

## ANAVE – Circular de Régimen Interior

Madrid, 11 de febrero de 2021  
Ref: SMA 1/2021/AB

### Asunto: Piratería:

1. Aumento de los ataques de piratería en el golfo de Guinea.
2. Nivel 2 de Protección ISPS en aguas de Gabón.
3. Carteles explicativos sobre las *BMP-West Africa* para colocar en el puente del buque.
4. Informes de seguridad marítima del Consejo de Seguridad Nacional y de ICS (Febrero 2021).
5. Encuesta anónima sobre la integridad en los puertos de Nigeria.

Muy Srs. nuestros:

### 1. Aumento de los ataques de piratería en el golfo de Guinea.

INTERTANKO y el Centro de Operaciones y Vigilancia de Acción Marítima, COVAM nos han informado de que un **grupo pirata muy agresivo** está operando en la zona sur del golfo de Guinea, al NNE de Santo Tomé y Príncipe y han perpetrado **varios ataques en los últimos días**. Esta zona de operaciones está fuera del alcance en el que están desplegadas las fuerzas navales de la región.

El pasado lunes, el buque de pabellón español *Madrid Spirit* fue atacado en la zona, **afortunadamente sin consecuencias graves**, cuando navegaba a unas 47 millas al SO de la isla de Sao Tomé.

Recomendamos a los buques que transiten por esta zona **extremar las precauciones** y seguir las directrices de las [Mejores Prácticas de Gestión del Sector contra la Piratería en África Occidental](#) y los procedimientos de registro y notificación de los tránsitos al COVAM de la Armada, al Centro de Notificación *Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea* (MDAT-GoG) y al *IMB Piracy Reporting Centre*. Los datos de contacto de estos organismos son:

<u>COVAM</u> Email: <a href="mailto:covam@mde.es">covam@mde.es</a> Tél.: 00 34 968 127 032 Fax: 00 34 968 127 033 Web: <a href="https://encomar.covam.es">https://encomar.covam.es</a>	<u>MDAT-GoG:</u> Email: <a href="mailto:watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org">watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org</a> Tél.: +33 (0) 298 22 88 88 Web: <a href="https://gog-mdat.org">https://gog-mdat.org</a>	<u>IMB Piracy Reporting Centre:</u> Emails: <a href="mailto:imbkl@icc-ccs.org">imbkl@icc-ccs.org</a> ; <a href="mailto:piracy@icc-ccs.org">piracy@icc-ccs.org</a> Tél.: 00 603 2031 0014 Fax: 00 603 2078 5769 Whatsapp o Telegram : 00 601126593057
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### 2. Nivel 2 de Protección ISPS en aguas de Gabón.

En el día de ayer, el COVAM nos ha informado de que las autoridades de Gabón han decidido **aumentar a Nivel 2**, hasta nuevo aviso, el Nivel de Protección del Código ISPS, tras el importante aumento de los ataques de piratería en el gofo de Guinea y en sus aguas jurisdiccionales. En su comunicado, las autoridades de dicho país **recuerdan que los Oficiales de Protección del**

**Buque (OPB), de la compañía (OPC), y de las instalaciones portuarias (OPIP), son los responsables de aplicar y comunicar este cambio en el nivel de protección a todos los buques** que naveguen por aguas gabonesas y a las instalaciones portuarias que les presten servicios. Recomiendan informar de cualquier ataque o avistamiento sospechoso a las autoridades locales y al *IMB Piracy Reporting Centre*.

### **3. Carteles explicativos sobre las *BMP-West Africa* para colocar en el puente del buque.**

INTERTANKO en colaboración con OCIMF han elaborado un conjunto de **9 carteles explicativos sobre las *BMP-West Africa*** (ver **Anexo 1**) para colocar en el puente de los buques que operan en el golfo de Guinea, que pretenden ser una referencia fácil y rápida de consulta en caso de que se produzca un incidente.

### **4. Informes de seguridad marítima del Consejo de Seguridad Nacional y de ICS (Febrero 2021).**

Esta misma mañana, la DGMM nos ha facilitado un informe de seguridad marítima (ver **Anexo 2**) que publica semestralmente la Célula de Información y Análisis de Riesgos y Amenazas para la seguridad marítima (CIARA), dependiente del Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Marítima. En el archivo adjunto se incluye un mapa con las distintas zonas afectadas y una valoración de la situación en cada una de ellas representada con símbolos de colores (triángulos, cuadrados, flechas, etc.). Pinchando en cada uno de ellos se descarga automáticamente un informe en formato "pdf" correspondiente a la situación de dicha zona. **Las empresas pueden hacer uso y compartir estos informes internamente pero no distribuirlos ni publicarlos en páginas de internet de acceso público.**

Por su parte, la Cámara Naviera Internacional (ICS) nos ha enviado la última actualización del **informe** que publica periódicamente *Risk Intelligence* sobre la **situación de la piratería a nivel mundial** (ver **Anexo 3**). Este informe (de 22 páginas) hace un repaso a los incidentes de protección marítima que se han notificado a lo largo de 2020 e incluye una descripción general de los ataques contra buques mercantes durante el último mes en 3 regiones principales (África occidental, la zona occidental del océano Índico y el sudeste asiático), así como evaluaciones de diferentes tipos de amenazas en estas regiones.

### **5. Encuesta anónima sobre la integridad en los puertos de Nigeria.**

La Cámara Naviera Internacional (ICS) nos ha enviado una circular en la que se invita a las empresas asociadas a **cumplimentar una encuesta** desarrollada por la *Maritime Anti-Corruption Network* (MACN), **sobre la integridad en los puertos y terminales de Nigeria**, que pretende evaluar el impacto de las distintas iniciativas que desde 2012 dicha organización está impulsando para fomentar la integridad y mejorar el entorno operativo en la zona.

La fecha límite para contestar a la encuesta es el próximo **15 de marzo**. Los datos se recopilarán de forma anónima y se tratarán de forma confidencial.

Las agencias gubernamentales en los puertos y terminales de Nigeria han desarrollado procedimientos operativos estándar para guiar a su personal, partes interesadas y usuarios de sus servicios con el objetivo de reducir el riesgo de corrupción y mejorar la eficiencia del despacho de buques y cargas. Esta encuesta busca obtener comentarios de los usuarios del sector privado de los puertos y terminales nigerianos sobre cómo se están logrando estos objetivos.

Muy atentamente,

Elena Seco  
Directora General

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# BMP West Africa

Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security off the Coast of West Africa including the Gulf of Guinea



# BMP West Africa Quick Reference Card Series

## 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 1



### INDEX

Card 2 REPORTING

Card 3 THREAT

Card 4 ASSESSMENT

Card 5 PLANNING

Card 6 UNDER ATTACK (APPROACH STAGE)

Card 7 UNDER ATTACK (ATTACK STAGE)

Card 8 SEV OPERATIONS

Card 9 EVIDENCE COLLECTION



## 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 3

# The Threat: Kidnapping of Crew, Hijacking of Vessels, Armed Robbery and Cargo Theft

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**The likelihood of attack further offshore West Africa is higher during the inter-monsoon season (October-May).**

**Attacks can take place at any time – day or night. However, the risk of an Undetected Approach is Higher at Night. More seafarers have been kidnapped during the hours of darkness.**

**Attacks have been reported over 200Nm from the coast.**

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Attackers may use **small arms fire** during attacks; the bridge tends to be the main target for these weapons. Attackers may use **long lightweight ladders, knotted climbing ropes or long hooked poles** to climb up the side of the ship. Once onboard they will make their way to the bridge to try to **take control of the ship**. When on the bridge they will demand the ship slows/stops to enable others to board. They will also try by all means to gain access to the accommodation to capture crew members before completion of the citadel retreat process.

Experience has shown the crew of a vessel targeted for armed robbery at sea or cargo theft are likely to be **treated badly** by perpetrators during an attack. **Injuries are common** and any resistance shown to the attackers may lead to an escalation of violence.

**Boarding risk will be higher if vessels are drifting, at anchor, conducting ship-to-ship (STS) operations or at slow speed.** A vigilant watch is paramount in order to activate the vessels security procedures as early as possible. If because of the nature of the navigation or of the operations the citadel process is not possible in case of attack, then additional security measures should be considered (secured anchorage, security escort vessels). Attacks against vessels underway occasionally involve some form of deception to force the vessel to stop. **Attacks on vessels vary significantly in their form.**

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**Ships and their operators should submit vessel position reporting forms to MDAT-GoG.**

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## 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 4

# Threat and Risk Assessment

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**A threat is formed of capability, intent and opportunity.**



All voyages in this region require thorough advanced planning using all available information. The maritime threats are dynamic, and it is therefore essential that a detailed threat and risk assessment is completed for each voyage and activity within the region.

**The risk assessment MUST consider but may not be limited to:**

- The threat assessment and geographical areas of increased risk.
- Requirements of the Flag State, company, charterers and insurers.
- Secure Anchorage Areas (SAA), Security Escort Vessels (SEV) and or Vessel Protection Detachments (VPDs).
- The ship's characteristics, vulnerabilities and inherent capabilities, including citadel and/or safe muster points to withstand the threat (freeboard, speed, general arrangement, etc.).
- The ship's and company's procedures (drills, watch rosters, chain of command, decision making processes, etc.).
- Background factors shaping the situation, e.g. traffic patterns and local patterns of life, including fishing vessel activity.
- Cooperation with military.

## 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 5

# Ship Master's Planning

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### Prior to entering the Voluntary Reporting Area:

- Obtain the latest threat information.
- Check the latest NAVAREA warnings, alerts and the Inmarsat SafetyNet broadcasts.
- Implement VRA vessel registration and reporting requirements as highlighted in section 6 and annex D of BMP West Africa.
- If security services are used, confirm arrangements with the Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSC).
- If used, rendezvous position and communication plan for Security Escort Vessels.
- Contingency plans if security services do not arrive or cannot meet operational requirements.
- Confirm propulsion can operate at full speed.
- Implement security measures in accordance with the Ship Security Plan (SSP).

### Location and Time at Anchor

- Keep time at anchor to a minimum.
- Anchor watch to be maintained.
- Avoid setting patterns.
- Consider use of “secure anchorage areas” operated by some countries in the region. More information is contained in local Notice to Mariners or Admiralty Charts.
- Vessels are most at risk when stopped in the water, drifting, at anchor or carrying out STS transfer, Single Buoy Mooring (SBM) operations or slowing down for pilot transfer.

### Coordinated Arrival

Many vessels wait offshore and transit at high speed to arrive at any rendezvous point '**Just in Time**' including STS and/or Offshore Terminals. Some vessels tender a virtual Notice of Readiness (NOR) whilst staying safely offshore, and both are accepted practice for many vessels operating in the GoG.

## Ships Under Attack – Approach Stage

**A proper lookout is critical for the ship's protection.**

**It will ensure the detection of a suspicious approach or attack early on, which allows defences to be deployed.**

Sound the emergency alarm and make an attack announcement, in accordance with the ship's emergency communication plan. Initiate emergency procedures.
Activate water spray.
Make a mayday call on VHF Ch. 16. Send a distress message via the Digital Selective Calling (DSC) system and Inmarsat-C, as applicable.
Activate the SSAS.
If not already at full speed, increase to maximum to open the distance.
Steer a straight course to achieve maximum speed quickly.
Activate the emergency communication plan.
<b>Report the attack immediately to MDAT-GoG by telephone +33 298 228888 and email <a href="mailto:watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org">watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org</a></b>
Ensure the AIS is switched on.
Ensure that all external doors and, where possible, internal public rooms and cabins are fully secured.
All crew not required on the bridge or in the engine room should muster at the safe muster point or citadel.
When sea and navigational conditions allow, consider altering course to increase an approaching skiff's exposure to wind/waves.
Sound the ship's whistle/foghorn continuously and put all deck lights on to demonstrate to any potential attacker that the ship is aware of the attack and is reacting to it.
Check Vessel Data Recorder (VDR) is recording and the data saved.

# 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 7

## Ships Under Attack

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### ATTACK STAGE

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Reconfirm all ship's crew are in the safe muster point or citadel as instructed by the Master.

**Report the attack immediately to MDAT-GoG  
+33 298 228888 by telephone.**

As the attackers close in on the ship, Masters should commence small alterations of helm whilst maintaining speed to deter skiffs from lying alongside the ship in preparation for a boarding attempt. These manoeuvres will create additional wash to impede the operation of the skiffs.

Large amounts of helm are not recommended, as these are likely to significantly reduce a ship's speed.

Security Escort Vessel if present, will conduct themselves as governed by their rules of engagement.

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### ACTIONS ON ILLEGAL BOARDING

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Muster the crew in the citadel. Bridge Team to lock inner doors (leading to the lower decks) when on route to the citadel.

Use all available means to establish communications from the citadel with MDAT-GoG and company to confirm all crew are accounted for and in the citadel or safe muster point.

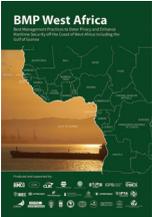
Stay in the citadel until conditions force you to leave or as advised by the military or company. (If a military response is not available CCTV from the citadel may be used to assist in assessing the status of the vessel / location of attackers).

If any member of the crew is captured it should be considered that the attackers have full control of the ship.

# 'Q Card' BMP West Africa – 8

## Operating with Security Escort Vessels

**Companies should check the credentials and licences/permits of the PMSC.**



*BMP does not recommend or endorse the general use of SEVs to accompany merchant ships; this is a decision taken by individual ship operators.*



The escort plan, RV position and communication arrangements should be agreed in advance.

Planning should consider that SEVs may have operating restrictions.

Regular communication should be maintained.

The SEV will be positioned to defend the vessel at all times and be reactive to intercept any approaching suspicious craft.

Authorisation to use force rests with the military detachment onboard the SEV.

The Master / Bridge Crew can aid the SEV with early detection and warning.

SEV should not enter any terminal or facility exclusion zone.

### **A contract for the provision of SEVs must:**

- Not prejudice the ship's insurance cover arrangements.
- Ensure the PMSC has insurance policies that are current and compliant with the requirements of the contract.
- Ensure the PMSC can legally operate the SEV in accordance with coastal state law.
- Ensure the SEV is fit for purpose.

## Post Incident Protection of Evidence

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**The collection and protection of evidence is critical.**

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To give the investigating authorities the best chance of apprehending the perpetrators, it is important that evidence is preserved in the correct manner. Companies, Masters and crew should refer to **IMO Guidelines on Preservation and Collection of Evidence A28/Res. 1091 and other industry guidance**. The quality of the evidence provided and the availability of the crew to testify will significantly help any investigation or prosecution that follows.



**The Master and crew can protect a crime scene until the nominated law enforcement agency arrives by following these basic principles:**

- Preserve the crime scene and all evidence if possible.
- Avoid contaminating or interfering with all possible evidence – if in doubt, do not touch and leave items in place.
- Do not clean up the area, including hosing it down. Do not throw anything away, no matter how unimportant it may seem.
- Take initial statements from the crew.
- Take photographs of the crime scene from multiple viewpoints.
- Protect VDR for future evidence.
- Make a list of items taken (e.g. mobile phones with numbers).
- Facilitate access to the crime scene and relevant documentation for law enforcement authorities.
- Make crew available for interview by law enforcement authorities.

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**INTERPOL can also be consulted to discuss recommended practices for the preservation of evidence that could be useful to law enforcement agents pursuing an investigation.**

**Contact details are: [os-ccc@interpol.int](mailto:os-ccc@interpol.int) | +33 472 44 7676.**

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USO OFICIAL

# INFORME DE SEGURIDAD MARÍTIMA 20-02

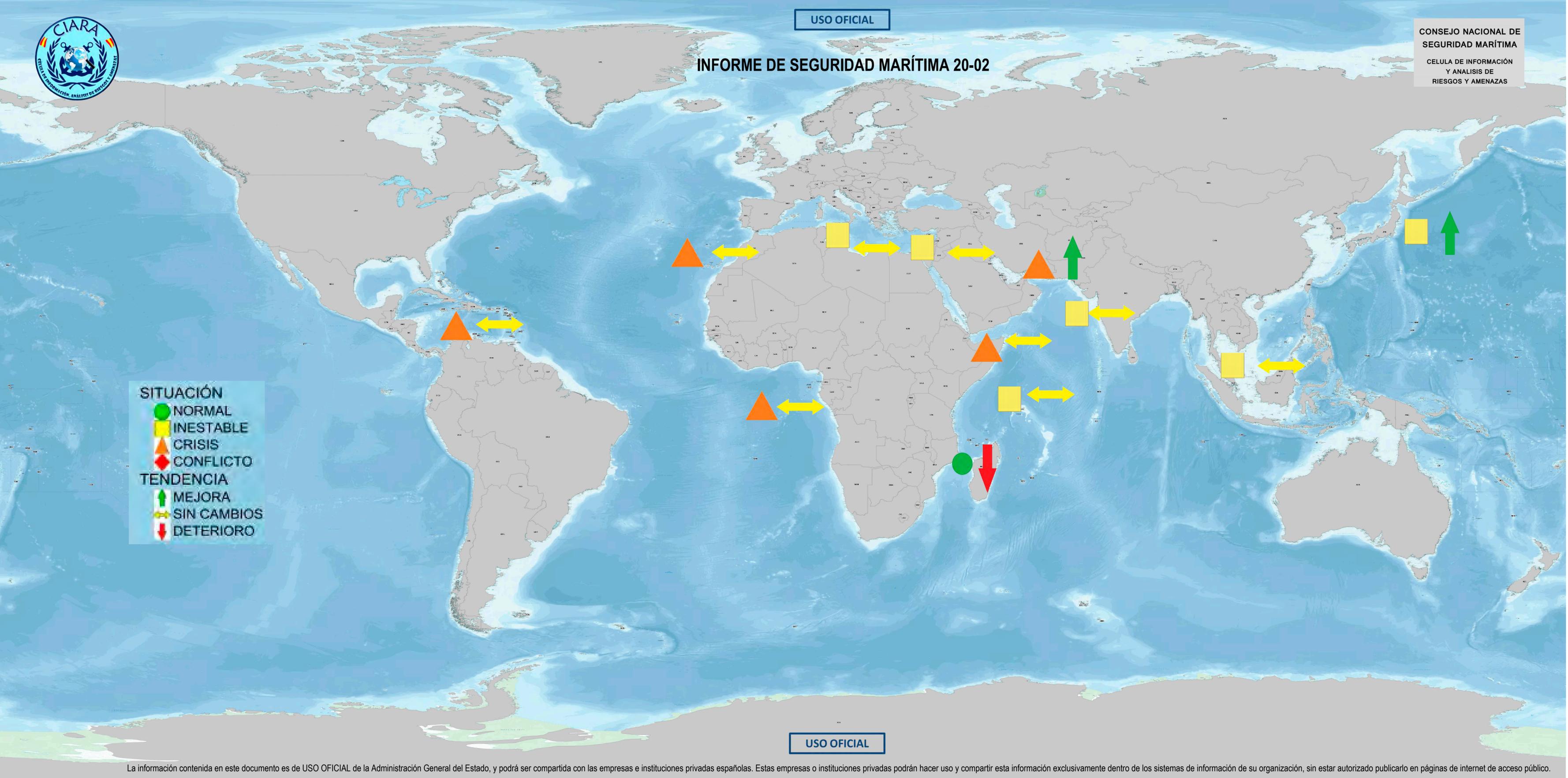
CONSEJO NACIONAL DE  
SEGURIDAD MARÍTIMA  
CELULA DE INFORMACIÓN  
Y ANÁLISIS DE  
RIESGOS Y AMENAZAS

**SITUACIÓN**

- NORMAL
- INESTABLE
- CRISIS
- CONFLICTO

**TENDENCIA**

- MEJORA
- SIN CAMBIOS
- DETERIORO



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RiskIntelligence

# Monthly Intelligence Report

February 2021

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## Monthly Intelligence Report

This report includes an overview of attacks against merchant vessels over the past month in three focus regions (West Africa, the western part of the Indian Ocean and South East Asia) as well as assessments of different types of threats in these regions. These areas are currently considered to be the global regions where the threat of such attacks is most significant.

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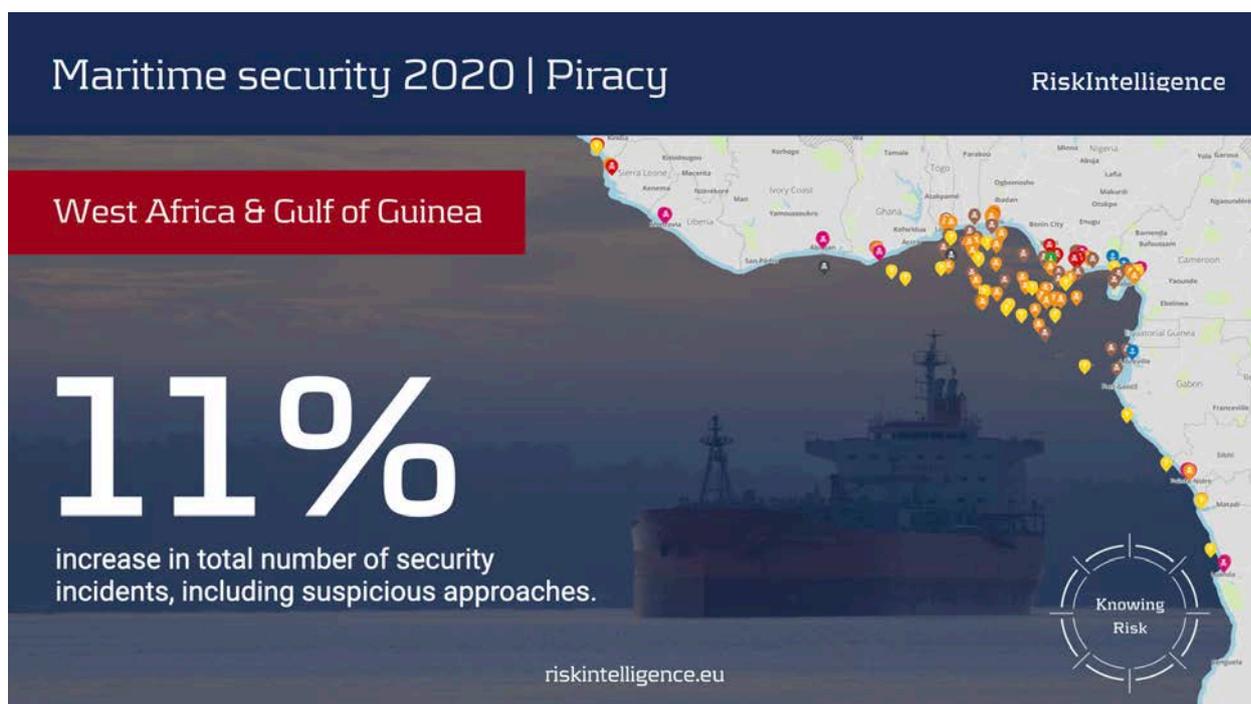
## Monthly focus: The year 2020 in review

### Introduction

This month, the focus section provides a short look at the number of maritime security incidents that were reported throughout 2020 in the three focus areas covered in this report. Further details regarding specific countries or other regions can also be generated with the statistics tool on the Risk Intelligence System

### Gulf of Guinea

The situation in the Gulf of Guinea has been the main area of concern in relation to piracy and armed robbery at sea in 2020. The overall number of incidents increased by 11%, although it should be noted that this is largely due to an increase in the number of suspicious approaches. The overall number and distribution of successful and failed attacks against all types of vessels remained almost the same as in 2019. Main concern for operators of merchant ships as well as for seafarers in the Gulf of Guinea remain kidnap-for-ransom attacks, aimed at taking crew members as hostages.



Arguably the most concerning trend in 2020 has been the spread of kidnap-for-ransom attacks which could already be observed in the fourth quarter of 2019. While many attacks still take place relatively close to the Nigerian coastline, neighbouring countries – including Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon – have also been affected in 2020. The perpetrators have largely targeted vessels underway, but some incidents at anchorages have also taken place. Moreover, the increasing number of reports about activities that were perceived as suspicious has underlined the concerns of seafarers.

Forecast for 2021

Considering the long-term development in the region, no significant change in the number and types of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea should be expected for this year. All types of vessels may be targeted in kidnap-for-ransom attacks, incidents outside the Nigerian EEZ are likely to continue as well. Any further spread of attacks, however, is very unlikely because organized criminal groups that are involved in taking seafarers as hostages are solely operating from bases in the Niger Delta, meaning that the geographic range of attacks will remain limited to the current extent.

Military initiatives by international actors – which are almost solely aimed at curbing piracy – are very unlikely to lead to sustainable improvements. Such actions are an important signal to seafarers and ship operators that something is being done to address the problem, but sustainable improvements have to be based on regional initiatives. Nigeria's Deep Blue project, which is supposed to be fully operational in the first half of 2021, is a vital step in this regard, yet it should be noted that it is not a genuine counter-piracy project. It is rather aimed at better surveillance and law enforcement across Nigeria's entire EEZ. This is likely to a decrease in attacks, but only in the medium term.

Regional integration is also likely to make further progress throughout the year. However, the impact of Covid-19 on government budgets and spending priorities means that large-scale investments in maritime agencies are unlikely. In the meantime, seafarers can now expect a quick naval response to distress calls, highlighting that vigilance and regular security drills can ensure that even successful boardings do not have to result in the kidnapping of crew members.

Western Indian Ocean



Throughout 2020, Risk Intelligence received frequent reports about suspicious approaches against merchant vessels in the Gulf of Aden. Not all these reports were logged as incidents, as many were clearly just sightings of local small boat traffic. Logged incidents, i.e. those shown on

the map below, were generally more ambiguous. In many cases, these incidents can be linked to patterns of life in the region – fishermen, traders or smugglers, as well as coastguard and militia forces from Yemen that might not be easy to identify. Most of the incidents were in areas where transit corridors used by merchant vessels intersect with higher concentrations of such craft.

In the southern part of the Red Sea, various naval operations linked to the conflict in Yemen took place. These included operations by the Saudi-led coalition to intercept drone boats used by Houthi forces, as well as operations by coastguard forces in maritime border areas. These operations tended to be closer to the coasts of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, in particular off Hudaydah and Jizan as well as close to the Hanish Islands. For the majority of vessels in transit along recognised corridors in the central Red Sea, these operations were not a threat. Operators should be aware of the potential implications of such operations, however, particularly in Saudi Arabian ports and off northern Yemen.

### *Forecast for 2021*

It is expected that the Gulf of Aden and the southern Red Sea will remain areas with high concentrations of local traffic intersecting with merchant vessels in transit. In the Gulf of Aden, smuggling, trading and fishing will continue – potentially giving cover to pirate operations. Ongoing naval presence and some improved law enforcement on land in Somalia are important deterrents to piracy, as are BMP measures on vessels. However, there are still areas in Somalia where pirates can operate, so there is still the potential for pirate activity – especially if naval deployments change, law enforcement falters, or BMP measures are relaxed.

There are wider changes taking place slowly, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE building their presence in southern Yemen and China opening its naval base in Djibouti to full operations. These changes will likely see more ‘grey hulls’ deployed in the Gulf of Aden. International and regional politics, however, may affect their effectiveness in targeting maritime crime.

In the southern Red Sea, the overall maritime security situation will continue to be driven by the conflict in Yemen. Houthi forces have already demonstrated their capabilities to target Saudi ports as far north as Jeddah and are likely to continue to do so as a means of pressuring Saudi Arabia during ongoing negotiations to resolve the conflict. There will likely be an ongoing threat of collateral damage for merchant vessels in these ports or in proximity to Yemen. A widespread threat to vessels in transit is unlikely, however, particularly for ships following the well-established transit corridors through the area.

## South East Asia

The most frequent crime impacting merchant vessels in South East Asia continues to be theft. The 46 incidents of theft recorded during 2020 represent more than half of all incidents for 2020, an increase of 28% compared with 2019. One third of thefts took place at anchorage areas, up from 19% in 2019. All but three of the 17 thefts involving ships at sea involved vessels transiting the Singapore Strait, the others in the Makassar Strait (two) and the South China Sea (one). Only one theft involved a vessel at berth. While no weapons were observed in these incidents, it is likely that perpetrators are carrying knives which they may use if confronted. There were no hijackings and only one incident of kidnap for ransom which targeted a fishing trawler.

## South-east Asia

45%

of all south-east Asia incidents took place within the Singapore Strait.

riskintelligence.eu

Knowing  
Risk

In the Singapore Strait, the total number of incidents decreased from 39 in 2019 to 36 in 2020. This 8% reduction is welcome, but it was only achieved by a reduction of thefts from 17 to 14. The number of armed robberies (5) and failed attacks (17) remained constant. Additionally, the shift of the perpetrators' focus from barges in tow towards bulk carriers and tankers is cause for concern. Meanwhile, law enforcement efforts will continue to face challenges posed by the intersecting borders of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Almost half of the incidents in the Singapore Strait were failed attacks, which might illustrate a higher level of awareness amongst crew on board the vessels in transit.

*Forecast for 2021*

Vessel boardings in South East Asia are expected to remain at levels similar to those during 2019 and 2020. The Covid-19 impact on regional economies could lead to an increase in crime. However, this is more likely to impact domestic crime than crimes at sea which require specific skillsets. The focus on attacks against bulk carriers and tankers in the Singapore Strait is likely to continue throughout 2021. Crew vigilance will remain the best preventative measure in the strait. Weather conditions impact the frequency of boardings, with fewer incidents taking place during the rainy season.

Other threats to monitor in South East Asia include potential armed robberies targeting vessels underway and anchored in the South China Sea, the Sunda Strait, at the Muara Berau anchorage off Samarinda, and the anchorages off Belawan, Banjarmasin, Dumai, Batangas and Manila. Hijackings for product theft have ceased and are not expected to resume, even though illegal STS operations related to unauthorised fuel sales as well as fuel smuggling will continue in many parts of the region. Other than kidnappings from fishing trawlers, kidnappings of crew on merchant ships are not expected to return as a significant threat in 2021. Although still active, the operations of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the southern Philippines are increasingly limited due to sustained pressure from the military. The ASG's ability to attack merchant ships in the Sulu & Celebes Seas is therefore very limited.

In the South China Sea, geopolitical tensions have led to media attention, but it is unlikely that innocent passage of merchant vessels will be affected in 2021. Amongst other recent developments, China and 14 regional nations signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November 2020. RCEP is said to be the world's largest regional free-trade agreement, having the potential to promote and maintain safe and open sea lanes within and beyond the South China Sea.

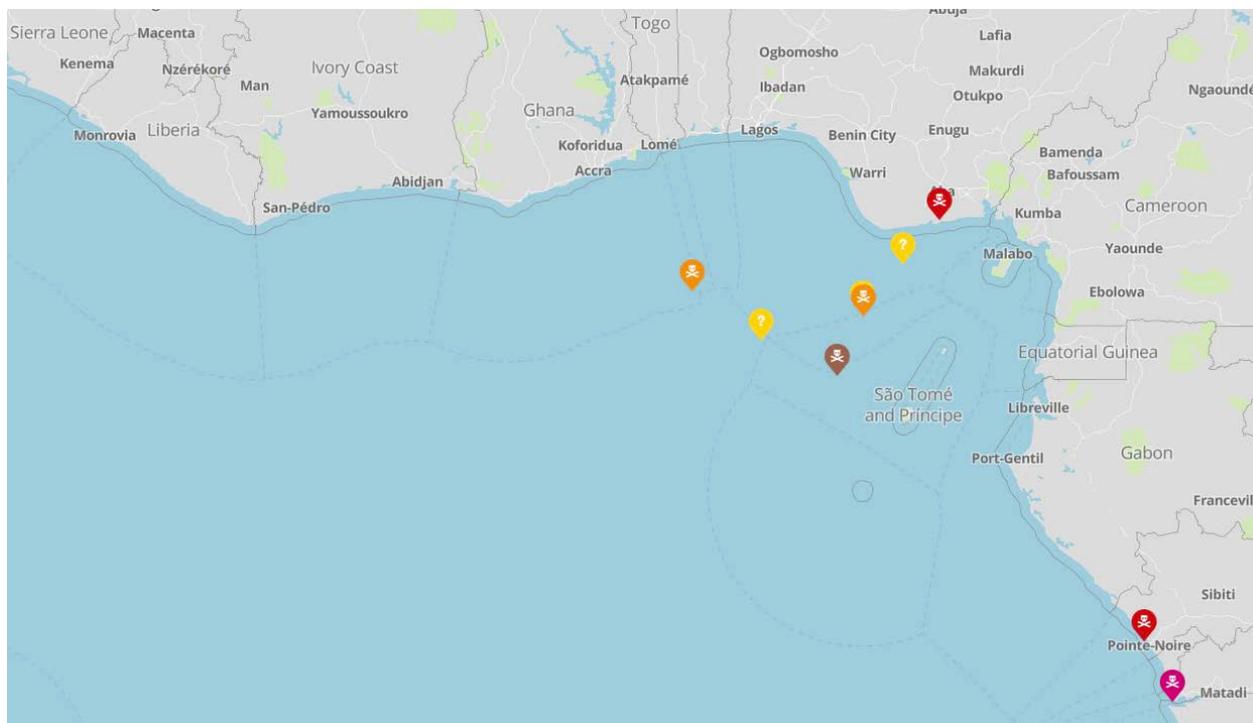
### [Additional services](#)

The Risk Intelligence System provides clients with real-time intelligence and situational awareness that will assist in avoidance of threats for operations around the globe. Moreover, Risk Intelligence offers ship operators the possibility to purchase security intelligence for individual ports and terminals. Bespoke services such as vessel-specific or voyage-specific risk assessments can also help to mitigate persistent or emerging threats.

In addition, frequent webinars provide in-depth updates, mini masterclasses in situational awareness methodology, and analysis of current events. Schedules and registration forms can be found at [riskintelligence.eu/webinars](https://riskintelligence.eu/webinars).

## West Africa

Events included in this report occurred between 1 and 31 January 2021, shown on the map below (Source: Risk Intelligence System).



## Incidents

### **04 January – Container ship NILEDUTCH BREDA boarded**

Armed robbery Pointe-Noire anchorage Republic of Congo 01:45 LT (00:45 UTC)

### **05 January – Passenger boats attacked**

Armed robbery Port Harcourt area Rivers state Nigeria Daytime

### **13 January – Container ship MAERSK CARDIFF attacked**

Failed kidnap/ransom 100 nm south of Brass Nigeria 20:00 LT (19:00 UTC)

### **14 January – LNG tanker SOKOTO reports approach**

Suspicious activity 110 nm south of Brass Nigeria 02:00 LT (01:00 UTC)

### **18 January – Reefer GREEN FREEZER boarded**

Theft Banana anchorage DR Congo 04:00 LT (03:00 UTC)

### **21 January – Container ship MSC ELSA 3 reports approach**

Suspicious activity 59 nm south of Bonny Nigeria 11:08 LT (10:08 UTC)

### **23 January – Container ship MOZART boarded**

Kidnap/ransom 98 nm north-west of Sao Tomé island 06:35 LT (05:35 UTC)

## **26 January – Product tanker SEAFRONTIER reports approach**

Suspicious activity 212 nm off Bayelsa state Nigeria 09:00 LT (08:00 UTC)

## **30 January – Bulk carrier ROWAYTON EAGLE boarded**

Failed kidnap/ransom 195 nm south of Lome Togo 04:24 LT/UTC

# Assessment

## Nigeria / Niger Delta

Attackers operating off the southern and eastern Niger Delta remain the most significant threat in the Gulf of Guinea. Successful boardings are most likely on 'low and slow' vessel types such as small bulk carriers or product tankers, general cargo and offshore supply ships or fishing vessels. However, other vessel types may also be targeted and even boarded successfully, underlined by three attacks against container ships in December and January respectively.

In January, attacks against the container ships MAERSK CARDIFF and MOZART underlined the threat level in this area (the MOZART incident is described in further detail in the next section). During the incident involving the MAERSK CARDIFF, the crew assembled in the citadel when a speedboat came close to the ship which was in transit south of Brass and just outside the Nigerian EEZ. No boarding attempt was made, but the crew reported that shots were fired. Several hours later, crew on an LNG tanker also reported an approach by a speedboat around 5 nm from the position of the first incident. In this case, however, no threatening behaviour was reported.

Another report about a suspicious approach was made by crew on a container ship. The vessel had been en route from Lagos to Onne when it was approached by a small craft around 50 nm offshore. While the embarked security team fired one warning shot, no additional details about threatening behaviour were received and it is at least possible that this incident was not an attempted attack against the ship.

By and large, patterns in January further underlined that the threat of attacks deep offshore in the coming months is somewhat higher than between April and September. The dry season in the Niger Delta, which will last roughly until March, allows for operations of small boats offshore and for attacks at significant distances from the coastline, including in the EEZs of neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, many incidents are now reported which would not have appeared in official statistics even in the recent past. Most notably, this includes cases involving cargo ships or fishing vessels which are solely trading within the region. For these incidents, it is often complicated to distinguish between genuine piracy attacks and incidents that are linked to other criminal activities. Overall, it is important to recognize piracy as just one symptom of insecurity at sea which is closely linked to other activities carried out by organized criminal groups.

Law enforcement at sea remains limited, particularly in the eastern part of the Niger Delta where cooperation between Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria is not on the same level as between Nigeria and Benin, Togo or Ghana. Attacks against local shipping on the Calabar River

and off the Bakassi peninsula are relatively frequent. These are often linked to smuggling and other illicit activities and should not be considered a major threat for merchant vessels in international trade. Moreover, criminal groups based in the Niger Delta have close links to the Bakassi area in Cameroon's anglophone region.

Regarding mitigation measures, the memorandum of understanding between the Nigerian Navy and 30 private companies remains the only legal basis for additional security measures in the Nigerian maritime domain (territorial waters and EEZ). All companies are authorised to provide escort vessels for merchant ships, partly manned by naval personnel while on task. These security vessels cannot operate outside of Nigeria's EEZ. Arrangements to embark armed guards are widespread in practice, but these are only legal in exceptional circumstances. Enforcement of the ban on armed guards has been limited in the past, yet vessels or even masters and other crew members may be detained. In case of an attack, damages to the ship as well as injuries to crew members are possible when attackers and armed guards exchange fire.

The situation surrounding the Secure Anchorage Area (SAA) off Lagos has underlined that enforcement of security-related regulations may become more stringent in the coming months. The arrangement involving a private company providing security for vessels in the SAA had often been criticized by Nigerian politicians. In January, the Nigerian Navy announced that military personnel would no longer be allowed to embark on security vessels patrolling around the SAA, effectively ending the current arrangement.

No alternative arrangements to replace the SAA were communicated, but patrols around the general anchorage area are frequent and no high-profile security incidents have been reported there in recent years. Main threats remain small-scale thefts of cargo, particularly from berthed or anchored product tankers where perpetrators often use crude methods to steal refined products. Similar incidents may also occur in other Nigerian ports, yet violence against crew members is rare and perpetrators are likely to escape upon discovery.

## Forecast

The threat level in the coming month remains severe off the Niger Delta. Attacks are possible at distances of up to 250 nm from the coastline during the current dry season in the Niger Delta which will roughly last until March. All types of vessels may be targeted, even container ships steaming at around 20 knots have been boarded in recent months.

Inshore attacks against local passenger and cargo vessels or against military detachments remain a threat across the Niger Delta. Such attacks are not a direct concern for merchant vessels in international trade, but crews must be vigilant during river transits in the Niger Delta.

Threats from militant groups in the Niger Delta should be closely monitored in the coming weeks. Several groups have threatened to attack oil facilities in the region in the recent past and actual incidents would likely lead to a diversion of security forces to counter such attacks. Despite threats issued by a coalition of militant groups in early January, direct attacks against tankers or other merchant ships are unlikely.

## Gulf of Guinea (Côte d'Ivoire to Gabon) / West Africa (Senegal to Angola)

Several attacks across the Gulf of Guinea have been reported in recent months. The most noteworthy incident outside the Nigerian EEZ that was reported in January involved the container ship MOZART. The vessel was attacked and boarded while steaming at around 20 knots at a distance of around 200 nm from the Niger Delta. No effective BMP measures had been employed on the ship and the perpetrators were able to break into a reinforced door with tools found onboard. Shots were fired, resulting in the death of one crew member; 15 other seafarers were taken as hostages, only three crew remained on the ship.

While this incident was widely reported as an escalation of the piracy threat in the region, such reports are exaggerated. The tragic death of one seafarer, however, has underlined that perpetrators will not hesitate to use violence. The alleged 'breach' of the citadel, however, was largely due to inadequate security procedures. No specific tools – or even 'explosives' which had been mentioned in several media reports based on dubious sources – had been brought onboard by the perpetrators.



*Container ship MOZART after the attack at anchor off Port-Gentil (Photo: Gabon Navy)*

Another attack was reported around 195 nm south of Lome in the Ghanaian EEZ, targeting the bulk carrier ROWAYTON EAGLE. In this case, the vessel was reportedly boarded but all crew members were able to assemble in the citadel. No hostages were taken and both the Ghanaian and the Nigerian Navy provided assistance, although no further details were available at the time of writing.

Overall, the geographic spread of incidents which had already been observed throughout 2020 remains a concern for ship operators. At the same time, some of the incidents that have been reported in recent months also highlighted links between cases that are widely reported as piracy and broader criminal activities at sea. It is therefore important to analyze and assess individual incidents carefully.

Ransoms for crew kidnapped from merchant vessels in international trade supplement the income derived from various other types of illegal activities which criminal groups based in the Niger Delta are involved in. Such links highlight that maritime security challenges have to be addressed on a broad scale rather than with a mere focus on counter-piracy operations. Whether the current initiatives such as the European Union's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept will

help to sustainably improve the situation is therefore unlikely, even though it is an important political signal to the shipping industry in general and seafarers in particular.

Several thefts or attempted thefts from anchored or berthed ships were also reported in January. Such incidents are unlikely to involve violence against crew members, underlined by incidents at the Pointe-Noire and Banana anchorages respectively. When perpetrators are discovered, they generally try to escape without confronting the crew.

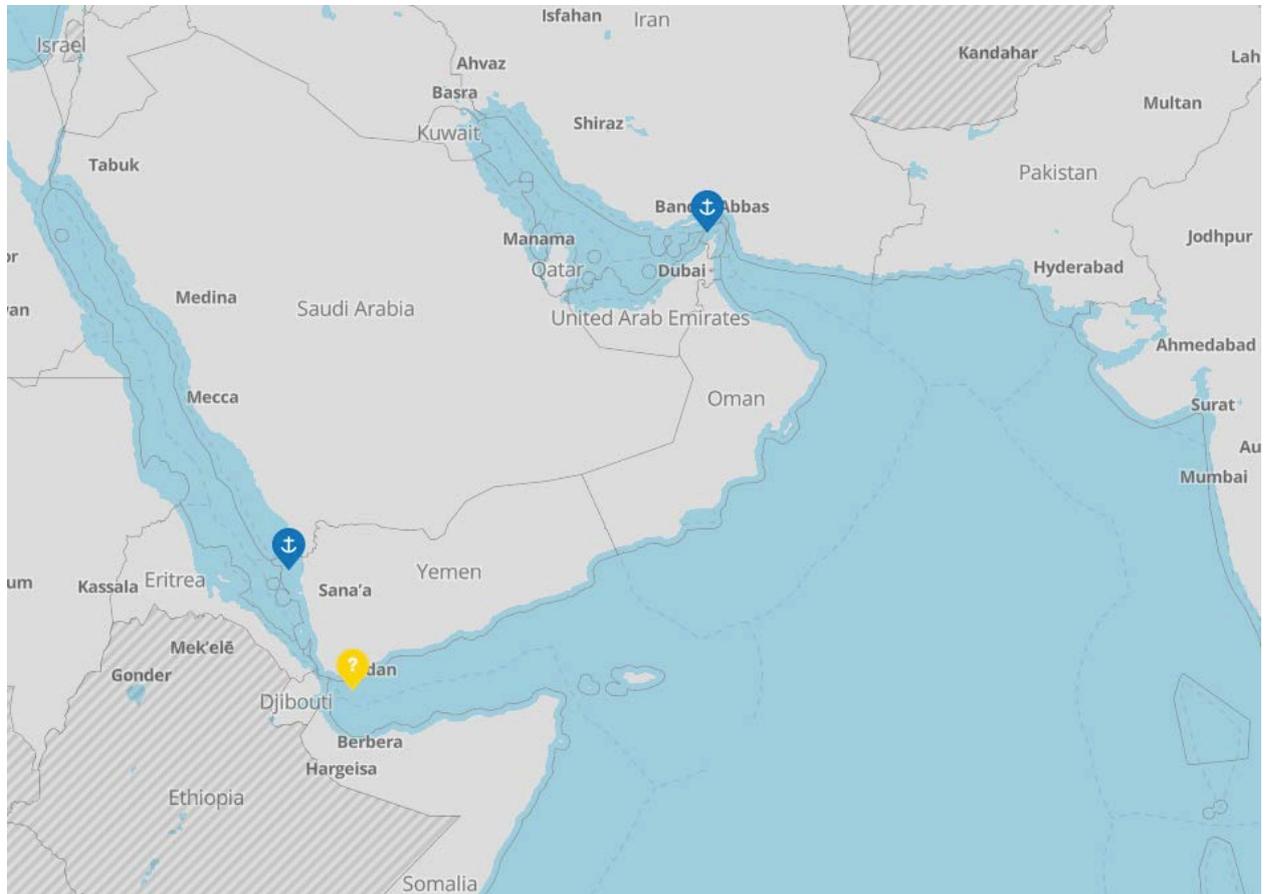
### Forecast

Throughout the Gulf of Guinea, the threat of kidnap-for-ransom attacks is assessed as moderate to high for the coming month, depending on the distance from the Niger Delta coastline where perpetrators have access to the necessary infrastructure to protect hostages from security forces and rival gangs during ransom negotiations. The threat level for hijackings is assessed as low. Moreover, this specific type of threat is almost exclusively directed against product tankers in laden condition for the purpose of cargo theft. Small product tankers – up to 10,000 dwt – are the most likely targets.

Throughout the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa as a whole, perpetrators may try to board berthed or anchored vessels. Around most anchorages, the amount of small boat traffic is virtually impossible to control for security agencies. Threat levels vary between different ports, but perpetrators will generally escape upon discovery. Physical confrontations with the crew are very rare, although Conakry in Guinea is an exception as perpetrators there may be armed and violent.

## Western Indian Ocean

Events included in this report occurred between 1 and 31 January 2021, shown on the map below (Source: Risk Intelligence System).



## Incidents

### **04 January – Product tanker HANKUK CHEMI boarded by Iranian forces**

Naval operation Persian Gulf 11:30 LT (07:30 UTC)

### **14 January – Bulk carrier MYRTO approached**

Suspicious activity Gulf of Aden 11:49 LT (08:49 UTC)

### **22 January – Saudi forces disrupt WBIED attack**

Naval operation Southern Red Sea Unknown time

## Assessment

### Gulf of Oman - Persian Gulf

There were no significant maritime incidents in this area during January that have led to a shift in the overall security situation. It is expected that there will be a period of repositioning in relations between the United States and Iran, with the Biden administration now in place, and that there will be a degree of caution shown by both sides. Iran, however, still has its regional foreign policy and security objectives and might still take limited action in support of these.

Iran still has various means of putting pressure on regional states and the international community. Aggressive enforcement of territorial waters demonstrates capabilities. Harassment of vessels in transit from time to time is a reminder that Iran has seized and detained vessels in the past under the pretext of political and commercial disputes. Direct attacks against merchant ships also remain a potential tactic. The primary threat for attacks is still to tanker vessels, particularly those with links to Saudi Arabia and the UAE such as ownership/flag or cargo.



*The South Korean and Iranian deputy foreign ministers  
in Tehran (Photo: Iran Foreign Ministry)*

It is clear from the HANKUK CHEMI boarding and subsequent detention that Iran is still prepared to take direct action in support of specific commercial disputes. The tanker was seized allegedly under suspicion of polluting, but it was soon clear that this was a pretext for a wider dispute between Iran and South Korea (the tanker is South Korean owned and flagged). Iran's government rejected allegations that it had seized the tanker as leverage over oil revenues held in South Korean banks due to US sanctions. However, several statements were then made about those funds.

Moreover, the incident took place a week before a visit by South Korea's vice foreign minister to Iran, which was expected to focus on the oil revenue. The dispute is ongoing, despite high-level government talks. The case has also highlighted how sanctions disputes and the pressure on Iran's oil exports are pushing Tehran to take aggressive steps to push back against sanctions.

Other reporting has focused on measures that Iran has taken to boost its exports, including sanctions-busting operations to trade refined products for Venezuelan crude oil that it can sell

onward to China. By these and other measures, Iran has been able to get its oil export volumes close to 50% of pre-sanction levels. But revenue frozen by South Korea (and others, notably Japan) is still a central focus.

### Forecast

Iran is likely to press for a return to the nuclear agreement that the US withdrew from, but only under the previous conditions where sanctions were not in place. It is not clear if this will be possible, but political positioning will continue. Iran will also retain options for other actions to potentially increase the stakes in the current situation.

If Iran were to take action, directing it against the oil industry of Saudi Arabia remains a relatively low-risk approach as this can be done with some degree of deniability through proxy groups, both on land and at sea. Oil tanker operations are likely to be the main focus of any maritime actions. It might be useful for Iran to continue its support of the Houthis through the transfer of arms and related technologies. This allows it to keep pressure on Saudi Arabia without being explicitly involved in any actions.

Further vessel seizures like the HANKUK CHEMI cannot be ruled out and Iran has ongoing disputes with a number of countries over frozen funds. The case is similar to the STENA IMPERO in 2019, seized by Iran as part of a dispute with the UK over a detained Iranian tanker, which indicates a pattern of using such actions as a means to exert pressure.

### Somali Basin - Gulf of Aden

The threat of Somali piracy remains elevated. It is mainly determined by current capabilities of Somali pirates, which are limited to the range of small craft without support from mother ships and is up to 500 nm from the Somali coast, although likely closer to 300 nm. This includes the Gulf of Aden, the western Arabian Sea, and the Somali Basin.

Vessels in transit should expect encounters with local traffic, which might be fishermen, traders, or smugglers (or all three). Skiffs will often pass close to merchant ships and the crew are likely to be armed – even if they are not showing their weapons to avoid attracting attention from armed guards. Such sightings represent a range of benign behaviour but could include approaches to identify vulnerable vessels. It is not clear if the incident on 14 January was such an approach. A ladder was reportedly observed but the CPA was 0.6 nm. Warning shots were fired by the armed guards on the MYTRO but no aggressive manoeuvres by the skiff were reported.

There is also activity by Yemeni coastguard forces in the area, particularly close to the Bab el Mandeb. Militia forces can also be active, and forces deploying from Yemen might not always be easily identifiable. This location in particular is frequented by fishing craft, smuggling vessels, and other local traffic. Large fleets of fishing skiffs operate from nearby Aden.

## Forecast

Local craft of various kinds will continue to be encountered in this area, which might include cases where craft are difficult to identify. It might also include cases where vessels in transit are directly threatened. Proximity to the Yemeni coast increases the possibility of such cases.

Possible pirate approaches to identify vulnerable vessels are likely, even if the number of actual attacks remains low. Correctly identifying pirate intentions can be difficult given the volume of local – legal and illegal – traffic. Some 'subsistence' level of piracy is expected to be ongoing, although widespread attacks against large merchant vessels remain unlikely. Isolated incidents cannot be ruled out.

## Southern Red Sea

There were no substantial shifts in the overall threat situation in this area in January. There were no further attacks against Saudi ports, such as the incident in Jeddah in December (see last month's report). However, Houthi actions against Saudi Arabia have continued, including drone attacks. Saudi Arabia claimed an interception of a waterborne improvised explosive device (WBIED), a so-called drone boat, on 22 January, following a similar interception on 09 December.

The use of WBIED boats by Houthi forces has been a frequent tactic, primarily to target coalition military assets off Hudaydah and Jizan. Limited maritime attacks by Houthi forces remain possible. There is still a threat to tanker vessels in transit, particularly those with links to Saudi Arabia and – to a lesser degree – the UAE such as ownership/flag or cargo. There is also a threat of collateral damage to merchant ships due to proximity to naval vessels during an attack.

The main threat for other vessels is becoming targets of opportunity. Ports north of Jizan might be targeted from the sea. The likely intent is to damage and disrupt Saudi port operations rather than to single out merchant traffic using the port. Nonetheless, this does mean that there is a threat to vessel operations in all Saudi ports in the Red Sea.

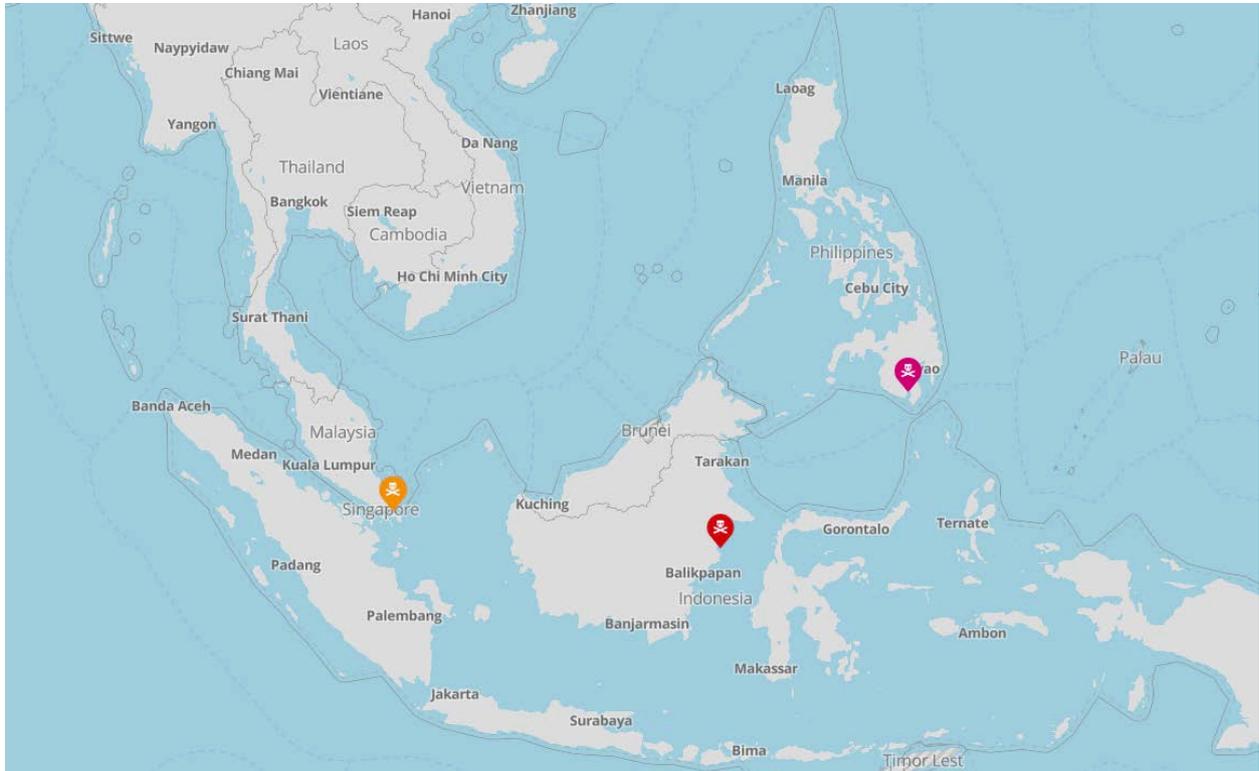
## Forecast

The Houthis are expected to continue their tactics of pressuring Saudi Arabia for political concessions. In the first instance, attacks on land will be favoured. Maritime operations could include the use of WBIEDs against port areas (likely) or tanker vessels linked to Saudi Arabia (less likely). Further incidents should be expected.

For the vast majority of vessels in transit through the Red Sea, however, the threat is lower and attacks against transiting vessels are currently not expected. It remains likely that the focus of Houthi maritime actions – or similar maritime operations – will be to directly target Saudi ports or local operations, although this still means that merchant vessel operations could be affected.

## South East Asia

Events included in this report occurred between 1 and 31 January 2021, shown on the map below (Source: Risk Intelligence System).



## Incidents

### **03 January – Bulk carrier SBI ORION boarded**

Armed robbery Muara Berau anchorage Indonesia 03:40 LT (19:40 UTC on 02 January)

### **25 January – Bulk carrier ARK ROYAL boarded**

Failed theft Singapore Strait TSS 03:25 LT (19:25 UTC on 24 January)

### **28 January – Bulk carrier ELIVA boarded**

Failed armed robbery Singapore Strait TSS 22:32 LT (14:32 UTC)

### **29 January – Bulk carrier VANTAGE WAVE boarded**

Failed armed robbery Singapore Strait TSS 02:21 LT (18:21 UTC on 28 January)

### **30 January – Container ship KOTA NEBULA boarded**

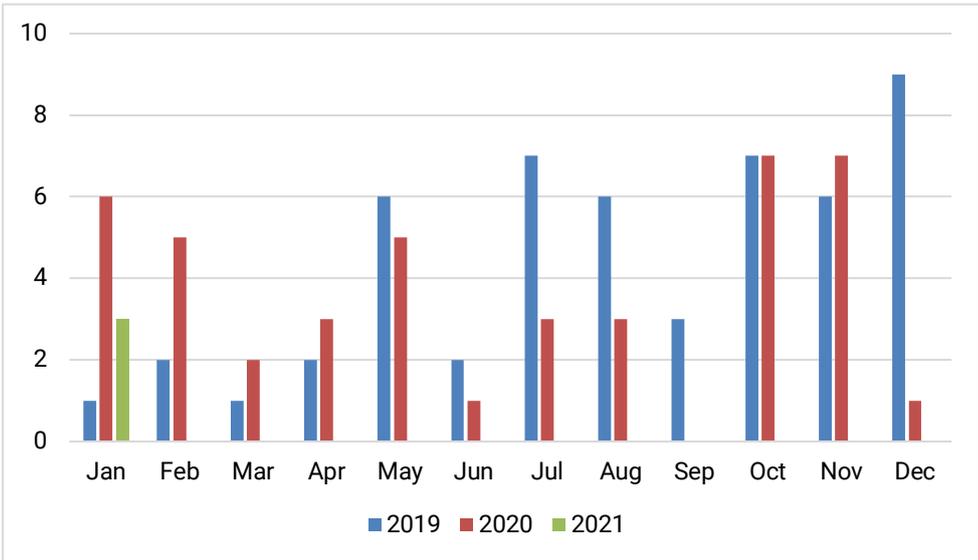
Theft General Santos City port Philippines 03:10 LT (19:10 UTC on 29 January)

# Assessment

## Singapore and Malacca Straits, South China Sea, Indonesian archipelago

There were four incidents recorded in January: an armed robbery on a bulk carrier at anchor off Samarinda and three failed boardings involving bulk carriers in transit in the Singapore Strait. The low frequency of activity within the Singapore Strait that appears to have now come to an end was possibly due to the rainy weather brought on by the north-east monsoon, forecast to end in late January or early February.

Almost half of all reported incidents in South East Asia in the past 12 months took place in the Singapore Strait. Following an incident-free period of six weeks, boardings returned on 25 January. While these generally pose a minimal threat to the crew, incidents can involve armed perpetrators. As the borders of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore intersect in the Singapore Strait, perpetrators seem to take advantage of jurisdictional challenges, improving their ability to escape.



*Number of maritime security incidents in the Singapore and Malacca Straits per month in 2019, 2020 and 2021 to date (Source: Risk Intelligence System)*

There have been 47 incidents in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore over the last 12 months. Of these, 39 occurred in the Singapore Strait and eight in the Malacca Strait. Of the total, 24 involved bulk carriers, 14 involved tankers, four involved barges and other craft in tow, one involved a container ship, and four involved other vessel types. Overall, more than 75% of all incidents targeted vessels underway, all in the Singapore Strait, the others took place at anchorages (nine incidents) and at berth (two incidents).

Barges underway are tempting targets because of easy accessibility and minimal risk of confrontation with crew. However, such boardings are far outnumbered by boardings of tankers and bulk carriers. As coastal authorities have increased the number of patrols, response times are generally quick when incidents are reported. In these cases, even though perpetrators are often armed with knives or machetes, it is unlikely that they will attack the crew.

For the wider region, incidents typically encountered by vessels are non-violent boardings at anchorages. Perpetrators usually board vessels undetected at night and target supplies and engine spares while avoiding the crew. Such incidents have taken place in the Sunda Strait at the Anyer, Cigading, and Ciwandan anchorages, along the Straits of Malacca and Singapore off Batam, Belawan and Dumai, at anchorages off Samarinda, the Taboneo anchorage off Banjarmasin, and off Tanjung Priok, as well as anchorages at some ports in the Philippines (namely Batangas, Manila and General Santos) and the Vietnamese ports of Cam Pha and Vung Tau. Although less frequent, boardings can also take place at berth as seen at Batangas, Balikpapan, Batam, Belawan and Dumai.

Moreover, incidents at Dumai in December, at Batangas in August, and others elsewhere in January and May are reminders that crew members may suffer injuries when perpetrators are confronted. Crew alertness is generally an important deterrent. Incidents involving violence have also taken place in the southern South China Sea off the Malaysian peninsula, north of the eastern Singapore Strait, and farther south in the western Natuna Sea off Pulau Mapur, Indonesia.

No hijackings for cargo theft have taken place in South East Asia since 2017. In 2018, there was only one reported incident which had the markings of a product theft attempt that involved the LEE BO off Mersing, Malaysia in the South China Sea. The immediate arrest of the gang leaders behind the incident in Batam might have stymied intentions of Indonesian groups to conduct such operations.

### Forecast

In the coming month, the threat of boardings of anchored vessels and vessels underway for the purposes of theft or armed robbery is elevated. Higher threat locations include the Belawan, Batangas, Dumai and Manila anchorages, the Merak, Panjang and other anchorages along and near the Sunda Strait, the Singapore Strait, the southern South China Sea off the Malaysian peninsula, as well as the Natuna Sea off Pulau Mapur, Indonesia.

The threat that locally trading tankers will be hijacked for product theft is moderate. The frequency of these operations is very limited due to effective law enforcement. The threat that internationally-flagged tankers will be hijacked for cargo theft is low; these incidents generally involve tankers trading and registered in the region.

### Sulu / Celebes Seas

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), estimated to be left with less than 100 members, persists despite continued pressure from the Philippines military, which has killed and captured dozens of ASG militants in 2020, while many others have surrendered. Although the ASG has sporadically kidnapped fishermen, there have been no successful kidnappings from merchant vessels in this area since the SUPER SHUTTLE TUG 1 attack in March 2017. Similarly, ASG terrorist acts have not targeted commercial maritime assets and there are no indications that attacks against such targets will be carried out in the coming months.

The only seafarers currently held by the ASG are four fishermen captured in January 2020. It is unlikely that international merchant vessels operating in this area will be targeted for kidnap-for-ransom operations, particularly within the designated transit corridors. It is likely that small craft, fishing vessels and local merchant vessels operating in the vicinity of the Sulu archipelago from the southern Sulu Sea area off Sabah to Zamboanga will be targeted.

Overall, small vessels remain vulnerable. Continued military and law enforcement operations in the Philippines aimed at neutralising the ASG have also led to the rescue and release of abducted seafarers. Kidnap-for-ransom activity has been trending downward following military actions by Philippines security forces against the ASG, the main group involved in such attacks in this area. In 2019, anti-ASG operations intensified, resulting in the deaths of ASG leaders and militants in addition to the loss of speedboats, weapons and strongholds in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. These operations continued in recent months.

Regular multinational naval exercises have also contributed to the suppression of kidnap-for-ransom operations, as have maritime patrols involving Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Military and police actions have been intensified elsewhere, maintaining pressure on the ASG and other militants in Sabah (Malaysia) and North Kalimantan (Indonesia). Other factors include the establishment of a coastguard station on Tawi Tawi, the Philippines' programmes to reintegrate surrendering ASG militants, and Indonesia's land patrol training exercises.

The Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) has a significant presence in the Sibutu Channel and transiting merchant vessels should expect to see PCG vessels and naval patrols. The PCG has also deployed escort boats with sea marshals to protect domestic merchant vessels in the Moro Gulf.

### Forecast

Small craft, tugs, local merchant vessels and in particular fishing trawlers remain most vulnerable to ASG operations, whilst international merchant vessels could be targeted. It remains to be seen whether the ASG or its affiliates maintain the capability to attack merchant ships. However, with an estimated force of almost 100 ASG militants persisting, vigilance remains important.

The overall threat that international merchant vessels in the Sulu and Celebes Seas will be targeted for kidnap-for-ransom attacks is assessed as moderate, particularly for vessels within the designated transit corridors. The threat level for small craft, fishing vessels and local merchant vessels in the vicinity of the Sulu archipelago from the southern Sulu Sea area off Sabah to Zamboanga to be targeted for kidnap-for-ransom operations is elevated.

## Definitions

### Threat levels

The threat levels used in this report are as per the Risk Intelligence System and are assessed based on the likelihood and consequence of a particular threat type occurring. The threat levels are as follows:

- Low: Negligible impact on operations in the coming month due to the unlikely occurrence of threat-related activity.
- Moderate: Some potential for minimal impact on operations in the coming month due to occurrence of low- level threat-related activity.
- Elevated: Moderate impact on operations in the coming month is possible with some threat-related activity expected to occur.
- High: Potential for major impact on operations in the coming month due to the occurrence of significant threat- related activity.
- Severe: Potential for severe impact on operations in the coming month as significant threat-related activity is ongoing or expected to occur.

### Incident types

The report covers the threats of piracy and armed robbery at sea in various forms but does not include other threats to merchant vessel operations such as stowaways or smuggling. All possible contingencies cannot be covered by any assessment and this report only includes an assessment of the threat for merchant vessels in general and not specific vessel types.