

## Lessons to be learnt from pirate attacks off West Africa in 2018

*By admin On January 14, 2019 January 13, 2019 In Cargo, Insurance Marine News, Keep, Marine Hull, Marine Liability, Political Risk, Credit & Finance*

Nigerian pirate action groups (PAGs) kidnapped 82 seafarers in 2018, as well as hijacking nine vessels for use as motherships or to perform cargo theft. Navigate Response noted that the PAGs had operated in waters stretching from Ghana in the west to the Congo in the south, well beyond their camps in the Niger Delta. It said that there were five lessons that ship operators, managers and the insurance community should learn from recent attacks in West Africa.

### **1) Nigerian pirates were geographically unpredictable**

The October 29th piracy attacks off the Congo demonstrated that the geographical scope of Nigerian piracy was difficult to define.

Since 2012 Nigerian pirates had attacked vessels as far west as Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) and as far south as Luanda (Angola). All of these far reaching attacks had been perpetrated by Nigerian 'petro-pirates', an industry term for pirates whose modus operandi is to hijack tankers for cargo theft. Nigerian pirate groups engaged purely in kidnap for ransom tended to operate firmly within the Nigerian EEZ, whereas petro-pirates were geographically erratic.

Hijack for oil theft re-emerged as a threat in 2018 in tandem with rising oil prices, and the geographical scope of Nigerian piracy expanded. In 2018 there were attacks off Ghana, Benin, Cameroon, Gabon and the Congo.

### **2) No vessel type was necessarily safe**

EOS Risk said that a commonly held misconception was that only tankers were at risk from the extended grasp of Nigerian pirate gangs, but recent attacks demonstrated the contrary. While it was true that petro-pirates' primary target was laden tankers, these pirates had shown "on countless occasions" that they would attack any vessel type opportunistically and resort to the ransoming of a crew or vessel as and when required. There were several incidents in 2018 where Nigerian pirates kidnapped seafarers from vessels outside of the Nigerian EEZ, and even cases where they temporarily hijacked non-oil bearing vessels, such as fishing vessels, reefers, OSVs and container ships. Risk assessments needed to focus on vessel variables such as freeboard, speed, routing and BMP compliance rather than assumptions based on an incomplete understanding of the West African piracy threat, said EOS Risk

### **3) Regional armed solutions to combat West African piracy were not yet properly employed or understood**

Following the recent hijackings off the Congo, a number of shipping companies began making enquiries about embarking armed guards off Pointe-Noire for upcoming voyages there. EOS Risk said that this raised two issues.

Firstly, neither naval nor private armed guard solutions were available in Congolese waters. Unlike in the Indian Ocean, there was no regionally implementable armed security solution to combat the threat of piracy in West Africa. Solutions that did exist involved the subcontracting of a states' naval personnel either directly onto a merchant vessel or onto a privately contracted escort vessel. These services were only available within the confines of each states' sovereign waters (EEZs) and were sometimes provided in regulatory grey areas. Not all West African states provided such services.

Secondly, even when armed solutions were available in West Africa, they needed to be considered based on numerous variables and should not be a knee-jerk reaction. Just because piracy attacks had been reported in a given area did not necessarily mean that armed mitigation was proportionate. Only in very particular areas, such as the Brass-Kwa Ibo axis off Nigeria, did EOS recommend an almost blanket application of armed security measures.

### **4) The inability to track hijacked vessels was impeding post-incident response**

When pirates hijacked a vessel they typically disabled ship positioning systems, such as AIS, and prevented the crew's access to communications systems. Locating the hijacked vessel was left to naval patrols and other merchant vessels acting like a maritime Neighbourhood Watch.

In two recent cases, vessels were hijacked for several days without a firm idea of their location, impeding any hopes of a regional naval response. EOS Risk said that there was an argument that letting an incident play out naturally was the safest option, lest there was a botched naval boarding or hostage situation in which seafarers were hurt or killed.

That said, improved visibility on hijacked vessels would never be a bad thing in and of itself. From the shipping and insurance industry's perspectives, hidden, independent tracking devices were a solution to this issue and could prevent a hijacked vessel, its crew and cargo from falling off the map.

### **5) Complex maritime piracy cases required expert support for successful resolution**

Recent piracy activity, involving hybrid hijack and kidnap scenarios, demonstrated just how complicated and fast moving West African piracy cases could be. EOS Risk said that the effective response to such complex incidents was key to preventing further harm to the hostages, vessel, cargo or company reputation.

EOS Risk provides a full spectrum of integrated security solutions for the merchant shipping, offshore, cruise and superyacht sectors, including armed and unarmed security,

intelligence and advisory support, tracking, training, project security management, asset hardening and Lloyd's of London retained marine kidnap and hijack response services.  
<https://www.navigateresponse.com/newsletter/response-newsletter-december-2018/five-lessons-we-can-learn-from-recent-nigerian-pirate-attacks-in-west-africa>

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