MAST Services

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maritime</th>
<th>Risk Consulting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counter piracy</td>
<td>Due Diligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISPS services</td>
<td>Risk management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Crisis management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K&amp;R and Ship Arrest</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Yacht Security</th>
<th>Physical and Asset Protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System Design, Installation and Maintenance</td>
<td>Close Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Consultancy</td>
<td>Residential Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber Risk Consultancy</td>
<td>Security Chauffeurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSCM Sweeping Services</td>
<td>Events and Clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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.

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Contents:

- Mast Services
- Indian Ocean region
- Somalia
- Yemen
- Mediterranean
- Libya
- Gulf of Guinea
- South East Asia
- Central & South America
- Severe Weather Warnings

Page
2
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

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Indian Ocean Region

The Royal Navy will accompany ships through the Strait of Hormuz amid soaring tensions in the Middle East, following the US’s fatal drone strike on Iran’s top general. The imminent move to protect UK-flagged ships came on Saturday Jan. 4th as the Foreign Office was strengthening its travel warnings across the region as fears of all-out war heightened. UK warships had previously patrolled the region and offered protection to UK-flagged vessels until November 2019, following the seizure of the Stena Impero by Iranian forces.

Incidents: Nothing significant to report.

MAST advice on increased tensions in region:
Following the death of Qasem Soleimani, a response from Iran is expected in the region. MAST strongly advises against deploying armed guards during transits in the Strait of Hormuz/Persian Gulf. Unarmed guards, trained in threat recognition and well schooled in the patterns of life at sea in the region are recommended. Masters should adhere to BMP 5 recommendations and ensure relevant agencies such as UKMTO are informed before transiting the region. Additionally, crew should run citadel training drills before entering the Strait.

Japan urges increased diplomatic efforts to ease tensions in Middle East, still plans SDF dispatch
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Monday Jan. 6th encouraged a deescalation of tensions in the Middle East, calling on all parties involved to step up diplomatic efforts. The Japanese leader mentioned no change in the Cabinet’s decision made last month to dispatch the nation’s Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) personnel to the Middle East.

Japanese shipper MOL issues new safety advisory for Strait of Hormuz transit
Japan’s Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, one of the country’s largest shipowners, issued a new safety advisory for its vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the key chokepoint for oil and gas ships traversing the Persian Gulf, amid heightened tensions between the US and Iran. Under the latest safety advisory -- which was issued after a US strike Thursday in Baghdad killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani -- MOL advised its ships to keep a distance from the Iranian coast and avoid Iranian waters when transiting the Strait of Hormuz, a company spokes-

man said on Monday Jan. 6th.

Pakistani warship docks in Dubai on anti-piracy mission
A Pakistani warship has arrived in Dubai for a visit while on a regional security patrol to tackle piracy. The warship – a Zulfiquar-class guided missile frigate – is one of several vessels engaged in anti-piracy patrols in the Horn of Africa and maritime patrols in the Gulf.

Riyadh Hosts Meeting of Red Sea Coastal States
Foreign ministers of Red Sea coastal states are set to kick off meetings in Riyadh this week to promote cooperation and economic integration and to ensure maritime security along this international waterway. The meeting is expected to tackle issues on the responsibility of Red Sea states to prevent the intervention of any foreign country in the affairs of this sensitive area.

Iranian general threatens strikes on US warships in Persian Gulf
A top Iranian military official for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) in southern Iran threatened attacks on U.S. destroyers and warships near the Persian Gulf on Friday Jan. 3rd. Gen. Gholamali Abuhamzeh, the commander of IRGC forces near the Strait of Hormuz, said those U.S. warships were some of the 35 U.S. targets Iran has identified for attacks in the region, according to Reuters.

To see MAST’s services in the Indian Ocean Region, please click here.
Four die in militant attack on Kenya phone mast
Four people have been killed in a militant attack near a boarding school in north-eastern Kenya on Tuesday Jan. 7th. The al-Shabaab fighters had been targeting a phone mast about 25km (15 miles) from Dadaab in Garissa county, the police said.

Kenya, Somalia keep eyes on court over ocean block dispute
Somalia's diplomatic relations with Kenya will in 2020 be tested depending on the outcome of the maritime boundary case which is due to be determined in June. As Mogadishu and Nairobi appeared to iron out relations as 2019 was coming to an end, legal experts said the case at the International Court of Justice was a sticking point and could make or break this rapprochement in 2020.

33 Al Shabaab militants killed
At least 33 fighters from al-Qaeda affiliated group Al Shabaab were killed in two separate operations in southwestern Somalia on Friday Jan. 3rd, officials said. The first operation was conducted by specially-trained Somali forces known as Danab in the vicinity of Balow Eyo in lower Shabelle province, killing at least 30 Al Shabaab militants, according to Ismail Abdimalik Malin, a senior military commander in the region.

Somalia attack: Demonstrations held in Mogadishu
Hundreds of people attended a local government-organised protest on Jan. 2nd against militant group Al Shabaab in Mogadishu. The demonstration came after the militants killed more than 80 people in a bomb attack on Saturday Dec. 28th.

Experts Dismiss Claim That a Foreign Country Planned Bombing in Mogadishu
Experts on Somalia say they doubt the claim by the Somali government’s intelligence agency that an unnamed “foreign country” planned the Dec. 28th attack in Mogadishu that killed scores of civilians. The National Intelligence and Security Agency of Somalia did not name the accused country, nor did it offer evidence for its explosive claim of foreign responsibility.

Three Al-Shabaab killed following U.S. airstrike in Lower Shabelle
U.S. Africa Command, Africom, has announced that three Al-Shabaab members were yesterday killed in an airstrike conducted in the vicinity of Ba’ow village, Lower Shabelle region. “In coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, U.S. Africa Command conducted an airstrike against al-Shabaab terrorists who engaged Somali National Army partner forces on patrol near Bacaw, Somalia, Jan. 3rd,” the statement said.

Kenyan officials say extremist attack on bus convoy kills 4
Kenyan officials say four people were killed on Thursday Jan. 2nd when a convoy of passenger buses was fired on in the country’s eastern coastal area. Al Shabaab rebels have claimed responsibility for the attack.

Control of Somali territory (March 2017) Source: Wikimedia Commons

- Under control of Al Shabaab and allies
- Under control of neutral forces
- Under control of Government and allies
- Somaliland Government
- Territory disputed by Puntland and Somaliland

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 BMP5s 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 PMSA 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 (IORA).
**Yemen**

Yemen’s Houthi rebel group has called for striking the U.S. military bases in the region in swift reprisal for the killing of the senior Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani. In a statement by the group’s political bureau on Friday Jan. 3rd, the rebels considered the U.S. killing of Soleimani as “a war crime,” saying “striking the American bases in the region is the only available solution.”

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**Missile attack kills 9 gov’t troops**

Nine government soldiers were killed in a missile attack by Houthi rebels on a military camp in south-western Yemen on Tuesday Jan. 7th, according to a Yemeni military source. The casualties occurred when a rebel drone struck the training camp in the town of Maris, north of Dhali province, the source said on condition of anonymity.

**UN resumes grain milling in Hodeidah**

The United Nation’s World Food Programme (WFP) said on Monday Jan. 6th it has resumed milling grain for food aid in Yemen after a brief halt due to shelling damage. On 26 December, artillery fire hit WFP grain stores at the Red Sea Mills in the highly strategic port city of Hodeidah, leading to a four-day halt in milling, the organisation said in a statement.

**Families flee from houses in Hodeidah due to Houthi shelling**

Many of the Yemeni families continued on Friday Jan. 3rd to flee their residential neighborhoods due to the sporadic shelling carried out by the Houthi rebels in the country’s Red Sea port city of Hodeidah. A local government official told Xinhua on condition of anonymity that “the families living in the southern part of Hodeidah received a new year amid continuing Houthi shelling on their houses.”

**Trump administration extends protected status for Yemen**

The Trump administration has decided to extend humanitarian protections for some Yemenis in the United States for an additional 18 months. The decision, made by acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, grants an extension of Temporary Protected Status for Yemen through Sept. 3, 2021.

**UAE combats airborne epidemics on Yemen’s Red Sea coast**

The United Arab Emirates has launched an extensive campaign to combat epidemics in cities and districts across the Red Sea Coast of Yemen, within the framework of its emergency response programme in the country, and in response to calls for help made by concerned Yemeni authorities. Hospitals in areas including Mokha, Taiz, Al Duraimi and Al Hodeidah were provided with large quantities of medicines to treat people struck with diseases including dengue, malaria and Acute Watery Diarrhea. A campaign which saw the spraying of insecticides to control mosquitoes and disease-carrying insects was also carried out in the region.

**Yemen’s southern separatists pull out of Riyadh agreement committees**

Southern separatists in Yemen have pulled out of committees implementing a November agreement to end a power struggle in the south that had opened a new front in the country’s multifaceted war. The pact was reached after more than a month of indirect talks in Saudi Arabia. Under the deal, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and other southerners would join a new national cabinet and place all forces under control of the internationally recognized government.

**Oil Revenues to Constitute 60% of Govt Budget, Says Yemeni Minister**

Yemen’s Oil and Minerals Minister Aws al-Awd has affirmed the government’s attempts to raise its oil production to about 80,000 barrels per day (bpd) in Q1 2020 from its current estimated 50,000 bpd. “All the plans put aim at increasing production while also ensuring secured vital sites that are affiliated with the Ministry and under the Saudi-led Coalition support,” he stressed.

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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.
Migrant crossings 2016-2019. Source: UNHRC

The International Organization for Migration reports 110,669 migrants and refugees entered Europe by sea during 2019, marking the sixth straight year that at least 100,000 arrivals were recorded on three Mediterranean Sea Routes. The total is only slightly below the 116,273 men, women and children who crossed the Mediterranean in this fashion in 2018, a decline of about five per cent. Deaths recorded on the three main Mediterranean Sea routes through 2019 are at 1,283 individuals—or about 44% of the 2,299 deaths confirmed during the same period in 2018. The Mediterranean has claimed the lives of at least 19,164 migrants since 2014.

Church initiative plans to launch rescue vessel
More than 150 organizations have pledged support to the “United4Rescue” initiative, launched by Germany’s Protestant Church, which hopes to finance sea rescue efforts and send its own vessel into the Mediterranean Sea. The group is hoping to acquire a rescue ship in the near future.

Two hundred migrants rescued off Spanish coast
The New Year in Spain has commenced with the arrival of two hundred migrants in 14 boats that arrived at different points along the Spanish coast. The first boats of the year arrived in the Canary Islands, specifically to Lanzarote and La Graciosa, although the largest influx of boats was recorded on the coast of Murcia where eight were counted with a total of 108 migrants on board.

Ghost boats disappear with Europe-bound migrants
The disappearance of seven boats in the Mediterranean Sea last year indicates the deaths at sea during this dangerous journey is higher than the 1,283 casualties documented in 2019. “The remains of those lost at sea this year may never be found, like thousands of others lost in the Mediterranean,” lamented Frank Laczko, Director of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM’s) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

600% increase in number of migrants crossing English Channel in 2019
The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor reported on Saturday that the number of migrants who crossed the English Channel increased almost seven fold in 2019, criticising the policies of France and UK regarding the rights of asylum seekers.

The current migrant smuggling situation
As the graph above illustrates, 2019 ended with higher crossing numbers than 2018, something which will focus minds in the region. Ongoing hostilities in Libya no doubt contributed to the figures, as smuggling gangs attempt to move migrants to embarkation points more rapidly to avoid other militia groups. The arrival of Turkish troops in Libya is likely to exacerbate further. While NGO rescue missions continue to arrive in the Mediterranean, there has been no further concrete action from the EU in terms of an overall plan. There is obvious concern over the rising number of migrants attempting to cross the English Channel after their arrival in the EU, a situation we expect to persist over the next few months until more action is taken by both the French and British governments to secure their waters.
Libya

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Jan. 5th that troops have begun moving into Libya after parliament approved the move last week. He said their mission was to ensure stability for the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. The Libyan government is fighting an insurgency by rebel forces under Gen. Khalifa Haftar, based in eastern Libya.

Haftar’s forces ‘seize strategic city Sirte’
Opposition forces in Libya said on Jan. 7th they have taken control of the coastal city of Sirte, in what would be a key strategic gain. Sirte has been controlled by forces aligned with Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) since Islamic State (IS) militants were expelled in 2016. A resident of the northern city of Sirte, located on the Mediterranean coast, told Reuters news agency they could see convoys of troops belonging to Gen. Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA).

CMA CGM announces port congestion surcharge in Libya
Considering the current increasing congestion in Libya at the ports of Benghazi and El Khoms, CMA CGM will apply Port Congestion Surcharges with immediate effect, it was announced on Jan. 6th.

Over 2,000 refugees evacuated from Libya in 2019: UN refugee agency
The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on Monday Jan. 6th that it evacuated more than 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Libya in 2019. “But nearly 1,000 asylum-seekers under the age of 18 are still languishing in Libyan detention centers,” UNHCR said in a statement.

Libya’s oil revenue tops 20 bln USD in 2019
Libya’s state-owned National Oil Corporation (NOC) said on Monday that the country’s oil revenues in 2019 exceeded 20 billion U.S. dollars. “NOC’s revenues come from sales of natural gas, crude oil and assorted derivative products, in addition to taxes and royalties received from concession contracts,” NOC said in a statement.

UN Libya Mission strongly condemns bombing of military academy, at least 30 dead
The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), on Sunday Jan. 5th strongly condemned the bombing of a military academy in the capital Tripoli, which according to news reports left at least 30 dead and more than 30 others wounded. Saturday’s bombing reportedly took place as cadets were gathering on a parade ground at the Hadaba academy in a southern district of the capital.

Turkey, Libya May Contract Drillers in Eastern Med
Turkey and Libya could work with international companies to search for oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday Jan. 5th, following a deal between Ankara and the Tripoli-based government on maritime borders.

UN chief calls for ‘immediate ceasefire’ in Libya
The head of the UN urged Saturday Jan. 4th an “immediate ceasefire” in war-weary Libya where the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) fights forces affiliated with Gen. Khalifa Haftar. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres wants a “return to political dialogue by all parties,” the UN said in a statement. “Any foreign support to the warring parties will only deepen the ongoing conflict and further complicate efforts to reach a peaceful and comprehensive political solution.”

Libya will confront and expel foreign forces, says Khalifa Haftar
The leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Khalifa Haftar said on Friday Jan. 3rd his forces would “confront and expel” any foreign troops sent to the country. His comments came after Turkey recently approved a parliamentary motion to deploy troops in Libya.

AU chief slams ‘interference’ threat in Libya
African Union chief Moussa Faki Mahamat has expressed his grave concern over potential “interference” in Libya, after Turkey approved the deployment of troops to the conflict-torn North African nation. Faki said in a statement on Friday Jan. 3rd he was “deeply concerned at the deterioration of the situation in Libya and the continuing suffering of the Libyan people.”

To read MAST’s Libyan Country report on MASTOPEDIA, please click here.
Gulf of Guinea

Suspected pirates killed four Nigerian navy operatives and abducted three foreign sailors in an attack on a dredging ship last week, security sources said on Monday Jan. 6th. Armed assailants raided the oil dredger MV Ambika as it worked in the volatile waterways of the Niger Delta late on Thursday, an intelligence officer told AFP. “During the incident, a team of naval rescue squad was sent for rescue, however, the hoodlums succeeded in killing four of the naval personnel of the squad during a gun battle,” the source said. Other sources have suggested that the naval personnel were guards onboard the vessel.

Incidents:
1. Nigeria-flagged hopper dredger attacked by gunmen at 2300 LT in position south of Forcados, Ramos River entrance, Nigeria. Gunmen exchanged gunfire with embarked armed naval security. Four naval guards reported killed, two unhurt. Three crew reported kidnapped as the gunmen escaped. Reported (Sources) 2nd Jan.


Nigerian Navy to get 40 new vessels in 2020
The Nigerian Navy (NN) plans to take delivery of 41 new vessels in 2020, including patrol boats, interceptors and a hydrographic survey vessel. In mid-December, the Nigerian Navy’s head of policy and plans Rear Admiral Beegroy Ibe-Enwo said it will receive new vessels from France, Malaysia, Vietnam and local manufacturers, adding to the 42 patrol boats and other vessels acquired in 2019.

Nigerian Navy hands over 57 Nigerians, 7 Sri-Lankans, 2 Ghanaians to EFCC
The war against oil bunkering and sea pirates received a major boost yesterday when the Nigerian Navy (NN) handed over 57 Nigerians, seven Sri-Lankans and two Ghanaians, suspected to be involved in oil bunkering, to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) also reports that the seven vessels, involved in the oil bunkering and having no valid approval, were arrested by the Nigerian Navy between December 3 and 30, 2019.

57 crew kidnapped off West Africa in just one month
A total of 57 crew were kidnapped last month in and around the Gulf of Guinea, a similar figure to November with shipping now on high alert as the security situation in West Africa has spun out of control, Splash 24/7 reported.

Prepare for war, Lagos CP warns pirates, kidnappers
Residents of Ilashe, Ibeshe, Irede, Iwerek/Osolu, Igboologun and Takwa Bay in Oriade Local Council Development Area, Amuwo Odofin, Lagos State, should enjoy a security boost in January. Policemen deployed to the newly constructed Area Command Headquarters have vowed to fight crime on the waterways in the area. The communities were hitherto known for oil bunkering, kidnapping and smuggling.

Navy arrests foreigners in crude oil siphoning sites in Lagos, Ogun
Troops of the Nigerian Navy confronting pipeline vandals and oil thieves in the country have dismantled over 300 illegal crude oil siphoning sites in Ogun and Lagos states. Some foreign collaborators without genuine documentation were also arrested. Nigerian media reported on Jan. 6th. According to the Navy, this was achieved following clearance operation in the maritime domain in an operation code-named Operation Kurombe conducted by Operation Awtse.

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

Maritime crime is making a comeback in one of the busiest commercial shipping areas of the world. An industry group says the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Singapore have experienced a rise in sea piracy in recent months, and a relative surge in 2019. According to media reports, ReCAAP says piracy incidents more than tripled in 2019 — from 8 to 30 — a four-year high.

Incidents:

1. Late Report: Five robbers armed with long knives boarded underway Bangladesh-flagged bulk carrier at 1530 UTC in position 01:15.34N – 104:03.7E, approx 3.5nm Northwest of Pulau Nongs. TSS eastbound, Singapore Straits. They entered into the engine room, took hostage two duty crew and threatened them with the knives. The robbers stole engine and generator spares then escaped. Alarm raised, crew mustered and incident reported to Singapore VTIS. A coast guard boat responded and escorted the ship to an anchorage, where they boarded the ship for inspection. All crew safe. Reported (IMB/ReCAAP) 20th Dec.

2. Underway India-flagged tanker boarded by six perpetrators armed with knives at 2325 LT in position 01:15.7N - 104:04.8E, approx 3.5nm North of Pulau Nongsa, Indonesia, eastbound lane Singapore Strait. The 4th engineer was punched in the face while the chief engineer sustained bruises on the neck and had a gold chain stolen from him. Master reported the incident to Singapore VTIS, and deviated the ship to Singapore to ensure the safety of crew, before proceeding on her voyage. Upon the ship's arrival in Singapore, the Singapore Police Coast Guard boarded the ships for investigation and verified that all crew safe. Reported (ReCAAP) 20th Dec.

3. Underway Panama-flagged bulk carrier boarded by unknown number of perpetrators at 0532 LT in position 01:13.95N - 103:59.98, approx 3nm Northwest of Tanjung Sengkuang, Pulau Batam, Indonesia, TSS eastbound lane Singapore Strait. Singapore Police Coast Guard notified VTIS. Search conducted, no perpetrators sighted. Nothing reported stolen. Vessel continued voyage. Reported (ReCAAP) 20th Dec.

Indonesia mobilises fishermen in stand-off with China

Indonesia will mobilise fishermen to join warships in the South China Sea to help defend against Chinese vessels, the government said on Monday Jan. 6th, as the biggest stand-off with China for years escalated off Southeast Asia’s largest country. In an unusually strong statement, President Joko Widodo told reporters: “There is no negotiation when it comes to our sovereignty.”

New AFP chief Santos a noted ‘hunter’ of Reds, Abu Sayyaf

A former Army intelligence chief, who gained a reputation for being a tenacious “hunter” who had captured Abu Sayyaf and communist leaders, has been named as the new chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Lt. Gen. Felimon Santos Jr. chief of the Eastern Mindanao Command (Eastmincom), will take the helm of the 190,000-strong military from Gen. Noel Clement, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

Westmincom to continue offensive vs. terrorists

Lt. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, Western Mindanao Command (Westmincom) chief, has ordered the troops to continuously pursue the foreign and local terrorists in its area of operations. Maj. Arvin John Encinas, Westmincom spokesperson, said Saturday Sobejana’s directive is to pursue and neutralize the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) bandits in Basilan and Sulu even if martial law in Mindanao has ended.

Philippines Remains in State of Emergency

A national emergency remains in effect throughout the Philippines, the government clarified Friday, after it lifted martial law in southern Mindanao island at the end of 2019.

To see MAST’s services in the region, please click here.
Incidents: Nothing significant to report.

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.