International Chamber of Shipping

Shaping the Future of Shipping

Key Issues

Piracy and Security

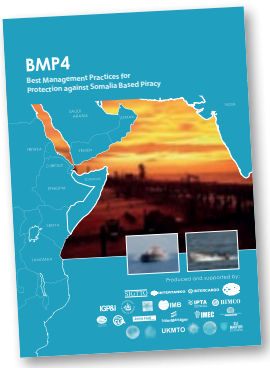
There are continuing signs that Somali pirates remain active in the Indian Ocean, but it is still too early to tell if there will ever be a resurgence of the level of piracy that occurred in the Indian Ocean between 2007 and 2012, when over 4,000 seafarers were taken hostage for ransom. However, ICS continues to emphasise the vital importance of ships and their crews remaining vigilant, and to continue applying the latest version of the industry Best Management Practices (BMP 4) which has played such an important part in the prevention of successful attacks.

In 2018, new security threats have emerged in the Southern Red Sea and Bab Al Mandab, due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen, with several instances of ships having been attacked.

In January 2018, the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) and the NATO Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) advised that a range of threats, including sea mines and water-borne improvised explosive devices, are also potential risks in the area. ICS, in conjunction with BIMCO and INTERTANKO, therefore published interim guidance to help ship operators be aware of new threat patterns in the area, and how the required preventive measures differ from the more familiar threat of piracy.

The new industry guidance stresses the importance of using the Maritime Security Transit Corridor established by coalition navies, and the need to adhere to registration and reporting requirements with the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) operated by EUNAVFOR, as well as reviewing and updating risk assessments and plans to address these new threats. The guidance also includes advice specific to identified threat types including water-borne devices, and complements the guidance provided on piracy by BMP 4. This guidance is available, inter alia, on the ICS website.

ICS and other industry partners are working on the development of new global counter-piracy guidance that would also address issues in West Africa and South East Asia, while also incorporating advice on other maritime security threats. This should be available during 2018.



The reduction in Somali pirate attacks has largely been attributed to the combined success of measures taken by shipping companies, including

BMP 4, and the protection that has been provided by military assets in the region. But the future maintenance of current levels of military protection against piracy has become problematic due to competing pressures on navies as a result of the political situation in the Middle East and elsewhere, as well as the need to respond to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean.

The current mandate for the EU counter-piracy operation, Operation Atalanta, finishes at the end of 2018, and its future thereafter remains uncertain. ICS, with other industry partners, is in discussion with EUNAVFOR about transition planning for 2019 onwards, including what elements of the operation might be maintained, and what could be passed over to others such as the U.S. led CMF and other independent military deployers.

ICS is keen to see the continuation of the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa, possibly with an expanded role. ICS is also advocating the possibility of a contingency EU force that could be called upon quickly in the event of sudden resurgence in pirate activity.