

MSIG
SPECIALTY MARINE



PLANNING A SAFE AND SECURE VOYAGE

CIRCULAR

Any voyage, particularly in international shipping, requires planning. Hardly any voyage between A and B is the same as the one before no matter what the experience of the Master and his staff is, as valuable as they most certainly are. Circumstances change, regulatory requirements change, and indeed times change in terms of the increasing impact of (geo)political volatilities on international shipping.

NOVEMBER 2025

Voyage planning - regulatory aspects

Conventional voyage planning has been subject to international and national regulatory requirements for quite some time. Let us start with the International Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), as amended. In essence, as per Chapter V, Safety of Navigation, all voyages of all ships need to be planned prior to departure. By using all available nautical charts and publications and all other available information, and taking [IMO Resolution A.893\(21\)](#) into account, voyage planning aims to ensure the use of relevant routing systems, sufficient sea room for safe passages throughout, anticipation of all known hazards and adverse weather conditions, and protection of the marine environment.

Absence of a proper voyage plan, or not having up-to-date information available, may result in issues with Port State Control, leading to deficiencies or even detentions. There can even be more costly ramifications, which was showed by the case of the CMA CGM Libra that grounded in 2011. In that case, the UK Supreme Court (2021) upheld previous rulings and confirmed that failure to have charts on board properly corrected for navigational hazards compromised the vessel's seaworthiness.

The planning process

In practical terms, the aforementioned IMO Resolution provides guidelines for the Master to plan a voyage. This comes in four stages: appraisal, planning, execution and monitoring. Ideally, a fifth stage should be added: evaluation upon completion of the voyage.

Appraisal

The appraisal stage includes the gathering of all available information. This not only deals with matters like oceanography, hydrography, and meteorology, but also with issues regarding the state and characteristics of the vessel itself and its equipment, the crew, the cargo (particularly heavy cargoes and project cargo) and all the necessary certificates. Most can be sourced from independent and frequently updated publications, amended with specifics from local correspondents, agents, terminals and port authorities, voyage instructions from charterers and, if applicable, the input of Marine Warranty Surveyors and/or weather routing services. And, as mentioned above, the personal experience of Masters and crews is always a valuable factor.

Planning

The information thus gathered and assessed is then condensed in an actual itinerary and plotted in charts (in paper or electronically). It is also translated into specific operational instructions for the crew at various stages of the voyage, and into an assessment of matters like the ship's equipment and gear, fuels, protective measures for cargo and so on.

Execution and monitoring

Once this is all planned and prepared, the voyage can ideally be executed, but obviously with a continuous assessment of potential changes in circumstances which may require deviations, some of which may already be addressed in contingency plans in the early stage of the process.

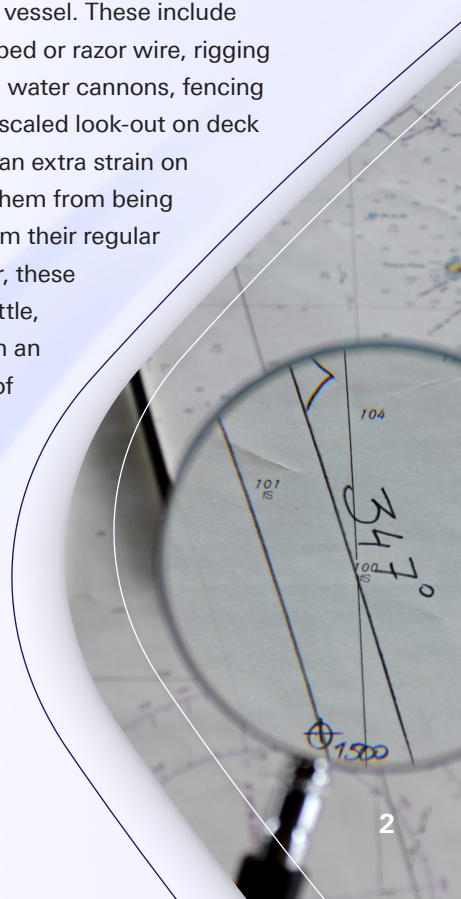
However, in certain cases, the four stages as mentioned above can have a much wider scope than was traditionally the case.

Challenges and hazardous areas

Particularly when it comes to hazardous areas, the shipping community has been, and increasingly is, faced with additional risks. Piracy, armed robbery, hijacking and kidnapping for ransom, for instance, are not new. Certain areas in the world are infamous for that, such as the South East Asian waters, North East African and West African waters. But such types of hazard have attained additional dimensions.

Navigating piracy areas traditionally meant that measures were planned and taken in order to prevent assailants from boarding the vessel. These include fitting the bulwarks with barbed or razor wire, rigging of pressurised fire hoses and water cannons, fencing off stairs and ladders and upscaled look-out on deck and on the bridge. This puts an extra strain on the crews and may prevent them from being well-rested enough to perform their regular duties. Increasingly, however, these measures proved to be too little, since pirates then engaged in an arms race not only in terms of means to board the vessels but also in real arms.

Additional deterrence was then found in engaging armed vessel protection detachments on board: either provided by [armed forces](#) of the Flag state or



by a Private Maritime Security Company (PMSC). Such companies are subjected to a wide range of rules and regulations. To name but a few:

- ◆ Flag state approval is required.
- ◆ The PMSC needs to hold full authorisation and certification from the competent authorities in their home state for their operations and personnel as well as for the weapons they use.
- ◆ They only serve as means of self-defence and can only apply proportionate, potentially lethal force if there is a genuine belief that lives are threatened.
- ◆ Their operation and the Rules of the Use of Force need to be pre-defined and to be shared with the vessel's Master beforehand.

These efforts and additional naval security operations like [Atalanta](#) and [Aspides](#), in the Western Indian Ocean near the Horn of Africa, have proven to be successful but only up to a point.

The aforementioned arms race has evolved further in the assailants' use of missiles and remotely controlled USVs or UAVs (unmanned surface vessels or unmanned aerial vehicles - drones) filled with explosives set to detonate on impact. For the armed security personnel on board, these are nearly impossible to neutralise before impact. The same applies to, for example, limpet mines attached below the waterline of a vessel still in port or at anchor, under the cover of darkness. Moreover, such arsenal is abundantly available to state-sponsored terrorist groups and, of course, states themselves.

Large-scale strikes or counterattacks by air and naval forces on mostly shore-based storage and launch facilities, as seen for example in [March 2025 in Yemen](#), appeared to have been more successful in the short term. In the long term, however, there are relatively few constants.

Threats shift from one place to another in short periods of time, as high-risk areas are increasingly linked to political tensions which can change almost overnight.

Whilst at the time of writing this circular the volume of shipping traffic through the Red Sea seems to increase slowly, for vessels normally transiting that area the safest option still is to shift their routes southward via the Cape of Good Hope or, depending on the season, further explore the northern route via Arctic waters. Such varieties, however, may come with potentially similar challenges.

Back to voyage planning

Navigating dangerous areas is seemingly 'part of the job' but, as outlined above, their nature can easily exceed levels which can be handled with conventional on-board resources. Voyage plans, in the conventional sense, have to take high-risk areas into account as referred to in Article 2.2 of the aforementioned IMO Resolution. However, while these conventional voyage plans were largely based on operational or nautical factors, nowadays other types of factors have entered into the equation as well.

Threat assessments and advices need to be sourced and evaluated. These may lead to amendments to the Ship's Security Plan and Vessel Hardening Plan, and then of course to the voyage plan itself. If and when applicable and/or available, even maritime escorts or escorted convoys may have to be considered. For certain areas and aspects, Flag states, Classification societies and insurance companies will need to be consulted. PMSCs may need to be sought well in advance to vet them, to seek approval from Flag State authorities as well as to arrange for their timely engagement and boarding, either in a port or at rendezvous points whilst en route.

Crew requirements may need to be reviewed and addressed both in terms of skill and experience as well as in number. Furthermore, Masters, officers and crews may need to be additionally instructed and trained.

The vessel itself may need to be additionally equipped, with items varying from sufficient SOLAS-approved life-saving equipment to accommodate PMSC personnel, to hidden and independently operating location-transmitting devices other than the standard Automatic Identification System (AIS).

These measures mainly serve as prevention or mitigation of risk, but it is equally important to establish post-incident procedures. These should address a wide variety of issues, from communications and first emergency response to the, sometimes overlooked, post-trauma support for seafarers and their families.

Takeaway

Long gone are the days when having the appropriate up-to-date charts, nautical publications, weather forecasts, along with conventional and mostly operational voyage instructions and the like, were enough to plan a voyage.

SOLAS regulations (Ch. V, reg 34-1) stipulate that the Master has overriding authority in deciding what is necessary for the safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment. This, of course, does not mean that the Master cannot or should not use valuable input from the owners' or managers' shore-based staff, or third parties' expert advice. And it is to be noted that having all the relevant up-to-date information available on board is the joint responsibility of all stakeholders.

For some further guidance, reference is made to the [International Chamber of Shipping](#) (ICS) which provides more elaborate information. Similarly, the ICS and other organisations, either governmental or private, periodically publish maritime [threat analyses](#) and advisories.

Links to various sources were valid at the time of writing this circular. MSIG Specialty Marine NV is not responsible for their contents, and no rights can be derived from them.

The content of this circular was prepared by MSIG Specialty Marine NV for the addressee and for informational purposes only. This circular is not, and is not intended to be construed as, an offering and insurance products or services mentioned might not be available. It does not constitute legal advice. Nothing in this information should be interpreted as providing guidance on any question relating to policy interpretation, underwriting practice, or any other issues in insurance coverage. No warranties are made regarding the thoroughness or accuracy of the information contained in this content, and MSIG Specialty Marine NV is not responsible for any errors or omissions. Use of it is at the user's own risk and MSIG Specialty Marine NV expressly disclaims all liability with respect to actions taken or not taken based on any contents of it. No rights can be derived from it under any circumstances.



Peter van der Kroft
Technical Loss Prevention Consultant

+31 10 799 5938
peter.vanderkroft@msigspecialtymarine.com



MSIGSPECIALTYMARINE.COM

MSIG Specialty Marine NV - Registered office at Boulevard du Roi Albert II 37, 1030 Brussels (Belgium)
Registration Number BCE 0670.726.393 - Supervisory Authority : Financial Services and Markets Authority ("FSMA") Brussels
Statute : Belgian Mandated Underwriters and Belgian Reinsurance agents
MSIG Specialty Marine NV is a member of MS&AD Insurance Group Holdings, Inc.
www.msigspecialtymarine.com

A member of **MS&AD** INSURANCE GROUP