



T2-NAVSEC/11

MEASURES TO ENHANCE MARITIME SECURITY

**DIRECTIVES FOR MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRES (MRCCS) ON
ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST SHIPS**

- 1 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-second session (17 to 26 May 2000), approved Directives for Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs), (MSC/Circ.967) which, in most incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships, are the first point of contact between the ship and coastal authorities concerned, following the Master's decision to request assistance.
- 2 The Maritime Safety Committee, at its seventy-seventh session (28 May to 6 June 2003), modified the text of the exiting Directives to include provisions for the handling by MRCCs of alerts received from ships in response to terrorist acts and other security incidents.
- 3 The revised text of the Directives is given at annex.
- 4 Member Governments and international organizations are recommended to bring this circular to the attention of their national MRCCs, shipowners, ship operators, shipping companies, shipmasters and crews.
- 5 This circular supersedes MSC/Circ.967 dated 6 June 2000.

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ANNEX

DIRECTIVES FOR MARITIME RESCUE CO-ORDINATION CENTRES (MRCCs)**1 Definitions**

“Act of violence”: For the purposes of this circular, the phrases “act of violence” and “acts of violence against ships” encompass acts of piracy, acts of armed robbery against ships and any other security incident directed against a ship which does not fall into one of the preceding categories. For the purposes of this circular, the “ship” includes all persons on board.

“Piracy” The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (article 101) defines piracy as follows:

“Piracy consists of any of the following acts:

- (a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:
 - (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;
 - (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State;
- (b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft;
- (c) any act inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in sub-paragraph (a) or (b).”

“Security Forces Authority”: For the purposes of this circular, and in accordance with the organization of and the decisions by the national Governments, the SFA (Security Forces Authority) is generally a national or regional command of a public agency such as the Navy, Coast Guard or Police in charge of providing the response to security incidents.

“Security incident”. SOLAS 1974, as amended, chapter XI-2 defines a security incident as “any suspicious act or circumstance threatening the security of a ship, including a mobile offshore drilling unit and a high speed craft, or of a port facility or of any ship/port interface or any ship to ship activity”.

“Overt Security Alert”: For the purposes of this circular, an overt security alert uses a communication channel or method which makes no attempt to deny knowledge of its activation and use, for example VHF broadcast.

“Covert Security Alert”: For the purposes of this circular, a covert security alert uses a communication channel or method designed to deny knowledge of its activation to perpetrators of the acts of violence, for example a ship security alert system as detailed in the ISPS Code.

2 General

2.1 While all Governments may grant their maritime rescue co-ordination centre(s) (MRCCs)¹, in addition to those of search and rescue (SAR), powers in the application of national regulations and instructions, the response to acts of violence against ships is the only one of these extensions that forms part of the IMO regulations². In this way, MRCCs are incorporated in the organization that Governments have to set up to deal with acts of violence against ships, which may occur suddenly and anywhere.

2.2 For these reasons, this circular has been drawn up especially for the MRCCs², taking into consideration their own situations and normal activities. It should be considered in connection with guidance on maritime security given in chapter XI-2 of the SOLAS Convention, and the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) Code, and guidance on piracy and armed robbery against ships given in MSC/Circ.622/Rev.1 for Governments, and MSC Circ.623/Rev.1 aimed at shipping companies, masters and crews.

2.3 MRCCs can expect to receive a ship security alert of an act of violence against a ship in a number of ways. This ship security alert can come directly from the ship or via an alternative source. These alternative sources include, but are not limited to, other ships, an adjacent MRCC, the national SFA, ship operators and flag State administrations.

2.4 The immediate MRCC response to an alert should be determined by whether the alert received by the MRCC is determined to be an overt alert or a covert alert. Determining whether the alert is overt or covert is a critical factor as the response for each is extremely different as shown below:

- .1 Overt Security Alert: For an overt alert communication with the ship or other ships in the vicinity of the ship under threat or attack need not be delayed or disguised, for example a Master of a ship may use an overt alarm to discourage an attack;
- .2 Covert Security Alert: For a covert alert **no attempt is to be made** to contact the ship originating the alert and no communications are to be made with other ships in the vicinity of the ship under threat. A Master of a ship may use a covert alarm to deny those posing the threat or making an attack the knowledge that an alert has been made; and
- .3 Unspecified Security Alert: A security alert is deemed to be unspecified when:
 - .1 it is unclear whether the alert is overt or covert; or
 - .2 the initial alert is overt and this is subsequently superseded by a declaration that it is a covert alert.

Detailed guidance for these three situations is provided in the operating instructions below.

¹ Certain missions, which MRCCs have to carry out, in addition to search and rescue, are however set out in chapter 7 of the IAMSAR Manual, volume II

² All the aspects laid down for the MRCC in this circular should be taken as valid for the joint rescue co-ordination centres (JRCC) and, if the national authority so decides, for the maritime rescue sub-centres (MRSC) and joint rescue sub-centres.

2.5 Bilateral agreements between States may be reached for the application of co-operation procedures that might differ from those set out above.

3 Preparatory measures

It is essential that MRCCs are in all respects prepared for situations involving acts of violence against ships. Preparatory measures taken by each MRCC must include actions to:

- .1 ensure that the MRCC is in possession of appropriate national instructions giving details of the Security Force Authority (SFA) responsible for the operational application of contingency plans (counter-measures) to deal with situations involving acts of violence against ships;
- .2 establish fast and effective methods of communication for use between the MRCC and the SFA in question. These methods of communication should be tested on a regular basis;
- .3 If appropriate and feasible, repeat points 3.1 and 3.2 above for each State whose coastal waters are included in the search and rescue region (SRR) of the MRCC;
- .4 ensure the MRCC has clear written procedures and instructions on the actions to be taken by operations personnel when dealing with an act of violence against a ship;
- .5 establish who is responsible for notifying other Administrations and Contracting Governments of the act of violence in accordance with SOLAS 1974, as amended, chapter XI-2, regulations 6 and 7; and
- .6 train the MRCC personnel in:
 - .1 the risks of an act of violence against a ship in the SRR covered by the MRCC in particular and the phenomenon of acts of violence against ships in general;
 - .2 the use of the MRCC procedures and instructions relating to acts of violence against ships;
 - .3 the communications regarding attacks or threats of attack that the MRCC might receive; and
 - .4 the reports to be sent in the event of an alert and all other actions to be taken.

4 Operating measures

4.1 Action to be taken by MRCCs upon receipt of all types of security alerts:

- .1 If the position of the incident is within the SRR of the MRCC, the MRCC should immediately inform the appropriate SFA, using the method of communications set out in 3.2. In addition, if the position is close to the boundaries of the SRR, the MRCC should also inform the appropriate neighbouring MRCC; and

- .2 If the position of the incident is outside the SRR of the MRCC, the MRCC should relay the alert to the appropriate MRCC using the normal methods of communication among MRCCs for search and rescue operations or other pre-determined discreet inter-MRCC communication channels as appropriate.

4.2 Operating measures for OVERT security alerts

In the event of receiving an overt security alert, in addition to the actions detailed in paragraph 4.1 above MRCCs should:

- .1 maintain contact with the SFA and other parties as detailed in 4.1 above;
- .2 contact the ship to determine if the security alert is real or false and to ascertain the nature of the current situation;
- .3 if no response is received, assume that the act of violence is ongoing and advise the SFA accordingly;
- .4 determine the most effective way of issuing a security alert warning for the other ships in the vicinity using appropriate systems and procedures² and
- .5 place SAR resources on standby if appropriate. Prior to authorizing their dispatch by the MRCC, the SFA should determine the risk to the SAR assets.

4.3 Operating measures for COVERT security alerts

In the event of receiving a covert security alert, in addition to the actions detailed in paragraph 4.1 above, MRCCs should:

- .1 maintain contact with the SFA and other parties as detailed in 4.1 above;
- .2 under no circumstances should an MRCC receiving a covert security alert acknowledge receipt of the information received. In addition the MRCC must not send any communication or advice to the Master, other persons on board, or ships in the vicinity of the incidents related to that incident unless directed by the SFA;
- .3 place SAR resources on standby if appropriate. Prior to authorizing their dispatch by the MRCC, the SFA should determine the risk to the SAR assets; and
- .4 assist the SFA by providing operational information as requested by the SFA.

4.4 Operating measures for UNSPECIFIED security alerts

Unspecified alerts should be treated as covert in accordance with paragraph 4.3 above.

5 Additional Actions

- 5.1 The MRCC should endeavour to keep the ship's Administration informed of the acts of violence committed against this ship and of their consequences.

² e.g Refer to format and drafting guidance in COMSAR/Circ.15 – Joint IMO/IHO/WMO Manual on Maritime Safety Information (MSI)

5.2 If laid down in the national regulations and instructions, the MRCC may also have to report directly:

- .2.1 to the national authority or authorities empowered to deal with the phenomena concerned, if this authority or these authorities are different from the SFA referred to above; and
- .2.2 to the person or body entrusted with the inquiries into the acts of violence within the meaning of this circular.

5.3 The MRCC may be required to supply additional information to the Administration, if the Administration has an obligation to send a report of events to the Organization.
