Weekly Security & Risk Report

Date: 04th March 2020
Series 14/Issue 218

MAKING THE WORLD A SAFER PLACE TO LIVE & WORK
## MAST Services

MAST has the experience, capability and global presence to provide comprehensive support to our clients.

*Making the world a safer place to live and work*

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The Security and Risk Report Series focuses on:

- Operational risks in areas of instability which could affect the safety of commercial and private vessels and personnel ashore and at sea.
- In country reporting on key countries where civil conflict are directly impacting on maritime operations; and
- Reporting and analysis of incidents of terrorism, piracy and other related criminal activity.

MAST has a global reach and presence, delivering first hand, accurate and exclusive intelligence. MAST is entrenched and committed in continuing to support and promote the awareness of the very real risks that seafarers and other stakeholders face.

This Intelligence Report Series is a brief snapshot of MAST’s Intelligence capabilities. MAST Intelligence specialises in providing clients with a suite of products and services, including: political and economic risk analysis, detailed port and vessel security briefs, vessel passage plans, threat and risk mitigation and travel risk management.

Working closely in conjunction with a host of experts, MAST Intelligence offers a market leading service pertaining to all maritime affairs.

Follow MAST on LinkedIn and Twitter to keep abreast with these insightful weekly reports and more — including real time security updates.

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04th March 2020

Issue 218 of the series reviews, analyses and threat assesses the fragile and conflict affected coastal states Libya, Somalia and Yemen. The Mediterranean migrant crisis, incidents affecting maritime security and influencing maritime news are also reported and analysed, focusing on the keys theatres of maritime instability.
Incidents:
1. MV reported a suspicious approach at 0806 UTC in position 24.43.07N – 057.38.54E, around 74nm WSW of Fujairah, Gulf of Oman. Two skiffs approached and circled the vessel. Coalition Warship in the vicinity and as it approached, the 2 skiffs departed. Vessel and crew safe. Reported (UKMTO) 1st Mar.

2. On 25th February 2020 at approximately 10:40UTC an MV was approached in position 12.13N 044.06E (BeM) by 3 skiffs. Vessels transiting the area are advised to exercise extreme caution. Reported (UKMTO) 1st Mar.

UKMTO warns of drifting naval mines
Drifting mines have been reported in an area of Yemen and Saudi Red Sea coastal waters. There is no specific threat to vessels following recognised shipping routes. In response a NAVAREA IX Navigation Warning has been issued:
NAVAREA IX. 071/20.
Southern Red Sea and Farasan Bank.
Charts BA 157, 2964 AND 4071.
Mines reported adrift in area bounded by
A. 16-45.60N 042-15.70E
B. 15-41.50N 042-39.40E
C. 15-54.00N 043-02.30E
D. 16-58.70N 042-35.10E

Foreign Military Presence in Hormuz Strait Unconstructive
The presence of foreign military forces in the sensitive Persian Gulf is unconstructive, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said. “We are against the presence of foreign forces in the region under different names and coalitions,” Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Monday 2nd March in a regular press briefing. IRNA reported.

Dutch Navy patrols Strait of Hormuz for European security mission
HNLMS De Ruyter is officially deployed in the Strait of Hormuz. There, the navy ship participates in the European security mission. This mission intends to reduce tensions in the area around Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Between these countries, the Strait of Hormuz is an important sailing route from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean.

Kenya takes over as head of CGPCS
The handover ceremony for the presidency of the Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was held at the Sofitel Hotel, Flic en Flac, this Thursday 27th. Organized on the initiative of the Republic of Mauritius, in conjunction with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), this ceremony will mark the end of two years of presidency by Mauritius in this international platform focused on the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia.

Exercise Falcon Response 2020
Exercise Falcon Response (EX FR) recently took place in the Arabian Gulf and focused on testing regional responses to a Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) incident. This year’s exercise included units from Royal Bahrain Naval Force, Royal Saudi Naval and Border Guard Forces, Kuwait Coast Guard and US Task Force 55. This main area of operation was the North and Central Arabian Gulf and tested communication flow between CTF152, Regional partners and search & rescue vessels at sea.

To see MAST’s services in the Indian Ocean Region, please click here.
Somalia

Somalia troops clashed with a regional militia on Friday 28th in one of the most serious outbreaks of fighting yet over political rivalries that Washington says are slowing the war against al Qaeda-linked insurgents. Tension spilled over on Thursday evening between the Somali National Army and the Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’a (ASWJ) militia, a group of moderate Sufi Muslims which has played a key role in the fight against the al Qaeda-linked Al Shabaab insurgency.

Somalia agrees offshore oil exploration roadmap with Shell/Exxon

Somalia has agreed an initial roadmap with a Shell/Exxon joint venture to explore and develop potential offshore oil and gas reserves, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources said on Monday Mar. 2nd. “I am delighted we have agreed an initial roadmap with the Shell/Exxon joint venture. This gives us confidence in the ability to further explore any offshore hydrocarbon potential,” minister Abdirashid Mohamed Ahmed said in a statement.

Bomb blast kills 4 soldiers

At least four Somali government soldiers were killed and several others wounded when a bomb blast targeted a military convoy near the town of Warmahan, lower Shabelle region, an official said on Sunday March 1st. Warmahan is a small agricultural town located near Afgoye, 30 kilometers (18 miles) southwest of the capital Mogadishu.

11 MPs questioned over secret Somalia trip

11 Members of Parliament from North Eastern Region were on Sunday March 1st interrogated for over three hours by security multiagency team over what the Interior Ministry says was an unclear secret mission in Somalia. According to the government, the 11 MPs from North Eastern were not cleared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from the office of the speaker of National Assembly to engage Somali leadership on any security negotiations.

US airstrikes kill 2 Al Shabaab operatives

U.S. forces in Africa have killed two terrorists in a pair of airstrikes in Somalia on Friday Feb. 28th, according to an initial assessment of the strikes provided to American Military News. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), working in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, has carried out the strikes targeting Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Shabaab terrorists near Qunyo Barrow.

World Bank restores relations with Somalia

The World Bank moved on Thursday Feb. 27th to reestablish relations with Somalia after a 30-year break, paving the way for the country to have access to low-cost development aid. “Somalia has made important reforms and has demonstrated strong commitment to staying the course,” said Hafez Ghanem, World Bank vice president for Africa.

Analysis

Al Shabaab continues to mount operations throughout the country, despite efforts by US Central Command to degrade its capabilities with ongoing airstrikes which aim to remove AS leadership. It is questionable as to whether this “body count” policy is working.

Threat Assessment

The political situation has seen increased tension between regional states and the Federal Government. Should this continue, there is an opportunity for criminal organisations to return to their previous maritime activities. Al Shabaab continues to challenge the government and efforts to disrupt its operations continue, although AMISOM forces will withdraw some time in 2019. The trade in illegal charcoal by terror and crime groups continues, although the Combined Maritime Forces and UN are working on measures to prevent it. Youth unemployment in Somalia has not improved with 67% of Somali male youths aged between 14 to 29 unemployed. Pirate financiers offer lucrative and attractive opportunities, and were seen to be increasingly active in the last inter-monsoon period. Recent incidents off Somalia have highlighted the robust protections offered by both BMPs and well-trained, vigilant armed protection teams. Illegal fishing has returned to the region and there are wider political concerns that it could spark a resurgence in maritime crime unless checked. There is a risk that complacency in some quarters has seen a reduction in PMSC presence in these waters that could result in a piracy success. A lack of adherence to BMP5 protocol, particularly not maintaining a safe distance off the coast, has increased risks to shipping. Merchant vessels would be wise to maintain the same distance from the coast, particularly ensuring that the Socotra Gap isn’t taken. All vessels are advised to update risk assessments and register with UKMTO/MSCHOA prior to entering the Indian Ocean High Risk Area (IHR).
Yemen

Houthi rebels have seized control of a strategic town north of the capital, government officials said on Sunday March 1st, in what analysts say could change the course of the five-year-old war. The Iran-aligned militia captured al-Hazm, capital of the northern province of al-Jawf, enabling the rebels to pose a threat to neighboring oil-rich Marib province, a government military official told AFP.

South Yemeni gunmen prevent ship from offloading fuel in Aden

Yemeni gunmen entered on Saturday Feb. 29th a port in the southern city of Aden and prevented a tanker from offloading a diesel cargo because the importing company is affiliated with the government, a Reuters cameraman reported. The gunmen belong to the separatist Southern Transitional Council, according to comments made in the port by their leader, who identified himself as Abu Hammam.

Houthi forces claim to down "US drone"

Media outlets loyal to the Houthi rebel forces claimed on Sunday Mar. 1st that they had downed a drone operated by the "US-Saudi aggressors" in Hodeidah governate, near the city of Ad-Durayhimi.

Second army regiment rebels against Yemen government in Socotra

A regiment in the Yemen Army has pledged allegiance to the UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Socotra, renouncing the UN-backed government of Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi, media outlets reported on Feb. 28th. An adviser to the Yemeni Minister of Information, Mukhtar Al-Rahbi, said that a second army regiment in Socotra has rebelled against the state, pledging allegiance to the so-called transitional council.

Pro-gov’t Yemeni exchange prisoners with Houthis in Hodeidah

A prisoner swap between pro-government Yemeni forces and Houthi militia took place on Thursday 27th in the country’s Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, a military official told Xinhua. According to the military source who asked to remain anonymous, “two pro-government soldiers were set free in exchange for the release of three Houthi rebels from the jail manned by the government forces in Hodeidah.”

US claims Iran is stepping up support to Yemen’s Houthis

Iran might be advancing its support for the Houthi movement in Yemen, according to a senior US State Department official. “I think Iran’s support to Houthis, especially in areas like sending advanced weapons, is continuing without any diminution,” the official said last week.

Prominent Foe of Houthis Appointed Yemen Chief of Staff

Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi appointed on Friday 29th Commander of the Joint Operations General Sagheer bin Aziz as Chief of Staff, promoting him to Lieutenant General. He succeeds Abdullah Salem al-Nakhi. His appointment coincides with the intensification of fighting between the army and Iran-backed Houthi militias on the Nihm, al-Jawf and Sarwah fronts.

Griffiths: No alternative to a negotiated solution

UN Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths said that peace in the war-torn country will only happen through a negotiated solution. “This conflict has already claimed too many victims, and it threatens the collapse of the state and the disintegration of the social fabric. And every day that we together lose translates into immeasurable more effort, time and resources that will be required to rebuild the institutions and infrastructure necessary for a return to civility and a dignified life for the people of Yemen,” said Griffiths at a two-day consultative meeting with Yemeni public and political figures in Amman.

Fears of revenge attacks in Yemen grow following killing of senior al Qaeda leader

Officials of the newly-recruited southern security forces have warned that “terror groups” are plotting to launch attacks against key military facilities in the Yemeni port city of Aden following the killing of a senior al Qaeda leader. In an audio speech revealed by pro-AQAP religious social media accounts, the group confirmed the death of its leader al-Raymi, and announced appointing Khalid Batarfi as a successor.

To see the latest threat analysis and Yemen port information in MASTOPDEIA, please click here.

MAST recommends BMP measures be enforced and watches strengthened during transits in the region.
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Friday Feb. 28th said the Libyan Coast Guard has rescued 1,944 migrants off Libyan coast so far in 2020. "As of 28th February 2020, 1,944 refugees and migrants have been registered as rescued/intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard and disembarked in Libya," the UNHCR said. There are more than 48,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers in Libya currently, it said.

After record year, 883 migrants arrive in Malta in 2 months
Malta is experiencing a record number of migrant arrivals in 2020, as 883 people have already arrived in the first two months of the year. That figure is around 16 times higher than the number of arrivals in the same period in 2019. In the first two months of the year, a total of 883 migrants have already arrived in Malta by boat from Libya, according to UNHCR. This figure is around 16 times higher than in the same period in 2019. Or, in other words, the number for the first two months in 2020 represents 25% of all 2019 arrivals.

35 migrants rescued off Libyan coast by merchant ship
A commercial ship rescued 35 Europe-bound migrants off Libya’s Mediterranean coast and returned them to the capital, Tripoli, the UN migration agency said. The International Organization for Migration posted on Twitter that the migrants, intercepted on Thursday Feb. 27th, were given medical assistance and relief items upon disembarkation.

Thousands of migrants gather on Turkey-Greece border amid Erdogan threat
Some 13,000 migrants have gathered along the Turkish-Greek border after Turkey’s president threatened to allow some of the many refugees in the country cross into Europe, the UN said Saturday Feb. 29th. "Thousands of migrants, including families with young children, are passing a cold night along the border between Turkey and Greece," the International Organization for Migration said in a statement, adding that its staff had observed "at least 13,000 people gathered along the 212-kilometre (125-mile) long border."

The current migrant smuggling situation
Little change to report in the past week, although the spread of the coronavirus and resultant Covid-19 could well hamper NGO rescue missions in the Mediterranean. Italy has already placed 276 rescued migrants in quarantine, following their disembarkation from the Ocean Viking vessel in Sicily. Médecins Sans Frontières has urged Italian authorities to let NGO-run vessels carry out rescue operations without quarantining them in connection with the coronavirus emergency. "Putting rescue vessels in quarantine is like stopping an ambulance in the middle of an emergency," the organization said. The virus and ongoing conflict in Libya continue to add new issues to the problem of migration in the region.
Libya

Libya's UN-recognized government on Saturday Feb. 29th said it struck multiple targets of warlord Khalifa Haftar's forces south of the capital Tripoli. In a statement, the Government of National Accord (GNA) said 11 targets of Haftar's forces were bombed. It said the offensive was in retaliation to attacks by Haftar's forces on civilian settlements in Tripoli and the Mitiga International Airport.

Haftar militias target Tripoli's Mitiga Airport
Militias loyal to Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar targeted Mitiga International Airport in the capital Tripoli on Monday Mar. 2nd. They fired nine rockets, according to local media. One of the rockets hit an area near the airport, causing fear and panic among passengers and employees.

Swiss traders conducting business with Libyan militias
An international criminal network with connections in Switzerland has been smuggling Libyan oil between 2014 and 2015, an investigative report revealed on Monday. Commodity traders based in the Swiss region of Zug have been conducting illegal business transactions with Libyan militias smuggling oil from the Zawiya oilfield, east of Tripoli, through a Maltese company, said the report, Al Jazeera reported on Mar. 2nd.

'Stressed' Ghassan Salame resigns as UN envoy
The UN's special envoy for Libya has resigned saying his efforts to bring peace in the North African country was damaging his health. Ghassan Salame tweeted that 'my health no longer allows this rate of stress'.

GNA forces say they killed 23 fighters from Haftar's forces
Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) announced Sunday Mar. 1st that it killed 23 fighters loyal to Khalifa Haftar in southern Tripoli. The GNA captured four of Haftar's forces alive while repulsing the attack, Mustafa al-Mujie, the spokesman for the GNA-led Burkan Al-Ghadab (Volcano of Rage) Operation, told Anadolu Agency. He added that nine GNA soldiers were killed.

LNA Downs Two Turkish Drones in Tripoli
The Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar announced it has shot down two Turkish drones in Souk al-Khamis, south of Tripoli, media reported on Feb. 27th. Commander of LNA’s western military operations room, Maj. Gen. al-Mabrouk al-Ghazwi confirmed the downing of a Turkish drone south of Tripoli after it took off from “Turkish base in Mitiga,” saying it was a violation of the ceasefire declared in the region.

Mellitah wins case against Posh Offshore services
Mellitah Oil and Gas, a JV between Libya’s National Oil Corporation and Italy’s Eni Oil, announced on Feb. 29th that it had successfully defended its case against Posh Offshore services before the Dutch court of Amsterdam. POSH was one of the companies subcontracted by the main contractor STX implementing the Gaza Floating Reservoir project to replace the old Sloug FSO for its offshore Bouri field. The Gaza FSO was built at a cost of US$ 424.78m. The Bouri oil reservoir is the biggest in the Mediterranean region and was Libya’s first subsea project. The field is in the block NC-41.

Immigrant shelter fire kills 1
The International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Sunday said that a fire broke out in a shelter for immigrants in Libya on Saturday Feb. 29th, leaving one immigrant killed. “A young Eritrean died in detention in Libya last night, after fire broke out in one of the hangars. This is another reminder of the dire and inhumane conditions in detention centers. It is unacceptable that avoidable tragedies continue to occur,” the IOM tweeted.

21 civilians killed by Haftar’s violations of Libya’s ceasefire
The Field Medical and Support Center (FMSC) in Tripoli has documented 21 civilians as killed and 31 injured in the last 41 days in Tripoli - since the announcement of a truce in the Libyan capital last January.

Haftar forces hit airport in Libyan capital Tripoli
Militias loyal to Libyan putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar targeted Mitiga International Airport in the capital Tripoli late on Wednesday Feb. 26th. In a statement, the Tripoli-based internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) said Mitiga Airport, open to civilian use, was hit by Grad missiles.

To read MAST’s Libyan Country report on MASTOPEDIA, please click here.
Incidents:


Nigeria plans bills to end ports, harbours, waterways’ insecurity

The Senate is currently perfecting arrangements to introduce three new bills to regulate and restructure the security architecture of the Nigerian waterways, ports and harbours. One of the proposed legislations is a bill for an act to provide for the establishment of the Nigerian Merchant Navy Coast Guard Security and Safety Corps. Nigerian media reported. It is not known which agency would take lead in this scenario, as Nigeria already has a plethora of agencies and bodies tasked with maritime, port security and policing.

Hazards of ship wrecks on Lagos waterways

No less than 100 ship wrecks and vessels have been abandoned on Lagos waters by unidentified shipping firms and individuals. The Nation newspaper has learnt. The wrecks, derelicts and abandoned vessels litter the waterways and need to be removed to stem criminalities on the territorial waters and around the port. stakeholders have said.

NIMASA Set to Tackle Piracy with Multi-million Dollar Vessels

In bid to halt piracy, criminality in Nigeria’s territorial waters and the annual loss of about $2.3 billion to maritime crime, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) have taken delivery of two Special Mission Vessels (SMV), an effort they believe will put an end to the menace. The vessel, DB Lagos and DB Abuja are equipped with sophisticated intelligence gathering capability for timely detection and response to illegal activities in the Nigerian maritime domain.

World shipping groups threaten to report Nigeria to UN

In a curious news article, Nigerian media last week reported that two International shipping groups, the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), and International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (InterTanko), have threatened to report Nigeria to the United Nations, UN, and the United States of America, USA, if cogent actions are not taken to stem the recent spike in pirate attacks against their vessels and personnel.

Buhari suspends Charles Dokubo, coordinator of Amnesty programme

President Muhammadu Buhari has approved the suspension of Charles Dokubo, coordinator of the presidential amnesty programme, Nigerian media reported on Feb. 28th. The program makes payments to former militants in an attempt to maintain peace in the Delta, but has been beset by allegations of corruption. Femi Adesina, special adviser to the president on media and publicity, disclosed this in a statement. Adesina said the suspension is in line with the recommendation of a caretaker committee set up to look into allegations and petitions against Dokubo.

To see MAST Services in the region, please click here. And to read Nigeria’s country report, please click here.
**South East Asia**

An Army soldier and two suspected terrorists were killed in a military offensive in Maguindanao province in the southern Philippines, the military report said on Tuesday Mar. 3rd. Major General Diosdado Carreon, commander of the Army’s task force in central Mindanao, said three Army soldiers were also injured in the offensive that took place on Monday morning in Ampatuan town. Operating troops of the joint task force central launched a focused military operation against the Daesh-inspired terrorist group using air and artillery assets, Carreon said in a statement.

**Incidents: Nothing significant to report.**

**Suspected Militant Surrenders to Philippine Military**

A suspected member of a terrorist cell that allegedly once plotted deadly bomb attacks with the Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf has surrendered to the Philippine military in southern Zamboanga city, six years after eluding capture, officials said Monday Mar. 2nd. Authorities identified the suspect as Rommel Aguirre, a mechanical engineer believed to be a bomb expert of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), a group composed mostly of former Christians who had converted to Islam and aligned with the Islamic State.

**SAF to restructure intelligence and cyber defence units, acquire new ships for maritime security amid evolving threats**

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) will restructure its intelligence and cyber defence units as well as acquire new ships to boost maritime security, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said in Parliament on Monday Mar. 2nd. This is in response to the clear and present security threats of terrorism, cyber and maritime threats, Dr Ng said in his Committee of Supply debate speech.

**200 Pinoy crew barred from getting off cruise ship**

Two-hundred Filipino crewmembers were barred from disembarking after their cruise ship arrived in Manila on Sunday Mar. 1st due to the threat of the coronavirus. The Philippine Coast Guard said that Filipino crew of the Netherlands-flagged Westerdam cruise ship was not allowed to take shore leave when it docked at the Port of Manila for re-provisioning.

**Vietnam joins ASEAN effort to combat IUU fishing**

Relations between the EU and some ASEAN member states have been tense in recent years because of the seafood trade, stemming from the European Commission’s (EC) sanctions related to the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. As Chair of ASEAN 2020, Vietnam hopes to promote cooperation among ASEAN member states and address this issue to actively contribute towards better ASEAN-EU trade relations.

**MNLF helping track kidnapped doctor**

Fighters of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) are helping the military track the location of a doctor seized by the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu. Daniel Moreno was seized from his clinic in Jolo on Feb. 4th by a group of bandits who are also holding captive five Indonesian fishermen.

**Coast Guard probes foreign ship for violating PH quarantine rule**

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is investigating a foreign cargo vessel for allegedly violating the Philippines’ 14-day quarantine rule amid the novel coronavirus outbreak. PCG Spokesperson Commodore Armand Balilio said that PCG Commandant Admiral Joel Garcia ordered the investigation of the Panama-flagged MV Harmony 6.

**Indonesia approves plan to receive ScanEagle UAVs, helicopter upgrades from US**

The Indonesian House of Representatives’ commission on defence, intelligence, and foreign affairs (Komisi I) has approved a plan for the navy to receive up to 14 ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and upgrades for three Bell 412 helicopters from the US government.
Central and South America

Nothing significant to report.

Incidents:
1. Duty crew on routine safety rounds onboard anchored Panama-flagged bulk carrier noticed two small boats secured near the bow and three persons climbing the anchor chain at 0540 UTC in position 12:01.80S - 077:12.30W, Callao Anchorage, Peru. One person was seen waiting in the boat. Alarm raised and all crew moved towards the forecastle. Seeing the alerted crew, the persons retreated and escaped in their boats. Reported (IMB) 1st Mar. *(Not shown on chart)*

Standing advice:
The repercussions of a vessel being caught acting as a mule with drugs stowed will depend on the type, amount and national laws, but may be disruptive and costly. When and if operating in these areas, especially Columbia and Peru, it is advised that:
- Potential stowage areas such as rudder shafts are denied as far as possible, and/or routinely searched.
- Access points are closely monitored by a vigilant watch for the duration of the vessel’s call at port.
Severe Weather Warnings

Warnings detailed on this page are from the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and are issued by respective Regional Specialised Metrological Centres, Tropical Cyclone Centres or National Meteorological Services. For further information on severe weather warnings please click here.

Nothing significant to report.