



Key Issues

Piracy and Violence: An Unacceptable Problem

Piracy, hostage taking and attacks on merchant ships' crew may be perennial threats. This does not make them any less unacceptable.

Piracy and armed attacks against shipping are a global problem and require a concerted response by the international community at the highest level. This includes the United Nations Security Council which debated the issue inconclusively in February 2019. While serious threats continue in the Indian Ocean, as well as South East Asia, ICS is particularly concerned by the deteriorating security situation in the Gulf of Guinea where there has been a sharp increase in the number of attacks on ships' crews, many extremely violent.

The statistics are stark. According to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports of attacks in waters between Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo more than doubled in 2018, with six hijackings, 130 seafarers taken hostage and 78 being kidnapped for ransom. These outrages have continued in 2019. Moreover, the number of unsuccessful attacks against shipping by speed boats, many using automatic firearms and causing great fear and anxiety among civilian ships' crew, is higher still, with perhaps as many as 50% of these estimated, by IMB, to be passing unreported.

In the last three months of 2018, 41 kidnappings were recorded by the IMB in waters off Nigeria alone. For example, in October 2018, eleven seafarers were kidnapped from a container ship 70 nautical miles off Bonny Island, Nigeria. Two days later, Nigerian pirates in a speedboat hijacked a tanker underway 100 nautical miles off Point Noire, Congo, with eight of the 18 crew then being kidnapped. These are just two examples of how armed criminals are reaching further out to sea and targeting a wider variety of ship including bulk carriers, containerships and general cargo vessels in addition to attacks on tankers, offshore support vessels and fishing boats.

Whereas the majority of attacks in the region in recent years had taken place in territorial waters, making intervention by foreign military vessels politically problematic, many vessels are now being attacked and boarded by pirates well outside territorial limits. Previously many of these attacks had been principally motivated by the intention to steal cargo. Increasingly, however, seafarers are now routinely being kidnapped and taken into Nigeria where they are then held for ransom in the most appalling and terrifying conditions.

In April 2019, in co-operation with other international shipping associations and the Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF), ICS made a submission to the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, meeting in June 2019, calling *inter alia*





for a far more co-ordinated response by governments and the worlds' military navies to support the law enforcement of authorities in the region. As well as presenting an unacceptable threat to the lives of seafarers, piracy also threatens the conduct of global trade.

The industry is also supporting a call by the Government of India for the United Nations to establish a diplomatic contact group with regular meetings to address the growing crisis, as it did with notable success to help resolve the surge of attacks off the coast of Somalia in which around 4,000 seafarers were taken hostage until order was eventually restored by the world's military navies.

In June 2018, with military support, ICS and other international shipowners' associations launched a new website (www.maritimeglobalsecurity.org) dedicated to providing comprehensive maritime security guidance to shipping companies and seafarers as well as links to other useful maritime and military security resources.

Central to the website are new best practice guides developed by the industry to help companies and crews to risk assess voyages and mitigate against external threats to their safety. Particularly important is a new publication: Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers, also published in June 2018, containing detailed guidance on preventive measures that can be deployed around the world. This includes specific guidance on the characteristics of the threats which prevail in different regions. Tens of thousands of copies of this publication have now been distributed to shipping companies around the world free of charge.

In June 2018, ICS and the other industry organisations also launched BMP5: a new edition of the very effective Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Safety in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to which ships are still strongly encouraged to adhere when trading in the Indian Ocean, where the possibility of a resurgence of Somali piracy is ever present, complicated by the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

In March 2019, the Round Table of international shipping associations plus OCIMF announced that the geographic boundaries of the High Risk Area for piracy in the Indian Ocean – which they are responsible for setting – had been reduced, with new advice issued to merchant ship operators. This followed extensive consultation with the military including the NATO Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), EUNAVFOR and United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), which continue to provide critical advice and protection to merchant shipping in the region.

Nevertheless, in view of the continuing threat of pirate attacks in the Indian Ocean, shipping companies are being urged to maintain full compliance with BMP5, and to be vigilant in their reporting of incidents, sightings of potential pirates and any other suspicious activity, as this is vital to provide intelligence on risk levels in the area.

