

## Industry Releasable Threat Assessment



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ICOD 15 Feb 24



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## Introduction

1. This Industry Releasable Threat Assessment (IRTA) has been prepared by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and the European Union Naval Force Operation ATALANTA (EU NAVFOR).
2. The purpose of the IRTA is to articulate the maritime security threat to merchant and large fishing vessels transiting the Red Sea (RS), Bab al Mandeb Strait (BAM), Gulf of Aden (GOA) and the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). It replaces the previous IRTA released on 13 Dec 23, which had an Intelligence Cut-off Date (ICOD) of 04 Dec 23.
3. During the reported period there were five IRTBs issued. IRTB 037 issued on the 21 Dec 23, IRTB 038 issued on 07 Jan 24, IRTB 039 issued on 18 Jan 24, IRTB 040 issued 18 Jan 24 and IRTB 041 issued 05 Feb 24.

## Executive Summary

4. The threat to merchant and large fishing vessels transiting the RS, BAM, GOA and the WIO is classified as follows:
  - a. Piracy threat is at a **MODERATE** level (an attack is a **REALISTIC POSSIBILITY**) across the Arabian Sea (AS) as a whole and along the Puntland coast. However, in other coastal strips of Somalia and GoA it is assessed as **LOW** (an attack is **UNLIKELY**).
  - b. Maritime crime threat is **BENIGN** (an attack is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY**).
  - c. Conflict-related activity:
    - i. **MODERATE** (an attack is **REALISTIC POSSIBILITY**) for vessels transiting through the North Red Sea (NRS) and central Red Sea (CRS).
    - ii. **SUBSTANTIAL** (an attack is **LIKELY**) for vessels transiting through the SRS, BAM and GoA or entering Yemeni TTW.
    - iii. **SUBSTANTIAL** (an attack is **LIKELY**) for Israeli, UK and US affiliated vessels in the SRS, BAM and GOA.
    - iv. **SUBSTANTIAL** (an attack is **LIKELY**) for vessels involved in the transfer (export) of oil and LNG from Yemeni ports such as Al-Dhabba and Al-Nashima.
    - v. Terrorism attack is **BENIGN** (an attack is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY**).

## Significant Events - 05 Dec 23 to 15 Feb 24

### Piracy

The following attacks related to piracy have been reported (list not exhaustive).

5. A piracy event took place on 14 Dec 23 in GOA. M/V RUEN, a Malta-flagged bulk/carrier was boarded by multiple armed personnel who seized the M/V. The crew stopped the engine in position 400 nautical miles (NM) East from Socotra, before hiding in the citadel. On 15 Dec 23, MV RUEN began transiting towards East coast of Somalia. At the time of writing, MV RUEN is still in the hands of pirates, **LIKELY** at anchor along the eastern coast of Puntland. (Last Known position IVO Eyl on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2024).
6. On 18 Dec 23, MV MAGIC VELA was approached by a rapid skiff with several armed persons onboard. After several warning shots by the PAST, the skiff retreated.
7. On 22 Dec 23, one Yemeni FV EMARAT-2 was hijacked by 20 heavily armed personnel onboard a boat 7 NM off Eyl (Puntland). It was assessed that this FV could be used as a mothership for future piracy attacks, but was eventually released and arrived in Hadramout, Yemen on 11 Jan 2024. No evidence that a ransom was paid.
8. On 23 Dec 23, another Yemeni FV FATAH AL KHAIR was hijacked IVO Ras Hafun, Puntland. Yemeni authorities gave information that the dhow had been released on 11 Jan 24 and had gone to Mukallah, Yemen. No evidence that a ransom was paid.
9. On 30 Dec 23, FV AL SAQAR was hijacked inside Somali TTW IVO Hafun. No further information available.
10. On 02 Jan 24, FV AL AYOOS No 81 was hijacked inside Somali TTW IVO Qandala. No further information available.
11. A boarding event took place on 4 Jan 24, on board MV LILA NORFOLK, involving a group of 5/6 armed people 460 NM east of Eyl, Somalia. On 5 Jan 24, Indian Navy Ship intervened and liberated the crew. Pirates had fled the MV before the arrival of Indian ship on the scene.
12. On 18 Jan 24, local security authorities reported that a Yemeni fishing dhow was hijacked IVO Alulaa, Puntland. No further information available.
13. On 27 Jan 24, Liberia flagged MV WAIMEA was subject to piracy attack by a small craft 700 NM east of Hafun, Somalia. One mothership was spotted. The skiff with 4-5 persons onboard with RPGs and AK 47 approached at 300m of the carrier and fired, PAST fired two salvo of warning shots, as a result the small craft retreated.

14. On 27 Jan 24 Sri Lanka flagged FV LORENZO PUTHA 4 was subject to suspected piracy by a skiff with 3 armed Persons on Board (POB). The following day a Seychelles special forces team boarded the vessel and captured 3 suspected pirates. According to Seychelles authorities, the 3 detainees declared that the mother ship was still active in the area with at least 11 pirates on board.

15. On 29 Jan 24, FVs IMAN and NAEEMI were subject to suspected piracy off the east coast of Somalia, but they were then released after support from an Indian Navy warship, which reacted to the distress calls of both FVs.

16. On 31 Jan 24, one bulk carrier was approached and threatened on VHF by 2 mother ships, that launched one skiff towards the vessel. The carrier increased speed and altered course, as a result the suspected pirates retreated.

17. On 07 Feb 24, Indian Navy warship conducted an antipiracy operation east of Somalia, forcing 7 pirates to surrender and rescuing FV OMARI with 11 Iranian and 8 Pakistani on-board.

18. On 07 Feb 24, a report was received that the Iranian flagged FV AL AMIN was subject to suspected piracy attack by a skiff with 7-8 armed personnel onboard which approached the FV and fired weapons. FV remained safe and continued her activities. No further information available.

### **Conflict Related**

The following attacks by Yemen based Houthi elements have been reported in the RS and GoA area (list not exhaustive):

19. On 10 Dec 23, UAS attack was conducted on Singapore flagged MV CENTAURUS LEADER. UAS missed the intended target.

20. On 11 Dec 23, missile attack was conducted on Norway flagged MV STRINDA causing a minor fire aboard the vessel. No injuries to ships crew reported.

21. On 13 Dec 23, Marshall-Island flagged MV ARDMORE-ENCOUNTER was subject to suspicious approach and missile attack. Initially, MV reported that it was being approached by three gunmen in a small boat, with whom the ship's security team exchanged small arms fire. Houthi-aligned authorities then contacted the MV and ordered it to alter its course toward Yemen, before the vessel witnessed an explosion 200 meters astern. No injuries to ships crew reported.

22. On 14 Dec 23, Hong Kong flagged MV MAERSK GIBRALTAR was subject to a UAS attack causing an explosion about 50 meters off the vessel's port side causing no

damage. As per reports, Houthi forces threatened the vessel via radio before and after the attack. No injuries to ships crew reported.

23. On 15 Dec 23, Marshal Island flagged MV AL-JASRAH was subject to UAS attack 60 NM southwest of Hudaydah, causing a fire on deck and one container to fall overboard. No injuries to ships crew reported.

24. On 15 Dec 23, two missiles were fired on Liberian flagged MV MSC PALATIUM III about 30 NM southwest of Mukha Port. One missile struck the vessel resulting in ship turning south from its previously northbound trajectory with minimal damage. The second missile impacted the water. No injuries to ships crew reported.

25. On 18 Dec 23, missile attack was carried out on Cayman Island flagged MV SWAN-ATLANTIC. No damage was reported.

26. On 18 Dec 23, missile attack was carried out on Panama flagged MV CLARA. No damage was reported.

27. On 23 Dec 23, UAS attack was carried out on Liberian flagged MV CHEM PLUTO. The hit caused structural damage to the vessel. No injuries to ships crew reported.

28. On 23 Dec 23, Norwegian flagged MV BLAAMANEN was subject to UAS attack. No injuries to ships crew reported.

29. On 26 Dec 23, Liberian flagged MV MSC UNITED VIII was subject to missile attack. The MV reported hearing an explosion and seeing multiple missiles around 4-5 NM from its position, with an explosion in the sea later seen in close vicinity. No injuries to ships crew reported.

30. On 30 Dec 23, missile attack was carried out on Singaporean flagged MV MAERSK HANGZHOU. Missile attack was a near miss which caused shrapnel damage to the vessel. Later, MV MAERSK HANGZHOU was approached by 4 skiffs. However, vessel continued its voyage. No injuries to ships crew reported.

31. On 02 Jan 24, missile attack was carried out on Malta flagged MV CMA CGM TAGE. Up to three explosions took place between 1 and 5 NM from the MV, 33 NM east of Assab, Eritrea. The vessel reported no damage and all crew remained safe.

32. On 15 Jan 24, missile attack was carried out on Marshall Island flagged MV GIBRALAR EAGLE in the Gulf of Aden. However no damage or injuries were reported.

33. On 15 Jan 24, missile attack was carried out on Malta flagged MV ZOGRAFIA in the Southern Red Sea, no damage or injuries were reported. After the initial missile attack, MV was approached by 4 skiffs. However, vessel continued its voyage.
34. On 17 Jan 24, Marshall Island flagged MV GENCO PICARDY was subject to UAV attack. However, no injuries or damage was reported.
35. On 18 Jan 24, 2 ASBMs were fired towards Marshall Island flagged MV CHEM RANGER. Both missiles missed the intended target. No injuries to ships crew reported.
36. On 24 Jan 24, 3 ASBMs were fired towards USA flagged MV MAERSK DETROIT. 2 ASBMs were intercepted by US navy warship and 1 impacted in the sea.
37. On 26 Jan 24, ASBM attack was carried out on Marshall Island flagged MV MARLIN LUANDA causing major damage resulting in fire on-board. Coalition warships responded and provided critical firefighting assistance over a 24 hour period. The ship remained seaworthy and was able to proceed to a safe port. No injuries to ships crew reported.
38. On 01 Feb 24, 2 ASBMs were fired on Liberian flagged MV KOI in the red sea. No injuries and damage was reported.
39. On 06 Feb 24, 3 ASBMs were fired on Marshall Island flagged MV STAR NASIA in the Gulf of Aden. First ASBM was shot down by US navy warship and second ASBM exploded near the ship causing minor damage.
40. On 06 Feb 24, 3 ASBMs attacks on Barbados flagged MV MORNING TIDE causing no damage.
41. On 12 Feb 24, 2 ASBMs were fired towards Marshall Island flagged MV STAR IRIS. The attack caused minor damage to the ship while no injuries were reported.
42. On 15 Feb 24, an ASBM was fired towards Barbados flagged MV LYCAVITOS. The attack caused minor damage to the ship while no injuries were reported.

### **Terrorism**

43. No terrorism incidents have been reported in the maritime domain during the reporting period. The last terrorism related incident was on 9 Sep 20 in which Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) seized Metundo and Vamizi Island (Cabo Delgado province) within Mozambique territorial waters.



## **Maritime Security Events (Suspicious approach)**

44. On 10 Jan 24, a French FV was approached by one skiff with several armed persons on board, and one bigger dhow assessed by the captain as a mothership. As a result, FV increased the speed and steered against the swell with onboard PAST displaying their weapons, which resulted in the pirates discontinuing their approach.
45. On 15 Jan 24, Malta flagged MV ZOGRAFIA was approached by skiff boarded by armed personnel. PAST onboard MV fired warning shot and the skiff dispersed.
46. On 24 Jan 24, South Korean flagged FV ADRIA was subject to a suspicious approach by a skiff with ladders on-board at 1000 NM east of Hobyo, Somalia. After warning shots fired by the PAST, the skiff left the area.
47. On 27 Jan 24, Liberia flagged MV WAIMEA was approached by one skiff with four armed persons observed onboard. PAST fired warning shot due to which the skiff dispersed.
48. On 28 Jan 24, Liberia flagged MV CLEMENTINA was approached by one skiff with five persons onboard. PAST onboard MV fired warning shot and the skiff dispersed.
49. On 29 Jan 24, Panama flagged MV PANTA REI 1 was approached by three skiffs with armed personnel onboard. PAST onboard MV fired warning shot due and the skiff dispersed.

## **Non-Maritime Security Events**

50. There was no report of Non-Maritime Security Events during the reviewed period.

## **Assessment**

### **General**

51. The most significant destabilising factor of the security situation in the SRS, BAM and GOA is highly likely due to multiple attacks conducted by Yemen based Houthi elements stating their ongoing support for Hamas in the Israel-Hamas conflict. Attacks by Houthis are reported by the Houthi elements to be focused towards ships related to Israel, US, UK or any nation supporting OP *Prosperity Guardian* however this is often not the case.
52. Coastal and inland communities in Somalia continue to face a severe security and humanitarian crisis. Taking advantage of coalition naval assets' focus towards the RS and GOA security situation, some criminal networks in Puntland are using the opportunity to conduct a resurgence in piracy. At the date of writing, four merchant



vessels have been pirated or attacked and approximately a dozen fishing dhows have been hijacked in the coastal waters of Somalia since Nov 2023. Any payment of ransoms, as well as the expected improvement of the weather conditions over the upcoming period might encourage further attacks in the Western Indian Ocean. Therefore, it remains paramount for ships operating in the vicinity to implement and follow the measures recommended in BMP5.

### **Piracy Threat Assessment – LOW to MODERATE**

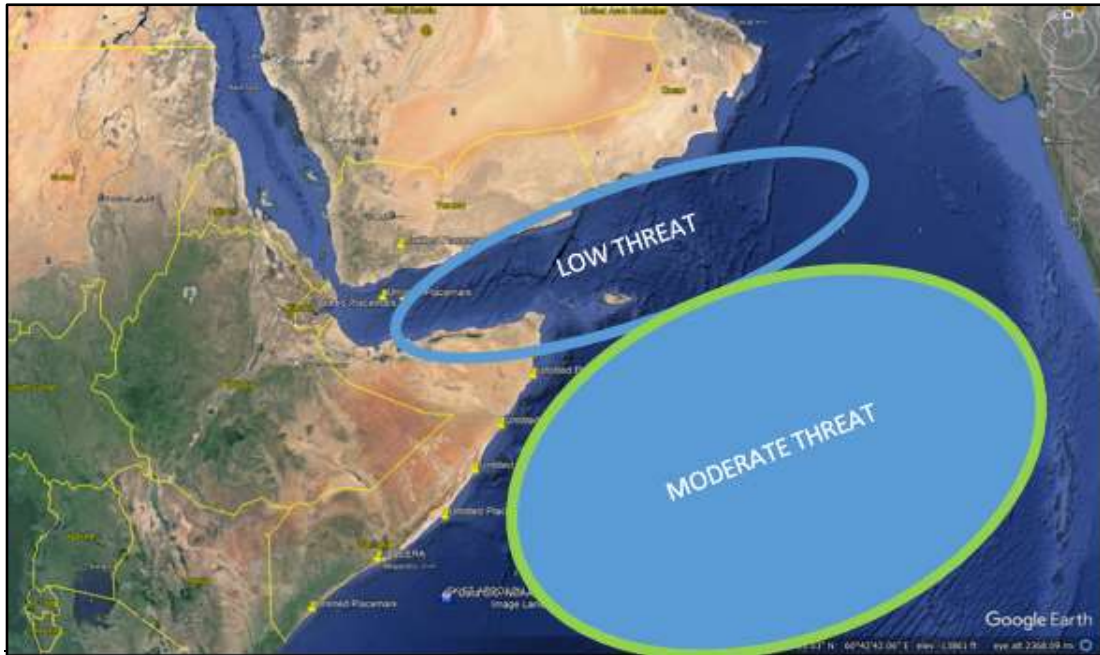
53. The prevailing degraded political, economic, and security situation in Somalia has created favourable conditions for piracy to resume. Former kingpins remain free to operate due to weak legal infrastructure and security force response in Somalia. Some previously unidentified criminal/piracy networks have demonstrated their capability to seize opportunities and execute attacks with little or no notice.

54. Since end November/ December 2023, the number of hijackings in, or close to, the territorial waters of Puntland has significantly increased. The targets are mainly traditional fishing dhows from Yemen or Iran. It is **HIGHLY LIKELY** that those vessels are then used as motherships for piracy attacks on the high seas.

55. MV RUEN, a Malta flagged vessel, has been under the control of pirates since 15 December 2023. It has spent most of the time at anchor, a few nautical miles away from the city of Eyl, Puntland, which is **HIGHLY LIKELY** used as a logistics base by the pirates.

56. Cinematic analysis of events depict that there are **HIGHLY LIKELY** at least three operational Pirate Action Groups (PAG) active in the Western Indian Ocean. Practical manifestation was observed on 27 January 2024 whereby one attack was carried out on a bulk carrier with almost simultaneous attack on FV LORENZO PUTHA 4 at 600 nautical miles from each other.

57. Referring to the positions of piracy-linked events since November/ December 2023, it is **HIGHLY LIKELY** that at least three PAGs are operating in the area depicted as moderate threat on the map below.



**Figure 1: Piracy Threat Assessment**

58. It is **LIKELY** that the number of attacks will increase in the coming weeks, due to the number of dhows which have been hijacked along the coast of Puntland coupled with favourable weather conditions expected in next two months.

**Conflict Related Threat Assessment – MODERATE to SUBSTANTIAL**

59. Significant tensions related to Israel-Hamas conflict persists in the region due to recent Houthi hostile actions associated with missiles, UAVs and USVs. Widespread threatening or targeting incidents have been reported against general merchant traffic transiting in the GOA, BAM or RS and the overall threat to general merchant traffic transiting these regions has increased to **MODERATE** (changed from **LOW** in the last IRTA Dec 23). These threats are not only present close to shore, but also on the high seas within range of Houthi capabilities. Although, there is a **REALISTIC POSSIBILITY** that MVs not directly associated with nations involved in the regional tension would not be attacked, there is an increasing risk that vessels might be misidentified by hostile parties or suffer from collateral damage. Houthi intent has indicated they are not deterred by target misidentification and will use any opportunity to attack vessels they identify as worthwhile. Any association with Israel, United States, or United Kingdom, including but not limited to flag or nationality of the operator and owner of the vessel, makes the vessel a preferred target for the Houthis. The Houthis have the capability to conduct attacks in the SRS, BAM and GOA with missiles, UAVs, USVs and potentially UUVs. Hence, the threat to Israeli, US, and UK affiliated vessels in the SRS, BAM and GOA is **SUBSTANTIAL**. In addition, an attack on the NRS is a **REALISTIC POSSIBILITY** given the stated Houthi intention and capability.

60. Since the last IRTA, the Houthis and the SLC have committed to steps towards a continued ceasefire and to engage in a United Nations-led peace process. It is

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**REALISTIC POSSIBILITY** that a peace agreement will be reached in near future however there is no identified timeline.

61. The Houthis have a self imposed ban in place on the export of oil products from Governemnt controlled Yemeni port areas and have targeted tankers in the past in southern regions of Yemen. An attack is assessed as **SUBSTANTIAL** for oil/ LNG tankers calling to Yemeni oil terminals.

62. It is **HIGHLY LIKELY** that Houthis will continue to employ UAVs and missiles in future. Notwithstanding, USVs may also be utilized which will pose a significant threat to traffic traversing in international shipping lanes. The recent emergence of the potential use UUVs is being investigated and remains a possibility in the region.

### **Terrorism Threat Assessment – BENIGN**

63. No reports have been received on terrorism attacks affecting the threat posed to merchant traffic in the RS, BAM and GOA. Ongoing instability in Somalia and Yemen continue to provide a safe haven for regional terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab (AS) and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The threat from terrorism in the maritime domain is assessed as **BENIGN** (an attack is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY**).

### **Operations/ MSCHOA Analysis**

64. MSCHOA is further enhancing its comprehension of the maritime domain in the Southern Red Sea, GoA and the Somali Basin, considering recent developments since November 2023.

65. It is crucial that all security-related incidents are promptly reported to MSCHOA, which will then disseminate the information to all stakeholders, including Registered Ships that may be affected by the maritime security incident, CMF partners, the UKMTO and security companies. This information is crucial for enabling an appropriate response to the incident, deploying a timely military response (if necessary), and enhancing the aforementioned understanding.

### **MSCHOA Vessel Movement Registrations and PAST**

66. Registration with MSCHOA facilitates communication with military forces during a transit of the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) and former HRA<sup>1</sup>, enabling timely notification of newly emerging threats to your ship and reciprocally, gathering information related to any maritime security events you may observe. In addition, regular

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<sup>1</sup> On 1st May 2019, the HRA was reduced in the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office Q6099 and Q6111 charts, which included the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. On 5th January 2023, the HRA was completely removed.

threat assessment updates, warnings and self-protection information are made available to shipping companies that register with MSCHOA.

67. The number of registrations, which has been declining until November 2023, is now on the rise. The initial decrease may have been influenced by the perception that piracy had ceased, and by the removal of the HRA from the UK Hydrographic Office charts. Thus, the average registration rate in the IRTC area, which was approximately 83% between 2016 and 2022, decreased to 68% in 2023. However, this rate increased to 75%, a surge likely attributable to recent events in the area.

68. Registration to MSCHOA indicates that by November 2023, the reduction in vessels engagement of PAST had stabilised at roughly 55%, down from an average of 65% since 2019. Nevertheless, an increase of up to 74% of PAST has been noted from December 2023.



Figure 2: Declared use of PAST last 12 months<sup>2</sup>

## IRTC.

69. Navies’ warships provide westbound and eastbound escorts along the IRTC. Information about convoy and group transit schedules, as well as instructions on how to join them, can be found on the MSCHOA website ([www.MSCHOA.org](http://www.MSCHOA.org)) and is updated daily.

<sup>2</sup> Data refers to vessels registered with MSCHOA VRS and to HRA.

## UKHO Charts.

70. Following the removal of the HRA, the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office released updated Q6099 and Q6111 charts covering the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Arabian Gulf.

71. In the updated charts, the voluntary reporting area is depicted in purple, and two registration methods are outlined: one for UKMTO and one for MSCHOA. Despite the cancellation of the HRA, ships are still urged to register *via* the MSCHOA website to partake in the traffic monitoring system in the area and receive alerts on all maritime security incidents. Ships transiting the area are reminded that the BMP5 recommendations for the area remain unchanged despite the removal of the HRA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS.

72. CMF and EU NAVFOR encourages MVs to:

- a. Ensure continued registration with MSCHOA prior to entering the VRA (as indicated in Maritime Security Chart Q6099). This enables EU NAVFOR to assign risk profiles to vessels transiting the area, optimize the use of naval assets, and attain a comprehensive understanding of traffic patterns and BMP compliance.
- b. Implement protection measures as detailed in BMP5 including PAST.
- c. Opt for trade routes beyond TTW (>12NM). This will enable EU NAVFOR and CMF respond more efficiently in the event of an incident.
- d. Maintain the highest level of readiness while transiting areas where ATALANTA assesses the presence of a PAG (Pirate Action Group).
- e. Promptly report incidents to MSCHOA, United Kingdom Maritime Trade Organisation (UKMTO), and the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), to facilitate a quicker effective response by naval assets patrolling the region.

## CMF Activity

64. CMF is routinely conducting Maritime Security Operations (MSO) and exercises with air and surface units in the AOO in order to deter through presence illicit non-state actors from use of the high seas, to ensure freedom of navigation, to preserve the International Rule Based Order and to reassure the maritime community.

65. As a reaction on the outbreak of the Israeli– Hamas conflict and the following substantial escalation of Maritime Security Events in the Red Sea, CMF has initiated the CTF 153 Focused Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN (OPG), which provides deterrence and reassurance through presence only. OPG does not provide convoy support or pre-emptive self defence actions in the region which are undertaken only under independent national authorities. OPG remains enduring at this time.

66. Since the last IRTA, CTFs have conducted a combined total of 4 Focused Operations and 1 multinational exercise with the support of various CMF member nations and EU NAVFOR. These operations were intended to maximize the efficiency of assets in direct support of CMF. CTF 150 has, in the period under review, handed over command from French-led deployment to Canada-led team, who will continue to conduct CTF 150 operations. CTF 151 has, in the period under review, handed over command from Philippian-led deployment to Brazilian-led team, who will continue to conduct CTF 151 operations.

67. As per the data below, there has been a decrease in Hash and Heroin seizures while seized quantity of Meth has increased during the period under review as compared to the same timeframe last year.

<b>Narcotics Category</b>	<b>Amount in kilogram</b>	
	<b>15 Feb 23 – 03 Dec 23</b>	<b>04 Dec 23 – 15 Feb 24</b>
<b>Hash</b>	7429	6454
<b>Methamphetamine</b>	512	621
<b>Heroin</b>	472	443
<b>Barbiturate pills</b>	-	22 (75000) pills
<b>Amphetamine</b>	-	417.3

68. Key Leadership Engagements by the CMF/ CTFs leadership were conducted with counterparts in Seychelles and Kuwait for promoting mutual cooperation and garner support for the CMF to help in its mission. In addition, various Head of Navies and ambassadors have visited CMF during period under review to strengthen mutual relations.

69. Operation COMPASS ROSE (CR) II was executed from 11 to 14 Dec 23 with participation from eight member nations and one organization, hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain at NSA. OP CR II demonstrated that there is great value and potential in CTF 154 MSET operations that not only bring together Subject Matter Experts in various Maritime Domain activities but also bring together military personnel from CMF member nations and key regional actors to share experiences on common ground.



## **EU NAVFOR Activity**

81. EU NAVFOR has persisted in its counter-piracy operations in the GOA and in the Somali Basin, whilst monitoring and protecting World Food Program (WFP) ships and vulnerable vessels. Additionally, it has established a Maritime Security presence in the area to provide assistance to the region. EU NAVFOR has enhanced coordination and exchange of information exchange with relevant Somali authorities within the context of counter-piracy effort, thereby, bolstering deterrence against potential pirate actors.

82. EU NAVFOR continues to improve its coordination and exchange of information with riverine partners of the Indian Ocean, to gain a clearer picture in the AOO and operate more efficiently with available assets against all kinds of illicit activities.

83. EU NAVFOR persists in conducting numerous Focused Operations (FO) that specifically target the root causes of piracy. These causes stem from interconnected factors and circumstances within particular areas, including the existence of criminal networks linked to piracy, illicit fishing activities carried out by a various actors, and the presence of localized maritime law enforcement entities.

84. EU NAVFOR is consistently adjusts its procedures to play a role in curbing piracy and increasing maritime security in a safe and effective manner.

85. EU NAVFOR maintains its maritime security presence by conducting Focus Operations aimed at addressing illicit activities such as drug trafficking, charcoal smuggling and weapons trafficking.

86. EU NAVFOR conducts Focus Operations in order to better understand and monitor fishing activities, focusing on those that could be Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) in the Area of Operation.

## **Conclusion**

87. The ongoing threat of piracy in the Horn of Africa remains a top priority for EU NAVFOR and CMF. The collaborative efforts of naval forces deployed in the region, along with sustained support from the Maritime Industry, are crucial for achieving success in eradicating the threat. Strengthening information exchange among various military and civilian agencies is imperative in order to establish a clear process for combating criminal activity. This, coupled with adherence to BMP5 procedures, will help ensure continued maritime safety in the operational area.



## **Feedback**

88. Enquiries about the content of this threat assessment should be directed to CMF and EU NAVFOR.

CMF:

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Website: [www.combinedmaritimeforces.com](http://www.combinedmaritimeforces.com)

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EU NAVFOR:

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Fax: 0033 (0) 298 220 171.

Website: [www.mschoa.org](http://www.mschoa.org)

Email: [postmaster@mschoa.org](mailto:postmaster@mschoa.org)

## **Annexes to this IRTA:**

- A. Threat Assessment and Probability Yardstick.
- B. Summary for the current situation in Somalia, Yemen, Mozambique and Sudan.
- C. Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations and Acronyms.

**Threat Assessment and Probability Yardstick**

The threat assessment and probability yardstick used in this document is as under for ready reference.

<b>THREAT ASSESMENT</b>	<b>BENIGN</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MODERATE</b>	<b>SUBSTANTIAL</b>	<b>SEVERE</b>	<b>CRITICAL</b>
<b>PROBABILITY YARDSTICK</b>	Attack is <b>HIGHLY UNLIKELY</b> (10% - 20%)	Attack is <b>UNLIKELY</b> (>25% - 35%)	Attack is a <b>REALISTIC POSSIBILITY</b> (40% - <50%)	Attack is <b>LIKELY / PROBABLE</b> (55% - <75%)	Attack is <b>HIGHLY LIKELY</b> (80% - 90%)	Attack is <b>ALMOST CERTAIN</b> (>95%)

**Summary for the Current Situation in Somalia and Yemen**

1. The following paragraphs contain a summary of the current situation in Somalia, and Yemen. This material is drawn from open source reporting with the aim of providing an overview of the security situation in the region.

**Situation in Somalia**

2. With the beginning of the year 2024, ETHIOPIA and SOMALILAND signed an agreement granting ETHIOPIA access to the Red Sea through SOMALILAND'S BERBERA port (via the lease a strip of SOMALILAND'S coast to ETHIOPIA) while ETHIOPIA recognizes SOMALILAND as an independent country which obtains also participation in Ethiopian companies

3. The Somali “pirates” have been responsible for a total of fourteen (14) events, ten (10) hijacking and six (6) piracy events since November 2023 along the Somali coast, and in the waters of the Wester Indian Ocean. The current wave of hijacking and/or “piracy” events has coincided more or less, with the Houthis attacks in Yemen targeting maritime shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. However, it remains unclear what sparked the recent surge in such events. There is a REALISTIC POSSIBILITY that some individuals and/or clan leaders have estimated that Piracy Business has become again financially attractive, with coalition navies more focused towards RS/ GOA to counter the Houthi related threat. It is also a REALISTIC POSSIBILITY that these attacks may have begun as part of a clan related dispute linked to Puntland politics and due to deteriorating economic situation across the public sector of Puntland. None of these hypotheses is confirmed at this stage. Currently, three or more Pirate Action Groups (PAGs) are active in the Arabian Sea, with the intent and capability to catch any opportunity (due to the high number of MVs present in the area) to conduct a Piracy or Hijacking attack.

4. The threat of Al Shabab (AS) attacks in Somalia remains considerable, with security personnel, checkpoints and government officials as main targets in addition to businesses that do not cooperate with their demands. AS continues capitalizing on security forces gaps, seeking opportunities to target them in near future with all sorts of IED or larger more ambitious complex attacks. However, there is currently no evidence of AS possessing maritime capabilities, or any future intent to operate within such environment.

5. On 27 Jan 24, the African Union Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) has handed over nine (9) military bases to the Somali government, marking the completion of the second phase of the troop withdrawal from the country. Seven (7) of the nine (9) military bases were handed over at a ceremony held in Mogadishu. In September last year the Somalia

Government requested a three (3) month suspension of the troop's withdrawal due to some operational problems and now this second drawdown phase was completed with 3,000 ATMIS troops handing over seven key Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). The African Union (AU) is fully committed to completing the security transition phase 3 drawdown of 4,000 ATMIS troops by 30 June 24.

### **Situation in Yemen**

6. During period under review, a substantial increase in activities in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has been observed. Houthi forces have continued to launch a series of attacks utilizing one-way attack UAVs, anti-ship cruise missiles, and anti-ship ballistic missiles launched into the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. In addition, USV threat also prevails in the area.

7. During the reporting period numerous incidents and attacks against merchant vessels occurred; 12 of which resulted in damages ranging from minor hull impacts and fires to larger sustained fires. All merchant vessels involved remained afloat and continued to their NPOC. There were no injuries or loss of life in any of the incidents.

8. These incidents demonstrate the wider effects of the war in Gaza rippling across the region, exacerbating tensions and threatening to spill over into already-volatile conflicts.

9. The domestic situation in Yemen remains tense despite the recent announcement of an imminent roadmap to peace under UN auspices. A regional escalation in the Red Sea could nevertheless derail ongoing peace efforts and lead to a resurgence of the conflict.

10. The Houthis messaging via their media channels states that they will continue to attack Israel, US and UK-linked ships for as long as the conflict in Gaza persists.

**Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations and Acronyms**

<b>AaS</b>	Ansar al-Sunna: Terrorist Group operating in Mozambique
<b>AG</b>	Arabian Gulf
<b>AOO</b>	Area of Operation
<b>AOR</b>	Area of Responsibility
<b>AQAP</b>	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
<b>AS</b>	Arabian Sea
<b>AS</b>	Al Shabaab: Terrorist Group operating in Somalia
<b>ASBM</b>	Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile
<b>ASCM</b>	Anti-Ship Cruise Missile
<b>ATMIS</b>	African union Transition Mission in Somalia
<b>BAM</b>	Bab-al-Mandeb strait
<b>BMP5</b>	Best Management Practice (Version 5): IMO and industry sponsored suggested planning and operational practices for ship operators and Masters of ships transiting the Indian Ocean
<b>BM</b>	Ballistic Missile
<b>CMF</b>	Combined Maritime Forces: 38 nation multi-national maritime force operating in Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and Gulf of Aden.
<b>COA</b>	Course Of Action
<b>CRS</b>	Central Red Sea
<b>CTF</b>	Combined Task Force
<b>EMASOH</b>	European Maritime Awareness Operation in the Strait of Hormuz
<b>EU NAVFOR</b>	European Union Naval Force Somalia (Operation ATALANTA)
<b>FO</b>	Focused Operation
<b>FV</b>	Fishing Vessel
<b>GOA</b>	Gulf of Aden
<b>GOO</b>	Gulf of Oman
<b>HOA</b>	Horn Of Africa
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters

<b>HRA</b>	High Risk Area: Industry defined area where it is considered there is a higher risk of piracy and within which self-protective measures are most likely to be required
<b>IMB</b>	International Maritime Bureau
<b>IMSC</b>	International Maritime Security Construct
<b>ICOD</b>	Intelligence Cut-off Date
<b>IOT</b>	In Order To
<b>IRTA</b>	Industry Releasable Threat Assessment
<b>IRTB</b>	Industry Releasable Threat Bulletin
<b>IRTC</b>	Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor
<b>IUU</b>	Illegal Unreported and Unregulated
<b>IS</b>	Islamic State
<b>Kts</b>	Knots
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum Of Understanding
<b>MSCHOA</b>	Maritime Security Centre (Horn of Africa): The maritime industry control centre for the EU's Op ATALANTA.
<b>MSO</b>	Maritime Security Operation
<b>MSTC</b>	Maritime Security Transit Corridor
<b>MT</b>	Motor Tanker
<b>MV</b>	Merchant Vessel
<b>NM</b>	Nautical Mile
<b>NRS</b>	North Red Sea
<b>OSINT</b>	Open Source Intelligence
<b>PAG</b>	Pirate Action Group
<b>PAST</b>	Private Armed Security Team
<b>PCASP</b>	Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel
<b>POB</b>	Persons on Board
<b>RS</b>	Red Sea
<b>SBM</b>	Single Buoy Mooring
<b>SLC</b>	Saudi-Led Coalition
<b>SNA</b>	the Somali National Army

<b>SRS</b>	South Red Sea
<b>SSF</b>	Somali Security Force
<b>STC</b>	Southern Transitional Council
<b>SV</b>	Sailing Vessel
<b>TTPs</b>	Tactics, Techniques And Procedures
<b>TTW</b>	Territorial Waters
<b>UAS</b>	Unmanned Aerial System
<b>UAV</b>	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UKMCC</b>	United Kingdom Maritime Component Commander
<b>UKMTO</b>	United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (Based in Dubai)
<b>USV</b>	Unmanned Surface Vehicle
<b>VRA</b>	Vessel Registration Area
<b>WBIED</b>	Water Borne Improvised Explosive Device
<b>WIO</b>	Western Indian Ocean
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme