

# IMSC Stakeholder Conference Yields Greater Alliance with Maritime Industry



The Royal Saudi Naval Force frigate Makkah (814), back, and the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81), not pictured, provide overwatch as the Royal Bahrain Naval Force patrol warship Al Zubara transits the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Nov. 20, 2020. The International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) maintains the freedom of navigation, international law and free flow of commerce to support regional stability and security of the maritime commons. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Louis Thompson Staats IV*

NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY BAHRAIN – The International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) held its third Stakeholders Conference for maritime industry professionals virtually from Naval Support Activity Bahrain, Sept. 30, Coalition Task Force Sentinel said in an Oct. 4 release.

During the conference, industry stakeholders considered topics such as regional security and IMSC's mission directives. The forum gave participants an opportunity to discuss current maritime challenges from an industry perspective with IMSC's leadership.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces opened the conference by highlighting the role of IMSC's operational task force in promoting security and freedom of navigation in the Arabian Gulf.

"Ships under Coalition Task Force Sentinel have been busy conducting countless overwatch transits through critical chokepoints because this is important work," said Cooper.

“Successfully preventing aggression against member-nation merchant traffic is critical to maintaining regional security and stability.”

The industry-focused conference, with a theme of partnering for better outcomes, featured speakers from the United States Maritime Administration (MARAD) and INTERTANKO, an organization that aims to promote safe transport for merchant tankers, cleaner seas, and free competition.

Royal Navy Commodore Gordon Ruddock, the commander of IMSC, moderated the conference and introduced both Cameron Naron, the director of the Office of Maritime Security at MARAD and INTERTANKO’s Marine Director Dr. Phillip Belcher.

Naron began his remarks with a high-level overview the MARAD’s maritime alerts and advisories system, the Maritime Security Communications with Industry (MSCI). He detailed how the alerts and advisories were established through a partnership between a number of U.S. Government agencies and the U.S. maritime industry. The system – while designed to more efficiently communicate information on threats in the maritime domain to U.S. maritime industry stakeholders and U.S. mariners – is today used by mariners and shipping companies from across the world, and closely aligned with various regional navigation and safety at sea constructs from across the globe.

“Our primary audience and the guidance in these is targeted toward U.S. maritime stakeholders, but we publish all alerts and advisories publicly and many are picked up in the maritime press.” he said.

He explained that MSCI replaced the legacy State Department “Special Warning” and Department of Transportation “MARAD Advisory” system, as well as international maritime-security related information previously published under the U.S. Coast Guard’s Marine Safety Information Bulletin system.

“The alerts are meant to go out to the maritime community very quickly, we usually aim to send them out within two hours,” said Naron, who noted that the last advisory from MSCI detailed how tanker crews could address the recent threat of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles at sea.

As government agencies continue to explore ways for alerting mariners to threats, industry must continue to manage the wide-ranging impacts of maritime incidents. During his brief, Belcher talked about significant challenges the tanker industry faces in the Arabian Gulf and offered his assessment of how to address threats, vulnerabilities, and risks.

“The tanker industry is a service industry; we go where our customers need but service doesn’t mean subservient, and we have to look at how we manage and own the risk but it needs to take an intelligent approach to risk,” he said, noting that most threats are external to the industry but that vulnerabilities are still directly owned by tanker companies.

Types of threats, Belcher explained, could include state actors, rebel forces in Yemen, piracy, the so-called tanker war, and even refugee or migrant crises.

Belcher added that the coronavirus pandemic had significant impacts on crew morale, shipping of goods, and fuel availability. On a positive note, he mentioned that vaccination rates continue to increase among ships’ crews, which is helping mitigate risks posed by the pandemic. Finally, he noted how critical it was for industry and constructs like IMSC to remain in constant communication and partnership to help counter these threats and risks.

Ruddock closed the conference with an assurance that IMSC would continue its vital work with industry partners to promote and protect the free flow of commerce; reassure the merchant shipping community through regular communication and

response as required; and, through continued partnership, cultivate an understanding of risks and challenges posed to the shipping community.

“IMSC is committed to refining industry and coalition relationships, cultivating new partnerships, and forging ahead with its maritime security operations,” said Ruddock. “I ask for your commitment to help our task force units identify, document, and respond to activity you may consider to be out of place or a physical threat to normal business.”