



3 July 2019

Safety & Security and the use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) in Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman

Introduction

Recent attacks against shipping off Fujairah and in the Gulf of Oman have caused great concern. This guidance is issued to offer risk mitigation considerations, available resources, clarity on the use of PCASP and awareness of navigation safety. Of the advice noted below, three aspects in particular are of vital importance:

- 1. PCASP should not be used as a risk mitigation measure in these waters;**
- 2. All seafarers operating in the Gulf of Oman, Straits of Hormuz and Arabian Gulf must remain vigilant and listen for military warnings AT ALL TIMES;**
- 3. Navigational norms in the Strait of Hormuz should continue to be complied with, and the use of the inshore traffic zone for navigation should only be undertaken for vessels calling at ports within the inshore area.**

What we know

On 13 June two tankers, in close proximity, suffered explosions and severe damage to hull and machinery whilst underway by what was reported to be multiple magnetic limpet mines.

The explosions were at or above the waterline and reporting suggests they were attached from undetected small boats possibly acting under the cover of darkness.

Neither vessel appears to have been targeted on the basis of flag.

The attack appears to have been well-planned and coordinated.

Additional military assets and vessels are actively deployed in the Gulf of Oman for surveillance, monitoring and response.

What we are doing

Industry Associations maintain close contact with Flag States, Regional Stakeholders, UKMTO, Combined Maritime Forces and other industry associations.

Recommended Risk Mitigation Measures

It is recommended that companies review:

- *BMP5, Section 2*
- *US Maritime Advisories*
- *Industry Releasable Threat Bulletins*
- *Flag Security Advisories and Bulletins*
- *The ship's hull and machinery, war risk and P&I Insurances before sailing into the region to ensure the ship has cover and remains within cover throughout*

and consider sending the following guidance to vessels:

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.

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

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

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

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

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

Mitigation Measures may include (in addition to maintaining a full and vigilant bridge watch for safe navigation):

Placing additional lookouts to the navigation team and bridge wings with a specific remit to maintain visual watch for small craft approaching.

Ensuring the lookouts are briefed on maintaining a clear watch astern and over the side.

Maintaining use of night vision binoculars and consider carrying more onboard.

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.

Ensuring ISPS security levels are strictly in place.

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).

Ensure water tight integrity underway or at anchorage.

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.

If during transit, a threat from mines is announced, move all crew to above the waterline.

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.

Report any suspicious activity immediately to both the port and UKMTO **+44 239 222 2060**.

Monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels.

Check all fire-fighting equipment is available for immediate use. Make sure the emergency fire pump is available if any maintenance is being undertaken.

Keep the Automatic Information System (AIS) on. There is no need to complete the field stating the last or next port of call.

Visual check of the hull, at sea or at anchor

Undertake a visual over side search from the deck, all around the vessel, to check for anything attached to the hull of the vessel.

Particular attention should be paid to the hull at or near the waterline.

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.

Crew conducting visual checks should wear appropriate PPE, protective head gear, safety harness and life jackets at all times.

Additional measures Operators may wish to take if alerted to suspicious activity whilst at anchor include:

Rotate the propeller continuously or at short, irregular intervals.

Operate bow and stern thrusters at zero (0) thrust.

Turn the rudder frequently.

Switch the echo sounder to transmit counter/combat swimmer/diver threat.

Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) PCASP should not be employed. Reports have suggested that ships transiting the region have used PCASP to mitigate the threats which confronted the maritime industry in the Gulf of Oman on 13 June. The use of unarmed maritime advisors to assist with onboard security and watch-keeping is sensible,

however, careful note should be taken of the legal and practical advice below regarding the use of PCASP against threats recently encountered in the Gulf of Oman.

Owners and operators' attention is drawn to the following high-level legal guidance when deploying PCASP;

- PCASP may only be deployed with the authorisation of the flag State and within the provision of the license issued.
- Within the High Risk Area as defined on Maritime Security Chart Q6099 or, within a specified geographical area defined by the Flag State.

The use of force against threats recently encountered in the Gulf of Oman carries significant risk and has the potential to escalate security situations to the detriment of the safety of ship and crew.

Practical considerations, PCASP

- Shipowners, -operators and -managers are strongly advised to consult their Flag State on the use of PCASP to protect ships operating in Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.
- PCASP should store all weapons in a bonded store unless use is permitted by flag state and licensing arrangements.
- The presence of weapons must be declared to port authorities.

Personnel intended to be deployed as PCASP in the Somali Piracy HRA could be used as advisors in an *unarmed* capacity when operating in Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.

Navigational Safety in Strait of Hormuz

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.

More Information:

Industry Maritime Security Website: <https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/>

Download BMP5: [Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.](#)

OCIMF's Ship Security: [Hull Vulnerability Study.](#)

NATO ATP2: [NCAGS Guide to Owners, Operators, Masters and Officers Edition A Version 1 Annex D to Chp 4](#)

US NCAGS: Guidance to Shipping 2019-001 dated 19 June 2019.