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| Type:    | Threat                              | Version: | 1.0 | Classification: | Restricted |
| Created: | 20231130                            |          |     | Status:         | Live       |
| Title    | AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 30/11/2023 |          |     |                 |            |



## AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 30/11/2023

**Source:**

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**Incident**

In the space of one week, two Iranian dhows were hijacked within Somali territorial waters while conducting legal fishing activities. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, Iran-flagged fishing vessel AL-ASHKAAN was boarded by 6-8 assailants armed with AK-47-style assault rifles and RPG-7s offshore Qandala, Puntland, Somalia. The week prior, another Iran-flagged fishing dhow, ALMERAJ-1, was hijacked by Somali clan militia offshore Eyl, Puntland, Somalia. Both vessels were boarded while fishing inside Somali territorial waters. Ambrey understands both incidents to be ongoing with the assailants remaining aboard the dhows and towing skiffs. The ALMERAJ-1 has returned to Somali territorial waters after sailing into the Indian Ocean 400M offshore, south of Socotra. This group threatened to attack other ships if they were not paid US \$400,000.



**Context**

Elections in Puntland are set to take place in January 2024. Historically, elections and political offices were rotated between sub-clans. The major sub-clans divided the most influential posts in government. Thus, the current President, Said Abdullahi Deni, of the Majeerteen Osman Mohmud sub-clan would have relinquished his position to a representative of the Majeerteen Isse Mohamud sub-clan. To avoid the looming loss of power, Deni opted to change the election

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system to a “one person, one vote” system bypassing the clan-oriented structure and influence. The attempted change has been ongoing throughout the year. In June, at least 26 people lost their lives during fighting around parliament in Garowe, Puntland, with opposition parties accusing Deni of attempting to implement constitutional changes to extend his term in office. The first “one person, one vote” municipal elections led to a victory of Deni’s Kaah Party. Several opposition parties accused the administration of rigging the election, so likely assess they will be disempowered by a similar electoral system.

**Analysis**

Ambrey assesses that opposition sub-clans are responsible for the recent hijackings offshore Puntland, Somalia. The semi-autonomous Government of Puntland issues fishing licenses separately to the Federal Government of Somalia. President Deni and previous officeholders have been accused of private gain from the issuance of such licenses. Ambrey understands that both hijacked Iranian fishing dhows were licensed by the Government of Puntland. A new licensing round was held earlier in the beginning of 2023. An extension of President Deni’s term would deny the Isse Mohamud sub-clan access to state-affiliated revenue streams. Ambrey can report that the leader of the pirates who hijacked the ALMERAJ-1 was from the Isse Mohamud sub-clan. Ambrey also notes that President Deni sacked the Puntland Minister of Security and Defence Abdisamad Mohamed Gallan in June 2023. He hailed from the Ali Salebaan sub-clan, influential in Qandala. A UN Security Council letter reported that a “clash” followed his dismissal in Garowe, the administrative capital of Puntland, and “previously launched an insurgency against the Puntland administration in 2016”. If the political disputes cannot be managed inclusively, it is assessed possible that disempowered sub-clans may tacitly permit the extortion of fishing dhows on the Puntland coastline. History indicates that once this is permitted, and once the capability is developed to hijack vessels, the same groups might turn to piracy. The Puntland Maritime Police Force commander, Abdullahi Mohamed Ahmed, ordered the force to double its patrols which are now being conducted on a 24-hour rotation. It is assessed that the existing international counter-piracy architecture will actively monitor developments, though limited by the scope of their mandates.

**Implications**

Ambrey advises merchant shipping to remain vigilant whilst transiting offshore Puntland. It is advised to avoid transits through Puntland’s territorial waters. Port calls to the region’s port of Bossaso are assessed permissible at this time, but it is advised to embark private armed security teams; weapons must be bonded in territorial waters. Industry advice is to avoid transits through the Socotra Gap, but vessels with high freeboards, high speeds and best management practice measures in place do continue to routinely transit through the area without disruption. It is recommended to take intelligence advisory and routing advice in the area as the situation remains fluid, and the ultimate intention of the hijackers remains unclear.

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