

Nigerian pirates return to oil theft after interregnum of kidnappings

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Until a few years ago the main concern for carriers passing through the Gulf of Guinea was cargo theft. Then, however, the domestic kidnapping business was well-established within the Nigerian Delta spread outwards to sea. The business model was transferred to the kidnapping of crew, and it followed a fairly well-established pattern of kidnap, outrageous demand, negotiation, much-lower cash payment, and release after about two months.

However, the implementation of cooperation between the Gulf of Guinea states and the introduction of international navy vessels for ship protection has served to make the international kidnapping model less attractive. A significantly high risk of arrest or death made the model less attractive to both the organizers and the implementers.

As a result, Nigeria's pirates look to be switching back to oil theft, as well as illegal fishing.

The UN Security Council said that the significant drop in piracy kidnapping incidents in the Gulf of Guinea in recent times meant that stronger action was required to address the re-emergence of other types of illegal activity in the area.

Martha Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in the UN, who presented the Secretary-General's latest report on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, said that "criminal groups have not gone away, but have transitioned to other activities".

Pobee said that the shifting dynamics would require greater response, not only from countries in the region, but also from international partners.

"Pirate groups are adapting to changing dynamics both at sea and in coastal areas. In this respect, the recent decrease in instances of piracy may in part be attributable to the shift by criminal networks to other forms of maritime and riverine crime, such as oil bunkering and theft, which they likely view as both less risky and more profitable," she said.

In recent months Nigeria has experienced a surge in large-scale oil theft and pipeline vandalism, the impact of which has seen production in the months of August and September falling to below 1m bpd.

A Nigerian investigation by the senate estimated that the thefts had resulted in Nigeria losing more than \$2 billion during the first eight months of this year.