

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) Guidance for Shipping Navigating the Southern Red Sea (SRS)

Overview

1. Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN has now commenced in the SRS. This is a presence and deterrence mission in support of the Freedom of Navigation, that will be conducted by an international Naval force under CMF, commanded by Combined Task Force 153. Vessels transiting in the SRS will note a significant increase in the number of coalition warships and aircraft operating in the area as part of this operation. A review of BMP5 and the extant MSTC guidance for southern Red Sea will be conducted with industry.

2. Definition of the Area of Interest:

SRS – The portion of the Red Sea south of 20' N

Threat Assessment

3. **Types.** Since 19 November, the Houthis have attacked or seized 13 merchant vessels, employing a variety of attack methods including, Ballistic and Cruise Missiles, One-way-attack Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (OWA UAVs) and, on one occasion, seizure of a vessel using a Helicopter. The Houthi have also previously demonstrated the capability and intent to use drone boats (Uncrewed Surface Vessels -- USVs) with mixed success.

4. **Locality.** Although the Houthis have made one successful attempt to fire missiles into the Gulf of Aden, towards the MV CENTRAL PARK when she was dead in the water following a piracy attack on 26 Nov 23, the predominate area of Houthi malign operations is the Southern Red Sea, concentrated in the vicinity of Al Hudaydah.

5. **Target Selection.** Since mid-November, the Houthis have steadily expanded their definition of viable targets. Specific targets are unclear, although we will endeavour to provide warning, via company security organisations, should we become aware of a merchant vessel being targeted, by name.

6. **Targeting.** The Houthis have so far demonstrated a limited capability to successfully attack vessels in the hours of darkness, although they do appear to be increasing in confidence with regards to flying their reconnaissance drones at night. Their targeting strategy and links to specific nations are difficult to confirm, and inconsistent.

On approach to the Southern Red Sea

7. **Reporting measures and information flow.**

The UKMTO Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) is identified on maritime security charts such as UKHO Q6099. Ships entering and operating within the VRA are encouraged to register with the UKMTO. Registration establishes direct contact between the reporting ship and UKMTO. UKMTO acts as the primary point of contact for merchant ships and their CSOs, providing liaison with military forces in the region. UKMTO administers the Voluntary

Reporting Scheme, under which merchant ships are encouraged to send regular reports. These include:

- (1) Initial report (upon entering the VRA).
- (2) Daily reports (update on ship's position, course and speed). The frequency of these may be increased by ships in the SRS especially if AIS 'dark'.
- (3) Final reports (upon departure from VRA or arrival in port).
- (4) Reports of suspicious/irregular activity (when necessary).

UKMTO can communicate with ships and CSOs directly, to disseminate Warnings and Advisories of incidents within the region:

- (1) Warnings: Simple messages describing that an incident has occurred in a Lat/Long and with a time. This is normally accompanied by direct UKMTO-to-ship telephone calls to all ships within a nominated radius of the incident to give ships the earliest possible alert.
- (2) Advisories: This is the next tier of alerts to ships, normally of sightings/reports that are relevant within the region.

UKMTO offers regular information to ships on its website www.ukmto.org and in a weekly report summarising the previous week's activity. UKMTO is also able to offer Masters and CSOs the opportunity to conduct drills and exercises to support their passage planning in the region. Companies that are interested can contact UKMTO +44(0)2392 222060 or watchkeepers@ukmto.org.

8. Consideration of Day or Night transit. Timings and navigation of SRS transit remain the vessel Master's responsibility. Based on analysis of Houthi activity, it appears that UAVs are generally active during daylight hours. Transiting through the area to the west of Al Hudaydah during the hours of darkness may reduce the threat from UAV attack or frustrate efforts to target MV with missile systems. Although the detection of water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIED) at night is difficult, it is also difficult for the Houthis to effectively direct them towards moving targets without visually identifying them.

9. Use of AIS. Adherence to IMO AIS guidance / regulations remains the responsibility of the Ship Manger and Master. Ships with AIS switched on and off have been attacked. Switching off AIS makes it marginally more difficult to track or target a ship but may also hinder the ability of the military to provide support or direct contact.

Navigating in the Southern Red Sea

10. Actions in the Event of an Attack. If contacted on VHF by "Yemeni Navy" and instructed to alter course to Al Hudaydah or another location on the NW coast of Yemen:

- a. Ignore the VHF call and continue on passage if safe to do so.
- b. Call for coalition warship on VHF Channel 16, inform them of your location, situation, state your intentions and seek advice.
- c. Contact UKMTO, own Company Security Officer and the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command maritime operations centre at +973 1785 3879.