WEEKLY THREAT ADVISORY NO. 682

(24 - 30 Oct 2024)

Summary of Threat Activities and Conclusion

1. Pirate and maritime crime activity in East Africa and the Indian Ocean HRA saw an increase in the number of attacks in the HRA. For the first time, we may be seeing evidence of a joint pirate action group and the Iranian-back Houthis against commercial shipping. There were onw report of attacks arising from political conflicts or piracy-related activities during the reporting period.

2. RED SEA. On 28 Oct, three attacks targeted a Libera-flagged bulk carrier approximately 25 nm south of Mokha, Yemen.

3. Based on the geographical development, the forecast is that the piracy situation will get worse as the conflict between Israel, the Hamas, the Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iran and other Arab factions intensifies. The attacks by the US and UK against Houthis targets in Yemen will only deepen and magnify the problems. In the meantime, pirate and criminal syndicates operating in Somalia will exploit the turmoil and chaos to conduct opportunistic attacks against defenceless commercial shipping.

4. There have been some calls by some ignorant commercial bodies that do not understand the threat deeply and well enough to call for the removal of AST onboard commercial vessels due to concerns that the onboard AST might cause an incident with approaching naval craft. While the concerns are reasonable, the proposed solution to remove the onboard AST is highly unprofessional and dangerous. Implementing it would make the commercial vessels concerned 'sitting ducks' in the face of attacks by Somali pirates who take advantage of the chaos and distractions caused by the conflict. Some intelligence sources have established that some pirate action groups are working in cahoot with the Houthis. Therefore, we should see the increased attacks by Somali pirates linked with the Houthis activities in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. For this reason, UMS HQ instructed how UMS Maritime Marshals will respond and behave when confronted with this situation.

5. All vessels in the vicinity are, therefore, to exercise caution and report any suspicious activity to UKMTO.

6. In the latest quarterly report by UKMTO, it was reported that there has been an increased incidence of suspicious sightings compared to a year ago before the lifting off of the HRA by commercial shipping bodies. Intelligence agencies have unanimously agreed that there would be attempts by pirates' syndicates to exploit hopefully a relaxed attitude by the shipping community, and today we are seeing the manifestation of the situation happening. In other words, the possibility of a successful hijack can only be prevented if vessels have on-board armed security teams (AST) to deter and if necessary, prevent any attack and boarding by pirates.

7. The main message of the Quarterly Reporting by UKMTO is that piracy has been suppressed but not eradicated. So long as the socio-politico-economic problems of Somalia and Yemen are unresolved, the threat of piracy against commercial shipping will remain.

8. All Masters and UMS Maritime are advised to remain vigilant. The increased piracy-related activities in the waters of the Indian Ocean and East Africa/Red Sea have, in fact, been anticipated by intelligence agencies by the removal of the HRA by world commercial bodies but not by the War Committee, which assessed that the present situation has inadvertently increased the threat level.

9. UKMTO and other intelligence agencies have noticed increased activities by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). This recent development brings a new equation and range of challenges to the safety of commercial vessels transiting in waters that are prone to pirates' attacks in the Northern Indian Ocean and Southern Red Sae and maritime security operations. UMS HQ repeats the article on the subject in paragraph 31 given its importance in understanding the capabilities of UAV in maritime security operations (in particular paragraph 31.6) for a detailed exposition.

10. The hijacks of product tanker MONJASA Reformer and Success tanker in West Africa waters remind all stakeholders that we cannot be complacent and take security nonchalantly. A successful hijack is an incident waiting to happen if ship owners, Masters and onboard Maritime Marshals are not serious about security, thus jeopardising their crew members' lives and their family interests.

A vessel transiting in waters that can possibly be attacked by pirates without armed security protection has a high risk of being hijacked. Therefore, an armed security team cannot be over-emphasised for the safety of the crew members on board.

11. **2024-001-Southern Red Sea, Bab el Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Aden, Northwestern Indian Ocean, Somali Basin, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Strait of Hormuz, and Persian Gulf-Threats to Commercial Vessels**

11.1.   This advisory replaces and cancels U.S. Maritime Advisory 2023-011 and U.S. Maritime Alert 2024-001B

11.2.   Issue: Regional conflict, military activity, and piracy pose significant threats to commercial vessels operating in the above listed geographic areas as evidenced by recent Houthi attacks and Somali piracy activity. The U.S. government is continually assessing the maritime security situation in the region to safeguard freedom of navigation, ensure the free flow of commerce, and protect U.S. vessels, personnel, and interests. The recent standup of Operation Prosperity Guardian is one of many examples of U.S. and international cooperative maritime security operations within this region. The following are currently deemed to be the most pressing threats to U.S.-flagged and U.S.-affiliated commercial vessels throughout this region.

11.3.   **Houthi Hostile Actions**: Commercial vessels transiting the Southern Red Sea, Bab el Mandeb Strait, and Gulf of Aden are at an elevated risk of hostile actions from the Houthis. Hostile actions include one-way Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) attacks; ballistic and cruise missile attacks; small arms fire from small boats; explosive boat attacks; and illegal boardings, detentions, and/or seizures. There have been at least 30 separate Houthi attacks on commercial vessels and one Houthi seizure of a commercial vessel in these areas, affecting over 55 nations since November 19, 2023. In November 2023, the Houthis conducted a helicopter-borne landing and seizure of a Bahamas-flagged commercial vessel in the Southern Red Sea. Entities claiming to be Yemeni authorities have also attempted to direct commercial vessels in the Southern Red Sea to divert to Yemen. These threats pose both direct and collateral risks to U.S.-flagged

and U.S.-affiliated commercial vessels transiting in international shipping lanes, or otherwise operating in these areas.

11.3.1. U.S.-flagged commercial vessels operating in these areas are advised to remain as far as possible from Yemen's territorial sea without compromising navigational safety. Crewmembers should be especially vigilant when at anchor, operating in restricted maneuvering conditions, or proceeding at slow speeds.

11.3.2. Coordinate voyage planning with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) and consider their recommendations and guidance whenever possible. NAVCENT NCAGS stands a 24-hour watch and has the latest information on the current maritime security threats and the operational environment in this region.

11.3.3. The route taken through these areas, and timing of the transit, remains at the discretion of individual companies and vessel Masters. Transiting these areas during hours of darkness may frustrate efforts to target vessels.

11.3.4. Adherence to all U.S. and international requirements and guidance regarding operation of AIS remains the responsibility of individual companies and vessel Masters. Ships operating with AIS switched on and off have both been the object of Houthi attacks. Switching AIS off makes it marginally more difficult to track or target a ship but may also hinder the ability of coalition forces to provide support.

11.3.5. U.S.-flagged commercial vessels are advised to provide hourly positional email updates to the NAVCENT NCAGS detachment when transiting these areas.

11.3.6. Maritime operators are advised to alert their crews to the fact that all electronics signals from their vessels pose a risk to maritime operations.

11.3.7.   A missile strike on a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker in the Gulf of Aden on January 26, 2024 resulted in a significant onboard fire. U.S.-flagged commercial vessels carrying flammable, explosive, or otherwise hazardous cargoes are strongly advised to reconsider transit through these areas. However, if planning voyages through these areas, vessels should take all prudent safety precautions, including thoroughly preparing for emergency responses, and considering carriage of additional safety and damage control preparedness supplies and equipment, such as those needed to extinguish fires.

11.3.8.   If hailed on VHF by the Houthis, or entities claiming to be Yemeni authorities, and instructed to alter course to Al Hudaydah or another location on the northwest coast of Yemen, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels should ignore the VHF call and continue their passage if safe to do so.

11.3.9.   If the Houthis seek to board U.S.-flagged commercial vessels in these areas, 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 the Law of the Sea Convention.

11.3.10. When combined with evasive maneuvering, vessels transiting these areas with armed security details onboard have successfully deterred boarding by individuals in approaching small craft. The decision whether to embark a contracted armed security detail and assessment of associated risks is the responsibility of individual companies and vessel Masters, who are responsible for establishing use of force guidance and pre-planned responses for vessels carrying contracted armed security details.

11.3.11. If Houthis board a U.S.-flagged commercial vessel without a contracted armed security detail onboard, the crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

11.3.12. When operating in these waters, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels should maintain a vigilant lookout at all times. If U.S.-flagged commercial vessels observe or hear a suspected UAV or missile or observe a small boat approaching with apparent hostile intent, crewmembers not needed for the safe navigation and operation of the vessel should be relocated to a safe space until the threat has passed. Additional precautions should be taken to ensure small boats are kept at a safe distance whenever possible.

11.3.13. In addition to U.S. Maritime Alerts and this Advisory, interim industry transit advice for the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has been established by Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). CMF guidance messages are available on the Maritime Global Security website at maritimeglobalsecurity.org/geography/goa-etc/.

11.4. **Iranian Illegal Boarding/Detention/Seizure**: Commercial vessels transiting the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea are at risk of being illegally boarded and detained or seized by Iranian forces. Recent incidents include the April 2023 Iranian seizure of a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Oman, the May 2023 Iranian seizure of a Panama-flagged vessel in the Strait of Hormuz, and the January 2024 Iranian seizure of a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel in the Arabian Sea. Iranian forces attempted to seize one Marshall Islands-flagged vessel and one Bahamas-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Oman during July 2023, but were prevented from doing so by U.S. Naval Forces. Iranian forces have utilized small boats and helicopters during boarding operations and have attempted to force commercial vessels into Iranian territorial water

11.4.1. If hailed by Iranian forces, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels should provide vessel name and flag state and affirm that they are proceeding in accordance with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention.

11.4.2. If Iranian forces seek to board a U.S.-flagged commercial 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 the Law of the Sea Convention.

11.4.3.   If Iranian forces board a U.S.-flagged commercial vessel, the crew should not forcibly resist the boarding party. Refraining from forcible resistance does not imply consent or agreement to that boarding.

11.4.4.   It is recommended that vessels in the Persian Gulf remain as far as possible from Iran's territorial sea without compromising navigational safety. When transiting eastbound in the Strait of Hormuz, it is recommended that vessels transit close to Oman's territorial sea.

11.4.5.   Industry transit advice for the Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman was established on 9 November 2023, and can be found on the Maritime Global Security website at maritimeglobalsecurity.org/geography/goa-etc/.

11.5.   **Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships**: Recent cases of piracy pose a threat to commercial vessels operating in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, and Somali Basin, and Northwestern Indian Ocean. Since November 2023, there have been three boarding/hijacking incidents, representing the first such attacks against commercial shipping in the region since March 2017. Pirates may utilize captured fishing vessels as motherships to target vessels operating hundreds of miles from the coast of Somalia. In November 2023, one Liberian-flagged vessel was boarded in the Gulf of Aden; in December 2023, one Malta-flagged vessel was hijacked in the Arabian Sea; and in January 2024, one Liberia-flagged bulk carrier was boarded in the Indian Ocean. Specific case details are available via the Office of Naval Intelligence's weekly "Worldwide Threat to Shipping" product at https://www.oni.navy.mil/ONI-Reports/Shipping-Threat-Reports/Worldwide-Threat-to-Shipping/.

11.5.1.   The Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea (BMP5), and Maritime Global Security website at: https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org should be consulted prior to operating in the above listed geographic waters.

11.5.2.   Transit by yachts and privately owned sailing vessels through the region is hazardous and may result in capture. The U.S. Government advises against all operation of yachts and pleasure craft in these areas. American citizens abroad should inform the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate of their plans to transit the area and/or update their information via the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at: https://step.state.gov/step/. Yachting guidance can be found   at: https://on-shore.mschoa.org/reference-documents/advice-for-sailing-vessels.

11.5.3.   **UAVs**: Outside of the Southern Red Sea, Bab el Mandeb Strait, and Gulf of Aden, UAV attacks also pose a threat to commercial vessels in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea. The most recent attacks were on a Malta-flagged vessel in the Arabian Sea in November 2023, and on a Liberian-flagged vessel in the Arabian Sea in December 2023.

- If U.S.-flagged commercial vessels observe or hear a suspected UAV, crewmembers not needed for the safe navigation and operation of the vessel should be relocated to a safe space on the vessel until the threat has passed.

11.6.   **Limpet Mines**: Limpet mines have been used to damage commercial vessels on multiple occasions in recent years and are primarily a threat to commercial 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.

11.6.1.   When operating in these waters, U.S.-flagged commercial 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.

11.6.2.   If a mine has been, or was attempted to have been, attached to a vessel, crewmembers not needed for the safe navigation and operation of the vessel should be relocated to a safe space on the vessel until the threat has passed.

11.6.3.   Guidance: U.S.-flagged commercial vessels operating in these waters are advised to exercise caution, review security measures, and monitor VHF Channel 16. To afford best protection in the region, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels are also advised to in the event of any attack, incident, or suspicious activity, immediately:

15.6.3.1. Activate the Ship Security Alert System

15.6.3.2. Contact the U.S. Fifth Fleet Battle Watch

15.6.3.3. Contact UKMTO

15.6.3.4. Simultaneously register with both the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Office (UKMTO) and the IMSC watch 24 hours prior to entering the Indian Ocean Voluntary Reporting Area by sending UKMTO and IMSC, via a single e-mail, the Initial Report from Annex D of (BMP5). Include the estimated times of arrival at the Suez Canal, Bab el Mandeb Strait (BAM), and Strait of Hormuz (SoH) in line 10 of the report and add 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.

15.6.3.5. Vessels operating in this area are advised to include both NAVCENT NCAGS and the IMSC watch on all updates or incident report emails. By including both as addressees on each email, awareness will be enhanced without creating an additional reporting burden.

15.6.3.6. Conduct a pre-voyage risk assessment and incorporate appropriate protective measures into vessel security plans.

15.6.3.7.   The   Maritime   Global   Security   website at https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/ offers industry issued best practices and guidance to mariners by geographic region and

provides contact and subscription information for regional maritime security reporting centers, particularly in high risk-areas.

15.6.3.8. Answer all VHF calls from coalition navies. Vessels should be aware that U.S. and other coalition naval forces may conduct maritime awareness calls, queries, and approaches to ensure the safety of vessels transiting these listed waters.

15.6.3.9. Due to the risks of piracy, kidnapping, hijacking, and robbery while operating within U.S. Coast Guard designated High Risk Waters, U.S.-flagged commercial vessels are required to comply with the Guidelines for U.S. Vessels Operating in High-Risk Waters contained in U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security Directive 104-6 (Rev 8) and comply with their Coast Guard approved Vessel Security Plan annex on counter piracy. The U.S. Coast Guard Office of Commercial Vessel Compliance announced in the Federal Register in August 2021 the availability of Revision 8 to Maritime Security (MARSEC) Directive 104–6. U.S. vessel owners and operators who needed to act under previous versions of MARSEC Directive 104–6 should immediately contact their local Coast Guard Captain of the Port or District Commander for a copy of Revision 8.

15.6.3.10. Per 33 CFR 101.305, report all suspicious activities, breaches of security, and transportation security incident events involving U.S. vessels or persons to the U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center. Additional U.S. Coast Guard port specific requirements may be found in Port Security Advisory 1-22 at https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO%20Documents/InternationalPortSecurity/Port%20Security%20Advisory/PSA%20%201-22%20Remove%20Cote%20d'Ivoire.pdf?ver=6DzYOEsWAJQVh7ld4c0ycQ%3d%3d.

15.7. Contact Information:

a) Fifth Fleet Battle Watch: cusnc.bwc@me.navy.mil or + 973-1785-3879.

b) NAVCENT NCAGS:
+973-1785-0033 (Primary/Watch Desk), +973-3940-4523 (Alternate), or m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil.

c) IMSC: m-ba-imsc-bwc@us.navy.mil or +973-1785-8412/8192/8193. IMSC organizational information is available at https://www.imscsentinel.com/.

d) UKMTO: watchkeepers@ukmto.org or +44 (0) 2392 222060. UKMTO advisories and warnings are available at https://www.ukmto.org/.

e) U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center: +1-800-424-8802.

f) USCG NAVCEN: www.navcen.uscg.gov/contact/gps-problem-report or +1-703-313-5900.

12. Maritime Advisory 2022-007-Gulf of Guinea-Piracy/Armed Robbery/Kidnapping for Ransom.

12.1.   Issued on 6 July 2022. This revised advisory cancels U.S. Maritime Advisory 2022-001. Issue: Piracy/Armed Robbery/Kidnapping for Ransom (KFR) serves as a significant threat to U.S.-flagged vessels transiting or operating in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) as well as U.S. mariners onboard a vessel or transiting to or from a vessel in the GoG. Guidance: Mariners transiting this area should visit the Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade-Gulf of Guinea MDAT-GoG) website at https://gog-mdat.org/home and the NATO Shipping Centre website at https://shipping.nato.int/nsc/operations/global-maritime-risk/west-africa-gulf-of-guinea for additional information on threats and specific recommendations for their vessels.

12.2.   Additionally, the "Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security Off the Coast of West Africa including the Gulf of Guinea" (available under the Geography – Gulf of Guinea pull-down menu at https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/) provides additional guidance and resources for operating in this area. For any maritime industry questions about this advisory, contact GMCC@uscg.mil. This Advisory will automatically expire on 2 January 2023

13. U.S. Maritime Advisory 2023-001-Gulf of Guinea-Piracy /Armed Robbery/ Kidnapping for Ransom Issued on 3 January 2023. This revised advisory cancels U.S. Maritime Advisory 2022-007. Issue: Piracy/Armed Robbery at Sea/Kidnapping for Ransom (KFR) serve as a significant threat to U.S.-flagged vessels transiting or operating in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) as we as U.S. mariners onboard a vessel or transiting to or from a vessel in the GoG.

Guidance: Mariners transiting this area should visit the maritime Domain Awareness for Trade-Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG) website at https://gog-mdat.org/home and the NATO Shipping Centre website at https://shipping.nato.int/ncs/operations/global-maritime-risk/west-africa-gulf-of-guinea for additional information on threats and specific recommendations for their vessels. Additionally, the "Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security Off the Coast of West Africa including the Gulf of Guinea" (available under the Geography – Gulf of Guinea pull-down menu at https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/)provides additional guidance and resources for operating in this area. For any maritime industry questions about this advisory, contact GMCC@uscg.mil. This Advisory will automatically expire on 2 July 2023.

14. Pirate and maritime crime activities in West African waters are at a low level. There was one report of piracy or crime at sea during this period.

15. In other parts of the world, there were two reports of piracy or crime at sea during the reported period.

16. INDONESIA: On 26 October, one pepertrator attempted to board a Singapore-flaggead buld carrier while underway in the eastbound lane of the Singapore Straits Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS).

17. INDONESIA: On 25 October, four armed robbers boarded a bulk carrier while underway in the Singapore Straits.

18. The navies of China, Japan, India, Russia, Korea and Iran continue to provide escort naval services to their flag vessels due to the continued presence and danger posed by Somalia-based piracy threats. These efforts, combined with the increased deployment of armed maritime marshals on board commercial shipping, have significantly reduced the success of Somalia-based piracy in the HRA in hijacking commercial vessels of late but not the presence of pirate groups operating in the HRA. International Intelligence Agencies' assessment is that the existing presence of Somali-based piracy threats can easily be translated to successful hijacks as were experienced in 2009/2010/2011 should these preventive measures be eased off by all stakeholders.

Instructions and Piracy Related News

19. Warning for Red Sea, Bab el-Mandab Straits and Gulf of Aden

19.1.   There have been numerous attacks and suspicious approaches reported near the southern entrance to the Bab el Mandeb Strait during the reporting period. Levels of pirate activity in the Indian Ocean remain elevated, with five hijacks reported since March 2017 (MT ARIS 13, CASAYR II NO.30, AL KAUSAR, SALAMA 1 and OS 35). The threat of further attacks and hijacking remains high. All Masters are advised to exercise heightened vigilance within the High Risk Area (HRA), stringently implement BMP4 and liaise closely with embarked armed security teams (AST) and regional authorities. If not making calls in Yemen, it's recommended by UKMTO that vessels should use the IRTC and western lane of the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) in the Bab el Mandeb / southern Red Sea region, to provide a greater lee from Yemen. Further such incidents and hijackings are likely to take place, and all vessels transiting this region are advised to remain vigilant. While international naval patrols and anti-piracy measures on-board commercial vessels have practically eradicated Somali piracy since its peak in early 2011, poverty coupled with other factors that motivate pirates remain and some vessels transiting this region may have increasingly become complacent in the belief that the piracy threat had diminished.

19.2.   While the international community has over the past several years taken significant steps in order to improve security in the region, including boosting naval forces in the area and requiring ships to take protection measures, including reporting in and out of high risk areas, sailing at top speed as far away as possible from the Somali coast and travelling with armed escorts on-board, the threat of an attack and hijacking remained as the real root of the cause on the ground in Somalia has never been properly addressed. After five years without a successful attack, analysts say that complacency may have set n and this week's successful hijacking is likely to result in potential copycat attacks, as pirate action groups head-out in a bid to successfully hijack a commercial vessel. Masters are advised to remain vigilant at all times inside the HRA and are advised to adhere to strict guidance and protective measures as set down in BMP5. Sailing yachts should avoid transiting the HRA. Past activity has demonstrated that pirates will attack both large and small yachts transiting this region. While successful attacks and hijackings of merchant vessels have significantly

decreased over the past two years, the possibility of attacks and the successful hijacking of sailing vessels continue to remain high. This is due to the reduction of revenue sources from pirated merchant vessels and the fact that sailing yachts are vulnerable and easier targets. PAG's continue to conduct "soft approaches" on merchant ships transiting the area. Skiffs have approached vessels in order to probe the reaction of the crewmembers and any possible Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) on-board. If the pirate approach does not elicit a resnse, the pirates will likely proceed with an attack, in which additional skiffs may participate. Vessels transiting the greater Gulf of Aden region should operate under a heightened state of alert. This is due to increasing tensions in the region, which in turn can escalate the potential for direct or collateral damage to vessels transiting the region. These threats may come from a number of different sources such as missiles, projectiles, or waterborne improvised explosive devices. Houthi rebels have claimed responsibility for the 1 October 2016 attack on a UAE vessel.

19.3.   UMS HQ advises all vessels transiting this region to report any hostile activities immediately. Somali pirates have recently shown an ability to mount hijacking expeditions far out into the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, and inshore traffic might be an easier target. EUNAVFOR spokesperson Commander Jacqui Sherriff said that the recent series of attacks against commercial shipping again highlights the need for vigilance and adherence to self-protection measures (by the deployment of on-board AST) and compliance to Best Management Practices (BMP) 5. It is crucial that Somali pirates are denied opportunities to attack vessels so that there will no chance of a successful hijack. One successful hijack is one hijack too many because it will encourage and motivate more Somalis to taking up piracy!

19.4.   CMF and EUNAVFOR and intelligence agencies have warned of increased complacency amongst stakeholders which may give rise to opportunities for piracy action groups and organizations funding piracy activities to revive the threat.

20. Actions to be Taken when a Vessel with On-Board UMS Maritime Marshals is Approached by a Naval Craft.

20.1.   On 16 Dec 23, in the face of increased attacks from pirate action groups and approaches from naval craft, UMS HQ issued the orders on actions to

be taken when a naval craft approaches a vessel. These orders were issued to all Team Leaders, and they were further personally briefed by the UMS Operation Officer because of the importance of the subject and the requirement that these orders be fully understood and complied with.

20.2.   UMS Maritime Marshals onboard a vessel are to protect the vessel and crew members from pirate action groups. They are equipped with weapons and equipment to handle the threat posed by pirate action groups and **ARE NOT MEANT TO DETER NOR OPPOSE ANY NAVAL CRAFT THAT MAY APPROACH THE VESSEL FOR WHATEVER PURPOSES. The Orders is repeated in the paragraphs below.**

20.3.   If a naval craft approaches our vessel, the following actions will be taken.

20.3.1.   The Team Leader is to alert and discuss the approach of the naval craft with the Master.

20.3.2.   The Master must notify the vessel's owner/HQ of the situation.

20.3.3.   The team Leader will notify the UMS Operations Officer/UMS HQ.

20.4.   If the naval craft asks the vessel to stop, the Master will take the appropriate action, as per his discussion with his HQ.

20.4.1.   Based on the decision to stop, the Team Leader will immediately give orders to his Maritime Marshal(s) to unload and clear their weapons.

20.4.2.   **NO WEAPON WILL BE LOADED.**

20.4.3.   **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL ANY MEMBER OF THE MARITIME MARSHAL TEAM SHOW HIS WEAPON TO DETER THE NAVAL CRAFT, FIRE WARNING SHOTS, OR FIRE ANY SHOT AT THE APPROACHING NAVAL VESSEL. THE TEAM LEADER IS TO ENSURE THIS IS CLEARLY BRIEFED AND UNDERSTOOD TO HIS TEAM MEMBERS. THERE MUST BE NO DEVIATION FROM THIS ORDER.**

20.5.   When the vessel stops as ordered and naval personnel come on board, UMS Maritime Marshals will take the following actions:

20.5.1.   All Maritime Marshals should keep low on the deck and cover their head with both hands, with their hands visible. They will all be together, lined up side by side.

20.5.2. On no account should any Maritime Marshal make any movement that could be misinterpreted as hostile actions. Their individual weapon should be placed on deck next to the Maritime Marshal, and at no time should any Maritime Marshal handle his weapon.

20.5.3. Do not take any videos or photographs.

20.5.4. All Maritime Marshals should be ready to be questioned on their identity and roles. They will answer the questions truthfully and cooperate fully with the naval personnel on board.

20.5.5. The Team Leader will be the spokesperson of the Maritime Marshal Team, working closely with the Master.

20.6. Remember to be cooperative and calm. There is no need to be unduly concerned as the vessel and crew members, including the Maritime Marshal Team, have not committed any wrongdoing.

20.7. After the naval personnel depart and the vessel resumes its mission, the Team Leader reconstitutes the Team to continue the mission.

20.8. The Team Leader will report the matter to UMS HQ accordingly

21. Piracy in the Indian Ocean HRA has NOT Been Eradicated

21.1. UMS HQ has always maintained this position not to give stakeholders a sense of false security. The current development of piracy raging its ugly head again in the waters off Somalia and in the Indian Ocean is testimony to the accuracy of our analysis.

21.2. The decision by world shipping bodies such as BIMCO and the like has given the wrong perception that piracy in the Indian Ocean HRA has been eradicated. **Nothing can be further from the truth!**

21.3. Piracy threats have been reduced due to the strong presence and sustained effort by naval forces, namely EUNAVFOR and the US-led Combined Military Force (CMF) and the deployment of armed security teams (AST) onboard commercial vessels. The deployment of ASTs onboard commercial vessels since the peak of the piracy threat in 2008 has proven effective, as no vessel with an AST has ever been hijacked.

21.4. Naval and intelligence agencies think pirate syndicates lie low due to the strong deterrence and are involved in other forms of criminal activities, such as drug smuggling. These pirate and criminal syndicates have not been

wiped out, and given the correct circumstances and environment, they can get their acts together quickly.

21.5. The pirate syndicates are privy to the announcement of the lifting of the HRA. They could view the situation in 2023 as a golden opportunity to resume their proven lucrative 'business'. The current political situation in the Middle East is a significant distraction to the naval forces that will not focus their attention and presence on the more critical military problems with the Iranian-backed Houthis.

21.6. Given Somalia's poor socio-economic situation, thousands of Somalians will be more than happy to take up arms to hunt and hijack commercial vessels again. The lack of local law enforcement to prevent piracy activities will make this revival a strong possibility. Therefore, the comeback scenario cannot be discounted and is a likely possibility.

21.7. Therefore, from a risk assessment point of view, the risk level in 2024, if deterrence measures are removed, the risk of piracy in 2024 will be objectively higher than in the last 5-6 years.

21.8. **Low piracy threat does not mean NO PIRACY THREAT!**

22. Present Tactics Employed by the Houthis and What We Should Do

22.1. UMS HQ recently studied the profile of attacks against commercial vessels and made the following observations.

22.2. They comprised attacks on commercial vessels by 2-3 skiffs with about 5-9 armed personnel on board (POB). Some vessels have ladders to suggest their intention to board the vessels.

22.3. They approached the commercial vessels, exchanged fires, and then kept a stand-off distance of about 1-2nm.

22.4. In some cases, one or more unmanned surface vessels (USVs) would strike the vessels.

22.5. This is what is happening.

22.5.1. The POB on board the skiffs could be either pirates working with the Houthis or Houthis personnel themselves.

22.5.2.   The approach to a vessel is, in military terms, " recce by fire."
The objective is to ascertain if the vessel is protected by armed
personnel on board because a vessel that is not protected by armed
personnel could be easily boarded and hijacked. If they confirmed
that the vessel was not protected, they would simply try to board
the vessel.

22.5.3.   Once they confirmed that the vessel is protected, after
exchanging fires they will withdraw if they are just pirates not
working with the Houthis.

22.5.4.   If the POB are pirates working with the Houthis or Houthis
personnel themselves, they would withdraw to a stand-off distance
of about 1-2nm and continue trailing the vessel. Why?

22.5.5.   The POB would use their laser designator(s) to guide the USV(s)
to engage the commercial vessel. These laser designators have an
effective range of about 1-2nm and the further the target is, the less
accurate the designation of the USV will be against the target
vessel. For this reason, have you noticed that these attacks always
happen in daylight hours because the POB does not have night
capabilities to designate their lasers at night or in poor visibility?

22.6.   What must we do?

22.6.1.   Apply the current SOP when responding to Alert Grey and Alert
Red. **The vessel should be transiting at maximum speed.**

22.6.2.   After the withdrawal of the skiffs and if the skiffs are still trailing
the vessel, it suggests that the threat has not disappeared. Be ready
to respond to an attack against USV. UMS HQ has issued an SOP on
how to destroy an approaching USV. To perfect this drill, UMS
maritime marshals should conduct training and rehearsals regularly
as part of their anti-piracy drill.

22.6.3. **The vessel must continue to transit at maximum speed to make it more difficult for the laser designators to designate our vessel.**

22.6.4.   After the skiffs' withdrawal, the personnel in the citadel should not remain there as the threat (if any) is different, and they should remain at a location above the vessel's watermark. This presupposes that all Masters have designated this location and approved it by their respective Company Chief Security and Safety Office.

23. Houthis Target Three Ships in Red Sea and Arabian Sea

23.1.   Yemen's Houthis said on Monday that they targeted three ships in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea, attacks they called part of their efforts to enforce a naval blockade on Israel.

23.2.   Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said in a televised address the vessels were targeted for attempting to approach ports bound for Israel.

23.3.   According to the latest data from LSEG, all three targeted vessels were Liberia-registered.

23.4.   One of the vessels, identified by the Houthis as bulk carrier Motaro, was last seen off Yemen's western coast in the Red Sea, en route from Egypt's Suez Canal to Shanghai, according to LSEG data.

23.5.   Another vessel, the containership SC Montreal, was reportedly targeted in the Arabian Sea while travelling from Seychelles' Port Victoria to Salalah, Oman.

23.6.   The third vessel, the containership Maersk Kowloon, was tracked by LSEG in the western Indian Ocean, also en route from Salalah.

23.7.   Earlier on Monday, British maritime security firm Ambrey reported two explosions near a merchant vessel travelling 14 nautical miles southwest of Yemen's Al Dhubab.

23.8.   Ambrey's report followed initial statements from the U.K. Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency, which received information about three explosions related to an incident 25 nautical miles south of Yemen's port of Mokha, but confirmed that the ship and crew were safe and had continued to their next port of call.

23.9.   Yemen's Houthis said they will continue these actions until Israel halts its offensive on Gaza and Lebanon. This poses significant risks to commercial shipping in the region, a critical route for global trade linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

24. Chinese Navy Conducts Advanced Anti-Piracy Missions in the Gulf of Aden

24.1.   According to information published by the Chinese MoD on October 30, 2024, Chinese Navy's 46th Escort Task Force, currently on an anti-piracy mission, has been intensively conducting specialized drills to hone capabilities in counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, armed rescue, and joint search and rescue operations.

24.2.   A recent exercise on the guided-missile frigate Jiaozuo exemplifies the navy's coordinated air-sea training approach. During a simulated threat scenario involving a "suspicious vessel" near their patrol route, the Jiaozuo received orders to deploy its shipborne helicopter on combat alert for reconnaissance. The helicopter conducted low-altitude surveillance and patrol, using the Honghu frigate's deck as an alternative landing point for repeated take-off and landing practice before safely returning to the Jiaozuo. This air-sea coordination drill highlighted the operational synergy between vessels and aircraft within the task force.

24.3.   Following the air-sea coordination, the task force moved seamlessly into a high-stakes armed rescue drill. In the Jiaozuo's command center, task force personnel, including dedicated staff officers, divided into specialized teams to formulate rapid-response plans. Each team operated on a simulated timeline, creating contingency scenarios to aid commanders in swift decision-making. Under the command center's direction, the task

force executed simulated rescue operations, demonstrating their swift adaptability to potential maritime emergencies.

24.4.   According to task force leaders, the emphasis on comprehensive training has been a focus since the mission's inception. Each position, platform, and team within the fleet is rigorously tested to optimize readiness for the complex demands of escort operations. This "capacity upgrade" process has significantly improved both command-level coordination and crew competency.

24.5.   Medical preparedness is also woven into the task force's training regimen. On-board the Jiaozuo, the medical team simulated battlefield trauma care using a scenario involving a "gunshot wound" to the abdomen. Military doctors conducted emergency procedures and life-support drills.

24.6.   Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters has seen fluctuating trends in 2024, marked by a resurgence of high-severity incidents. Despite a global decrease in piracy rates, piracy remains persistent in this region, largely due to geopolitical instability and economic incentives for Somali pirate groups. Notably, Somali pirates have recently resumed hijackings, employing fishing vessels as "mother ships" to launch skiff-based attacks on passing merchant ships, especially those less protected by armed security or defensive measures.

24.7.   Pirate tactics in the Gulf of Aden often include kidnapping crews for ransom, with recent months witnessing heightened violence against captured individuals. While many attacks are thwarted by security teams and vessel hardening measures, pirates continue to exploit vessels lacking rigorous defenses. Reports highlight cases where pirates intercept vessels using false distress calls or approach vessels under the guise of local fishermen, increasing the risk of misunderstandings and violence.

24.8.   The ongoing regional conflict, particularly involving Houthi attacks and Iranian-backed groups, has also destabilized the Gulf of Aden, further threatening commercial shipping. The recent uptick in anti-ship missile and drone attacks, some targeting vessels linked to Western interests, underscores the rising regional complexity. Consequently, international naval task forces such as the U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian and the European Union's Operation Aspides have expanded their protective scope to secure critical shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

25. Yemen's Houthis target one ship in Red Sea, strikes miss, source says

25.1.   Yemen's Houthis targeted a Greek-operated, Liberia-flagged bulker but all three strikes against it missed, a maritime security source told Reuters on Tuesday.

25.2.   The Oct. 28 attack was the first against a commercial vessel in weeks following an escalation in Israel's campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon this month.

25.3.   The military spokesperson of the Iran-aligned Houthi militants, Yahya Sarea, said on Monday that the attack on the vessel, identified as Motaro, was part of their efforts to enforce a naval blockade on Israel.

25.4.   The U.K. Maritime Trade Operations agency said on Monday it had received information about three explosions related to an incident 25 nautical miles south of Yemen's port of Mokha. It added that the ship and crew were safe and proceeding to their next port of call.

25.5.   The Houthis, who say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians in Israel's year-long war in Gaza, claimed another two attacks against Liberia-flagged vessels in the Arabian Sea on *Monday.*

25.6.   *They identified the* vessels as the SC Montreal and the Maersk Kowloon. The incidents could not be confirmed by Reuters and their managers were not available for comment.

25.7.   Yemen's Houthis have said they will continue with attacks on commercial ships until Israel halts its offensive on Gaza and Lebanon.

25.8.   Since November, the Houthis have carried out nearly 100 attacks on ships crossing the Red Sea, a critical route for global trade linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. They have sunk two vessels, seized another and killed at least four seafarers.

26. Red Sea Is Now So Dangerous Even NATO Warships Are Avoiding It

26.1.   The Red Sea, one of the world's busiest and most strategically vital waterways, has become so hazardous that even the German Navy is steering clear. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius's decision to redirect the frigate *Baden-Württemberg* and support vessel *Frankfurt am Main* around the Cape of Good Hope on their return from an Indo-Pacific deployment speaks volumes. The Red Sea is now deemed too perilous, underscoring just how ineffective current U.S. and EU naval protections are in this region.

26.2.   For months, the U.S. and EU have stationed forces to secure the Red Sea's shipping lanes. Yet, Houthi rebels, equipped and backed by Iran, continue to harass and attack vessels under the guise of "solidarity" with Palestinian forces in Gaza. Reports reveal Houthi attacks extending into the Indian Ocean and even the Mediterranean, a spread that demonstrates their increased capability and adaptability. The EU's mission *Aspides* commander warned of escalating danger but lacked the ships and resources needed to respond adequately. The United States Navy continues to send warships through the Red Sea, but its mission to protect merchant ships—Operation Prosperity Guardian—is considered a failure by several naval experts we interviewed and has significantly diminished in scope and size. As a result, even many US-flagged commercial vessels – which the US Navy is obligated by law to protect – are opting to divert their routes around Africa.

26.3.   The impact has been devastating. Major shipping lines are rerouting to avoid the Red Sea entirely, disrupting supply chains and escalating transport costs globally. The German decision to bypass the Red Sea – lengthening the journey by thousands of miles – should be a wake up call for the minority of ship owners who are still transiting the red sea.

26.4.   This situation shines a harsh light on decades of underspending on naval defense among NATO members, particularly in Europe. Faced with maritime challenges from the Indo-Pacific to the Middle East, European nations – not to mention North American ally Canada, which has allowed its navy to shrink to an alarmingly small size – find themselves stretched thin, struggling to deploy warships where they are needed most.

26.5.   The failure to invest in robust maritime forces, and preference to spend small defense budgets on Army capabilities, has left Western navies with insufficient resources to counter even minor threats like the Houthis effectively.

26.6.   With geopolitical tensions escalating and traditional maritime routes becoming war zones, this re-routing marks a turning point. Unless NATO allies begin addressing these gaps by investing in naval assets, modern maritime strategies, and systems aboard merchant ships capable of defending against drones and missiles the future of secure global shipping lanes remains in question.

26.7.   The broader question is even more stark: If NATO cannot send warships to face the Houthis, how will it possibly survive in a war against a larger adversary like China?

27. West Africa

27.1.   Unlike the presence and substantial involvement of international navies, numbering more than 43 countries and the legit deployment of armed security team (AST) onboard commercial vessels transiting the East Africa and Indian Ocean HRA, the situation in the West Africa HRA is about just the opposite. Nigerian government laws and regulations prohibit the deployment of ASTs other than those brokered by local security companies that used personnel from the Navy, which the government has declared as not supported by it. Besides the Nigerian Navy, no other naval forces provide security and deterrence to the pirates managed by criminal syndicates operating from Nigeria.

27.2.   In other words, the waters and ports around Nigeria are almost a perfect hunting ground for the local criminal syndicates. Given this situation, the threat of piracy at this point of time is higher and more dangerous than that posed by Somali pirates in the East Africa and Indian Ocean HRA, although depending on the continued presence of the navies of EUNAVFOR and CMF and the other independent naval forces and the continued used of on-board ASTs, the situation may quickly reverse. Somali pirates still have the intent, skills, and resources to attack merchant ships. Fundamentally naval forces and intelligence agencies have repeatedly

called for continued vigilance and preparedness in the fight against the threat of piracy at both the East Africa and Indian Ocean HRA and the West Africa HRA. Ignoring these warnings places one's business, vessels, and crew members at risk!

27.3.   UMS HQ advises all stakeholders never to take the security and safety of their vessels and crew members for granted. **CURRENT LOW PIRACY THREAT doesn't mean NO PIRACY THREAT!**

28. *Remember Always "Be Vigilant, Be Safe and Never Be Sorry"*

LTC (Ret) Harpal Singh
Operations Officer
Universal Maritime Solutions
HP: +65 96924765