

International Working Group on Acts of Piracy and Maritime Violence

Piracy Update

While, as reported in Hamburg, the incidents of piracy have been on the steady decline in recent years, the Director of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), Pottengal Mukundan has said recently that “*there has been a worrying new rise in attacks against small coastal tankers in Southeast Asia,*” which is now occurring on average once every two weeks. On a more positive note, Somali pirates continue to be deterred by a combination of factors: the key role of international navies, the “hardening” of ships, the use of private armed security teams, and the stabilising influence of Somalia’s central government. There have been no Somali attacks in the first quarter of this year.

What is the current situation?

The consensus seems to be that piracy is declining. However, while trends are changing, piracy continues to be a pressing problem. To demonstrate the changes, some statistics:

- According to the IMB quarterly report, as of 31 March 2015 there have been no piracy incidents involving Somalia. However Somali pirates are currently holding 29 crew members for ransom. Additionally here have been 5 actual and 2 attempted attacks off the coast of Nigeria.
- The overall cost of Somali piracy is down by almost 50%. The total cost for 2013 was \$3 billion – 3.2 billion; down from \$5.7 billion-6.1 billion in 2012.¹
- A total of 245 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships were reported to the International Maritime Bureau’s Piracy Reporting Centre in 2014. This is a 7% decrease from the 2013 figures of 264, an 11% decrease from the 2012 figures of 297 and a 41% decrease from 2011 (445 incidents) when Somali piracy was at its peak.
- In Somalia, only 11 incidents were reported to the IMB in 2014, including two vessels that were fired upon. These figures are the lowest since 2006, down from 15 in 2013, 75 in 2012, and 237 in 2011.
- West African piracy made up 17% of attacks worldwide in 2014. Nigerian pirates and armed robbers accounted for 18 of the region’s 41 attacks, which is an improvement from 2013 where Nigerian pirates took 29 people hostage and kidnapped 36, more than in any year since 2008.²
- However, so far in the period between 1 January 2015 – 31 March 2015 there have been 38 piracy incidents in South East Asia and the Far East, with 21 of those in Indonesia and 8 in Vietnam.³
- There has also been a noticeable upward trend in successful hijackings of vessels, with 21 in 2014 compared with only 12 in 2013. The IMB attribute this to the rise in small coastal tanker hijackings in South East Asia mostly targeting gas oil.⁴
- Small coastal tankers in South East Asia are now being successfully hijacked at least once every two weeks, which is causing the IMB concern.⁵

¹ Oceans Beyond Piracy – The State of Maritime Piracy 2013.

² ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ship Annual Report 2014.

³ ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ship Quarterly Report 31 March 2015.

⁴ ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ship Annual Report 2014.

⁵ “One coastal tanker hijacked every two weeks in SE Asia” IMB News reports 21 April 2015

Recent developments

The courts have recently ordered France and Denmark to pay compensation to several Somali pirates who claimed that their human rights had been disregarded at the time of their arrest in 2008. IMB stressed that, *“it is not the size of the compensation payments but the principle that the courts failed to recognise the special circumstances involving the prosecution of a case of piracy and particularly the uniqueness of Somali piracy”* and they hoped that the ECHR and other national courts take that into consideration in the future.

The UK Piracy Ransom Task Force has published its report and made four recommendations: To develop a new strategic partnership between Flag States, the private sector and law enforcement agencies that brings together those tackling piracy and those subjected to it in a united effort to break the piracy business model; to develop a more coordinated approach to information-sharing to provide evidence to pursue and prosecute all involved in piracy; to strengthen co-ordination between Flag States, the private sector and military responders to prepare for potential hostage situations; and to encourage implementation of anti-piracy measures, including greater compliance with Best Management Practice. In addition, the Regional Anti-Piracy Prosecution & Intelligence Coordination Centre (RAPPICC) opened in February 2013.

What next?

In view of the increase in hijackings of small product tankers below 6,000 GRT carrying gas oil/ diesel oil, the IMB has urged regional authorities in the affected areas, particularly Indonesia and Vietnam, to cooperate to halt this trend to ensure it does not become a more popular activity for criminal syndicates. However the collaboration between the IMB and the Indonesian Marine Police in particular has resulted in a fall in attacks in almost all of the protected areas.

West Africa and Nigeria still face some significant and seemingly intractable problems. Corruption, collusion, ethnic tensions, poverty and inequitable distribution of proceeds of oil wealth have created a black market for illicit oil which is deeply entrenched. Significant governmental and structural changes will be needed to address these issues: changes which are frankly unlikely to have effect in the short to medium term. The Nigerian Navy is enthusiastically working to reduce the problem, but with limited success to date.

The regional body Economic Community of West African States, through its Directorate of Political Affairs, Peace and Security is addressing issues of maritime security. However, there is still a suggestion that they should develop a common maritime security and interdiction operation.

A number of initiatives have been developed regionally and internationally in relation to East Africa, the most prominent being the International Information Sharing Centres that are currently planned for the region.⁶

The use of armed guards is likely to continue to increase, particularly following the introduction of GUARDCON West Africa. Additional 'piracy hardening' may also become a requirement in the future. The UN Security Council has also recently unanimously authorised the continued presence of naval ships to patrol off the coast of Somalia.

Conclusion

The prevailing risks of piracy attacks are not to be underestimated in light of the seemingly positive figures referred to above. As highlighted by a spokesperson for Britain's UN Mission, *"this positive trend shows that the international community's counter-piracy strategy is working, however, we need to remain vigilant as the underlying causes of piracy remain."*⁷

⁶ Oceans Beyond Piracy – East Africa Information Sharing 2015

⁷ ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships – 2014 Annual Report