

Piracy troubles ease in Gulf of Guinea

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Low-level near-coast crimes on ships in south-east Asian waters have become a more likely threat to ship than major hostage-taking attacks in the Gulf of Guinea off the west coast of Africa, according to the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB)'s quarterly piracy and armed robbery report.

While there was a nearly flat top-line number for maritime piracy/armed robbery incidents, (37 recorded in the first three months of 2022 compared to 38 incidents over the same period last year), 41% occurred in Southeast Asian waters, particularly in the Singapore Straits, with only seven incidents reported in the first three months of the year in the Gulf of Guinea – down by roughly half.

IMB said that concerted and sustained efforts to eliminate piracy in the volatile waters of the Gulf of Guinea were proving to be successful, with no reported crew kidnappings during the quarter, compared to 40 crew kidnappings in the same period in 2021.

“Sustained efforts are however needed to ensure the continued safety of seafarers in the West African region that remains dangerous as evidenced by the hijack of a product tanker off the coast of Ivory Coast on January 24th, during which all 17 crew were taken hostage. Reports of armed robberies have also been received within the anchorage waters of Angola and Ghana,” said IMB.

On April 3rd there was an attack on the Panamax bulk carrier Arch Gabriel, which was boarded by pirates 260nm off the coast of Ghana. Italian Navy warship Luigi Rizzo and its helicopter intervened, saving the crew and enabling the vessel to proceed to a safe port under escort.

Worldwide, this was the first quarter since 2010 where no crew kidnappings were reported.

While the Singapore Strait was termed “a dangerous sea route for commercial shipping”, accounting for almost 30% of all incidents during the period, all of these were considered to have been low-level opportunistic crimes, and to be armed robbery rather than piracy.

Of the 11 reported armed robbery incidents on ships in these waters, two crew were threatened and one was taken hostage for the duration of the incident. Michael Howlett, IMB Director, said that “perpetrators are armed in most incidents, putting crews at risk even in the low-level opportunistic incidents. Coastal states are urged to increase efforts to identify and apprehend these criminals to enhance maritime security and facilitate safer trade across these important and strategic waterways”.

Four incidents were reported off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia, compared to two over the same period in 2021.

The IMB said that Peruvian waters were becoming an area of concern, with incidents in Peruvian ports accounting for 27% of global incidents, with 10 reported events.

Three incidents were reported in Macapa anchorage off the coast of Brazil. In two of the incidents, seafarers were either threatened or taken hostage, threatened with knives, tied up with their face covered with burlap for the duration of the incident.