



## **SPOT COMMENTARY 2/17**

*Abduction of Crew of Giang Hai  
off Sibutu Passage*

**21 February 2017**

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While this new incident is of serious concern, the IFC maintains its assessment as stated in SPOT COMMENTARY 01/17:

- The risk to the merchant shipping, primarily towards fishing vessels, tugboats and low-freeboard vessels, from the risk of kidnapping and harassment by criminal / terrorist elements in the Sibutu Passage remains **MODERATE**.
- The threat to large merchant vessels with higher freeboard; whom implement hardening procedures; and conduct evasive manoeuvres, remains **LOW**.

## Purpose

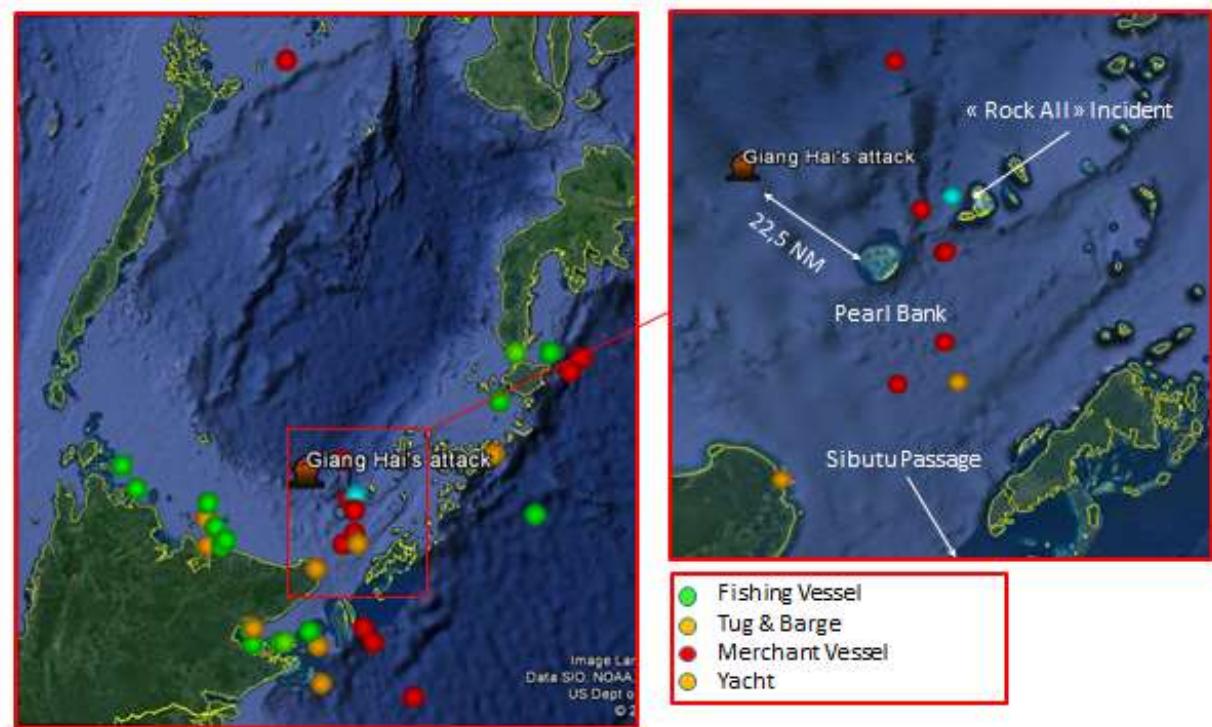
1. This Spot Commentary 2/17 aims to provide an update to the incident of MV GIANG HAI off the Sibutu Passage, which occurred on 19 Feb 2017.

## Details of Incident

2. The Information Fusion Centre (IFC) acquired information that a Kidnap At Sea incident had occurred on board a laden Vietnam-Flagged Bulk Carrier "MV GIANG HAI", while the vessel was underway at Lat: 6° 7' 59"N, Long: 119°24'42"E, on 191824LT Feb 17. It has also been confirmed that the perpetrators abducted 6 crew members of Vietnamese nationality, and shot dead one crew member on-board the vessel. Reportedly, the remaining crew are safe and vessel is currently at TAGANAK Island (Turtle Island) to assist in investigations by the Philippine authorities. At the time of the incident, the vessel was reported to be fully laden with 4,500 tonnes of cement cargo.



Figure 1: MV GIANG HAI



*Figure 2: Map of incidents*

### **Reported Events in the Sulu Seas, with Focus on the Sibutu Passage**

3. Reference IFC Spot Commentary 1/17, there have been 37 incidents observed in the Sulu Seas since Jan 2016, with the majority of the incidents occurring in the vicinity of the Sibutu Passage. Of these incidents in the Sibutu Passage, notably Kidnap at sea affected 2 larger merchant vessels like Bulk Carriers (DongBang Giant 02 on 20 Oct 2016; Giang Hai on 19 Feb 2017). It should also be noted that this is the second occurrence where a victim has been killed during the process of abduction in this vicinity. The first incident occurred on-board the Yacht "ROCKALL" on 5 Nov 2016 where a female victim was similarly killed by firearms during abduction. The male German National remains in captivity with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

### **Modus Operandi**

4. Based on preliminary information by the Philippine authorities, the perpetrators reportedly boarded the vessel using 2 speedboats equipped with high-powered outboard motor-engines (200HP), with 5 armed personnel in each boat.

The perpetrators subsequently abducted 6 crew members and shot dead one, presumably when he tried to resist being taken. They also destroyed navigation and communication equipment before escaping.

## **Assessment**

5. From this incident, it was observed that the *modus operandi* conforms to the assessments made in IFC Spot Commentary 1/17. Considering the interval and proximity of the reported incidents observed thus far, it is assessed the perpetrators are likely from the same group based on the similarity of their reported *modus operandi*.

6. The Modus Operandi observed includes:

a. Targeted vessels:

- i. Bulk carriers,
- ii. Tankers,
- iii. Heavy load carriers,
- iv. Tugs and barges,

b. Perpetrators tend to:

- i. comprise five to ten armed individuals,
- ii. be dressed in black with face-masks,
- iii. carry high-powered automatic rifles,
- iv. operate in 1-2 speedboats,
- v. operate during daylight hours,
- vi. fire on vessels with small-arms sporadically.

7. While these incidents are indeed serious, the IFC assesses that the risk to merchant shipping, primarily towards fishing vessels, tugboats and low-freeboard vessels, from the risk of kidnapping and harassment by criminal / terrorist elements (notably the Abu Sayyaf Group or ASG) in the Sibutu Passage remains **MODERATE**. Based on observed traffic levels and maritime patterns of-life in the affected area, it is assessed that this threat to large merchant vessels with higher

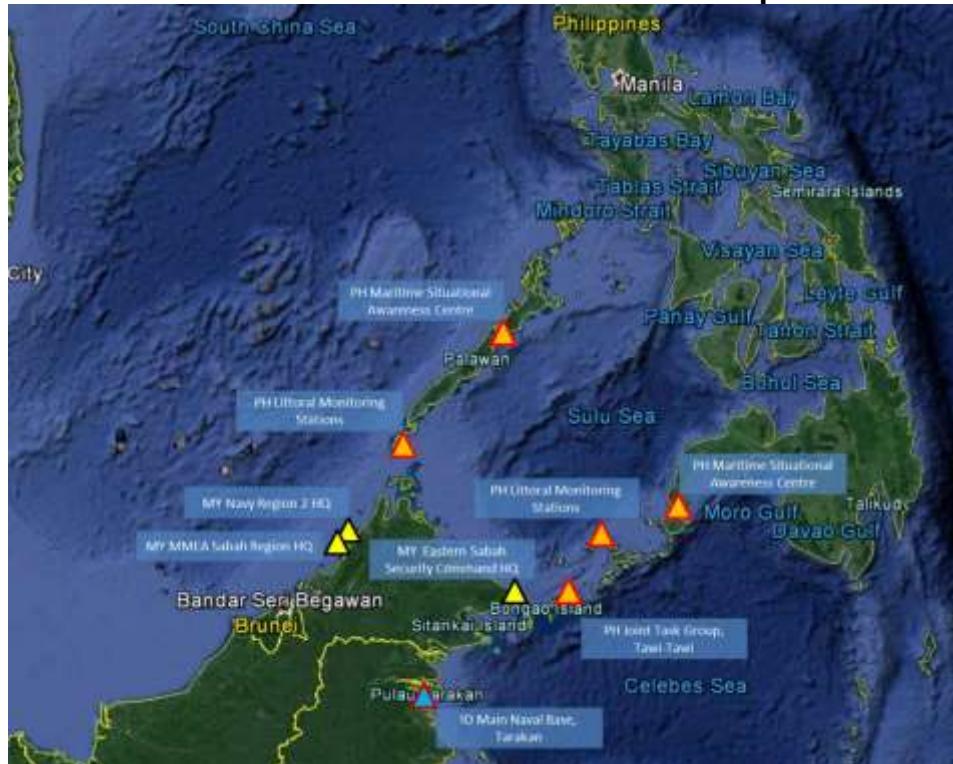
freeboard; who implement hardening procedures; and conduct evasive manoeuvres, remains **LOW**. It is important to note that the “GIANG HAI” conformed with the vulnerabilities mentioned above when the incident occurred. It should also be noted that the affected vessel was not reported to have implemented any self-protection measures at the time of the incident, nor initiate communications with the Littoral Monitoring Station at BONGAO Island.

## **IFC Recommendations**

8. Noting the above, the IFC recommends the following measures be implemented while transiting in the affected area off the Sibutu Passage, to mitigate the prevailing threat to as low a probability as possible:

- a. Maintaining good communications via VHF Channels 08 and 16 with littoral law enforcement agencies and the IFC. A map and contact details of the relevant local authorities is attached at Annex A.
- b. Activate ship’s Automatic Identification System (AIS).
- c. Increase vigilance in watch-keeping and deploy additional lookouts.
- d. Use CCTV cameras for coverage of vulnerable areas (if available).
- e. Keep ship’s whistle and fog horn ready for immediate use.
- f. Secure or lift external ladders to prevent their use and to restrict external access to the bridge.
- g. Deploy Self-Protection Measures (SPM) eg. Rig the water spray hoses and foam monitors in a fixed position. Evasive manoeuvres have also been proven to deter perpetrators in the reported incidents in this specific area.
- h. Firmly secure all doors and hatches providing access to the accommodation and machinery spaces.
- i. Consider restricting personnel access to upper decks and bridge wings during Sibutu Passage transits, so as to not present a target for potential small-arms fire. All non-essential personnel should be located in a secure part of the ship where practicable.

## Annex A to IFC Spot Commentary 2/17



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