



14th December 2016

To: Maritime Security Contacts

DfT Ref: 2016/23

Dear Colleague,

UPDATE ON THE SECURITY SITUATION IN YEMENI TERRITORIAL WATERS AND THE BAB-AL-MANDEB STRAIT

The purpose of this Security Notification is to provide you with an update following recent security incidents in Yemeni Territorial Waters and in the vicinity of the Bab-al-Mandeb Strait.

UAE High Speed Vessel (HSV) SWIFT-1 and US Navy Incidents

In the early hours of the morning of 1 October 2016 the UAE HSV SWIFT-1 was attacked in the vicinity of the Bab-al-Mandeb strait whilst transiting the southern Red Sea. Following Houthi claims of having attacked a UAE warship with a missile, the Emirates confirmed that an attack by Houthi forces had targeted the HSV SWIFT-1.

The attack caused significant damage to the SWIFT-1, likely resulting in a total loss of operational capability and indicates that Houthi forces have established the ability to target shipping in the southern Red Sea. It is unclear as to the type of weaponry used in the attack but it may have included a shore-launched anti-ship cruise missile, small boat fired munitions (such as heavy machine guns or rocket-propelled grenades), shore-launched unguided rockets, or a combination of all these methods. If the SWIFT-1 was targeted with an anti-ship missile it is possible that Houthi forces have gained access to existing stocks of former Yemeni naval weaponry, potentially including 42km range C801 and 95km range STYX anti-ship cruise missiles. It is possible that these weapons could be deployed quickly and without warning and the range of these systems could allow Houthi forces to target shipping in the Bab-al-Mandeb strait and a significant portion of the southern Red Sea.

You will also be aware of the recent security incidents in the region involving the US Navy destroyers USS Mason and USS Ponce which have been covered extensively in the media. We are unable to comment further on these incidents.

Although Houthi forces are likely to prioritise targeting Saudi-led coalition naval assets, the potential for misidentification and targeting errors, or the suspicion that commercial vessels are supporting Saudi-led coalition forces, raises the risk of collateral damage to neutral shipping. With limited defence against sophisticated anti-ship weapons, commercial shipping is particularly vulnerable to this type of attack. Future attacks against vessels in the region by Houthi forces cannot be ruled out. Future offensives by Government of Yemen forces in coastal areas are likely and this will probably result in

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escalated clashes along the coast, heightening the risk to shipping, particularly if Houthi forces perceive any associated maritime threat.

Galicia Spirit Incident

On the 25 October 2016, the Spanish flagged Liquefied Natural Gas carrier GALICIA SPIRIT was attacked by up to 4 small boats whilst transiting the coast of Yemen. It is unclear at this time the exact number of small boats involved in the attack.

The attack took place just to the south of the Bab al Mandeb traffic separation scheme whilst the vessel was transiting northbound. The attack commenced with small arms fire and open source reports indicate that a rocket-propelled grenade was possibly fired. The vessel sustained minor damage, possibly including damage from an explosion in its vicinity, none of the crew sustained injuries.

There have recently been piracy attempts on merchant vessels transiting the area, and the use of small arms and rocket-propelled grenades corresponds with known piracy methodology. In addition, there are extensive smuggling and maritime facilitation routes in the area, some of which are possibly moving weapons and explosives.

There are groups operating in Yemen with known maritime attack intent, namely al'Qaida in the Arabian Peninsular (AQAP). AQAP published open source articles in 2014 and 2016 calling for attacks on merchant vessels. There have been no claims by any extremist organisations for the attack on the GALICIA SPIRIT.

It remains unclear at this time who was responsible for the attack on the GALICIA SPIRIT. However, the incident correlates closely with pirate attack methodology.

ISPS Code Security Levels in the region

The ISPS Code Security Levels for Yemeni TTW and for the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait remain at **SL2**. All ships registered in the United Kingdom, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories' are therefore required to apply and maintain the extra security measures required at SL2 as set out in your Ship Security Plan. In addition to the SL2 measures in your ship security plan you should consider the following: maintain the farthest possible distance from the Yemen coast; transit the Bab al Mandeb straits during daylight hours; use the western TSS; increase speed; and maintain vigilance and report any unusual activity to UKMTO.

The recent security incidents demonstrate the volatile security situation in the region. We are monitoring the situation closely and, should the situation deteriorate further, will consider increasing our ISPS Code Security levels and/or any additional security advice.

We also recommend that you regularly refer to FCO travel advice for the region.

Handling

You may pass a copy of this security notification to those within your company with a **need to know**.

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Enquiries

If you require any further information on this security notification please email the MSRD email account – MARITIMESECURITY@dft.gsi.gov.uk If your query is urgent outside normal working hours i.e. between 17:30hrs – 09:00hrs Monday to Friday and 17:30hrs Friday to 09:00hrs Monday (and Bank Holidays), then please phone the DfT Duty Office on +44 (0)207 944 5999 and ask for a message to be relayed directly to the DfT Maritime Security On-Call officer.

Yours sincerely,

**Maritime Security and Resilience Division
Department for Transport**