ARC

Guidance to Shipping
Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Yemeni Ports

Introduction

This guidance is provided to shipping companies, shipping associations and Masters of vessels sailing through the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and/or calling at ports in Yemen. It is based on guidance issued by NATO Shipping Centre, UKMTO, the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), as well as shipping associations such as BIMCO, Intertanko, OCIMF, Intercargo, and the International Chamber of Shipping, and ARC's own experience and expertise in maritime security and geopolitical risk, but is designed to be a single point of reference to its users for ease of use.

The risk to vessels sailing through the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden has increased following statements and actions by the Houthis in Yemen, as well as threats to vessels from Iran in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Since November 2023, numerous attacks and threats have been made towards merchant vessels in the area, including boarding via helicopter, missile/drone attack, threats from armed persons in small crafts, and demands via VHF for vessels to change course.

Operation Prosperity Guardian (US, UK and other coalition forces) and Operation Aspides (EUNAVFOR) are operational in the Southern Red Sea, and therefore merchant vessels will note an increased presence of warships and aircraft in the area.

The targeting of vessels remains inconsistent, with the Houthis claiming that only vessels with links to Israel, US and UK, or scheduled calls to Israeli ports will be targeted. However, **the risk of mistaken identity or collateral damage is high,** due to poor accuracy by Houthi weapons system or out-of-date information.

This document will cover the following items and threats:

1.   Actions Prior to Transit
2.   General Reporting Guidance
3.   Mines
4.   Missile Attack
5.   Interaction with potentially hostile military forces or law enforcement
6.   Water-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIED) / Unmanned Surface Vessels (USV)
7.   Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)
8.   Navigational Challenges
9.   Use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP)
10.   Links to Israel, USA and United Kingdom

Contacts:
UKMTO +44 2392 222 060 / watchkeepers@ukmto.org
IMSC +973 1785 8193 / M-BA-IMSC-MTO@US.NAVY.MIL

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1. Actions Prior to Transit

a.   If a port or facility is operating at maritime security levels 2 or 3, the additional security measures that are to be taken by vessels calling at that port or facility will depend on the nature of the specific threat towards the vessel.

b.   Undertake a new ship-and voyage-specific threat risk assessment before entering any region where there has been an incident, or the threat has changed.

c.   Where transit includes passage through a confined strait, if navigationally safe to do so, consider unmanned machinery spaces (UMS) for the duration.

d.   Consider transiting at full speed whilst ensuring this is only done where it is commensurate with safe navigation and manoeuvring permits.

e.   Consider if a Day/Night transit is appropriate to the threat posed.

f.   After the risk assessment, review the Ship's Security Plan and Vessel Hardening Plan.

g.   Conduct Security and damage control Training/Exercises prior to entering areas of increased risk.

h.   Mitigation Measures may include (in addition to maintaining a full and vigilant bridge watch for safe navigation):
1)   Placing additional lookouts to the navigation team and bridge wings with a specific remit to maintain visual watch for small craft approaching.
2)   Ensuring the lookouts are briefed on maintaining a clear watch astern and over the side.
3)   Maintaining use of night vision binoculars and consider carrying more onboard.
4)   Maintaining a strict communications watch and establish communication with all vessels coming close and strictly observe any promulgated exclusion zones or guidance issued by coastal states.
5)   Ensuring ISPS security levels are strictly in place.
6)   Consideration of extra unarmed lookout to be carried in addition to any contracted security for HRA transits, (note the northern part of the Gulf of Oman is not part of the industry designated High Risk Area for piracy).
7)   Ensure watertight integrity underway or at anchorage.
8)   Crew to wear clothing made of fire-retardant fibre.
9)   Ensure watch officers save Voyage Data Recorder (VDR / SVDR) data in the event of an attack or suspicious event in the vicinity of the vessel.
10)   If during transit, a threat from mines is announced, move all crew to above the waterline.
11)   Rig outboard lighting where possible provided they do not interfere with keeping a safe lookout, particularly over the stern and rig/use searchlights if available.
12)   Check all fire-fighting equipment is available for immediate use. Make sure the emergency fire pump is available if any maintenance is being undertaken.
13)   Keep the Automatic Information System (AIS) on. There is no need to complete the field stating the last or next port of call. Ships with AIS turned off have been attacked. Switching off AIS makes it marginally more difficult to track or target a ship but may also hinder the ability of the military to provide support or direct contact.
14)   Ensure breathing apparatus is readily accessible for use if required by crew for firefighting purposes. Any detailed crew should be trained on use prior to transit.
15)   For tankers, ensure that the inert gas system is functioning and ready for immediate use.
16)   Establish crew muster location above waterline in case of risk of WBIED/USV.

2.   General Reporting Guidance

a.   Monitor VHF Ch 16 and all local reporting VHF channels.

b.   Maintain AIS as switched on (save for IMO guidelines which cover switch off of AIS if the security of the vessel may compromise the security of the vessel). Switching off AIS is unlikely to prevent an attack, and ships have been attacked with AIS switched off.

c.   Changes in voyage routing should be considered to make it harder to estimate a position. Not including next port of call in the AIS data fields could be considered or enter "Armed Guards Onboard".

d.   Muster point and citadel should be established prior to entry to the area. It should be positioned above the waterline.

e.   Firefighting equipment should be rigged and easy to use quickly.

f.   Maintain a close radar watch.

g.   Ensure all crew briefed of "actions-on".

h.   Report all:
   1)   Sighting of suspicious floating objects (Possible Mine or Water-borne Improvised Explosive Device) in the area.
   2)   On receiving a distress call from another Merchant Vessel operating in the area that reports being harassed or attacked.
   3)   Threatening or harassing conduct directed at a Merchant Vessel.
   4)   Threatening or harassing language transmitted on VHF.
   5)   Boarding or search of a vessel without a valid legal pretext.
   6)   Unnecessary manoeuvring in unsafe proximity of a Merchant Vessel.
   7)   Intentional close manoeuvring so as to restrict a vessel's ability to manoeuvre without lawful justification.
   8)   Aircraft operating at an unsafe altitude that results in a threat to a merchant vessel.
   9)   Unprofessional or inappropriate queries, including asking questions beyond flagged state, port of departure and port of arrival. Including questions relating to:
      i)   Whether warships or aircraft are operating in the area.
      ii)   Asking unnecessarily probing questions about the crew or cargo.

i.   **REMAIN AWARE THAT HOUTHIS CONDUCT COMBINED ATTACKS ON VESSELS INVOLVING BOTH MISSILES, UAVS AND WBIEDS/USVS. THEREFORE, CREW SHOULD REMAIN VIGILANT FOLLOWING AN ATTACK IN CASE OF SECONDARY ATTACK.**
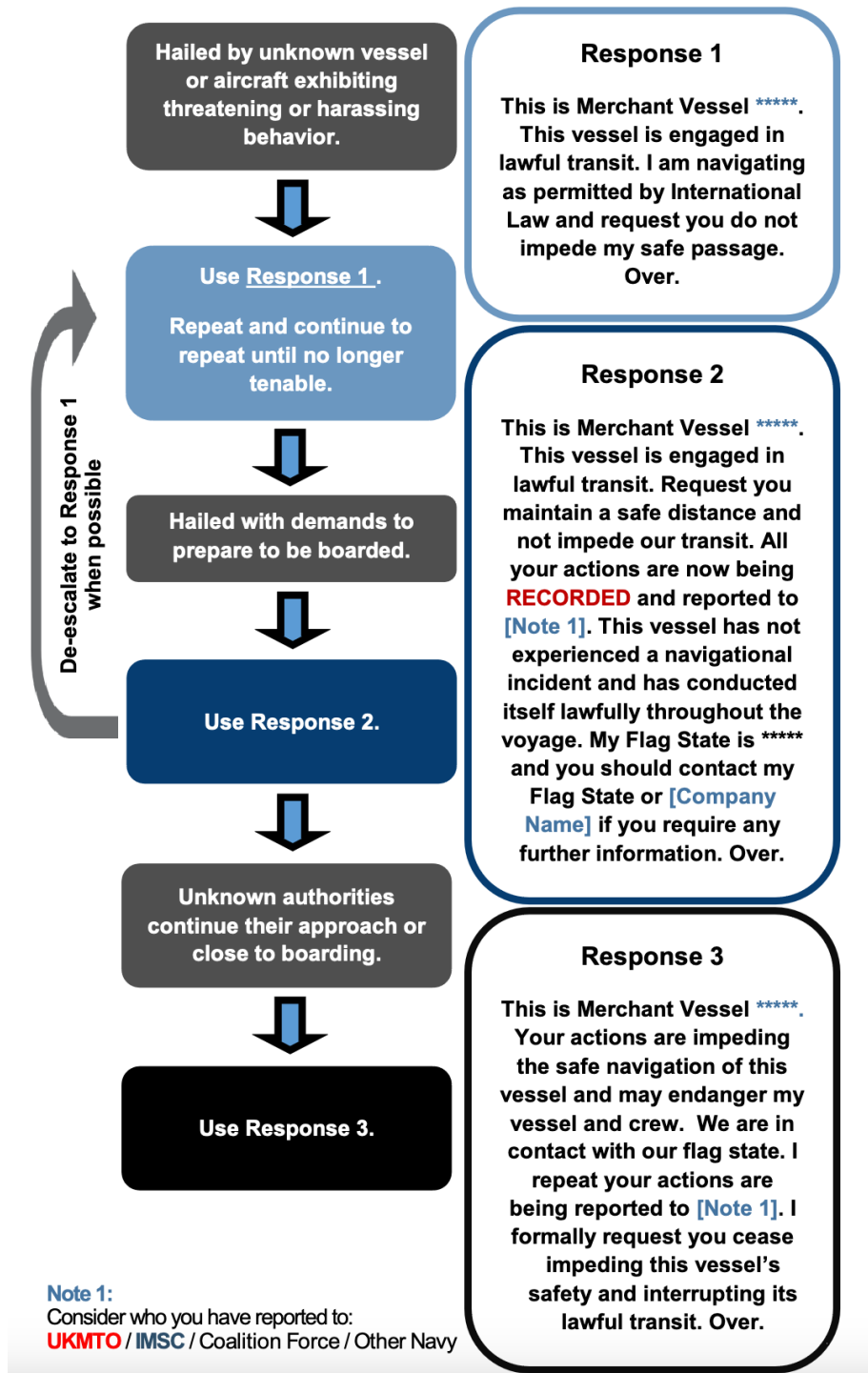
3.   Mines

a.   Ships should use established maritime transit corridors and avoid all identified mined areas.

b.   If possible, avoid waters with less than 200m water depth.

c.   If possible, sail at high water in order to increase the distance between hull and mine.

d.   If possible, take advantage of favourable currents or tidal streams, which will reduce the time spent in the area of danger without the need to increase speed, or alter other ship-made influences. Tidal stream or current will also cause a moored mine to dip, which may result in a ship passing over a moored contact mine.

e.   Keep the lowest steering speed, in areas where a mine threat might exist, especially in waters of less than 60m. Ensure that the maximum degree of watertight integrity is maintained below the main deck.

f.   Do not throw anything overboard. Many objects that float may be mistaken by lookouts for floating mines.

g.   Watch should be kept for any unusual or suspicious activity, such as the releasing of objects into the sea that might indicate mining activity. Aircraft may release mines with or without parachutes.

h.   If a mine clearance operation is in progress in a particular area, merchant ships may be guided through the area by naval forces. Before arrival in the area, information on the rendezvous and procedures for such a routeing will be provided by the naval force.

i.   Follow directly over the same ground as the ship ahead, avoiding violent manoeuvres that generate noise.

j.   Minimize the ship's acoustic signature by securing non-essential machinery and impose a silent routine to keep human and mechanical noise to a minimum. Avoid unnecessary alterations of course, engines reversing, or extreme changes of revolutions that generate noise.

k.   Reduce the number of personnel remaining below the main deck, or in compartments below the waterline, to the absolute minimum.

l.   Order all personnel to put on safety helmets (hard hats) and life jackets should be worn when on the upper deck.

o.   Personnel on the upper deck should stand clear of stays, antennas, and overhanging parts of the superstructure. Keep crew clear of the forward area of the ship.

p.   It is advisable not to anchor in the Mine Threat Area (MTA), but if unavoidable master's should be aware of the change to the ships magnetic and acoustic signatures that this would entail.

q.   If a mine is sighted:
        1)   Evacuate all personnel from compartments below the main deck and from below the waterline.
        2)   Order all personnel to 'brace for shock'. This position can only be held for a limited time and should only be ordered when danger is imminent.

4.   **Missile Attack**

a.   When inside MarSec Level 3 area, all crew should remain inside accommodation and not on deck.

b.   Watch for evidence that the ship is under surveillance.

c.   Increase speed when sailing.

d.   Emergency drills should be carried out for the following:
1)   Lifeboats, so that vessel can be abandoned as quickly as possible in the event of damage sustained that leads to vessel sinking.
2)   Firefighting. If vessel is not at risk of immediate sinking, any fires caused by missile attack are quickly put out, so no further damage is caused/to minimise extent of damage and structural integrity of the vessel.
3)   First Aid. Ensure all crew are up to date on first aid qualifications so that any injuries can be attended to immediately before arrival of any rescue authorities.

e.   If vessel receives a report of imminent missile threat:
1)   Reduce the heat signature by cooling down the funnel.
2)   Turn off all radars if ordered by the Military Commander (to reduce threat from anti- radiation homing missiles).
3)   Maintain listening watch on radio circuit detailing missile threat information and ship manoeuvring orders (example IMM VHF 16).
4)   Ensure damage control personnel if embarked are positioned for rapid response to fire and shock damage.

5.　　Interaction with Potentially Hostile Military or Law Enforcement

a.　　Vessels should comply with any military forces' instructions so as not to put vessel at risk for "non-compliance".

b.　　If vessel is demanded to carry out any activities by a military force which places the crew and vessel in direct harm, it should be reported to regional maritime security forces (such as UKMTO or the International Maritime Security Construct) and the vessel's operators via secure communication (email or telephone).

c.　　If contacted by an unknown vessel or aircraft exhibiting threatening or harassing behaviour, follow IMSC bridge card:

Hailed by unknown vessel or aircraft exhibiting threatening or harassing behavior.

⬇

Use Response 1.

Repeat and continue to repeat until no longer tenable.

⬇

Hailed with demands to prepare to be boarded.

⬇

Use Response 2.

⬇

Unknown authorities continue their approach or close to boarding.

⬇

Use Response 3.

De-escalate to Response 1 when possible

Response 1

This is Merchant Vessel *****. This vessel is engaged in lawful transit. I am navigating as permitted by International Law and request you do not impede my safe passage. Over.

Response 2

This is Merchant Vessel *****. This vessel is engaged in lawful transit. Request you maintain a safe distance and not impede our transit. All your actions are now being RECORDED and reported to [Note 1]. This vessel has not experienced a navigational incident and has conducted itself lawfully throughout the voyage. My Flag State is ***** and you should contact my Flag State or [Company Name] if you require any further information. Over.

Response 3

This is Merchant Vessel *****. Your actions are impeding the safe navigation of this vessel and may endanger my vessel and crew. We are in contact with our flag state. I repeat your actions are being reported to [Note 1]. I formally request you cease impeding this vessel's safety and interrupting its lawful transit. Over.

Note 1:
Consider who you have reported to:
UKMTO / IMSC / Coalition Force / Other Navy

d.   If approached by suspicious craft in port or at anchor:
    1)   Notify terminal and port, UKMTO, and Company Security Officer of the presence of the suspicious craft.
    2)   Maintain alert watch on vessel. It may be a distraction from other illegal or dangerous activity.
    3)   Evacuate engine spaces until waterline check shows no anomalies.
    4)   Keep personnel clear of exposed decks. The exception to this is access to bridge wings to maintain visual checks AFTER risk of access has been assessed.
    5)   Request the port authorities carry out a waterline survey around the vessel. If unable to do so immediately, carry out the check at the next safe port.
    6)   Take as many photos as possible without putting crew at risk. If available, use CCTV video as well.

e.   If a craft comes close to the side of the vessel:
    1)   Undertake a visual over side search from the deck, all around the vessel, to check for anything attached to the hull of the vessel.
    2)   Particular attention should be paid to the hull at or near the waterline.
    3)   If a vessel detects anything unusual attached to the hull, then it should contact the UKMTO and Flag State immediately. All crew should be evacuated from the immediate area and mustered in a safe place. Vessel should follow the advice of the military authorities.
    4)   Crew conducting visual checks should wear appropriate PPE, protective head gear, safety harness and life jackets at all times.
    5)   Additional measures Operators may wish to take if alerted to suspicious activity whilst at anchor include:
        i)   Rotate the propeller continuously or at short, irregular intervals.
        ii)   Operate bow and stern thrusters at zero (0) thrust.
        iii)   Turn the rudder frequently.
        iv)   Switch the echo sounder to transmit counter/combat swimmer/diver threat.

f.   If unknown vessels are impeding safe navigation and attempting to deviate the vessel from its course, position at anchor or away from international waters:
    1)   Call UKMTO and provide regular updates, with crew details. Maintain open phone line with UKMTO.
    2)   Respond on VHF professionally. Hails should not be ignored.
    3)   Check vessel's position by multiple methods before confirming position.
    4)   Contact Company Security Officer.
    5)   Record video and details of the event.
    6)   Head to nearest friendly territorial waters/warship at best possible speed if safe to do so.

g.   If boarding of the vessel is attempted:
    1)   Manoeuvre away from danger.
    2)   Report to UKMTO.
    3)   Use of Citadel should be considered if boarding personnel are NOT uniformed.
    4)   If force is persistent in attempts to board, do not endanger your vessel or crew – slow down the vessel and allow them to board.

6.   Waterborne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIED) / Unmanned Surface Vessels (USV)

a.   Maintain a good lookout at all times. If a WBIED/USV is identified, maintain look out on all sides of the vessel in case of threats from other directions.

b.   Report anything suspicious to the port, UKMTO, local authorities, and Company Security Officer.

c.   A small craft with multiple persons onboard is unlikely to be a WBIED/USV. WBIED/USV will either be unmanned or have a solitary occupant.

d.   Evacuate crew clear of the upper deck on observation of a craft heading directly to the vessel.

e.   All crew inside vessel to move away from areas that may be impacted by the WBIED/USV, including sides of the vessel and in the engine room.

f.   Because of the risk of water ingress, crew should muster in a location **above the waterline** (not necessarily the citadel). <u>Crew should be informed of this location prior to entering the high risk area</u>.

g.   Manoeuvre vessel so that any impact on the vessel and where the crew musters is minimised.

h.   The aim of a WBIED/USV attack is to damage the vessel and cause water ingress, and therefore impact may result in a breach of the ship's superstructure and / or hull. If an attack is expected:
1)   Evacuate off the upper deck if possible.
2)   All crew inside should adopt a brace position to protect crew from shock waves. Hold onto something solid with both hands and have both feet planted firmly on the deck.
3)   Move away from certain areas such as the sides of the vessel, the poop deck, and engine room.
4)   Ship's firefighting and damage control teams should be ready to react to any fire or breach of hull integrity/ingress of water.

i.   If a WBIED/USV attack has happened:
1)   Ensure all crew and personnel are accounted for.
2)   Send distress signal.
3)   Implement damage control.
4)   Survey area where blast occurred. Take pictures for evidence collection.
5)   Remain vigilant in case of secondary follow-up attack on vessel. Attacks have included multiple vessels (multiple WBIEDs/USVs) as well as additional threats such as gunmen on skiffs and missile attacks.

j.   If a PCASP is embarked on the vessel, then the PCASP team can attempt to neutralize the WBIED/USV:
1)   Aimed shots at the propulsion system of the WBIED/USV to stop its approach.
2)   The PCASP team should maintain 360-degree coverage of the vessel to identify threats from any direction.

k.   Members of the ship's crew and PCASP should be careful not to expose themselves to potential other threats (such as missile strike, UAV, gunfire) when monitoring a WBIED/USV, especially if outside on bridgewings.

7.　　**Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV)**

a.　　Maintain a good lookout at all times.

b.　　Evacuate crew clear of the upper deck in known threat areas or on observation of a craft as a possible Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) acting suspiciously.

c.　　Report anything suspicious to the port, UKMTO, local authorities, and Company Security Officer.

d.　　Manoeuvre vessel so that any impact on the bridge, accommodation block and/or where the crew musters is minimised.

d.　　UAV attack explosions may result in a breach of the ship's superstructure. If an attack is expected:
1)　　Evacuate off the upper deck if possible.
2)　　If on the deck, lie flat on the deck as this reduces exposure to the blast area.
3)　　All crew inside should adopt a brace position to protect crew from shock waves. Hold onto something solid with both hands and have both feet planted firmly on the deck.
4)　　Move away from certain areas such as the sides of the vessel, the poop deck, and engine room.

e.　　If a drone or UAV attack has happened:
1)　　Ensure all crew and personnel are accounted for.
2)　　Send distress signal.
3)　　Implement damage control.
4)　　Survey area where blast occurred. Take pictures for evidence collection.
5)　　Remain vigilant in case of secondary follow-up attack on vessel.

8.　　**Navigational Challenges**

a.　　Due to possible GPS interference and AIS spoofing in the area, vessels should maintain safe distances from other vessels and keep engines ready for moving. This is particularly important in areas where vessel traffic has built up.

b.　　Any disruptions should be reported to UKMTO.

c.　　Navigational norms in the Strait of Hormuz should continue to be complied with and in particular compliance with Rule 10 (Traffic Separation Schemes) of the COLREGS. The use of the inshore traffic zone for navigation should only be undertaken for those vessels calling at ports within the inshore area. It is noted that an inshore traffic zone may be used to avoid immediate danger, but the word "immediate" in this respect must be taken account of. Therefore, the inshore traffic zone should not be used for routine navigation through the Strait. The reason for this is that the risk of collision would dramatically increase if all vessels both in bound and out bound used the inshore traffic zone.

9.   Use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP)

a.   Whilst PCASP can still be employed as part of the shipping company's operating procedures to counter the threat of piracy, PCASP should not be expected to counter the threat of military action by state forces or state-backed groups.

b.   Any PCASP onboard should make it clear to the boarding force that they do not pose a threat and should not be seen to hold any weapons by the boarding force.

c.   Any weapons, ammunition or security equipment onboard should be declared to the boarding force early in the incident – discovery later could seriously worsen the situation and give cause to the boarding force for additional sanctions against the vessel and crew and make any release attempts much harder.

d.   Any action by an armed team onboard may be met with an overwhelming force from a boarding force helicopter or naval vessels, which would greatly endanger the safety of the crew and PCASP.

e.   Attempts by the PCASP to defend the vessel from the boarding force may be seen as provocative and may result in poorer treatment of the PCASP and crew after the boarding force has taken control of the vessel.

f.   Any PCASP onboard a vessel should be briefed on embarkation of the client vessel of the actions to take in the event that a force attempts to board the vessel. The same instruction should be provided via email to the PMSC that deployed the PCASP.

g.   Ship operators should review all PMSC Standard Operating Porcedures regarding PCASCP actions in the event of military actions. **A PCASP may be able to disable a WBIED/USV by firing on it causing it to explode before reaching the vessel.**

h.   If PCASP are engaging a threat (armed skiff, UAV or WBIED/USV), one member of the PCASP should remain vigilant on other side of vessel in case of threat on other side of vessel.

10.   Links to Israel, USA, United Kingdom

a.   Any possible links to Israel, USA or United Kingdom should be considered by the vessel owners and operators, as this will increase the likelihood that a vessel may be targeted. Such links can include the following:
   1)   Ownership, either of the vessel itself or the operating companies.
   2)   Recent calls to Israeli ports by the vessel or other ships operated by the same companies.

b.   Be aware that websites may publicly list information that links the vessel to Israel, USA or United Kingdom, even if no such commercial or operational link exists, due to out-of-date information. Check through online searches whether such information exists.

c.   Israeli ports have removed vessel schedules from their websites. However, operators should be sensitive to such information being published in public domains.

d.   If the ship operator has other vessels calling at Israeli ports, it is recommended that the vessel calling at the Israeli port does not list the port or country destination on its AIS, as this information is publicly available on ship tracking websites.

Africa Risk Compliance Threat and Intelligence Assessments

MARITIME SECURITY | UNDERWATER SERVICES | OPERATIONAL SUPPORT | AGENCY SERVICES

E: info@arcafrica.com

T: +44 (0) 203 151 0170

www.arcafrica.com

LONDON | LOMÉ | COTONOU | LAGOS