

Piracy Resurfaces - Recent Hijackings Escalate Maritime Threats in the Indian Ocean

The Gulf of Aden, Somalia, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean have recently witnessed a surge in maritime security concerns, particularly in the form of piracy and hijacking incidents. In a stark turn of events, Somali pirates executed the first successful hijacking in six years on 14 December 2023 off the coast of Bossaso, Somalia.

A series of alarming hijacking incidents unfolded in December 2023 and early January 2024, underscoring the escalating regional piracy threat. These incidents include the hijacking of a bulk carrier, a potential pirate group operating in the Somali Basin, the hijacking of five dhows near the coastline of Somalia, and the recent boarding of another bulk carrier off the coast of Eyl, Somalia.

In the past, the issue of Somali piracy has historically persisted across an extensive region, spanning the southern Red Sea, Bab El Mandeb, the Gulf of Aden (including Yemen), the northern coast of Somalia, the Arabian Sea (near Oman), the Gulf of Oman, the eastern and southern shores of Somalia, as well as regions off the coasts of Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mozambique, the Indian Ocean, and the western and southern shores of India and the west Maldives. Somali pirates commonly utilise automatic weapons, RPGs, and skiffs that are launched from mother vessels, which are hijacked fishing vessels or dhows.

Ships operating and navigating through the high-risk waters of the Indian Ocean are strongly advised to implement a comprehensive set of enhance maritime security measures and strictly adhere to the latest Best Management Practices ([BMP5](#)).

Additionally, shipmasters and owners are urged to prioritise vessel hardening measures before entering these high-risk areas, fortifying their vessels against potential threats. Maintaining continuous vigilance is crucial, necessitating a 24-hour visual and radar watch during transits to detect approaching boats early, facilitating informed decision-making.

Ensuring the ship's citadel is thoroughly prepared, stocked with essential provisions and equipment, and adequately fortified is essential to provide a secure shelter for the crew for a prolonged time in case of a threat or emergency.

Crews onboard must undergo training to effectively distinguish between potential threats and local fishermen, mitigating the risk of misunderstandings and potential confrontations as they may aggressively approach vessels to protect their nets, and some may be armed to safeguard their catch.

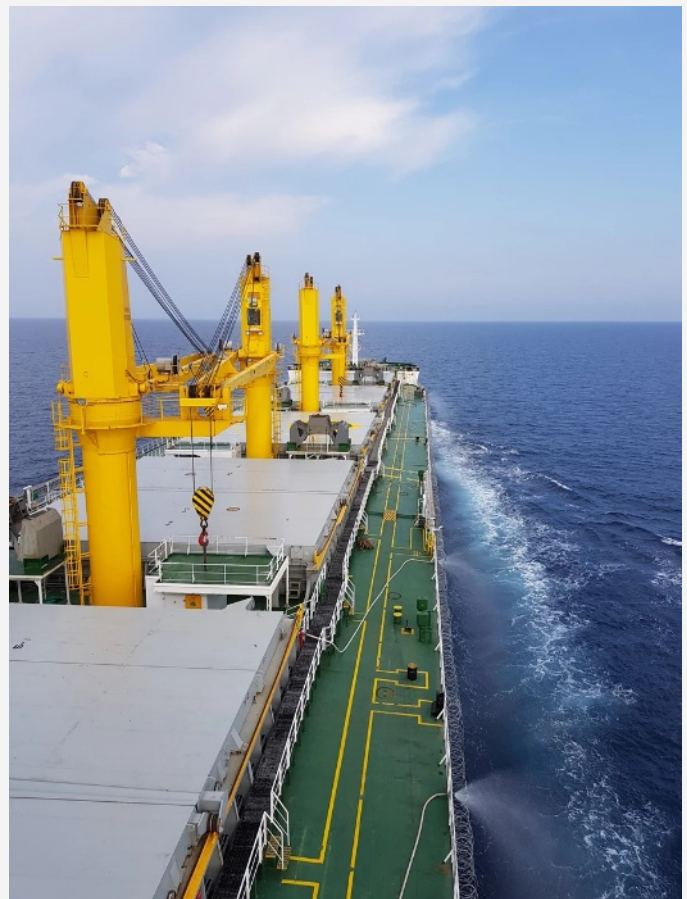
Furthermore, in a collaborative effort to combat piracy, vessels are encouraged to promptly report any suspicious activities to the relevant reporting centres, contributing to the collective endeavour to address and mitigate the evolving piracy threat in the region.

Pirates always look for easier and more accessible ships to attack, so one of the most effective ways for a ship to protect itself is to make it look harder and more challenging to attack than the others around it.

Having visible security rounds, securing and locking all doors and hatches effectively, ensuring the ship is well-lit without obstructing the navigation lights, and posting extra lookouts on the bridge wings are well-established methods to promote this perception.

Another measure ships can take is installing surveillance equipment such as CCTV cameras and motion sensors. These systems can help detect suspicious activity and alert crew members to potential threats. They can also provide valuable evidence in the event of an attack, which can assist in identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators.

However, it is essential to note that surveillance equipment should not be relied on as the sole means of protection, and ships should still employ other anti-piracy measures.



Ships must also follow best practices for safe navigation to reduce the risk of piracy incidents. These include keeping a safe distance from suspicious vessels, avoiding sailing close to known piracy hotspots, and maintaining communication with local authorities and other ships within the area.

Additionally, ships can employ non-lethal measures such as water cannons and loudspeakers to deter potential attackers and buy time for the crew to respond and get to the designated safe area within the ship.

Lastly, crew members should undergo training in anti-piracy tactics, participate in drills and exercises, establish communication protocols, and understand their roles and responsibilities in the event of an attack. Training should also cover identifying and reporting potential threats to relevant authorities.

The recent incidents in the high-risk waters of the Indian Ocean should be differentiated from the attacks occurring in areas such as Yemen, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and Bab El Mandeb, as they are unrelated to piracy. Consequently, ships navigating through these waters can successfully mitigate the likelihood of such incidents by implementing well-established anti-piracy measures.

Members requiring further guidance should contact the Loss Prevention Department.

Resource links - Red Sea, Gulf Of Aden, Somali Basin, Arabian Sea:

- EUNAVFOR MSCHOA - Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa
- UKMTO - UK Maritime Trade Operations
- CMF - Combined Maritime Forces
- ICC Commercial Crime Services
- [ADMIRALTY Maritime Security Chart Q6099 - Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea](#)