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MEASURES TO ENHANCE MARITIME SECURITY

Security in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

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SUMMARY

Executive summary: The security situation in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden is extremely serious with civilian merchant ships being fired upon and the lives of seafarers being put at risk on a daily basis. Seafarers have been killed and seriously injured in these deliberate and targeted attacks. The co-sponsors detail the volume and the impact of attacks faced by civilian seafarers and request a detailed discussion on the issue within an appropriate group with the aims to condemn the attacks on seafarers and ships and to identify how to achieve a long-lasting security situation that can be put in place after the immediate crisis is resolved.

Strategic direction, if applicable: 5

Output: 5.2

Action to be taken: Paragraph 12

Related documents: MSC 108/7 and MSC 108/7/1

Introduction

1 In the months between the hijacking of the RoRo ship **Galaxy Leader** on 19 November 2023 and the submission of this document, there have been over 65 incidents where ships have been threatened or attacked in the Southern Red Sea (SRS) and Gulf of Aden (GoA). These attacks have deliberately targeted innocent seafarers, several of whom have been killed and others have suffered life changing injuries. This unprecedented threat to seafarers warrants the urgent attention of the Committee.

Impacts of the crisis

2 The threat to the lives of seafarers in the SRS and GoA is unprecedented. Missiles and aerial and waterborne drones have struck ships carrying the most volatile of global cargoes. Only the incredible dedication of the crew of the **Marlin Luanda**, supported by navies, prevented a catastrophic explosion and mass loss of life. The accommodation blocks of ships have been hit and missiles have passed so close that bridge windows have been blown out.

3 The attack on the **True Confidence** of 6 March 2024 resulted in multiple fatalities and injuries. Irrespective of the attackers' declared intent, their attacks have resulted in deaths and injuries to innocent seafarers.

4 The Committee must also not forget that, at the time of submission, the crew of the **Galaxy Leader** remain in captivity. Similarly, the fate of the crew of the **Ruen**, hijacked on 14 December 2023, 430 NM east of Socotra, is also unknown. The physical and psychological impacts on these seafarers will endure long after they are eventually released. Additionally, the psychological effects on the seafarers who have come under attack will be long lasting, and the stress for those who have passed through this affected area is likely to be considerable.

5 The attacks have had a considerable impact on trade; ships are passing through the threat area at higher-than-normal speed whilst the significant number of diversions around the Cape of Good Hope not only add many days to normal passage times but a significant increase in global CO₂ emissions. There have been further local environmental impacts – the missile attack of 18 February 2024 on the **Rubymar** forced the crew to abandon the ship following the flooding of the engine-room. The vessel's sinking and the environmental threat it presents are a direct consequence of the actions of the attackers. It seems inevitable that more pollution will occur with a consequential effect on delicate marine ecosystems and the livelihood of coastal communities.

6 More than 50% of global trade using the Red Sea has now re-routed to avoid the many threats to seafarers and ships, resulting in a significant drop of 42% of traffic passing through the Suez Canal. This is now impacting both the local and global economy through increased delivery time of goods and services and an increase in costs for all consumers. Seafarers on board ships in the threat area are faced with unimaginable pressure both physically and mentally; their families at home worry about their safety.

Actions taken by the international community

7 The international military response to this crisis through missions such as Operation Prosperity Guardian and Operation Aspides has been rapid and effective in stopping and intercepting attacks. These missions are welcomed by the shipping industry, and the ongoing and improving cooperation between industry and military deployers is crucial to maritime situational awareness. The establishment of the Joint Maritime Information Centre as a single source for incident reports is especially welcome.

8 Furthermore, the efforts of the Secretary-General in highlighting the impact of the ongoing security crisis at the highest level in the UN are welcomed, and the co-sponsors wholeheartedly support all such efforts to increase the safety of seafarers in the face of unprecedented aggression in the region.

9 Normality will only return to the region once safety and security are assured – the current scenario of sustained missile and drone attacks is profoundly abnormal, presenting a real and significant threat to safety of life and the environment. As such, it is essential that every effort is made to end this security crisis, the like of which seafarers have not seen in two generations.

Proposal

10 The co-sponsors believe that the Organization should be unequivocal in its denunciation of the attacks on seafarers and ships and the Committee should take action.

11 The co-sponsors propose that an appropriate group be established to explore solutions to the ongoing crisis. If a working group is not available, then it is noted that paragraph 5.25 of MSC–MEPC.1/Circ.5/Rev.5 states that other groups may be formed, depending on the necessity and urgency of the issue to be considered, and such groups may meet in addition to or in lieu of working or drafting groups. The proposed issues for discussion include to:

- .1 develop an MSC resolution condemning the attacks;
- .2 promote relevant best practice guidance for ships and seafarers preparing to transit, or transiting the region;
- .3 identify if existing international and regional structures could be used to further enhance maritime security in the region; and
- .4 review information flow and reporting to ensure GISIS is accurate.

Action requested of the Committee

12 The Committee is invited to note the information contained in this document and the proposal for an appropriate group with draft terms of reference contained in paragraph 11 and decide as appropriate.
