

Piracy – Recent NSC/UKMTO advice concerning fishing vessels

Gard has learned that attacks on fishing vessels by armed security guards on board merchant vessels have occurred in some areas. According to a recent report from the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO)¹, both India and Yemen have reported such “attacks” against their subsistence fishing fleet.

Distinguishing between fishing vessels and potential pirates is not an easy task and some of the manoeuvres made by fishing vessels can be perceived as threatening by Masters of merchant vessels. Gard’s Members and clients should advise their Masters to be particularly observant in such situations and the following advice provided by the UKMTO should be considered when assessing a potential threat involving what appears to be fishing vessels:

- Most piracy attacks are made on the stern of merchant ships.
- Fishing boats will attempt to protect their nets if they believe a merchant ship is going to run over them.
- If boats are pair fishing, both boats will turn inward to protect their nets, a manoeuvre that appears to be aggressive but is carried out in order to protect their valuable nets.

In their latest piracy update, the NATO Shipping Centre (NSC)² also reminds Masters that “a large number of fishing vessels operate in the Southern Red Sea (SRS), Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) and up to 50 nm off the west coast of India. Fishing vessels may approach a merchant ship in order to maximise fishing opportunities or to safeguard fishing nets. Fishing off India is generally carried out by mechanized boats and single hull boats with outboard motor carrying 4-5 crew using long lines. Masters are requested to ensure they distinguish between fishing vessels and potential pirates when able; fishermen may carry small arms.” A link to daily and weekly piracy updates concerning operation in the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin can be found via [NSC’s Ocean Shield webpage](#).

If an incident occurs, Masters are requested to report it immediately to UKMTO by telephone and provide details of the incident. This will ensure that the information is passed to other ships in the area for their awareness and vigilance. If Masters are safely able to take pictures and/or video of the suspicious activities, please send these by email to UKMTO (ukmto@eim.ae), the NATO Shipping Centre (info@shipping.nato.int) and MSCHOA (postmaster@mschoa.org).

¹ [The UK Maritime Trade Operations \(UKMTO\)](#) office in Dubai is part of the contribution by the Royal Navy to ensure that trade can safely transit in the area North of 10 degrees South and West of 78 degrees East. They act as the primary point of contact for merchant vessels and liaison with military forces in the region. UKMTO Dubai also administers the Voluntary Reporting Scheme, under which merchant vessels are encouraged to send regular reports, providing their position/course/speed and estimated time of arrival at their next port whilst transiting the region bound by Suez, 78°E and 10°S. UKMTO Dubai subsequently tracks vessels and the positional information is passed to Combined Maritime Forces, NATO Shipping Centre and European Union Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA). Emerging and relevant information affecting commercial traffic can then be passed directly to ships, rather than by company offices, improving responsiveness to any incident and saving time.

² [The NATO Shipping Centre \(NSC\)](#) is the link between NATO naval forces and the merchant shipping community. Permanently manned by NATO, the NSC is the primary point of contact for the exchange of merchant shipping information between NATO’s military authorities and the international shipping community. The NSC is also the primary advisor to merchant shipping regarding potential risks and possible interference with maritime operations and major exercises.