



**SUPERYACHT SPECIAL ADVISORY**  
**CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN:**  
**ISIS MARITIME THREAT ASSESSMENT**

18 MARCH 2015

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- The current ISIS threat to superyachts at sea in the Central Mediterranean is assessed as LOW and, given the normal superyacht pattern of life and cruising areas, the risk of an ISIS-related maritime attack against such a vessel is assessed as VERY LOW.
- Despite speculative press reports and intelligence assessments, there have been NO stated ISIS threats that specifically mention superyachts, although a general threat to shipping in the Mediterranean has been articulated in ISIS propaganda.
- Dryad has no evidence of any current ISIS maritime capability. It is assessed that such a capability would probably only emerge once a strong foothold had been gained in Libya; this is not currently the case.
- ISIS fighters in Libya are heavily engaged in land combat with Libyan government forces and competing militias, including other Islamic extremists. This is assessed as their priority and main effort.
- International naval, coastguard and air forces are operating in the central Mediterranean, primarily dealing with mass migration from North Africa to Europe. Some of these forces have missions related to counter-terrorism (CT).
- There should be no reason to decide not to operate luxury yachts in the normal sea areas.

# INTRODUCTION

Dryad Maritime Limited (Dryad) has been commissioned by MYBA The Worldwide Yachting Association, on behalf of its members, to analyse and assess the threat to superyachts posed by the expansion of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) affiliates in Libya.



This request has been prompted by recent speculation in the media regarding a specific threat to superyachts, an advisory issued by an international flag registry and an unsolicited intelligence report received by MYBA discussing the ISIS threat.

This report will detail the likelihood of attack by assessing the current maritime capability of the ISIS terrorist organisation in Libya; its likely intent and the opportunity it might have to pose a security threat to vessels at sea in the Central Mediterranean, with a particular emphasis on superyachts. The report will consider what risk there is to superyacht security, taking into account the potential ISIS threat and the known operating patterns of superyachts at sea in the Mediterranean.

## Methodology

This report has been produced following a comprehensive review of all available open and technical sources, alongside analytical discussions on threat capabilities amongst experienced maritime intelligence and operations practitioners

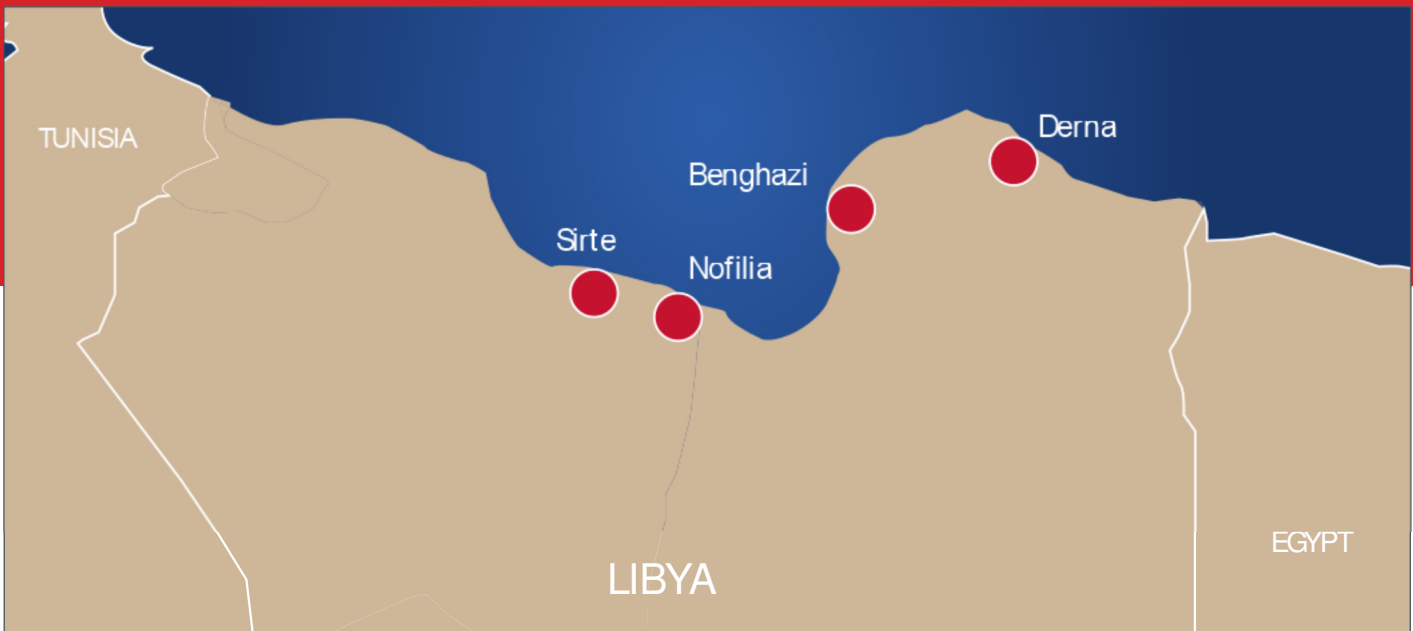
with experience of operating in the areas mentioned and in high risk areas across the globe. Analysis has also included consultation with other maritime professionals outside of Dryad Maritime and has been peer reviewed by a senior analyst not involved in the work. The report is supported by scenario generation and red team analysis, where an analyst puts themselves in the mind of the potential adversary. Dryad Maritime's technical analysis and knowledge of naval forces operating in the region also adds an additional layer of detail upon which the assessment is made.

It is important to make a very clear distinction between threat and risk when considering the security of superyachts and their crews in the Mediterranean. This report will address the ISIS maritime threat; in other words the capability, intent and opportunity for an ISIS attack on superyachts. Risk, on the other hand, is a function of the probability and impact of an attack; how likely it is and what harm it would cause. The report will also discuss this aspect, but it is important to understand the distinction from the outset.

The Intelligence Cut Off Date (ICOD) for this report is 18 March 2015. Information received after this date has not been included.

# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Media reports of ISIS fighters in Libya, including the documented atrocities on the ground that recently resulted in Egyptian air strikes, are well known. More recent reporting in prominent newspapers and the maritime press has now suggested an ISIS maritime capability. What is the probability of maritime terrorism and could it be masked by maritime human trafficking?



Assessed disposition of ISIS in Libya

## ISIS in Libya - Origins

ISIS first came to public awareness due to the ongoing Syrian civil war and the subsequent rapid expansion and success of its operations into northern Iraq during 2014, but can trace its origins back to 1999 as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Infamous for its violence, especially towards captured non-combatants, it has set itself up as an alternative jihadist organisation to Al Qaeda, amongst others, in its fight against the west. Its initial success has drawn fighters and affiliates from all around the globe, to join the fight against the Syrian government but more recently in its attempts to establish a caliphate based on an extreme interpretation of Sharia law.

ISIS has also attempted to expand its reach from its central inland bases in northern Iraq and eastern Syria to Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia and beyond. The most notable example of this was the seizure and control of the port town of Derna in eastern Libya in December 2014, which

included the absorption of local jihadist organisations already established in the town. It should be noted that the choice to establish the Libya branch of ISIS in Derna was not a random event as the town has a long history of extremism and it has been reported that no town in the world supplied more foreign fighters to Al Qaeda in Iraq, per head of population, than Derna. ISIS' capture of other towns in Libya (Nofilia and Sirte), along with propaganda material outlining the advantages to ISIS of expanding its grasp of Libya has resulted in additional anxieties in some quarters. These concerns have also been exacerbated by a recently released report from the Italian Ministry of Defence that has been widely reported in the media, suggesting that ISIS could attack shipping in the Mediterranean. One commentator, interviewed by a prominent UK newspaper, has further speculated that superyachts could be targeted in such an eventuality.

### Maritime Terrorism

Attacking a target at sea requires a range of equipment and supporting logistics, as well as expertise that is not believed to be widely held amongst terrorist groups. A 2014 academic study on the subject of maritime terrorism by Asal & Hastings (2014) states: 'Attacks against maritime targets by terrorists are very rare. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) only notes 199 out of 98,000 attacks in 40 years, which is less than 0.2% of the total.'

With the exception of the conflict in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil Tigers developed a maritime capability in their fight against the government, there are very few instances of terrorism against vessels in open water. Attacks in harbour and in anchorages are much less challenging for the terrorist and have a much greater chance of success. They also take place where the media are readily available to record the action to further terrorist propaganda.

Well known and widely reported attacks, notably the Al Qaeda attacks on USS Cole and MT Limburg, have been against static targets either in harbour or close to shore. Even these relatively simple operations can go wrong when the terrorists lack basic maritime experience, such as the case of the USS The Sullivans in Aden in Oct 2000, where a plot to attack the vessel failed when the terrorists' overloaded boat sank.

**“Most concerns regarding migrants are less about terrorist acts at sea and more about the migration route being used to move Islamic extremists into Europe.”**

### Mediterranean Migrants and Terrorism

At a simpler level, it is theoretically possible that terrorists could use the significant flow of migrants to take their threat to sea, but most of the migrant transits originate from government controlled areas and are intercepted by naval and coastguard forces in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Dryad's technical analysis of coastguard operations shows that some deployments of European coastguard forces are quite close to the Libyan shoreline, probably to extend the level of surveillance.

Most concerns regarding migrants are less about terrorist acts at sea and more about the migration route being used to move Islamic extremists into Europe. In Dryad's view, there are far less risky ways of getting into Europe in support of terrorism objectives, but it is theoretically possible that amongst the thousands of migrants fleeing civil war and seeking a better life there could be extremists. However, this is not considered more likely than the numbers of potential extremists who already live within western communities.

Noting the above analysis, it would be a prudent precaution to avoid dwelling in the areas where maritime mass migration is taking place, not because of strong concerns over terrorism, but rather because of the sheer numbers of desperate migrants that could overwhelm a small craft in the course of a rescue at sea. Such work is best left to government authorities, larger commercial vessels and charities such as Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS).

# THREAT ASSESSMENT

The following represents Dryad's analysis of the ISIS maritime threat and the organisation's ability to conduct attacks in the central Mediterranean Sea, by looking at the individual components of threat (intent, capability and opportunity).

## Intent

It should be noted that there has been no stated ISIS intent to target superyachts. Instead, ISIS has a stated intent to use Libya as a springboard to attack southern Europe and an ISIS propagandist recently stated that Libya could support the "closure of shipping lines because of the targeting of Crusader ships and tankers." This ISIS propagandist publication has been seized upon by at least one maritime security company and the media, highlighting the perceived threat to the superyacht community, directly quoting passages and graphics from the document that give it more credence than it probably deserves.

However, this is not the first time that Islamic jihadists have declared an intent to attack western shipping. The most recent was a declaration by Al Qaeda in 2014 while earlier attempts date back to the attacks on the MV Limburg and USS Cole in 2000. A recently leaked Russian Intelligence Agency (FSB) report from 2011 assessed that there were 60 Al Qaeda operatives that were ready to conduct maritime attacks. However, nothing has been seen of this particular threat suggesting that despite the reported intent and capability, maritime attacks are more difficult to stage than one might expect.

**"It should be noted that there has been no stated ISIS intent to target superyachts."**



Migrants rescued en route to Lampedusa

It should be recognised that the analysis of the organisation that produced the original report on which the intelligence alert was based, The Quilliam Foundation, judged that the (unnamed) propagandist was not seeking to intimidate enemies, but attempting to recruit jihadists to the cause of assisting the ISIS mission in Libya. Furthermore, the publication sought to highlight the strategic advantages of access to the maritime domain, primarily for logistic access to southern Europe, and did not take into account the significant international naval forces in the Mediterranean when discussing the possibility of 'closing shipping [lanes]'.

## Capability

The capability of any armed force has a number of components that can be simply summed up under the headings of manning, equipment, sustainability and training.

### Manning

ISIS is predominantly a land-based organisation focused on the establishment of a caliphate. It is reported that at the core of the Libyan organisation there are around 200-300 fighters that have returned from operations in Iraq, although other reporting suggests that they are not all Libyans. Despite this land-centric organisation and apparent lack of maritime personnel, it is possible that they could co-opt some of the local fisherman to act as boat drivers. At this stage, the numbers involved would likely be small, if any. The majority of ISIS fighters will be fully occupied with fighting both the official Libyan government and Operation Dignity forces as well as the opposing Libya Dawn Islamists, as clearly demonstrated just a few days ago when international media reported a fierce battle between ISIS and Libya Dawn forces on the outskirts of Sirte that reportedly resulted in ISIS casualties.

### Equipment & Sustainability

While there is little doubt that ISIS in Libya has sufficient weapons to conduct a maritime attack on a superyacht, it is not clear if they have access to suitable vessels. To attack a superyacht underway in the Mediterranean, maritime terrorists normally require boats that have both a speed advantage over their intended targets and the ability to operate at considerable distance from their base, possibly for an extended period. The way that Somali pirates have achieved this in the past is by the use of small, fast craft with relatively limited endurance that are embarked on a 'mothership' to enable them to conduct and sustain long-range operations. Dryad judges that the typical Mediterranean fishing vessels of around 500 tonnes, supporting two or three small boats would be suitable. However, analysis of available overhead imagery and open source photographs of the Libyan ports assessed to be under ISIS control suggests that the numbers of this type of vessel are possibly limited. It should also be noted that another Somali pirate method of using slower "whalers", with barrels of fuel on board to tow faster skiffs to an attack position, is unlikely to be successful, given that this type of fishing is not as widespread in the Mediterranean and could be more easily identified as being out of the ordinary.



Suspected Somali mothership towing skiffs

### Training

Prior to conducting a successful maritime attack there would likely need to be some level of rudimentary training in operating the mothership, the launching of the boats and in how best to approach a vessel underway. However, it is highly unlikely that this training would take place in any formal manner, given the desperate and suicidal nature of the fighters involved, but could be more likely represented by attacks on smaller vessels closer to Libya, some of which will fail. This was the manner of the development of Somali piracy before they reached the height of success in 2010-2011; even then, the majority of attempts were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons.

In summary, Dryad has no positive evidence to suggest that ISIS currently have the capabilities to successfully conduct an offshore attack. It is possible that such a capability could be developed in the future, but this would probably only be possible if ISIS were able to establish a stronger foothold in Libya, providing them with the necessary launch points and logistics for such activity.

**“Dryad has no positive evidence to suggest that ISIS currently have the capabilities to successfully conduct an offshore attack.”**

Opportunity

Location and patterns of life

The key factor in assessing the opportunity for ISIS to attack superyachts at sea is that the number of superyachts operating close to Libya is insignificant, even at the height of summer, compared to the number of merchant and fishing vessels operating in and transiting the primary sea lanes (see graphic). It is almost certain that any attack on a superyacht at sea by ISIS would be an opportunist attack, with attacks on the more numerous merchant vessels being far more likely.

The normal operating pattern for either owned or chartered luxury yachts, either in their home marinas or on likely voyages, means that they are well away from any potential ISIS maritime threat. Even though some, including the ISIS propagandist, have suggested that ISIS might venture as far afield as Malta and the western approaches to the Aegean, the distances involved represent a challenge with extended periods of operation that would likely be required to specifically target superyachts.

Western naval security forces

The number of military and coastguard vessels and aircraft operating in this area further reduces the opportunity for a successful attack. The current operation by FRONTEX, the EU border agency, to counter irregular migration from Libya consists of seven vessels and five aircraft operating some 40NM off the Libyan coast. This operation is further supported in the summer months by the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) vessel MV Phoenix I. FRONTEX's Operation Triton replaced the Italian Navy's earlier operation, Mare Nostrum, which consisted of an amphibious vessel, four warships with associated helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) further supported by Italy's coastal radar and, occasionally, submarines. Further reporting suggests that since the ISIS takeover of Derna, the US have been increasing its reconnaissance flights by patrol aircraft and UAVs from Sigonella in Sicily. Finally, evidence of naval operations comes in the form of a long standing NATO Operation, Active Endeavour, which was established after



Main shipping lanes, superyacht areas and coastguard forces



9/11 to “detect, deter and protect against terrorist activity.”

It is almost certain that if NATO, or the EU, has any concerns of possible attacks by ISIS at sea then there would be a rapid build-up of naval forces in the region. As the military command and control (C2), as well as the political mandate, is already in place, it would not suffer the delays and arguments seen in establishing the NATO and EU operations in the Indian Ocean to counter Somali pirates.

Dryad has been observing the activities of the Italian Coastguard (see map on page 6) in their operation to deal with maritime migration in the Mediterranean. In addition to sustained patrols south of Lampedusa, we have also noted the forward deployment of an Italian Coastguard vessel off the coast of Tripoli (Libya). This proactive patrolling demonstrates the ongoing commitment of these naval assets. Additionally, the Italian Coastguard have recently been armed after an incident where the service was forced to hand back an empty boat to armed people traffickers following a rescue at sea. It should be stressed that the armed individuals were criminals and not terrorists. It is highly likely that other naval forces, in addition to the forces of NATO’s Active Endeavour are present in the central Mediterranean. We have also noted the regular sorties of the Maltese MPA which appears to be conducting surveillance related to the migrant issue.



The Phoenix vessel and one of the two Schiebel camcopters  
(Source: MOAS)

**“The number of military and coastguard vessels and aircraft operating in this area further reduces the opportunity”**

In wider developments, a recent report from the U.N. Security Council’s Panel of Experts on Libya argued that the Libya arms embargo established in 2011 should be enforced. The report urged the Security Council to form an international maritime force “to assist the Libyan government in securing its territorial waters to prevent the entry into and exit from Libya of arms ... the illicit export of crude oil and its derivatives and other natural resources.” If this recommendation were to be taken forward, the maritime forces involved would further inhibit any ISIS attempts to attack ships at sea, given the surveillance and operational interdiction that would be required to meet the UN’s objectives.

# RISK ASSESSMENT

It is important to make a very clear distinction between threat and risk, with capability, intent and opportunity forming the basis of a threat assessment and risk being a function of the probability and impact of any threat.



Human trafficking vessel (Source: [www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu), © Frontex)

**“our judgement is that there is no current evidence to support the sensational media reports that suggest immediate and present danger to any vessels transiting the Mediterranean.”.**

We cannot know with certainty how well developed the ISIS maritime threat is in Libya but, based on the foregoing analysis, our judgement is that there is no current evidence to support the sensational media reports that suggest immediate and present danger to any vessels transiting the Mediterranean, including superyachts.

Whilst Dryad assesses the current risk of ISIS threat of attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean as LOW, it further assesses that the risk of an attack specifically against superyachts to be VERY LOW. These luxury vessels are based in marinas on the southern shores of Europe and their patterns of life do not generally see them transiting close to the North African coast and Libya. Put simply, superyachts are not generally in the areas where the likely localised threat could exist and there are, arguably, far more attractive targets within much easier reach. There should be no reason to decide against luxury yacht charters in the normal areas where such craft operate. The statistical probability of being subject to a terrorist act is judged to be no greater than that to be expected in New York City, Paris or London.

In Dryad’s view, if a developed ISIS threat were to migrate to the maritime environment, the most likely targets would be vessels in Libyan ports and terminals and, possibly, shipping within sight of the Libyan coast, probably at anchor. Furthermore, any extension beyond Libyan shores into international waters would likely be met by a robust response from the European and NATO naval forces in the Mediterranean, as detailed earlier in this report. In such circumstances, the risk to superyachts would remain VERY LOW, as friendly naval forces would bolster their surveillance and interdiction operations with the objective of containing the threat. Under such circumstances, it is likely that safe transit corridors, patrolled by warships, would be established to ensure the safe passage of vessels through the Mediterranean, again reducing the risk to very manageable levels.

# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

## CONCLUSION

Whilst elements of ISIS have stated an intent to attack shipping in the Mediterranean, their capability is currently limited, as is the opportunity to conduct a successful attack against superyachts. This judgement is based on a number of factors, from the strategic direction of ISIS and the military objectives within a country in which they are still trying to wrest control from political competitors, to the lack of capability and opportunity to attack superyachts at sea.

The establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in the Middle East is the immediate stated goal of ISIS and whilst it clearly wishes ill upon any nation that gets in the way of this goal, its resources and main effort will likely be focused on this land-based objective in the first instance.

It should be noted that the propagandist author of the paper that has caused so much anxiety, appears to have written the piece as a call to action aimed at recruiting other extremists to the cause in Libya and that the essay is not a document from the ISIS leadership. The paper could be seen as being aligned with the strategic aims of ISIS, as the planned Caliphate extends across North Africa, but, in our judgement, ISIS has its hands full in the land environment at present.

From an ISIS perspective, it would be unwise to open a maritime front that would risk bringing the full weight of NATO, EU and national naval forces into play before their foothold in Libya was fully established. A threat to the strategic shipping lanes in the Mediterranean is something that the international community, and adjacent countries like Egypt whose economy depends upon Suez Canal revenues, would not accept. Even nations that are reluctant to become embroiled in action against ISIS in other areas, would doubtless put their weight behind any action to counter a threat to their citizens, freedom of navigation and economic well-being.

Dryad considers the media reports highlighting the threat to superyachts to be speculative and is unaware of any basis for singling out luxury yachts as the intended victims of ISIS in the maritime domain. We are not surprised at the eye-catching headlines of the media, but judge that the emphasis placed upon such speculation to be misplaced. In our view, the maritime threat from ISIS is LOW and the risk of superyacht attack is VERY LOW.

Finally, this report has focused on an assessment of the current ISIS maritime threat and the associated risk to superyachts at sea. It is based upon the available sources and the professional knowledge and experience of Dryad's intelligence and operations practitioners. Whilst, for the reasons articulated in the foregoing analysis, it is not assessed that the risk to superyachts is likely to escalate significantly, the situation needs to be kept under constant review, with any developments carefully considered in an ongoing assessment of the ISIS threat. This is something that government agencies and companies like Dryad will continue to monitor.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Dryad recommends that superyachts do not make port calls in Libya, nor transit within 75 NM of the Libyan coast and, wherever possible, remain clear of the migrant route between Libya and Lampedusa. More generally, Dryad recommends that captains and crews maintain a good level of maritime domain awareness (MDA) regularly reviewing their standing security measures and procedures. These should cover the full range of maritime security threats, including maritime crime and terrorism. Any particular concerns should be raised with those responsible for the general security of the vessel, appropriate security forces and the vessel's Flag State authority.

**TUNIS TERRORIST ATTACK 18 MARCH 2015** - The Tunis attack, despite involving tourist from cruise ships, was a typical land-based attack, reportedly targeting the Tunisian parliament in the first instance, prior to being repelled and shifting to the Bardo Museum. There is no suggestion that the perpetrators were related to any maritime threat and, as such, the incident is outside of the scope of this report. At the time of writing, no group has claimed responsibility for the atrocity, although media reports are focusing on Islamic extremists. It has also been reported that the Tunisian parliament was debating anti-terrorism legislation at the time of the attack.

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About Dryad Maritime

Dryad Maritime is a specialist maritime operations company with a high-grade intelligence capability.

At Dryad we focus on driving operational safety and efficiency through the delivery of independent, intelligence-based support services to vessels, fleets and shore-based teams.

With seamless integration of our 24/7 risk and weather monitoring capabilities, we help ship owners, charterers and managers optimise their voyage management through smarter and safer, risk-assessed planning and conduct of operations.

Dryad's team is primarily drawn from former Royal Navy specialists, who collectively have over 500 years of maritime operations experience between them; people who understand the environment and the threats, have operated in the areas concerned and who are able to think like the mariners they support.

We welcome observations and contributions from readers. If you wish to submit your comments or find out more about our services please contact us on 0845 060 0072 or email [enquiries@dryadmaritime.com](mailto:enquiries@dryadmaritime.com)



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