

PIRACY: THE UNDERESTIMATED KILLER

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KEY POINTS

The ICC-IMB received **107 piracy incident reports** in the first 6 months of 2018, notably up from the 43 incidents in the same period last year.

When the figures from the first half of 2018 are broken down there were, **69 vessels boarded, 23 attempted boardings, 11 vessels fired upon, 4 hijacked vessels, 102 seafarers held hostage, and 25 crew members kidnapped.**

Piracy at its most basic level, is a crime committed out of necessity and opportunity. As such, it can be curtailed at sea but never solved.

The underlying issues that promote men and children to act in such a daring and dangerous manner **must be solved ashore**, and if they're not then piracy will remain.

In 2015 Yemen erupted in civil war ... this conflict had driven many into poverty with **little choice but to feed their family through activities such as piracy.**

There is now an understanding that piracy is a threat in any waterways where there is instability... **piracy will never be defeated in its entirety.**

Prevention is always better than cure.



Introduction

This White Paper has been written by kind permission of ARX Maritime. Its purpose is to set out the first hand experiences of the author on the threat posed by piracy, why it still continues and how vessel owners and operators can best protect their vessels from the threat.

Until recently, it may have been said by many in the industry that piracy was well in decline. Looking at the traditional piracy global hotspots - we have seen recently; in the Sulu Sea in South East Asia, the governments of the Philippines, Malaysia & Indonesia have entered into a tri-nation agreement to share intelligence and patrolling duties to combat piracy being conducted by Abu Sayyaf and other extremists. In Nigeria, with presidential elections looming in February 2019, there is a lot of talk about the Nigerian Navy soon to issue a memorandum on the use of Armed Guards in Territorial Waters to help combat the threats of groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and the more persistent threats from Nigerian Delta Separatist Groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In the Indian Ocean and around Somalia, from 2014 onwards it was believed that with the stabilisation of Mogadishu Port, under the ownership of a Turkish Company, and the efforts of the multi-national Combined Maritime Force (CMF) and World Food Programme (WFP) Aid Assistance protected by European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) that piracy in these water has ceased to exist.

Yet, with all these initiatives the recent report from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has reported that their Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) has received 107 incident reports in the first six months of 2018 which is notably up from the 43 received in the same period of 2017 and 37 received in Q1 for 2016. When the figures for the first half of 2018 are broken down we see there has been 69 vessels boarded, 23 attempted attacks, 11 vessels fired upon and four vessels hijacked leading to a hundred and two crew members being taken hostage and 25 kidnapped. Rather more worryingly is the emergence of new piracy areas of Venezuela and Bangladesh where violence towards the crew of the targeted vessels is brutal and very often fatal. These figures and acts of atrocity should highlight in a reader's mind the fact that piracy has not gone away and is in fact on the rise again. So why then does it continue?





THREAT LEVEL ASSESSMENT

The author of this paper has seen piracy from a number of different positions and the thought processes behind them. He served for 6 years as a Warfare Officer in the Royal Navy conducting two operational tours in the India Ocean for a combined period of 18 months during 2010-2011 and then in an operations oversight role during 2012-2013 as Battle Watch Officer CMF based in Bahrain overseeing the deployment of three Task Groups and the legal and operational necessities to conduct anti-piracy boarding and interdictions. After leaving the Royal Navy the author continued to serve in the Royal Naval Reserve for a year and half with the Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) whilst working for a major container shipping company as the Deputy Safety and Security Manager for vessels often trading within the High Risk Area (HRA). During this time he had a unique perspective on the continued operations from a military stand point and how the merchant vessels under his management were preparing for operating in this area. Finally the author now works for a leading Protection and Indemnity insurance company as a Senior Loss Prevention Executive where part of his role is to advise those insured by the Company about the present threats associated with piracy and how vessels can best protect themselves. He also sits on the Maritime Security subcommittee of the International Group of P&I insurance companies. During this time he has witnessed a marked change in how piracy is perceived and challenged.

When the author first deployed to the Indian Ocean the threat of piracy was at its highest levels. Best Practice Management 4 (BMP4) had only recently been issued and we were tasked with reporting back to Admiralty how vessels were protecting themselves from attack. We saw with fascination a number of different methods including hose pipes rigged outboard and constantly running, dummies on the bridge wings and poop decks of merchant vessels, in the Gulf of Aden we were presented with conveyers the like of which had not been seen since World War 2 and the Battle of the Atlantic and finally aboard nearly every vessel was the ubiquitous razor wire to varying degrees of proper deployment. It was fair to say that the vessels and those that managed them were taking the threat of piracy very seriously indeed.



Why do they do it?

Turning to the pirates themselves it was in truth a sad state of affairs most of those we arrested during our operational tours were conducting these operations out of need. Their traditional livelihood of fishing had been taken away from them, either by zealous local warlords stealing their catch or by the simple fact that other nations had come into their waters, once Somalia had been declared a failed state, and over fished it. A rather memorable occasion was when we stopped a skiff 250 nautical miles from Somalia. On board were 4 men and a boy of 14 whose assault rifle was bigger than him, they had been out for just over a month and were down to their last drum of fuel one bag of mouldy rice and two onions, it was fair to say they were not an effective fighting force but it was also a stark reminder of the lengths these people would go to feed their families. Simply, this is why piracy will not go away. Piracy, at its most basic level, is a crime committed out of necessity and opportunity. As such, it can be curtailed at sea but never solved. The underlying issues that promote men and children to act in such a daring and dangerous manner must be solved ashore and if they are not then piracy will remain and this is what we are witnessing now.



PIRACY IN DECLINE?

When the author left the Royal Navy and joined the container shipping company he was tasked with auditing the Private Maritime Security Company (PMSC) that was employed to provide armed guards to the vessels he managed. He had first seen PMSC escort vessels in the Indian Ocean at the end of 2010 and he had seen the rise of armed guards in merchant vessels in the HRA ever since. Impressed with the professionalism of the organisation, he encountered and the meticulous planning that went into their operation. In 2013 they were providing four man teams to each vessel, however, this was not to last. As 2013 moved into 2014 piracy in Somalia was in, what many took to be, steady decline as such the on-board security teams were decreased from four men details to two men. In summer of 2015 the author attend a conference where the use of the Socotra Gap was being suggested as a routing option for container vessels to save time and money on fuel expenses. The logic behind it was that no container vessel had ever been taken by pirates and that piracy in Somalia was all but dead (in 2017 this was proved wrong with the attack on a 52,000 tone container vessel). In the space of less than two years all of that initial caution seemed to have disappeared. The vessels were still hardened in accordance with BMP4 utilising razor, although this had been proven to be a fallible defence, and a small team of armed guards and this was considered adequate. Very quickly, the industry had found a cost effective measure to dissuade piracy and especially in Somalian waters it had seemed to work. As the author was leaving the container company at the end of 2015 there were discussions afoot about sending vessels into the port of Hobyo Somalia, a place in 2010 he had actively patrolled as a known piracy hotspot.



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In the intervening two and a half years since then we have seen a number of developments. Most notably in 2015 Yemen erupted in Civil War Houthi forces who controlled the capital Sana'a allied with forces claiming to be loyal to the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, clashed with forces loyal to the current government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi based in the port city of Aden. During the disruption caused by the civil war Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) & the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant moved into the country and now control large parts of land with AQAP in particular ascendancy in coastal regions. This conflict has driven many into poverty with little choice but to feed their family through activities such as piracy. There is also the terror threat posed but such organisations as AQAP and their affiliates with a directive of disrupting trade through maritime straits belonging to the Arabs and Muslims. This has manifested itself most recently when a Turkish flagged bulk carrier was hit by a projectile in the Southern Red Sea in May 2018.

In Venezuela in 2015, the price of oil was halved. This along with catastrophic response by the government to plug the hole in public finance by printing money led to rampant inflation sending the economy into free fall. There has subsequently been a similar pattern of economic decline and the rise in piratical activity in the region as seen in other piracy hotspots across the globe. By understanding the motivation of some of the base line of piracy activities we can now understand why it happens and the threat posed by it, so how then do we as an industry best protect ourselves and more importantly our seafarers from it?





The Threat As previously stated in this article and by the cases cited above it is hoped that there is now an understanding that piracy is a threat in any waterways where there is instability. As such, it is an omnipresence threat and one which ship managers and owners must be constantly alive to. Piracy will never be defeated in its entirety at sea so it must be viewed as an evolving presence and combated as such. The first thing one can do is to understand the area in which their vessels are operating and the risk present in this area, there are a number of options open to vessel owners on how to do this including ARX's OPENBRIDGE Resource and the Maritime Intelligence Portal provided by the UK P&I Club.

Once the threat of an area is understood then this needs to be passed down to the crew's operating the vessels. They in turn should be properly trained in not only observation techniques for sighting potential attackers but also what to do in the event of an attack, how to manoeuvre the vessel to repel an attack and where to muster and who to contact should an attack succeed. At this stage we should note the shortfalls of razor wire, razor wire was thought of as a quick and cost effective way to deter pirates from boarding a vessel. However, it has now been in place for more than 8 years and has repeatedly been overcome. If a vessel is trading in an area where piracy is known then thought should be given to other more effective barriers, such as ARX's Anti-boarding system, and more defence in depth on the vessel with the implementation of door jams, window shields and enhanced ladder gratings, to slow the advance of pirates to the bridge. Once the vessel has been properly hardened then the crew should undergo regular refresher training to keep their skillset fresh and also to know their vessels escape routes and muster points, which there should be more than one in case of an internal breach into the accommodation.

CONCLUSION...

Prevention is always better than cure. It is hoped that this article has, through the use of first-hand accounts, highlighted the continued presence and risk of piracy and the dangers of prematurely reducing a vessel's effective response to that threat. The need to constantly examine your trading environment will always exist whilst there is instability in the world, so will the need to effectively train your crew to be aware to this threat and the correct response to it. Most importantly always remember that you are not alone in this endeavour and there is a wealth of experience both within ARX and the UK P&I Club to assist you.

ARX SOLUTIONS ARX offers a modern and effective anti-piracy barrier that features in the latest BMP5 as a recommended way to harden vessels against piracy attacks. The ARX Anti-Boarding and Climbing System (ABaC) restricts attempts to board via ladder or rope. The non-lethal barrier system has been tested by Royal Marine Commandos and the UK Special Forces, and comes recommended by oil majors like BP and Shell. They're quick and easy to install, and don't need to be taken off when entering ports.

ARX Solutions offers a comprehensive intelligence package for its clients, as well as consultation with subject matter experts. Modern risk management is predicated upon accurately identifying the probability of a threat and multiplying that by the consequences of that loss. ARX's consultancy services help to build a more holistic picture of a threat, and so to help minimise the potential loss of an incident. Clients can source an up-to-date intelligence picture for high-risk areas, consult on the current terrorist threat for a high-risk area, and draw upon ARX's consultancy services in building and maintaining their ships' security procedures.



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FOOTNOTES:

¹ <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1249-new-imb-report-shows-persistent-piracy-risk-in-gulf-of-guinea>