MAST Services

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- K&R and Ship Arrest

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- Risk management
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- Training

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- System Design, Installation and Maintenance
- Technical Consultancy
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- Close Protection
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- Security Chauffeurs
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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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**Indian Ocean Region**

The Iranian navy commander said on Sunday Dec. 29th that U.S. navy forces should leave regional waters, Tasnim news agency reported. “The era of American free action in the region is over, and they (the U.S. navy forces) must leave the region gradually,” Hossein Khanzadi said on the sidelines of a joint naval exercise with Russia and China, which is underway in the Gulf of Oman. “We believe regional security does not require the presence of those (foreign) countries, and that regional countries themselves can ensure security together,” he added.

Incidents: Nothing significant to report.

**16 Malaysians on ship reported seized by Iran**

A ship with 16 Malaysian crew members on board has been seized by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps for fuel smuggling, according to the official Irna news agency. The ship was reported to be carrying nearly 1.3 million litres of fuel. It was not known under which national flag the ship was sailing. It was reportedly seized near Abu Musa Island, near the entrance to the Straits of Hormuz.

**Japan green-lights MSDF dispatch to Middle East amid tensions**

The Japanese Cabinet on Friday 27th approved the dispatch of Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) personnel to the Middle East amid tensions in the region, despite public opposition and post-war military constraints restricting the nation’s military activities constitutionally. The planned deployment, backed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition ally, Komeito, is to purportedly conduct information-gathering operations and others related to enhancing the safety of commercial shipping in the region.

**11 years on, Chinese navy escort missions make the world safer**

Dec. 26th marked the 11th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy’s escorting missions across the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin. On December 23, 2019, China dispatched the 34th fleet to waters in the Gulf of Aden, off the Somali coast.

**IRGC Navy Urges Iranian Fishermen Not to Respond to Foreign Vessels**

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy called on Iranian fishermen not to respond to foreign warships passing through the Persian Gulf waters, saying they have no right to question Iranian sailors. In a statement addressed to all Iranian fishermen on Monday Dec. 23rd, the IRGC Navy said neither the US’ vessels nor those of other countries have the right to inspect, seize or question any of Iranian fishing boats, particularly in Iran’s territorial waters.

**HMS Defender Seizes Record Haul of Crystal Meth**

On Dec. 19th, Her Majesty’s Ship (HMS) DEFENDER, a UK Royal Navy destroyer operating in the Gulf of Oman in direct support of Combined Task Force 150 (CTF 150), seized 131 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine from a dhow they had been following.

**Bangladesh Coast Guard requests press not to use ‘piracy’ for ‘robbery’**

Bangladesh Coast Guard has requested journalists not use the word ‘piracy’ or ‘pirate’ while referring to robbery incidents on inland and coastal waterways. The word ‘piracy’ on sea refers to robbery or criminal incidents outside the maritime boundary of the country while the incidents handled by the coast guards occur along the coast of the country and is thus robbery, said a release.

To see MAST’s services in the Indian Ocean Region, please click here.
Kenyan troops repulse Al Shabaab attack at army base
Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) with the help of Somalia National Army SNA (SNA) on Tuesday Dec. 24th repulsed a deadly Al Shabaab attack, multiple sources have confirmed. Al Shabaab militants, sources said, waged an attack targeting Kulbiyow army base in Lower Jubba, which is manned by KDF troops.

US strikes in Somalia kill four militants
The United States military said it killed four “terrorists” in airstrikes against the Al-Shabaab militant group in Somalia on Sunday Dec. 29th, a day after the country’s deadliest attack in two years. US Africa Command (Africom) conducted three air-strikes in two locations in the conflict-hit East African nation on Sunday targeting Al-Shabaab militants, it said in a statement.

Attack on Somali Base Kills 3 Soldiers
Officials in Somalia say Al Shabaab extremists killed three soldiers during an attack on a military base in the southwest on Monday Dec. 23rd. The assault on the Gofgadud base in the Bay region by the al Qaeda-affiliated extremist group marks the latest setback for Somalia’s army, which is expected to take over responsibility for the country’s security from an African Union force in 2020.

Five killed, six injured in hotel attack
At least five people were killed and six others injured in an explosion on Saturday Dec. 21st in Galkayo town in Somalia’s central region of Mudug, an officer confirmed on Sunday. A police officer who declined to be named told Xinhua the blast happened when a car parked near Global Hotel went off, causing casualties and damages.

Plague of locusts ravages harvests in Somalia
Desert locusts are destroying tens of thousands of acres of crops and grazing land in Somalia in the worst invasion in 25 years, the United Nations food agency said on Wednesday 19th, and the infestation is likely to spread further. The locusts have damaged about 173,000 acres of land in Somalia and neighboring Ethiopia, threatening food supplies in both countries and the livelihoods of farming communities, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said. Locals have been eating the locusts, which are high in protein.

Flash Floods Displace Thousands in Somalia
Higher than average rainfall and devastating storms have caused heavy flooding that has affected an estimated 570,000 people and displaced more than 180,000 from their homes. The situation is dire: aid experts anticipate that hunger levels will almost double in the coming months with the number of people facing a food security crisis expected to rise from 1.2 million in September to 2.1 million by January and an estimated one million children under the age of five are likely to be acutely malnourished through mid-2020.

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 BMP5 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).
Houthis say they shot down 2 drones
Yemen’s Houthis said they shot down two drones on Monday Dec. 30th “belonging to the Saudi-led coalition.” According to a statement by the Houthis’ military spokesman Yahya Sarea, the first drone was shot down over Razih district in the Yemeni northern province of Saada, while the second was downed over Saleef area in the Yemeni Red Sea port city of Hodeidah.

Yemeni general vows to seize Sanaa from Houthis
Brig. Gen. Tareq Mohammed Saleh, a nephew of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and a military commander at the Joint Forces in Yemen’s Red Sea battlefield, said on Saturday Dec. 28th that his forces wanted to free people from repression and tyranny. He said Yemeni forces had taken the offensive on the battlefield and managed to push back Houthi attacks with little help from the Saudi-led coalition.

Houthis blamed for attack on military parade
A missile strike that targeted a military parade in southern Yemen on Dec. 29th has killed at least five people. The attack came at the end of a graduation ceremony for recruits to the Security Belt forces - a powerful organisation backed by the United Arab Emirates - in the town of al-Dhalea.

17 Civilians Killed in 3rd Attack on Yemen Market
Seventeen civilians were killed in an attack on Dec. 24th in a market in Yemen’s northern Saada governorate, the United Nations said, the third deadly assault on the same location in just over a month. The attacks came despite relative calm in Yemen, where large-scale combat between government troops — backed by a Saudi-led military coalition — and the Iran-aligned Huthi rebels has largely subsided.

8 die from H1N1 flu in Yemen’s capital
The Yemeni public health authorities said in a statement that eight Yemenis died from the H1N1 flu in Sanaa in the past weeks, a local media outlet reported on Monday Dec. 23rd. The suspected H1N1 flu cases have reached 1,600 in several northern provinces since November, the Houthi-controlled Al-thawranews website quoted the statement as saying.

NGOs suspend work in southwestern Yemen
A number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have suspended their work in Al-Dhale’e region after their offices were attacked with rocket-propelled grenades over the weekend of Dec. 21st-22nd. The attacks in southwest Yemen follow a campaign carried out against the aid groups, accusing them of being “enemies of Islam” and using their work as a front for missionary work.

Houthis suffer more casualties in foiled Hodeida attacks
Yemen’s Iran-aligned Al Houthi militia suffered casualties this week in its foiled attacks and infiltration bids in the western port city of Hodeida, the Yemeni army has said. At least 13 Al Houthi fighters were killed in clashes, and 67 injured. They have been taken to hospitals in areas controlled by the rebels in Hodeida and the capital Sana’a over the past three days, the army, according to Yemeni news portal Aden Al Ghad on Saturday Dec. 21st.

Rabies in Yemen: Estimated ‘hundreds of deaths’ in Sana’a
Stray dogs roaming the streets of the Yemen capital of Sanaa have caused a terror and huge public health problem, according to a Gulf365 report. The report notes that medical sources confirmed that the number of “rabies” infections in the capital, Sanaa, is estimated at thousands, including hundreds of deaths, most of them children and women.

Yemen territorial control (September 25th 2018)

Control of Yemen territory (September 25th 2018)
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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

MST recommends BMP measures be enforced and watches strengthened during transits in the region.

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Migrant crossings 2016-2019. Source: UNHCR

Mediterranean

German humanitarian ship Alan Kurdi rescued 32 migrants in the Mediterranean, the organization Sea-Eye said on Friday Dec. 27th. The migrants were rescued from a rubber boat off the coast of Libya, two hours after the Alan Kurdi received an emergency call with coordinates for their location on Thursday night. All of the rescued migrants said they were Libyan citizens. Sea-Eye said. Among them were a pregnant woman and 10 children, the youngest being three years old.

Rescue ship Alan Kurdi docks in Sicily carrying 32 migrants
The rescue ship Alan Kurdi docked in Sicily on Sunday Dec. 29th with 32 Libyans onboard — including 12 children — saved from the Mediterranean Sea. The vessel arrived at the port of Pozzallo after Malta refused to allow it ashore.

Spain’s Coastguards Rescue 200 Migrants On Christmas Day
Spanish coastguard has informed that some 200 migrants were rescued from makeshift boats in the Mediterranean Sea on Christmas Day. The total migrants rescued were from a number of separate operations off the coasts of Spain and Morocco, however no information has been given about the nationalities of those on board. According to the Spanish coastguard, the largest number of people rescued were found on the Zaffarin islands off Morocco and the tiny islet of Alboran, in total some 120 individuals were located and safely rescued there.

Ocean Viking saves 162 migrants
"Ocean Viking" reported on Saturday Dec. 21st that it has rescued 50 migrants who were crammed into a wooden boat in the Mediterranean Sea, adding to another 112 rescued from a deflating rubber vessel a day earlier. "Last night #OceanViking performed a second critical rescue after 8 hrs of searching. Fifty people, including 10 children & a baby, were on an overcrowded wooden boat in dire weather conditions in the Maltese search & rescue region," the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), the NGO that operates the ship along with SOS Mediterranee, said in a tweet.

The current migrant smuggling situation
Despite winter weather and sea states, trafficking gangs continue to put to sea as the situation in Libya worsens. The December holiday period saw a significant number of rescues by both NGO and Libyan maritime assets. The ongoing conflict around Tripoli and news that Turkey may lend military support to the internationally recognised government, the GNA, has clearly had an impact on smuggling operations, forcing gangs to move more quickly as the situation on the ground remains unstable. News that another NGO rescue vessel will deploy in the region is welcome, but still represents a sticking plaster covering a larger issue.

Migrant statistics in the Mediterranean (Figures last updated on Dec. 31st 2019). Source: UNHCR
Russia calls for ceasefire in Libya
Russia considers a ceasefire in Libya a basic condition for the start of a political dialogue, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Monday Dec. 30th. Speaking at a news conference in Moscow, Lavrov said no conditions must precede the cessation of hostilities.

UN envoy to Le Monde: Multinational mercenaries are fighting for Haftar in Libya
The UN envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame has told French newspaper Le Monde that the UNSMIL has documented intensified non-Libyan drone activity in the Libyan airspace recently. Salame, in an interview on Monday, indicated that there are also several planes coming frequently from Syria to Benghazi, adding that the UNSMIL doesn’t know what was on those planes.

New photo surfaces of Syrian militants in Libya
A new photo of Turkish-backed Syrian militants in Libya has surfaced on the social media platform Twitter this week amid reports of hundreds of Syrian National Army (SNA) fighters deploying to the North African nation.

Tripoli repulses attack by Haftar forces
Libya’s UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) said on Dec 30th it had destroyed 12 armed vehicles and killed 10 militants of rival Khalifa Haftar forces as fresh clashes hit southern Tripoli. GNA military spokesman Mohammed Kanunu said in a statement late on Monday 30th that they repulsed an attack from the Haftar forces backed by armored vehicles.

Libya conflict: Turkey troop deployment bill sent to MPs
Turkey has submitted a bill to parliament to allow it to deploy troops in Libya, as the conflict there intensifies. Turkey is allied with Libya’s UN-backed government, which is based in the capital, Tripoli. The move, reported on Dec. 30th, comes earlier than expected, and marks an acceleration of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s plans.

Libya government calls for prosecution of Haftar internationally as a war criminal
The Libyan Foreign Ministry said on Saturday Dec. 28th it does not understand the inability of the United Nations Security Council to take an action regarding Khalifa Haftar’s crimes against civilians and public facilities in the country. In a letter addressed to the Security Council, Libya’s Foreign Minister, Mohamed Sayala, explained that Haftar’s forces committed crimes against humanity by bombing civilians in Zawiya and Tajoura.

Haftar’s warplanes strike Libya’s Al-Zawiya oil refinery
Libya’s oil infrastructure has once again found itself in the crosshairs of the country’s prolonged civil conflict between the UN-backed Government of National Accord and Khalifa Haftar’s forces. The country’s 120,000 b/d Al-Zawiya refinery was the target of an airstrike Friday and state-owned National Oil Corporation (NOC) confirmed that sites near the oil storage facility operated by Al-Zawiya refinery were hit by a bomb on Friday Dec. 27th.

Violence escalates in Libya following Turkey pledge
The Financial Times reported on Dec. 20th that fighting in Libya had increased following the announcement of possible military aid by Turkey. Air strikes conducted by LNA forces loyal to Haftar on Tripoli and two other cities were reported by the paper, as Haftar continues his efforts to take Tripoli from GNA and rival militia forces.

Erdogan says Turkey will increase military support to Libya if necessary
Turkey will increase its military support to the internationally recognised government of Libya if necessary and will evaluate ground, air and marine options, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday Dec. 22nd, after the two signed a military cooperation accord last month.

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

On Sunday 16th Dec., six armed pirates reportedly boarded the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker, MT Duke and abducted 20 Indian crew members off Togo. Reports state that the vessel about 115 nautical miles south-east of Lomé and kidnapped all but one on board – believed to be a Nigerian national. This is the second major kidnapping operation in recent weeks, highlighting once again the insecurity present in Gulf of Guinea waters and the ongoing threat to crews operating in the region.

Incidents:
1. MV attacked at 2310 UTC in position 03:58N - 009:05E, around 3nm off Cameroon coast. Attacked ended. Awaiting further details. Reported (MDAT) 30th Dec.
2. Underway MV reported attacked at 0050 UTC in position 01:56:30N - 004:53:37E, around 161nm SSW of Brass, Nigeria. Awaiting further details. Reported (MDAT) 30th Dec.
5. Underway MV attacked and boarded by eight armed pirates at 0615 UTC in position 00:55N - 009:01E, approx 38nm West of Libreville, Gabon. Vessel categorised as hijacked as comms lost for 2 days. Around 10nm off Fairway Buoy Wouri, Cameroon, pirates departed the vessel at 2035 UTC 23 Dec. Reported (MDAT) 22nd Dec.
6. LATE Report | Two fishing vessels reported attacked by unknown number of pirates at 0130 UTC in position 00:50:40N - 009:23:42E, Bay of Owendo, Gabon Estuary, Gabon. Reported (MDAT) 22nd Dec.
7. Duty crew on board an anchored product tanker noticed two unauthorised persons onboard and raised the alarm at 0225 UTC in position 06:15:44N - 003:13E, Lagos Anchorage, Nigeria. Crew mustered. Naval patrol boat notified via VHF, which responded and searched the waters around the tanker. A search was carried out. Nothing reported stolen. Reported (IMB) 21st Dec.

Two more ships attacked in Gulf of Guinea: Greek and Singaporean, 8 crew kidnapped
Media reports state that three vessels were attacked in the Gulf on Dec. 30th, and that a pirate attack on a tanker called Happy Lady off Cameroon has resulted in the kidnapping of eight crew members. We await official confirmation.

Officials establish contact with 20 Indian sailors abducted off Benin
The Indian High Commission to Nigeria says contact has been established with pirates who kidnapped 20 Indian seafarers from a tanker off Benin Republic with all crew members reportedly safe. An official of the Commission in Abuja said efforts are underway to seek the early release of the abducted seafarers whose location remains unknown.

Crew of Pacific Warden Released
Swire Pacific Offshore (SPO) has confirmed the release of the seven crew members of the Pacific Warden abducted offshore the coast of Equatorial Guinea on Nov. 20th, 2019. On their release, after 31 days in captivity, the crew were met by senior representatives from SPO. Immediate medical checks and other necessary arrangements were organized, and all have now returned to their homes.

Navy nabs six oil thieves
The Nigerian Navy Forward Operating Base (FOB), Igbokoda, has arrested six oil thieves operating in two boats laden with drums of adulterated diesel on Ondo coastline, Nigerian media reported on Dec. 23rd.

To see MAST Services in the region, please click here. And to read Nigeria’s county report, please click here.
Incidents:

1. Chief Engineer onboard a bulk carrier underway noticed four robbers armed with knives in the engine room and informed Master at 1520 UTC in position 01\:16\:2\,N - 104\:13\:4\,E, Singapore Straits. Alarm raised, deck lights switched on and crew mustered. Seeing the alerted crew the robbers escaped. A search was carried out. Foot prints were noticed on the quarter deck. Nothing reported stolen. Reported (IMB) 28th Dec.

2. Five persons armed with knives and guns boarded underway bulk carrier at 1720 UTC in position 01\:15\:57\,N - 104\:07\:01\,E, Singapore Straits. They entered into the engine room, took hostage two duty crew, threatened them and tied them up. The robbers stole engine spares and escaped. Incident reported to Singapore VTIS. A coast guard boat responded and escorted the vessel. Reported (IMB) 22nd Dec.

3. Underway tanker boarded by five robbers armed with knives at 1600 UTC in position 01\:15\:26\,N – 104\:05\,E, Singapore Straits. Two duty crew on routine rounds were confronted by the robbers, who threatened them and tied them up. Alarm raised and crew mustered. Hearing the alarm, the robbers escaped without stealing anything. Incident reported to Singapore VTIS. Reported (IMB) 22nd Dec.

4. Five robbers armed with long knives boarded underway bulk carrier at 1530 UTC in position 01\:15\,N – 104\:01\,E, Singapore Straits. They entered into the engine room, took hostage two duty crew and threatened them with the knives. The robbers stole engine spares and 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) 20th Dec.

Asian Piracy Meeting Assesses the Threat of Robbery at Sea
A renewed rash of piracy attacks in the Straits of Singapore has underscored the need for action as discussed at the recent two-day meeting organised by the Philippine Coast Guard and the intergovernmental piracy watchdog, Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP).

Indonesia Protests to China over Border Intrusion near South China Sea
Indonesia said on Monday Dec. 30th it had protested to Beijing over the presence of a Chinese coastguard vessel in its territorial waters near the disputed South China Sea, saying it marked a “violation of sovereignty.” The boat trespassed into Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone off the coast of the northern islands of Natuna, Indonesia’s foreign ministry said in a statement. It did not say when the incident occurred.

Indonesia, Philippines join hands to free abductee of Abu Sayyaf
The Indonesian and the Philippine governments have jointly sought to release another Indonesian national who is being held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Philippines. Muhammad Farhan, 27, and his two fellow sailors were kidnapped by the group in September in the waters of Sabah in Malaysia, but the latter have been freed recently.

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.

South-West Indian Ocean

Note: The forecasts are correct as of the day before publication. For latest updates please follow the provided links.