

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> April 2017

*"Making the maritime environment a safer place to live and work"*



## MV OS 35 piracy incident



### Incident Report

On the 8<sup>th</sup> April, Tuvalu-flagged bulk carrier OS 35 was approached by a skiff with pirates on board. OS 35 came under attack and was boarded at 1310 UTC in position 14°02'9N 051°40'E close to Point B in the IRTC, around 135nm NW of Socotra Island. OS 35's Master and crew stopped the engines and retreated to the Citadel. The MV was left drifting. Vessels within VHF range heard reports that there was a fire on-board and that one crew member had been killed. The pirates were heard using VHF to order the crew out of the citadel.

The United Kingdom's Maritime Trade Organisation (UKMTO) reported the incident to Commander Maritime Forces (US Led Coalition based in Bahrain) and they co-operated with Chinese and Indian warships which came to the aid of the OS 35. The Chinese reporting suggests that Chinese military forces, supported by an Indian helicopter regained control of the vessel. It has since been reported that the prominent Somali pirate leader Abdikarim Salah "Aw Koombe", who was the pirate spokesperson during the Aris 13 hijack, was captured by the Chinese along with two others. The remaining pirates escaped.

By 0432 9<sup>th</sup> April, in position 14°02'5N 051°37'9E, OS 35 was back under control of the Master and crew and underway to the next port of call with a military escort.

### MAST Assessment

This was a clear 'win' for coalition and independent navies operating in the HRA. The co-ordinated response by UKMTO, CMF and the independently deployed Indian and Chinese warships was effective in bringing back control of the vessel from the Somali pirates. This demonstrates that the military element of the HRA security framework, while much reduced in numbers of aircraft and ships from its peak in 2009-12, remains effective.

This incident also demonstrates how the effective use of BMP 4 can buy time for the crew to remain free of capture by the Somali pirates and relatively safe, until warships have had time to arrive on the scene. This incident occurred in the IRTC and the OS 35 clearly benefitted from the greater number of warships operating in the area. Had this incident occurred in the wider Indian Ocean or in the waters around Socotra Island, the outcome might have been very different.



The amount of BMP 4 measures on board the vessel is not known and whatever was in place did not prevent the Somali pirates from successfully boarding the vessel. It was recourse by the crew to the Citadel that prevented them gaining full control of the vessel. While it is possible that one crew member was a casualty, the Citadel was otherwise a safe sanctuary for the rest of the crew. Knowing that the crew was safe in the citadel would have been an important consideration for the military forces before they made their move to re-capture the vessel.

In a vessel of this level of vulnerability the use of well trained and equipped armed guards would have prevented the pirates getting on board in the first place. It is notable that at the same time as this incident unfolded, an approach by Somali pirates on a vessel in the IRTC which had an armed team embarked, had an entirely different outcome. It was reported that the showing of weapons was sufficient for the Somali pirates to break off their approach.