of Aden / Southern Red Sea / Bab El Mandeb: Vessels are being approached by skiffs and hailed via VHF, allegedly by Yemen naval forces, to alter course into Yemen waters. Masters are encouraged to be cautious and reported any such activities to Coalition warship on VHF Ch 16. Due to the conflicts between the United States, Israel, and Iran, Panamanian-registered vessels are experiencing electronic interference, particularly affecting transmission systems. All vessels are urged to remain vigilant. Follow the instructions published in MMN-03/2024, MMN 03/2025 and MMN 05/2026.

2. Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC):

2.1 All the Panamanian flagged vessels are requested to use the IRTC, which includes the creation of separate eastbound and westbound transit lanes. Each lane will be 5 nautical miles wide and will be separated by a 2 nautical miles buffer zone.

2.2 As the IRTC is subject to changes by the military Authorities, according to prevailing circumstances, the Panamanian flagged vessels are urged to obtain updated information from the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) on the website address http://www.mschoa.org or from the NAV-warnings promulgated for that area.

2.3 Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) and be considered as the first, minimum, preventative option. Placing armed guards on board as a means to secure and protect the ship and its crew should only be considered after a risk assessment has been carried out.

3. Best Management Practices (BMP):

3.1 All Panamanian flagged vessels, including within the World Food Program (WFP) in the GoA and the Somali basin are requested to implement the necessary security measures described in the latest edition of the Best Management Practices (*please visit Maritime Security link: https://panamashipregistry.com/maritime-services/maritime-security/ (ANTIPIRACY)* before, during and after the transit through High-Risk Areas.

3.2 Panamanian Flagged Vessels operating within the World Food Program (WFP) in the GoA and the Somali basin, shall implement as far practicable, the BMP.

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3.3 The use of Best Management Practices must be reviewed and implemented by all the parties involved prior to entering high-risk areas. The implementation of BMP must include, but is not limited to the following:

a) Conduct trainings / drills with the crew;
b) Watch keeping and Enhanced Vigilance;
c) Effective use of monitoring and/or surveillance equipment;
d) Maneuvering practice;
e) Alarm or Alerts systems to demonstrate awareness to any potential attacker;

f) Use of deck lighting and illumination to demonstrate awareness to any potential
f) attacker;
g) Denial of use of ship's tools and equipment, and protection of equipment stored on the upper deck;
h) Control of Access to Bridge, Accommodation and Machinery Spaces and Physical barriers;
i) Other equipment used for self-defense;
j) Safe-Muster Points and Citadels, if determined appropriate.
k) Submit vessel movements and transit plans to MSCHOA and all other organizations in the area before, during and after transiting High Risk Area.

3.4 The Ship-owners, Ship-operators, must make sure the crew is familiarized with all the recommendations given in the BMP5 and by this Administration. They must also communicate with crew relatives before entering High Risk Area in order to make them aware of the transit and must also provide them with the contact on the different organizations which operate in the area so they can communicate with these organizations in case there is a need to do so.

3.5 All the Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSC) listed in the MMC-245, must ensure compliance with Best Management Practices or any official local recommendations and coordinate with the master and crew that all exercises are planned and conducted on board prior to entering the High-Risk Area and these measures must be kept before, during and after the transit, including the areas listed below and the recommendations posted in our web page.

3.6 Statistics have shown that following the BMP, including suggested routing advisories, considerably lessened the incidence of pirate attacks. These measures also help the Naval Forces in the area to protect the vessels in transit.

4. <u>Security Measures:</u>

4.1 The Panama Maritime Authority discourages the carrying and use of firearms and ammunitions on board Panamanian Flagged vessels, for personal protection and/or protection of the ship by the seafarers/crew; following with the principles discussed during the

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MSC.86/26. Under no circumstances, this Administration will allow the use of firearms by seafarers for self-protection on board the Panama flagged vessel.

4.2 All the Panamanian flagged vessels transiting through High-Risk Areas (HRA) have to raise the Security Level according to their Ship Security Plan (SSP).

4.3 The Panamanian Flagged vessels are requested to verify that the SSAS equipment have been correctly set-up and is working properly through a SSAS Test, which must be reported to the PMA contacts, as instructed in the MMC-133.

4.4 For any additional security measures are required (other than BMP), shall be approved by the Panama Maritime Authority.

A. West Africa - Gulf of Guinea (GoG):

4.5 On May, 2021, Panama signed the Declaration of the Gulf of Guinea, on the suppression of piracy, which seeks to provide security to vessels and crew that transit through this area.

4.6 The Panama Maritime Authority encourages all Panamanian flagged vessels transiting the Gulf of Guinea, to increase the security measures on board and to comply with any security regulations recommended, in territorial waters, by the Coastal and Port Authorities and comply with the Best Management Practices (BMP) West Africa including Gulf of Guinea.

4.7 All crews to keep a vigilant lookout using all available means. Panamanian flagged vessels transiting in the Gulf of Guinea must to remain at least 300 NM from the coast at all times, or until the vessel can transit to commence cargo operations at a berth or safe anchorage.

4.8 The use of PMSC is an exclusive decision of the Ship-owner or Operator, and is only recommended outside the territorial waters of the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea. In cases where the use of PMSC is permitted within the territorial waters of a country, the ship-owner or ship operator must follow the national regulations applicable by the country in this regard.

B. Nigerian waters:

4.9 Taking account the high number of incidents in Nigerian waters, the INTERTANKO has released the following issues related to security in Nigerian waters:

a. The Nigerian Navy has started to station floating operating bases in the Delta and, coupled with a new monitoring process supplied by the US Navy, are able to interdict pirates at a very early stage.

b. The Nigerian Naval is only allowing naval guards to operate in the area onboard the vessels. The armed guards are no longer allowed onboard merchant vessels. Any

vessel found with armed guards onboard will be detained and if the guards were from the Navy, they would face sanctions.

c. To provide security in Nigerian waters, the Nigerian Navy has entered into agreements
with private security companies to supply armed escort vessels. These escort vessels are painted in Nigerian Navy colors, have a Nigerian Navy designation and will de crewed by and under the command of the Navy. Civilian contractors would be onboard to assist in maintenance and other general duties.

d. To obtain more information or in case to verify the authenticity of any companies operating under MOUs covering such deployments please contact Mr. Phillip Belcher phillip.belcher@intertanko.com

C. Southern Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb.

4.10 The International Chamber of Shipping, BIMCO and INTERTANKO have published an Interim Guidance on maritime security in the Southern Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb. This guidance has been published in response to the conflict in Yemen and the development of maritime threats beyond the threat of piracy in the region, including missiles, sea mines and water-borne improvised explosive devices.

4.11 The interim guidance is to be read in conjunction with the latest edition of the Best Management Practices BMP, and Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers (*please visit Maritime Security link: https://panamashipregistry.com/maritime-services/maritime-security/ (ANTIPIRACY))* and is aimed at assisting Company Security Officers and Masters in conducting a threat assessment in respect of transits through the Southern Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb.

4.12 The Interim Guidance strongly suggests that ships should register with the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) and United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) to ensure that the military is aware of the ship's presence in the region. Furthermore, use of the Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MTSC) is strongly recommended.

5. Reporting and Emergency Centers:

5.1 This Administration recognizes that an essential part of preventing, deterring and suppressing attacks from pirates, is the prompt reporting to the proper authorities and organizations involved, both during and post incident.

5.2 All Panamanian flagged vessels whether using or not the services of Private Maritime Security Companies should maintain a wide communication with the Administration and to lease with the International Contact Centers according to the BMP in order to counter piracy in the High-Risk Areas of the Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and any other Region of High Risk, as determined by this Administration before, during and after the transit.

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5.3 For this reason, we strongly encourage all Panamanian flagged vessels to complete and submit the "Vessel Position Reporting Form" to UMKTO, and the "Vessel Movement Registration Form" to MSCHOA, both described in the latest edition of the Best Management Practices (BMP) prior to entering the High-Risk Area, including the International Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC).

5.4 We exhorted the captains of the vessels that the below information be placed in areas where there is communication such as the bridge, the engine room, citadel, among others.

IMB
Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC)
Phone: + (60 3) 2078 5763
24 Hrs ANTI PIRACY HELPLINE: + 60 3 2031 0014
(**Manned 24 Hrs Everyday**)
Fax: + 60 3 2078 5769
WhatsApp /Telegram: +60 11 2659 3057 (photograph or video submission encouraged)
General E-mail: imbkl@icc-ccs.org
Piracy E-mail: piracy@icc-ccs.org

Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)
Naval Transmitting Station
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September, 2026 - *Modification in paragraphs 1.10*
April, 2026 – *Modification in paragraphs 1.10 and 1.12.*
January 2026 - *Modification in paragraph 1.10 and 1.11.*
October, 2025 – *Modification in paragraph 1.10.*
April, 2025 *- Modification in paragraph 1.10 and 1.11.*
January, 2025 – *Modification in paragraph 1.10, 1.11 and 5.4.*
October, 2024 *- Modification in paragraph 1.10.*
July, 2024 – *Modification in paragraph 1.10, 1.11 and inclusion of paragraph 1.12.*
February, 2024 – *Modification in paragraph 1.10.*
August, 2023 – *Modification in paragraph 1.10 and change in References.*
April, 2023 – *Changed the circular in the subject, supersedes and compiles the circulars MMC-208, MMC-238, MMC-320, MMC-327, MMC-349, MMC-358 and MMC-363.*

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April, 2022 – *Modification of paragraph 9 and 19 Panama email address.*
February, 2022 *- Modification in paragraph 9.*
October, 2021 *- Modification in paragraph 9.*
July, 2021 – *Modification in paragraph 7 (Indonesia and Philippines) and paragraph 9*
April, 2021*- Modification in paragraph 7 (Africa and Red Sea) and paragraph 9.*
March, 2021 *- Update MDAT-GoG information.*
January, 2021 – *Modification in paragraph 7 (Africa and Red Sea), 9 point 3, 9, 11, 22 and 25.*
November, 2020 – *Change in paragraph 9.*
July, 2020 *- Update HRA*
June, 2020 – *Change of PMA phone numbers.*
April, 2020 – *Update HRA and modification in paragraph #9*
June, 2019 – *Exclution of paragraph #13 and update of paragraph #16*
May, 2019 – *Updated HRA and Inclusion of new paragraph.*
November 2018- *Updated HRA, modification in paragraph 12, inclusion of paragraph 16*
August 2018 – *New Contacts*
May 2017 – *Update of paragraph #8*
January 2017 – *Inclusion of new paragraph #8 and inclusion of information of contact of MDAT-GoG.*
December 2016 – *Update of the subject, addition of paragraph #13 and correction of phone number in Panama contact point.*
May, 2016 – *Correction in Africa and Red Sea places.*
December, 2015- *Inclusion of new paragraphs*
August, 2014 – *changes all throughout the circular.*
April, 2012 – *Update of emails*
February, 2012 – *inclusion of new paragraph (point 2)*
September, 2011

Inquiries concerning the subject of this Merchant Marine Circular or any other request should be forward to:

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