AIS guidance from NATO and EUNAVFOR

NATO and EUNAVFOR have issued revised guidance on operational use of AIS for vessels in high-risk piracy areas off Somalia.

The advice notes that, while Regulation V/19 of the SOLAS Convention requires specified ships to maintain AIS in operation at all times (except where international agreements, rules or standards provide for the protection of navigational information), another IMO Resolution suggests that turning off the system could be recommended in piracy-risk areas.

Resolution A.917(22) states that "if the master believes that the continual operation of AIS might compromise the safety or security of his/her ship, the AIS may be switched off. This might be the case in sea areas where pirates and armed robbers are known to operate. Actions of this nature should always be recorded in the ship's logbook together with the reason for doing so."

EUNAVFOR and NATO had, until now, recommended that AIS transmission within the Gulf of Aden be left on with restrictions, and outside the Gulf of Aden in other parts of the High Risk Area be turned off completely, in accordance with Resolution A.917(22).

However, that advice has been revised, with the aim of making sure that Counter Piracy Naval Operations are able to gather data from AIS transmissions to track real time positions of merchant ships, thus enabling them to mitigate the risk of piracy to merchant shipping.

The new recommendation from NATO and EUNAVFOR is to leave AIS transmitting across the entire High Risk Area as set out in BMP3 of the IMO Resolution.

The advice states that "AIS transmission should continue to be restricted to ship's identity, position, course, speed, navigational status and safety-related information. As noted, this is a change to the previous guidance which recommended that AIS be left on only in the Gulf of Aden."

"The decision on AIS policy remains at the discretion of the Master, however, if it is switched off during transit, it should be activated immediately at the time of an attack."