Danger of Piracy

Guidelines for yachts

This update intended for Yacht Skippers who may be considering a passage through the Gulf of Aden, Yemeni and Somali waters including the NW Indian Ocean north of 5° S and west of 60° E.

It is the sixth notice to be published by World Sailing (formerly ISAF) on this subject and is based on notes that are published in co-operation with the MSCIO (Maritime Security Centre – Indian Ocean).

A final decision on whether to enter the Gulf of Aden, Somali Basin or any waters where pirates operate and how to conduct a vessel in those waters remains entirely the responsibility of the master of each vessel. All vessels entering the area do so at their own risk. Yacht skippers are advised to read the notes prepared by MSCIO which follow below.

Yacht skippers should take note that:

- The number of successful pirate attacks on merchant shipping in the area has significantly increased in the past year. The danger of piracy and consequent loss of life and property in the GoA (Gulf of Aden), Yemeni and Somali waters (up to 750 miles offshore) is high. Yachts are strongly recommended to avoid the area.
- The use of firearms in incidents indicates an increase in aggression and risk to all mariners in the area.

The security assessment of EUNAVFOR, MSCIO and UKMTO concludes unmistakably that:

- The threat remains unchanged in terms of the freedom of movement of Pirate Action Groups (PAG's) in the wider Indian Ocean. The area of high risk remains and the incidence of piracy has increased significantly over the past year
- The greater deployment of Private Armed Security Contractors (PASCs) on Merchant Shipping, along with disruptions by Naval Forces, has had some positive effect in deterring attacks.
- The greater deployment of PASCs increases the threat to yachts. If ships become harder to capture then the PAG's may well turn to more vulnerable targets such as yachts.

Yacht skippers should also be aware that there are other high risk piracy areas, notably the Malacca Straits, South China Sea and the Gulf of Guinea where the generic guidance provided here remains relevant.

Further detailed guidance for the West Africa/Gulf of Guinea region can be found at:
https://shipping.nato.int/nsc/operations/global-maritime-risk/west-africa-gulf-of-guinea

1. Threat

The danger of piracy and consequent loss of life and property in the GoA (Gulf of Aden), Yemeni and Somali waters (up to 750 miles offshore), is high. Yachts are strongly recommended to avoid the area. The conclusions of current Threat Assessment reports state that the Somali-based pirate networks and their affiliates retain both the intent and capability to conduct acts of piracy. Yachts which are slow and low are extremely vulnerable from opportunistic attacks, hijackings or armed robbery. The general security situation in the High Risk Area (HRA) remains unstable. Many coastal areas in the southern Red Sea are the focus of significant kinetic activity. Vessels are frequently hailed by Houthi forces claiming to be the legitimate government of Yemen. These hails are often accompanied by threats and orders to comply with directions passed. Whilst the overall threat in the southern Red Sea remains high, particular focus on any vessel that has Israeli, UK or US affiliation (particularly if a vessel has visited Israel in the recent months) are subject to increased attention from Houthi forces. Coalition warships continue to operate in the area and you can expect to be hailed and challenged by these warships.

2. Registration

2.1 MSCIO liaises with anti-piracy patrols being conducted by warships from several nations in the area, and UKMTO coordinates the management of all merchant ship and yachts in the area. The patrols operate mainly in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin but may operate anywhere within the area and will provide surveillance and support as far as possible to yachts. However, no guarantee whatsoever can be offered as to the safe transit of any yacht through these waters, and no dedicated escort can be expected.

2.2 A yacht which, despite the risks described, decides to make a passage should advise her plans with as much notice as possible[1] to UKMTO and MSCIO and provide the information set out in the attached Yacht Vessel Movement Form, preferably by email but alternatively by telephone:

- **UKMTO** (UK Maritime Trade Organization) (Royal Navy) email: info@ukmto.org – Tel: +44 2392 222065 (General Enquiries)

- **MSCIO** (EUNAVFOR Maritime Security Center – Indian Ocean) - email: postmaster@mscio.org – Tel: +33 298 220 220 / + 33 298 220 170

- US-flagged vessels may wish to contact NCAGS (Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping) (US Navy) Tampa – email: m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil – Tel +1 813 529 7108(Helplines)

[1] Yachts are urged to register at least two weeks before entering the High Risk Area (HRA). Yachts coming south through the Red Sea should report well before reaching Bab al Mandeb and should register before reaching Safaga/Jeddah.

3. Attack Patterns

3.1 Pirates operate from very small craft, which limits their operation to moderate weather conditions. While no statistics exist, it is likely to be difficult to operate these small craft in sea states 3 and above, though operation in higher sea states cannot be ruled out. Pirates are less likely to launch attacks in the dark, and merchant ships try to pass through the area between 47E and 49E in the IRTC during the hours of darkness for this reason. Even during the day, the typical pirate's visual horizon is less than five miles; he will see a merchant vessel long before he sees a yacht.

3.2 In a typical pirate attack small, high speed (up to 25 knot) open boats deploy from a mother ship, often a pirated fishing vessel or dhow. Commonly two or more of these small high speed open boats are used in attacks, often approaching from either quarter of the intended target. Be aware that perfectly legitimate tuna fishermen often employ similar tactics when chasing fish. It can be very hard to differentiate between a genuine fisherman and a prospective pirate; in general, the crew of a fishing boat will have 'all eyes' trained on their elusive target; in a pirate boat, the 'gunmen' may remain hidden.

4. Preperations

4.1 A vessel considering entering the area is recommended to carry UK Admiralty Anti-Piracy Planning Chart – Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea – Q6099. (Annex to this document).

4.2 During her passage a yacht should monitor VHF 16 and VHF 8 and report by the means and at the intervals advised by UKMTO, or by a patrolling warship.

4.3 Emergency contact details:

- MTO (UK Maritime Trade Organization) (Royal Navy) - email: watchkeepers@ukmto.org – Tel: +44 (0) 2392 222060 (24 hours watch)
- MSCIO (EUNAVFOR Maritime Security Centre – Indian Ocean) - email: postmaster@mscio.org – Tel: +34 956 470 534 (24 hours watch)
- For US-flagged vessel, US NCAGS (Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping) (US Navy) Tampa – email: m-ba-navcent-ncags@us.navy.mil – Tel: +1 813 529 7108
  (24 hours watch)

4.3. Merchant ships transiting the GoA are being advised to use an Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor (IRTC) in order for warship patrols to be effective. UKMTO advises yachts to remain close to or within the IRTC as follows:

i The IRTC has two lanes, each 5NM wide and a separation zone between them 2NM wide. To all intents and purposes, it operates as a Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) although formally it does not have that status. The co-ordinates of the IRTC lanes are:

Westbound lane 252T	North boundary	12 00N 45 00E 14 30N 53 00E
	South boundary	11 55N 45 00E 14 25N 53 00E
Eastbound lane 072T	North boundary	11 53N 45 00E 14 23N 53 00E
	South boundary	11 48N 45 00E 14 18N 53 00E

4.4. A yacht which has registered her intention to transit the GoA is invited to sail EITHER in the 2-mile-wide buffer zone between the two lanes OR close to the outer limit of the appropriate lane. These options give the best chance of a yacht's transmission on VHF16 or VHF 8 being received by a patrolling warship or being relayed by a merchant vessel. However VHF contact is not guaranteed.

4.5. A yacht coming from, for example, Aden eastbound or Salalah westbound may join the IRTC some way from its start point. The area of the IRTC between 47E and 49E is considered the most dangerous, and a yacht should ensure she has joined with the maximum possible protection. It is recommended to conduct this part of the passage at night. In the interests of navigation safety, on joining the IRTC mid-way along its length a yacht should act as if joining a Traffic Separation Scheme.

4.6. It has long been common practice for yachts intending to transit the GoA to form small informal convoys in either Djibouti, Aden or Salalah. It is emphasized that this is a decision for individual skippers but the military forces support this concept. If the convoy approach is to be followed it is suggested that there is a limit of no more than five vessels in any one convoy. This is because vessels will need to keep close to one another if they are to offer any protection through numbers, and close station-keeping for the duration of the voyage through the GoA may prove a strain, particularly if short-handed.

4.7. **Carriage of arms is not advised**. There is a serious risk of escalation of the levels of violence.

4.8. AIS, Communications, Radar, EPIRBs etc:

Current advice to ships (which are required to carry AIS class A) is to have it transmitting limited information whilst transiting the Gulf of Aden, restricted to ship's identity, position, course, speed, navigational status and safety related information. Most AIS class B transponders (commonly carried by yachts) can only transmit limited information and are not configurable by the user. Current naval advice to yachts is to leave transponders switched on in the Gulf of Aden so that the warships know where they are. Navigation lights are to be illuminated at night or periods of low visibility and should not be turned off because of a perceived threat.

In the Somali Basin or further afield where there are fewer warships, an AIS transponder should be switched off unless the yacht is either aware of military forces in their vicinity or is under attack.

A 406MHz EPIRB or PLB (Personnel Locator Beacon) will quickly draw attention to you but remember these are emergency devices intended specifically for saving life. A SART will show a signal on any nearby marine radar which may include that of pirates. It is legitimate to call "mayday" if under attack (VHF or HF DSC, VHF 16 or 8, Sat-C or any other means). For an early warning call discreet use of a satellite phone to one of the numbers in para 4.2. above may be the best option. When in transit a radar transceiver should be used in the normal way. A radar target enhancer (RTE) provides an apparently large echo and should be switched off unless there is danger of collision.

GPS jamming and other forms of electronic interference have been conducted in the southern Red Sea. Skippers are advised to avoid any over-reliance on GPS for navigation.

4.9. Ensure that all systems (in particular the engine) are in good shape, radios and sat phones are working properly, that you have plenty of fuel and the ship's batteries are in good shape. Be prepared to motor or motor-sail at your maximum speed for the entire transit of the IRTC. Carry additional supplies (particularly water purification, medical supplies and vitamin supplements) in the event that you are unfortunate enough to be pirated.

4.10. Bear in mind:

- split up money into different caches
- keep electronic copies of your passport etc. on yahoo- or google-type accounts with spurious names - if your original papers are lost you can access the copies from any police station or internet café
- consider carrying only copies (not originals) of essential documents on the boat
- consider having two passports (a legitimate exercise for e.g. business travellers)
- wear a cheap watch
- have an old mobile phone
- keep only old (out of date) credit cards in your wallet
- (if ashore) wear only such clothing that you can afford to lose
- advise your next of kin if you are going into a dangerous area so they are prepared to deal with matters if the worst happens – they should know in advance which authorities to talk to, etc.

4.11. Despite the odds being uneven, it is worth making a risk assessment in advance of a transit and making sure everyone on board (including new crew) has thought through and agreed how they will respond. Guidance on what to do in the event of an attack is at para 5. Thorough mental preparation is essential – think through all the scenarios. Continuous vigilance and an early call to the authorities if in doubt, is recommended as the arrival of military units (by sea or air) or a VHF call to a warship (even if you cannot see a warship) may cause an impending attack to be called off. If you can delay the pirates from boarding by even 15 minutes, it may give the warships time to react. The time between first sighting a pirate and the commencement of an attack could be as little as 5 minutes. When making a routine call on VHF, do not give your position in Lat and Long, unless you are absolutely certain that the warship is close enough to be able to assist you, or you are making a Mayday call. The risk is that in reporting what turns out to be a false alarm, you could alert other skiffs of your position and excite their interest in you.

5 Under Attack

It is recommended to:

If under attack a 'Mayday' call should be made using VHF or HF DSC, VHF 16 or VHF 8, Sat-C or any other means. Also, please contact UKMTO by telephone and pass your last known position.

Report immediately to UKMTO by telephone if possible on +44 (0) 2392 222060 (24 hours watch) – please make sure you know your position. If possible, the call to UKMTO should be followed by a call to MSCIO, and US NCAGS (Tampa) (who focus on US-flagged vessels).

6 Pirates on Board

Stay calm - attackers are likely to be excitable and nervous - you will think more clearly and your conduct may also calm them – do not make sudden movements.
Stay together as far as it is practicable to do so. Offer no resistance. Cooperate with the pirates.

Do Not Use firearms, even if available – the risk of escalation is significant. Do Not use flares or other pyrotechnics as weapons against pirates.

Do Not use flash photography, which may be mistaken for muzzle flashes by the pirates or by any military force sent to assist.

In the event that military personnel take action on board the vessel, unless otherwise directed all crew members should keep low to the deck, cover their head with both hands (always ensuring that both hands are empty and visible). Be prepared to answer questions on identity and status as military personnel will need to differentiate quickly between crew and pirates.

Follow-up Reports should be sent to MSCIO who will advise on information needed.

7 Summary

The continued presence of international naval forces in the High Risk Area serves to suppress piracy activity. Despite this, recent incidents serve to highlight that piracy is not eradicated. The crew of yachts are very valuable targets of maritime crime. If captured the crew may be the subject of brutal captive conditions.

Gulf of Aden/Somali Basin YACHT VESSEL MOVEMENT FORM

1. YACHT NAME	
2. MMSI	
3. NATIONAL REGISTRATION NUMBER (IF ANY)	
4. HOME PORT	
5. FLAG STATE	
6. CALLSIGN	
7. LOA	
8. NUMBER OF PERSONS ON BOARD ….M/….F/ TOTAL….	
9. SATCOM C NUMBER	
10. SATPHONE NUMBER(S)	
11. MF/HF (DETAILS PLEASE)	
12. NORMAL CRUISING SPEED / MAX SPEED	
13. COLOUR OF TOPSIDES	
14. COLOUR OF DECK	
15. RIG	
16. SAIL NUMBERS/INSIGNIA	
17. EMAIL ADDRESSES ONBOARD	
18. MASTER'S NAME	
19. MASTER'S NATIONALITY AND PASSPORT NUMBER	
20. YACHT CLUB OR ASSOCIATION	
21. 24/7 SHORESIDE CONTACT PERSON WITH BOAT INFORMATION	
22. DATES/PLACES OF INTENDED PASSAGE	

Chart Q6099 – Maritime Security Chart – Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea

