

PIRACY POSITION PAPER



THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS

*Operations
Working Group*

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The Issue

Piracy is defined as an act of robbery or criminal violence by ship or boat borne attackers upon another ship usually with the goal of stealing cargo or valuables and includes holding the ship and/or crew for ransom. It also includes acts of violence against a ship or crew for 'terrorist' purposes.

These pirates can be opportunistic, stealing stores/spares or attempting to break into containers, however, there is increased evidence that they could form part of organised crime syndicates or be used for state sponsored terrorism. This could include hijacking vessels for ransom or for political ends.

Piracy has been prevalent in areas in areas where countries are typically described as developing. These countries generally have a lack of a functioning criminal justice system and, due to poor infrastructure, these criminals can carry out their illegal activity unhindered.

Piracy today is centred on, but not limited to: West Africa, Gulf of Benin, Horn of Africa, Persian Gulf, Red Sea/ Indian Ocean and Malacca Straits, Gulf of Aden, South China Sea and Niger Delta, and is usually associated with maritime choke points.

Over the previous years there has been a decrease in activity around the Horn of Africa and most shipping/security companies have lowered the threat level in this area. Unfortunately, there has been a dramatic uptick in West Africa, specifically within Gulf of Guinea.

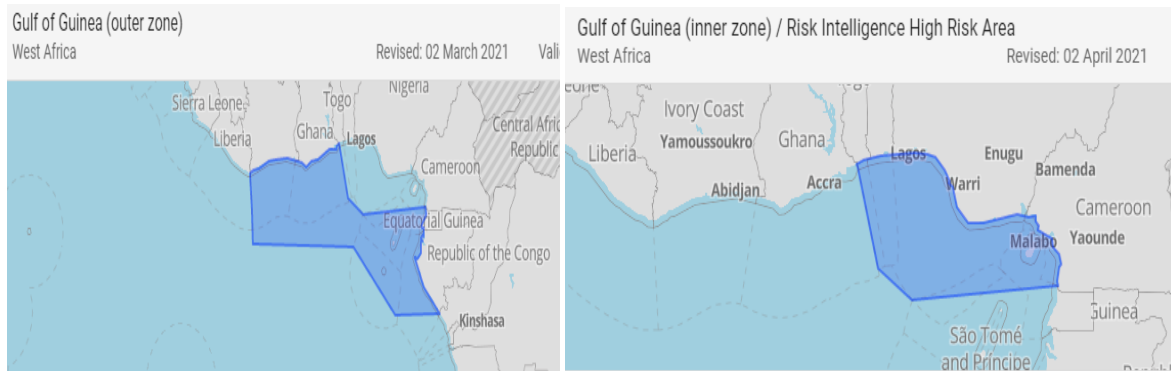
Threat area/threat type	Hijacking	Military operations	Aggressive enforcement	Terrorism
Southern Red Sea	Very Low (1)	Low (2)	Very Low (1)	Very Low (1)
Gulf of Aden/ Somali Basin	Low (2)	Low (2)	Very Low (1)	Low (2)
Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf	Very Low (2)	Low (2)	Low (2)	Very Low (1)

Area	Lagos / Western Niger Delta	Southern Niger Delta	Elevated Risk Area	Voluntary Reporting Area
Threat	High (4)	Severe (5)	Medium (3)	Very low (1)

Threat classification based on the Risk Intelligence rating.

West Africa - Gulf of Guinea

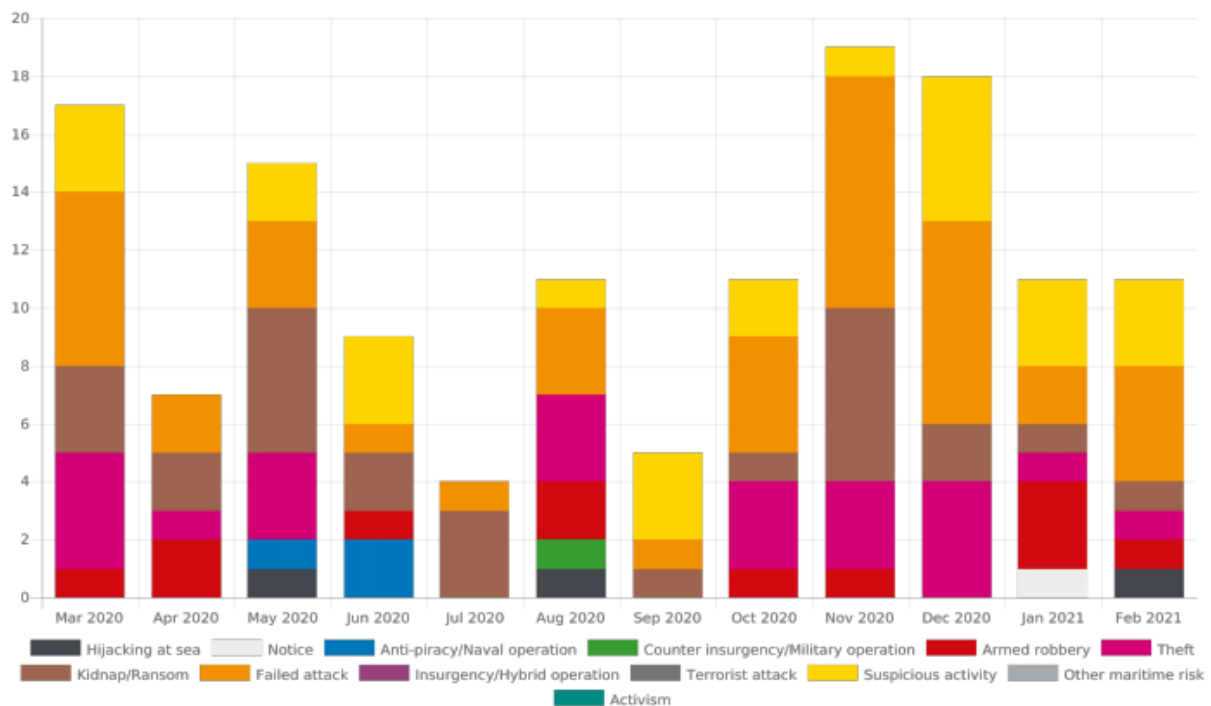
The threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) can be split into two zones i.e. inner and outer. The inner zone includes the EEZ of Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon as well as parts of the EEZ of Sao Tome & Principe. The outer zone includes all costal and inland nations Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon.



At the time of writing, the main concern with the inner zone is the situation off Nigeria where attacks of robbery and kidnap are prevalent. The threat level in this area remains high for vessels sailing close to the Nigerian coastline, however, there have been incidents as far as 150 nautical miles offshore with attacks against product tankers attempting to steal the full cargo.

In February 2021, the hijacking of a trawler was then used to launch four attacks against different types of tankers, including a fully laden LNG Vessel, was an escalation into an area outside the littoral. It is unknown if the hijacking of the trawler was specifically for the purpose of attacking vessels out to sea or was part of other illicit activities in the area.

There were 138 maritime security incidents in the West African region between March 2020 and February 2021, most of which occurred within Nigeria's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). 130 crewmen were kidnapped in 22 incidents within these waters. Incidents in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) are particularly dangerous with over 80% of attackers being armed with a variety of weapons.



Crew kidnappings were reported in 25% of vessel attacks in the GoG – more than any other region in the world. The GoG off West Africa has been becoming increasingly risky for commercial shipping, accounting for most of the maritime kidnappings worldwide.

The uptick of piracy activity in GoG is due to the improvement of weather in the region and pirate groups expanding their area of operation to attack and kidnap crew members not just from Nigerian waters but from those of neighboring countries such as Benin, Togo, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome & Principe.

The Need to Act

Part of the UK and European energy supply line runs directly through the affected GoG area. Consequently, lack of fleet and vessel protection arguably presents an issue for UK and EU critical commercial, strategic, and energy supply infrastructure – particularly our gas and oil supply routes. If the UK and its commercial partners do not act to secure these routes and our commercial interests, it may be viewed that we are either uninterested, or that we are unable to protect national interests. This sends a conflicted and negative message to antagonistic groups who would seek to harm our way of life and commercial wellbeing.

Although the prime responsibility for action rests with the littoral states of the GoG and there has been a degree of naval counter-piracy action in the region, this is an international problem, and the countermeasure response should be shared with our commercial partners and allies.

Recent experience off the Horn of Africa demonstrated how a multi-national coalition naval and security effort can succeed in markedly reducing pirate activity.

The HCMM Position

It is clear from the above that there is an existing and increased criminal threat to Merchant Shipping in the GoG. This has manifested itself in the form of robbery, kidnap or terrorism with criminal groups taking advantage of the lack of coordinated security in the region.

The Honourable Company of Master Mariners (HCMM) is aligned with the position of the UK Chamber of Shipping, that State action is required to ensure the safety of those working onboard vessels in high-risk areas.

The HCMM welcomes the announcement that the Royal Navy will soon deploy an offshore patrol vessel to assist in maritime security in the Mediterranean and West African regions and we make the following recommendations:

1. The British Government should leverage diplomatic pressure on GoG littoral states to secure ports, approaches, and territorial seas and to achieve better coordination of those states' naval forces in counter-piracy operations.
2. The British Government should encourage the formation of a coalition naval task force to work with the GoG littoral states navies along the lines of that used to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa to act as a deterrent in the wider GoG region.