

Stockpiles at Sea

FLOATING ARMOURIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

There has not been a successful pirate attack off the coast of Somalia since 2012, but the shipping industry's demand for anti-piracy measures remains high. Indeed, this demand has resulted in an increase in registered maritime private security companies (PSCs) from 56 in 2010 to more than 400 in 2014. In 2013, private armed guards were on board roughly 35–40 per cent of the estimated 65,922 merchant vessels transiting across the Indian Ocean's 'high-risk area' (HRA) (see Map 8.1).

One of the major challenges for maritime PSCs that provide anti-piracy services for merchant vessels transiting the HRA is moving their arms and ammunition between coastal states that prohibit or have restrictions on vessels with arms on board. Floating armouries have emerged to overcome this challenge. There is a lack of information on the number of floating armouries, their use, the number of arms they store, and related physical security and stockpile management practices. This chapter introduces the types of vessels used as floating armouries and their services. It provides an overview of some of the nascent—and potential—approaches to regulating floating armouries to ensure safe and secure practices.

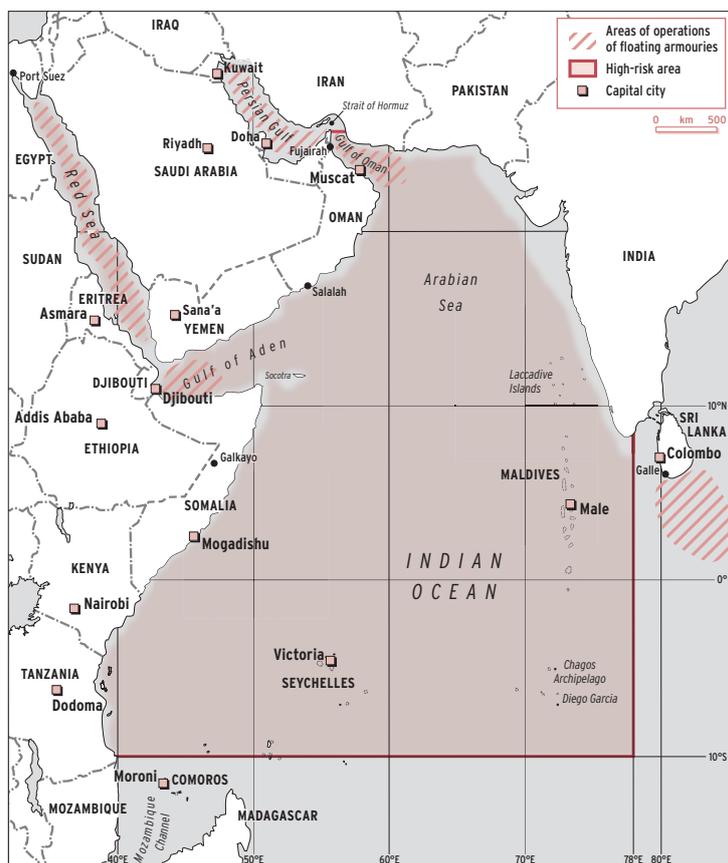
There are no international standards for floating armoury security or storage.

Addressing maritime insecurity: the PSC solution

The International Maritime Organization has issued recommendations and guidance to ensure that the carriage and use of weapons and equipment by private armed guards comply with the legislation and policies of their vessel's flag state and of the countries with jurisdiction over the territorial waters and ports that the vessel is to enter. Nevertheless, there are no common standards or practices agreed among flag states or coastal states regarding the carriage, embarkation, disembarkation, or storage of maritime PSC arms. In the face of regulatory hurdles, including prohibitions on the entry of arms, and the often high cost permits and storage in government-owned

land-based armouries, maritime PSCs increasingly use floating armouries for convenience, economy, and safety.

Map 8.1 Floating armouries and the high-risk area, 2014



Around 30 floating armouries operated in the HRA during 2014.

What is a floating armoury?

A floating armoury is a ship operating in international waters that provides services for maritime PSCs, including the embarkation and disembarkation of PSC personnel, arms, and equipment between a commercial vessel or port and the floating armoury; storage, service, and maintenance, or rental of arms; and the provision of accommodation for private armed guard teams. Storage capacities vary, but some floating armouries can hold approximately 1,000 fire-arms, as well as ammunition.

Around 30 floating armouries operated in the HRA during 2014 in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman, and 1 in Sri Lanka. In 2014, governments in and around the HRA were not known to own or operate any floating armouries; however, the Sri Lankan government had authorized and closely controlled the floating armoury MV *Mabanuwara*, which was operating in its territorial waters.

Arms circulating in the HRA

Due to limited transparency, questions persist regarding the control of arms supplies to maritime PSCs operating in the HRA, as well as the total number of arms that they use and store in floating armouries in the region. Only the Netherlands and the UK have provided public information regarding small arms transfers to maritime PSCs and the use of floating armouries. Estimates of the total number of PSC firearms in the HRA are in the range of 7,000–10,000.

Safe and secure

There are no international standards for floating armoury security or storage and armoury practices vary significantly. For example, due to the fact that floating armouries operating in the HRA are not designed to serve as armouries, storage space for weapons, ammunition, and equipment may be inadequate. In addition, new market entrants could seek to undercut existing operations by slashing costs and neglecting armoury security.

Official government statements stress that no arms have been diverted from maritime PSCs or authorized floating armouries, but anecdotal evidence provided by maritime PSCs utilizing floating armouries reveals that certain practices—such as transferring arms and ammunition from one maritime PSC to another—violate the terms of arms export licensing provisions.

Regulating floating armouries

A variety of approaches have been proposed for regulating floating armouries. These include:

- the establishment of an international regulatory authority for monitoring and inspecting floating armouries;
- International Maritime Organization guidelines, standards, and recommendations for floating armouries;
- flag state regulations for floating armouries, drawing upon the practice of the Saint Kitts and Nevis registry;
- licensing for use by maritime PSCs by government authorities in arms exporting states; and
- an international standard connected to ISO/PAS 28007, which covers maritime PSCs' operations and guard training and qualifications, but not floating armouries.

Other areas at risk from piracy and armed robbery at sea are examining the HRA model, with the Gulf of Guinea identified as a potential site for floating armouries.

The use of floating armouries is a lucrative business that has responded to diverse, often contradictory, legislative and administrative measures relating to the carriage of armed guards into territorial waters and ports. For now, it seems that only a catastrophic incident may prompt the international community to regulate floating armouries. ■