



Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center M I C A C e n t e r

A French centre of expertise on maritime security,
with worldwide competence

French expertise in maritime security

The expansion of maritime traffic and the multiplication of activities at sea (maritime transport, cruises, industry, renewable energies, etc.) require an appropriate and operational framework to guarantee the security of maritime areas.

With the second largest EEZ in the world, France has developed a maritime policy based upon cooperation between the various public and private actors and on information sharing.

By forwarding useful information to the relevant actors, such cooperation enables a better understanding of maritime traffic and activities in order to improve the security of the maritime areas concerned.

The French Navy promotes this cooperation on a global scale and operates a dedicated centre of expertise: The Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center (MICA Center).

The Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center (MICA Center)

With a worldwide scope, the MICA Center is the French centre of expertise dedicated to maritime security.

Launched in Brest in June 2016, it promotes information exchange and cooperation in response to the threats affecting the maritime industry. Commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Gilles Chehab, the centre is operated by about thirty men and women belonging to the French Navy and navies of partner¹ countries.



■ It fulfills 2 missions:

- ▶ to be on duty 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, to identify and analyze situations and incidents affecting maritime navigation throughout the world's oceans;
- ▶ to provide ships and their owners with tailor-made security information; for example, by providing direct support to the crews and shipowners in the event of a piracy alert.

The MICA Center encourages close cooperation between the military and commercial navies and the maritime industry to improve global maritime security.

As a result, the MICA Center is now committed into a process of opening up to partner countries. Indeed, maritime information for surveillance purposes is becoming more and more crucial for many states, especially in Europe.

The MICA Center operates in synergy with the actors involved, through different agreements depending on the areas covered:

- ▶ the Gulf of Guinea, where it monitors and records acts of piracy and robbery via the Franco-British agreement "Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea" (MDAT GoG);
- ▶ the Horn of Africa, where it hosts the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSC-HoA), under the command of the European Union operation ATALANTA, in the fight against piracy in this region;
- ▶ and also, the areas of greater interest for French maritime actors, for which the MICA Centre provides surveillance services in the framework of voluntary national naval cooperation.

This unique geographical location, in Brest, allows the sharing of expertise for the benefit of all, encourages synergies, and strengthens the MICA Center's status as a major player in the field of maritime security.

¹ 1 Spanish officer and 1 Belgian petty officer (at date 18/11/2019).

² Risk maritime areas, alerts in case of an incident, security assessments, bi-annual meetings, specific briefings, exercises, etc.

³ Maintaining a direct link with the assaulted vessel, warning of ships in the vicinity, informing the relevant centres of the alert so as to coordinate an intervention, post alert feedback).

■ Two operational examples of how the MICA Center actually works :

▶ Attack of the heavy lift vessel Blue Marlin and of the tugboat Charis in the EEZ of Equatorial Guinea (May 2019):

The Blue Marlin made an emergency call on VHF16. A ship navigating in the vicinity received this call and transmitted it to the MDAT-GoG, which in turn warned nearby vessels, the company's CSO as well as the Regional Marine Operational Centres (COMs) (Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea). Equatorial Guinea quickly engaged a frigate and 2 helicopters. Through its liaison officer, the MICA Center warned its Spanish homologue which rerouted the frigate *Serviola* sailing in the vicinity. The presence of military forces stopped the piracy attack.

▶ Attacks in the Gulf of Oman :

After the incidents recorded on the ships *Front Altair* and *Kokuka Courageous* in the Gulf of Oman (June 2019), the MICA Center forwarded the incident alert to all ships navigating in the Indian Ocean that subscribed to the naval voluntary cooperation (NVC). The ALINDIEN Maritime Security Cell (MARSEC) contacted all NVC vessels in the area providing them with instructions and recommendations to minimize the danger.

Agreements supporting the action of the MICA Center

■ The Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea (MDAT GoG)

The MICA Center's office for the Gulf of Guinea monitors and processes acts of piracy and robbery through the Franco-British Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea (MDAT GoG) agreement.

Subscription to this service is accessible to all ships operating within the Gulf of Guinea no matter their flag or nationality.

It is based upon the expertise of France within the Gulf of Guinea, the knowledge of the French Navy in terms of naval control and on the British technical expertise.⁴

It contributes to the maintenance of a consistent assessment of the maritime situation in the approaches of Central and West Africa, with the capacity to inform and support the maritime industry, thus contributing to the safety of crew members.

All information is treated with the highest degree of confidentiality and is exploited to improve the safety of people working in the maritime industry and to protect maritime trade.

Approximately 950 ships are currently registered and recorded in the MDAT-GoG, with an average of 430 ships tracked every-day.

The emergency call number of the MICA Center in Brest appears on all the nautical charts, British and French, that are used by ships from around the world sailing in the Gulf of Guinea.

■ The Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSC-HOA)

As regards the Horn of Africa region, the MICA Center is home to the Maritime Security Centre - Horn of Africa (MSC-HOA), subordinated to Operation Head Quarter (OHQ) Atalanta, the organization in charge of the European counter-piracy operation in the Indian Ocean.

The MSC-HoA was relocated in Brest on March 29th 2019, and the OHQ Atalanta in Rota (Spain).⁵

⁴ United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations [UKMTO].

⁵ The MSC-HOA used to be located in Northwood (UK). In the context of Brexit, France and Spain both suggested to take back the command structure and the maritime security centre. The OHQ was thus relocated in Spain, in Rota, whereas the MSC-HOA was relocated in Brest, France.

The MSC-HOA :

- ▶ monitors and shares the maritime situation within the Horn of Africa region (from the South of the Red Sea to the Somali Basin, via the Gulf of Aden);
- ▶ serves as an interface between the command of the Operation Atalanta, shipowners and other civilian maritime actors.

In this way, it monitors merchant vessels operating in the area, communicates an assessment of the piracy threat off the Horn of Africa, is able to give alerts and shares feedback with shipowners, industry and shipping companies.

In concrete terms, ships subscribe to MSC-HoA services through a web portal and then receive the safety assessments that the OHQ establishes and that the MSC-HoA puts online. In exchange, they inform the MSC-HoA of any suspicious incident occurring within the risk area.

■ French Naval Voluntary cooperation

Over the years, France has traditionally adopted a voluntary cooperation approach between its public authorities and private maritime actors, enabling the exchange of information in the field of maritime security (piracy, terrorism, illegal immigration, illicit trafficking and cybercrime). This cooperation is open to ships that have signed a protocol.

This cooperation focuses on 4 priority areas: the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Guinea, South-East Asia and the Mediterranean Sea.

The MICA Center acts as an interface between the commanders of the French Navy's maritime zones in these areas, and the shipowners who operate vessels there. Such cooperation is facilitated by the on-field presence of the French warships that are regularly engaged and by the pre-positioned forces. The MICA Center also collaborates with partner countries⁶ and structures.⁷ Today, 24 companies and 276 French ships or ships of French interest can rely on a daily monitoring within the framework of this voluntary naval cooperation. This principle of cooperation can of course be extended.



⁶ Djibouti, EAU, ...

⁷ IFC Singapore and CRFIM Madagascar in particular.