



# HQ MARCOM

## Threat to commercial shipping operating in the Mediterranean



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(NU) This product includes data compiled from Open-Source and NATO unclassified material. The report includes data drawn from operational as well as intelligence sources with additional analyst comment added for context and clarity. The information contained herein remains the property HQ MARCOM.

### 1. Introduction

(NU) The Mediterranean Sea is one of the world's busiest waterbodies; from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Levant coast, it covers approximately 2,500 miles and occupies an area of nearly 970,000 square miles. While the region offers safe transit to commercial traffic and entry to the middle east and beyond via the Suez Canal, regional instability in certain areas such as Libya and Syria have the potential to spill over into the maritime, posing a possible threat to commercial traffic.

(NU) The purpose of this report is to provide a general assessment on the threat posed to commercial shipping while transiting the Mediterranean in open water. The risk to vessels when operating close to the coast or within confined areas and port exit/entry is clearly elevated due to the opportunistic nature it provides to a would be attacker. However it is assumed Company Security Officers (CSOs) will have conducted their own port threat assessments and advised ships accordingly in these instances.

### 2. The Western Mediterranean

(NU) The threat to Shipping in the WMED is currently assessed as low. It is well known that military forces along the Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian coastline regularly patrol along their territorial waters (TTW) to ensure integrity and security is maintained. However, it is clearly impossible to monitor the entire coastline continuously and therefore a number of illegal activities continue to take place in the WMED.

(NU) Drug trafficking from the Moroccan coast to the south Spanish coast using small, modern high speed vessels is still observed. Law enforcement agencies in the region continue to fight these activities. Other than a navigational consideration, these fast craft pose no direct threat to commercial traffic as their main focus is on delivery of illicit cargo. A recent incident occurred 30 May 18 when Liberian flagged container vessel VEGA MERCURY was detained at the port of ORAN, Algeria with 700kg of Cocaine onboard - again highlighting the use of the maritime for illicit activity.

(NU) Illegal migration routes from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia are used predominantly by economic migrants to get into the European Union. Use of routes by Violent Extremists is not confirmed, but also cannot be excluded. Despite receiving the highest proportion of arrivals this year by land and sea, Italy was surpassed by both Spain and Greece during the second quarter of the year.

Authorities in Spain registered a total of 17,950 arrivals between January and June 2018, two times more than the 9,401 reported in the same period in 2017. 16 percent of migrants and refugees arrived in Spain by land, mainly to the two Spanish enclaves in North Africa (Ceuta and Melilla). The remaining 84 percent (15,076) were sea arrivals to the south of Spain, mainly in Tarifa, Almeria, Motril, Valencia, and Málaga. This represents a significant increase in arrivals to Spain. Due to the normal transit routes used by merchant vessels, the probability of encountering a migrant boat in the WMED, while possible, is assessed as Low.

## **OVERALL THE SECURITY AND TERRORISM THREAT TO SHIPPING TRANSITING IN THIS REGION IN OPEN WATERS IS ASSESSED AS LOW.**

### **3. The Central Mediterranean**

**(NU)** The dynamic changes considerably in the CMED with the region dominated by the ongoing internal conflict within Libya. The country's complex political and security situation has made reaching a political settlement between rivals extremely difficult. Key figures in the east and west continue to wrestle for the upper hand, with recent clashes over the Libyan oil crescent further setting back progress. In Eastern Libya, General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) concluded an offensive to retake the coastal city of Derna declaring victory on 28 Jun 18 against local fighters and violent extremists. In Western Libya, the migrant crisis shows no sign of slowing down with a record number of illegal migrants being held in unofficial detentions facilities in 2018.

**(NU)** While the ongoing turbulence and political vacuum in Libya do not directly impact transiting merchant vessels; as stated previously the potential for a regional crisis to impact within the maritime domain is always possible, even more so in this region.

**(NU)** There are a number of warning areas, TTW claims, and areas of potential miscalculation that all CSOs should be aware of – these are outlined below.

**(NU)** Gulf of SIRTE TTW Claim: Since 1973, Libya claims TTWs in the area south of 32-30N.

**(NU)** NAVWARN 225/16 is an area bounded by the Libyan Coastline and 34-00N. Ships are advised to proceed with caution and for their own safety, get in touch with the nearest coastal station to receive a safe track line. This NAVAREA serves to advise the maritime community of ongoing military activity in the region. No incidents involving Libya and commercial shipping have been observed over this NAVWARN area.

**(NU)** LNA SELF DECLARED “NO SAIL ZONE” (NSZ): The “No Sail Zone” was declared by the LNA in December 2015. The area is officially undefined in time and space; however, some references indicate the area stretches from Derna to Al Bayda on the Eastern Libyan coast and may also extend along the coast to Benghazi. It is most likely aimed at deterring the transit/smuggling of weapons and other materials to Eastern Libya. The NSZ remains active and there have been a number of incidents throughout 2017-2018 with vessels stopped and detained by the LNA CG. In the case of MV LINTAN on 24 SEP 17, shots were fired in an attempt to stop the MV; however, she evaded and escaped by implementing best management practices (BMP).

**(NU)** Historic events in the NSZ 2017 – 2018 include:

- 17 FEB 17: MV MORNING COMPASS (Suez - Misurata) detained IVO Ras Al Hilal, which is to the west of Derna.
- 12 MAR 17: MV EQUALITY (Misratah – Beirut) detained at Ras Al Hilal and later released.
- MAY 17: 2 ITA fishing vessels were detained in vicinity of Ras Al Hilal, but were released hours later.
- 24 SEP 17 (as mentioned): MV LINTAN sailing approximately 24nms from DERNA, LIBYA, was approached by a Libyan fast boat and ordered to stop for inspection.
- 11 MAR 18: MV SANTORINI was sailing close to the NSZ near DERNA when she was ordered to stop for an inspection. Warning shots were fired before the MV was taken to RAS AL HILAL for further questioning prior to release.
- 15 MAY 18: Sailing Yacht BLISS was detained at RAS AL HILAL. The Yacht was avoiding poor weather when arrested by the LNA coast guard. She was released a number of days later, but not before an LNA social media campaign circulated with some reports stating they were possible terrorists.

**(NU)** It is currently unknown whether ship owners/companies are being requested to pay a fine or other penalty for release of vessels when detained for violating the NSZ. MARCOM N2 would greatly appreciate engagement from industry in order to better understand if this is occurring. Any information received will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

**(NU)** Commercial shipping can still be observed arriving at the main Libyan ports to the east and west, but traffic in these areas has been assessed as light and predominantly weighted towards oil carriers and general cargo vessels. DERNA PORT remains closed due to the ongoing fighting, but further west, low level traffic has been noted entering Benghazi as the port was re-opened earlier in 2017.

**OVERALL THE SECURITY AND TERRORISM THREAT TO SHIPPING TRANSITING IN THIS REGION IN OPEN WATERS IS ASSESSED AS LOW.**

#### **4. The Eastern Mediterranean**

**(NU)** The EMED is an extremely busy region and, similar to the Central Mediterranean and Libya, it suffers from the ongoing regional conflict in Syria. A wide range of military units from various countries are also conducting operations. The benefit of this means a large visible deterrent against any terrorist or criminal related activity that could take place. While the threat to commercial shipping is currently assessed as low, CSOs should take appropriate consideration/risk assessment when entering certain EMED ports or transiting close to the far EMED coastline.

##### **4.1 Suez Canal**

**(NU)** The attack on MV Cosco Asia during her northbound transit in August 2013 had a huge impact at the time. In the aftermath, Egypt responded robustly. The current canal security is a reflection of the Egyptian government's understanding of its domestic and world-wide importance, with security achieved close to the canal zones 160km length, and in depth in the Sinai area. Security of the canal is helped by a buffer zone in selected

locations. Ground transportation and access through the Canal Zone is strictly controlled. Security cameras and improved radar allow the Canal Authority to monitor all waterway traffic from its Ismailia Headquarters. Patrols are frequent with interlocking watchtowers providing over watch. Security vehicles and/or boats may shadow transiting ships, and military aircraft complete the layered defence.

**(NU)** Based on heightened security arrangements in the canal and surrounding area, the assessment of a similar attack on a merchant vessel is currently low. However, as with all restricted manoeuvrability transits, the risk is always greater in these areas, particularly from an opportunistic attack similar to COSCO ASIA.

## **4.2 Maritime Terrorist Activity**

**(NU)** The last maritime terrorist attack took place in July 15 with the land-based missile attack on an Egyptian Navy vessel moored off Rafah. Prior to that, there was an attack on an Egyptian Navy vessel in 2014. In Sinai, terrorist related attacks continue to focus on the mainland against Egyptian forces and also to incite sectarian violence and radicalise the Muslim majority through sectarian attacks. There is currently no reporting to suggest Violent Extremists in the Sinai or other related actors have the intention to target Merchant Vessels in open waters. However, certain areas do pose a slightly more elevated risk than others, as demonstrated with the attack on COSCO ASIA. A target of opportunity attack can never be discounted.

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## **5. GPS Interference Eastern Mediterranean**

**(NU)** GPS interference and possible jamming is reportedly occurring in the EMED between Cyprus and Suez, with potentially dangerous consequences.

**(NU)** Between MAR – JUN 18 GPS jamming or interference was reported in the EMED region. Vessels reported a loss of GPS signal, incorrect locations or no location at all.

**(NU)** Recently, the US MARITIME ADMINISTRATION issued several maritime alerts: 2018-004A and 004B, and more recently 2018-007. The reports were concentrated in the vicinity of Port Said, the Suez Canal, and south of Cyprus. Reported interference altered GPS signals affecting bridge navigation and GPS timing and communication equipment. The alerts reaffirm the need for redundant navigation practices when experiencing disruption and also a platform to promote other disruption mitigation practices and procedures.

**(NU)** The Civil aviation authorities in the region also issued NOTAM 0356/18 that reported signal termination and incorrect location of aircraft between Cyprus and Syria.

**(NU)** The impact of this interference is still under investigation, but it is likely vessels will, and should, adopt reversionary modes such as Radar, Chart, and Visual data to account for loss of GPS or inaccuracies encountered. While the impact of this interference may be less in open waters, it will likely be felt during confined navigational movement, or while entering port due to the increased workload on bridge teams. MARCOM encourages companies/Masters to report all instances of GPS interference, actions taken,

and the overall impact (if any) to vessel transit. A separate reporting signal is available on the NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) Website. ([www.shipping.nato.int](http://www.shipping.nato.int))

**(NU)** We have also noted reports that ships are suppressing their static AIS data (name, next port of call, etc.) and switching to “receive only”. While there may be valid reasons for masters doing this, overall it means a loss of situational awareness in the area. Commercial vessels operating in the Mediterranean are likely to receive special attention by warships in the region if adopting this practice. Ships should expect to be queried to ascertain why AIS is off or switched to inhibit. AIS suppression is a ploy often used by vessels to hide suspicious movement, therefore we advise against this practice.