

War risks claims environment as at May 2017

Yemen

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen's southwest coast continues to emerge as an area that poses substantial risk to the significant volume of commercial shipping transiting the Red Sea. The Houthi rebels have maintained their attacks against both military and merchant shipping in the region. On 30 January 2017, a Houthi skiff carrying a marine borne improvised explosive device rammed into a Royal Saudi Navy frigate at high speed off Hodeidah resulting in an explosion and fire. Two crewmembers were killed and three others injured. The US Maritime Administration (MARAD) reported in February that the rebels had deployed naval mines off Al-Mokha. Shortly after these reports, on 10 March 2017, a Yemeni coastguard vessel struck one such mine causing an explosion which resulted in the deaths of two crewmembers.

The class's crisis management consultants, NYA International, advise all vessels to maintain the furthest possible distance from the Yemeni Red Sea coast when transiting the area.

Philippines

Despite a coordinated anti-piracy plan being implemented by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, the ISIS affiliated Islamist terrorist group, Abu Sayyaf, continues to conduct hijackings and crew kidnappings in the Sulu and Celebes seas. Whilst their primary targets were once small fishing boats and slow moving tug and barge combinations, the last 12 months have seen a marked shift in their capabilities such that even large bulk carriers and tankers with high freeboards are coming under threat.

On 19 February 2017, a general cargo ship was fired upon and boarded by Abu Sayyaf militants near Doc Can island. One crewmember was shot dead and six others were kidnapped. Only a few days later, on 22 February 2017, a bulk carrier was chased for 1.5 hours by three high speed Abu Sayyaf skiffs off Tawi-Tawi island. Whilst the attack against the bulk carrier was ultimately unsuccessful, it illustrates the fact that Abu Sayyaf is becoming more brazen in their attempts to hijack large commercial ships with a view to abducting crew.

ReCAAP has advised ships to re-route from the area where possible. A new route east of the Philippines, through the open Pacific Ocean, is becoming the preferred route for many owners in the face of the heightened threat posed by Abu Sayyaf, despite the additional fuel costs involved.

Gulf of Aden

On 13 March 2017, a tanker was hijacked by Somali pirates near Ras Asayr and was sailed to a piracy anchorage at Alula Bari in Somalia. Eight crewmembers were held hostage and a ransom demand was made for the release of the vessel. This incident marked the first successful hijacking of a large merchant ship by Somali pirates since May 2012. The ship and crew were ultimately released following the intervention of local tribal elders, reportedly without the payment of a ransom. However, according to NYA International, at least five other vessels have since been hijacked or boarded by Somali pirates lending credence to the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) previous warning that it would need only a single successful hijacking to lead to a resurgence of pirate activity in the area.

The threat to ships transiting the HRA remains high and the managers continue to recommend that members exercise extreme caution when trading near Somali waters and

comply with the latest version of the *Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy* and other related guidance.

West Africa

Piracy off West Africa, in particular Nigeria, continues to be of significant concern. According to the IMB, maritime kidnappings worldwide have shown a threefold increase since 2015 with over half of all such kidnappings occurring off West Africa. It is particularly worrying that many of these attacks occur a significant distance, in some cases over 100 nautical miles, from the coastline. NYA International are maintaining their highest 'Severe' threat level rating for the region.

SWRM claims activity

There have been no notified claims on the facility since inception in February 2015.