

Global piracy falls to lowest level in decades

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Global piracy and armed robbery incidents in the maritime industry have fallen to their lowest levels in three decades, according to a report from the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) covering the first nine months of 2022.

The decline has continued patterns that have emerged over the past two years. IMB warned against complacency and called for regional and international players to continue their work in preventing piracy incidents.

The organization's latest global quarterly piracy report detailed 90 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the first nine months of 2022, the lowest levels since 1992. Reported incidents were down 7% year on year.

The number of vessels boarded remained constant year on year, at 85. This year the attacks were successful in gaining access to the vessels in 95% of reported incidents.

Among the 90 incidents there were 85 vessels boarded, four attempted attacks, and one vessel hijacked. In many of the cases vessels were either at anchor or steaming when boarded. Nearly all the incidents took place under cover of darkness.

Piracy threats were nearly equal between ships at anchor (40 incidents) versus those underway (37 incidents). The fewest number of reports (13) came from berthed vessels.

Bulkers were the most vulnerable type of vessel, suffering nearly half of the reported attacks (40) this year. There were 23 reported attacks on tankers. Containerships suffered just 10 attacks.

ICCIMB said that local initiatives and an increased international presence helped the continuing decline of reports from the Gulf of Guinea – a trend that has now been underway for two years. Just 13 reports have been received from the Gulf of Guinea so far this year, down from 27 in 2021 and 46 in 2020.

Michael Howlett, IMB Director said that “we commend the efforts of the coastal authorities of the Gulf of Guinea. While the decline is welcome, sustained and continued efforts of the coastal authorities and the presence of the international navies remain essential to safeguard seafarers and long-term regional and international shipping and trade”.

Non-pirate incidents in the Singapore Straits rose by nearly 50% year on year during the first nine months of 2022, with 31 vessels being boarded, up from 21 during the same period last year. The vessels, including several large vessels and tankers, were underway when they were boarded.

In most cases the boarders stole ship stores and property and fled as soon as they were detected. Howlett said that “while these are so far considered low-level opportunistic crimes, with no crew kidnappings or vessel hijackings, littoral states are requested to increase patrols in what is a strategically important waterway for the shipping industry and for global trade”. He said that the IMB believed that the Singapore Strait incidents suffered from a degree of underreporting.

The IMB reported an overall decline in attacks against vessels at the anchorage in Callao, Peru, where incident reports were down by nearly half, although it also noted five attacks at the Macapa Anchorage in Brazil, including one on August 30 where six security and duty crew were assaulted and tied up aboard a bulk carrier.