Maritime Security – Gulf of Guinea

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Disclaimer

Introduction

Piracy off West Africa has been a very serious concern for many years. Incidents have been reported as far south as Angola and as far north as Sierra Leone.

The spectrum of potential maritime criminals in West Africa is wide. They range from opportunistic thieves looking to rob vessels at anchor; stevedores stealing small amounts of cargo, to highly sophisticated criminal gangs that can operate across national boundaries. These gangs have the ability to identify, track and hijack specific vessels and conduct ship to ship transfers of petroleum cargoes offshore.

Attacks are often violent in nature and cases include kidnapping for ransom of ships' crews.

Added to the criminal mix are politically motivated militias who regard maritime assets, in particular those connected to the local oil industry, as legitimate targets.

This briefing should be read in conjunction with the Loss Prevention Briefing, *Maritime Security – General Recommendations* which can be read here:

lp-briefings/ships

For a glossary of the abbreviations used in this briefing see appendix 2 found here.

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Security organisations

Marine Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea, (MDAT-GoG)

The MDAT-GoG was established in 2016 and is operated by the UK and French navies; it replaces the now dissolved MTISC-GoG.

The scheme is entirely voluntary; however vessels are encouraged to take part to allow a prompt response to any incident.

The voluntary reporting area and reporting structure can be found on the UKHO security chart Q6114. (See Appendix I).

Contact details for the reporting scheme can be found on UKHO Chart Q6114 and are as follows:

Email: watchkeeper@mdat-gog.org
Telephone: +33 (0) 298228888

Regional specific security guidance

Piracy tactics

As previously stated there is a broad spectrum of tactics employed by pirates in the West African region, the main activities in this area can be broadly split into the following categories:

Armed robbery

Vessels slowly approaching port or at anchor are prime targets. Robbery is often opportunist and violent in nature. The usual targets are personal valuables, and money from the ship's safe off Lagos, Port Harcourt, Bonny River, Cotonou and Lomé.

Cargo theft

Theft of vessels cargoes happens throughout the region. In particular the pirates target vessels carrying valuable oil or chemical cargoes. As such they target product and chemical tankers, although other vessel types are not entirely excluded. The aim of the pirates is to hijack vessels and transfer the cargo to smaller vessels. These attacks are well organised, and often the pirates are knowledgeable about vessel operations and can operate the cargo systems independently of the ship's crew.

Kidnapping

There have been numerous instances of crew kidnapping. Crew are typically taken ashore following an attack and ransom demands are issued by the kidnappers.

Ports, anchorages and operational areas

The type and level of threat at each port and area of operation varies. It is important that the threat level and type in a particular port, anchorage or area of operation is regularly assessed. This may require expert advice. At the very least IMB piracy reports for the area should be monitored, but CSOs should be aware that it should be understood that many incidents in the region, particularly in Nigeria, are not reported to IMB.

Image courtesy of REUTERS/Luc Gnago

Guidelines for owners, operators and Masters for protection against piracy in the GoG region

Version 3 of this document was released in June 2018. It was written to be read in conjunction with the global counter piracy guidance for companies, Masters and seafarers. It was produced by a number of industry bodies such as the International Chamber of Shipping, BIMCO, Intertanko and Intercargo.

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It contains information of piracy tactics for the region, company and voyage planning advice, and vessel hardening details.

A link to these guidelines can be located here:

https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/media/1026/gog-guidelines-v3.pdf

Global counter piracy guidance for companies, Masters and seafarers

As well a general advice in relation to all forms maritime security, the Global counter piracy guidance for companies, Masters and seafarers contains regional specific advice as well. This includes important contact details.

It is recommended that Members distribute the guidance among their Masters and crew and it can be downloaded here:

https://www.ocimf.org/media/91171/Global-Counter-Piracy-Guidance-For-Companies-Masters-and-Seafarers.pdf

Maritime global security site

The site provides guidance and information for companies and mariners seeking on a wide range of Maritime Security Issues.

This includes regions specific links to the military supporting the region and well as the guidelines for owners, operators and Master for the protection against piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea region version 3.

The maritime global security website can be found at the following link:

https://www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org/geography/gulf-of-guinea/

High risk area (HRA)

The voluntary reporting scheme for MDAT-GoG covers what should be considered as the HRA. This extends from Cap Blanc on the Mauritanian border to the Southern border of Angola; it also incorporates the Cape Verde Islands.
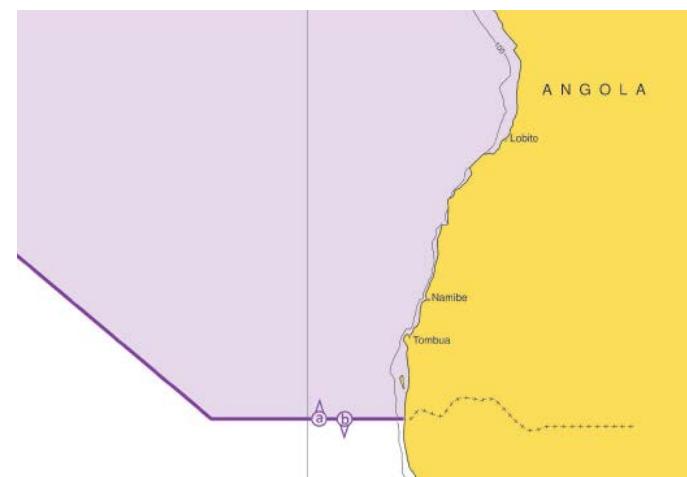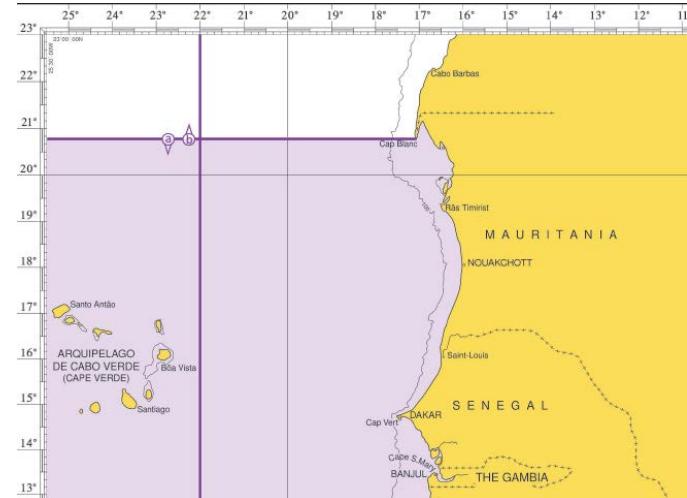
From UKHO security chart Q6114

Voluntary reporting area (VRA)

MDAT-GoG reporting requirements are found on UKHO chart Q6114. (See Appendix I).

Vessels are strongly encouraged to take part in the scheme when entering or leaving the VRA, reporting daily when within the VRA, also when arriving or leaving ports within the VRA.

Vessels should also report suspicious activity to the MDAT GoG.

Reporting forms and the relevant UKHO security chart details can also be found here:

https://www.admiralty.co.uk/maritime-safety-information/security-related-information-to-mariners

Appendix 1 - UKHO security chart Q6114
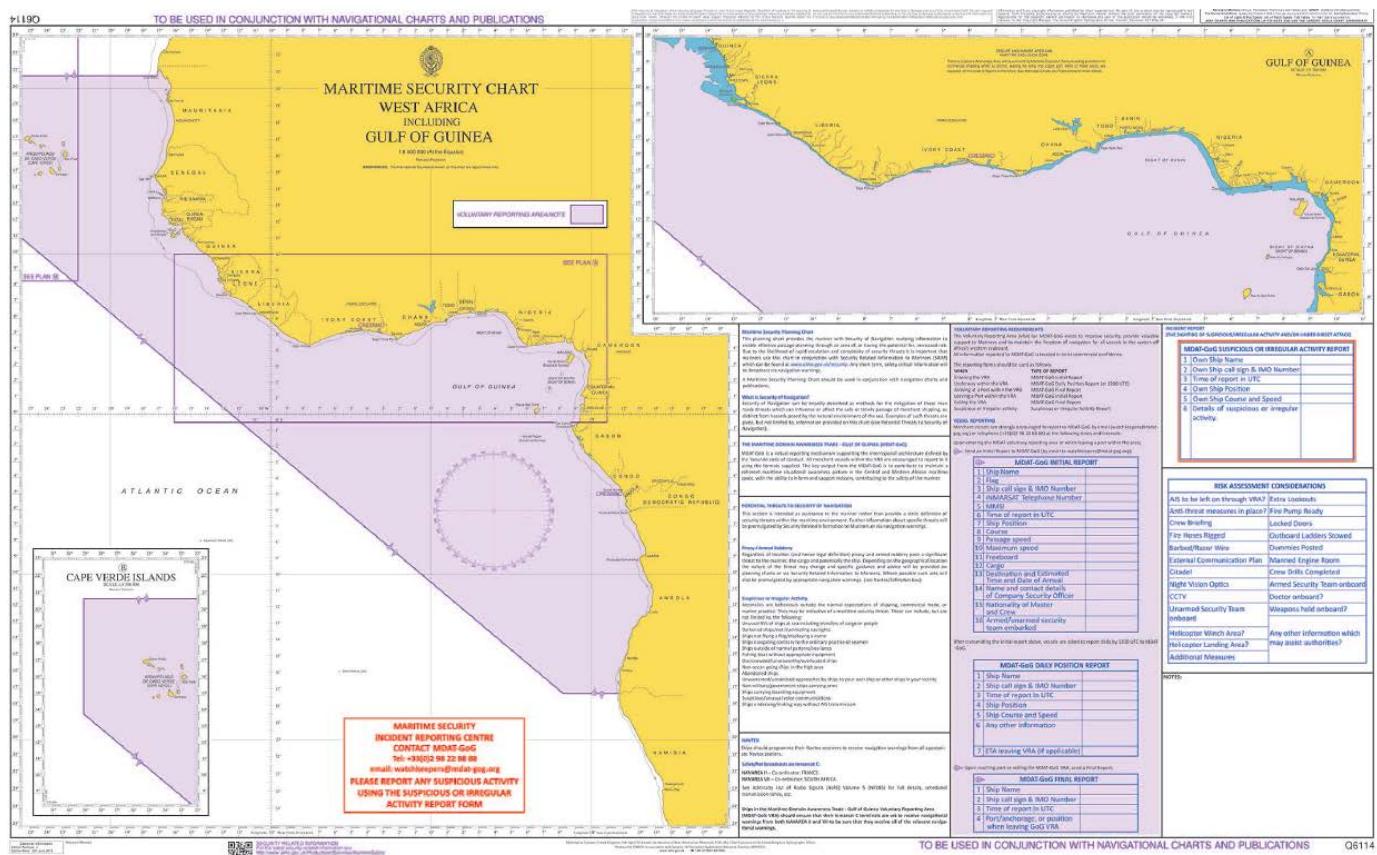
Appendix 2 – Glossary of abbreviations

CSO: Company Security Officer

IMB: International Maritime Bureau

GoG: Gulf of Guinea

HRA: High Risk Area

MDAT-GoG: Marine Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea

UKHO: United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

VRA: Voluntary Reporting Area