



Security challenges in the HRA and chronology of recent incidents



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MAST continues to keep a weather eye on maritime crime in the HRA. Since October 2016 there have been a number of incidents in the Bab el Mandeb and the Southern Red Sea pertaining to piracy, terrorism and the Yemen civil war. This report reviews recent incidents and considers the security challenges.

Chronology of recent incidents in Southern Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb (see Figure1)

On the 22nd December 2016 an MV reported being approached by 2 speed boats with 5 persons in each on the port and starboard quarter at 1025 UTC, around 3nm West of Perim Island, Bab Al-Mandab Strait. The closest speed boat approached to within 0.3nm. The MV sounded the alarm, increased speed and activated water hoses. The embarked armed security team showed weapons to the speed boats, which then altered their course and moved away.

On the 23rd December 2016 an MV reported an approach by 3 skiffs at 1905 UTC, around 81nm West of Yemen coast, Red Sea. The closest skiff came within 100m. The MV's embarked security team fired warning shots, 3-4 flashes of light were seen from the skiffs. Crew mustered in the citadel and the vessel carried out evasive action. The skiffs moved away.

On the 3rd January 2017 the UAE supply vessel Sultan 2 was reportedly attacked at 1400hrs. The attack occurred 30nm north of the BAM strait in the transit corridor and was initially attributed to pirates. The vessel had conducted several NW / SE transits in area over the previous few days but had been heading east when it was attacked. There is strong evidence (although not confirmed) that Sultan 2 was engaged in some form of support role for the coalition forces aligned to the Yemen government in the war with the Houthi rebels. She therefore presented herself as a target similar to the HSV-2. Whilst it is natural that such an attack would cause alarm amongst the maritime community it must be remembered that the Sultan 2 (like the HSV-2 Swift) had a military profile, both in terms of physical appearance and behaviour and would therefore present itself as a 'legitimate' and actionable target for threat groups.

On the 9th January 2017 MV Elpida GR, a Maltese flagged bulker, reported that 4 high speed skiffs approached the starboard side within 2 cables at 0815 UTC in the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait, off Yemen. Six armed persons on board were identified in each white skiff. The MV's embarked security team took their positions and the skiffs turned away.

BIMCO noted in their 'Reflection 2017' publication that despite no commercial ships being taken for ransom in 2016 "BIMCO has recently witnessed significant developments including the armed attack



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on a ship transiting the Somali basin 300nm from the coast – prevented by a maritime security team on board”.

Added to which has been suspected terrorist attacks in the southern Red Sea. These are a spill over into the maritime domain from the Yemen conflict – which is evolving the threat from the established Somali pirate threat. Yemen remains locked in a state of civil war and vessels connected with the war effort have been targeted, attacked and destroyed.

Somalia continues to attempt to establish a new government while being undermined by Al Shabaab, and as noted in the [UN Security Council Report](#) (October 2016), “Somali pirates possess the intent and capability to resume attacks should the opportunity present itself”. To date Somalia continues to provide a suitable haven from which to launch piracy operations. The overall regional situation shows no signs of imminent progress to stabilisation.

NATO’s operation Ocean Shield ended in November 2016. Towards the latter years of the operation often only one warship was available. EUNAVFOR, CMF and national navies remain committed and in place; but force flow (the number of warships and aircraft) is a challenge for them.

The incidents in October 2016 and the 4 recent incidents demonstrate increased intent. Quality armed security guards remain the most effective way of ensuring a vessels safety. Importantly, in conjunction with the industry at large, BIMCO has continued to raise the awareness, and danger of, PMSC’s which are using leased or borrowed weapons which can incur potential liabilities on the vessel’s stakeholders if embarked.



Figure 1: Plotted incidents from December 2016 and January 2017