

Terrorism's Effect on Maritime Shipping

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Abstract

In the first years of the nineteenth century, Mediterranean pirates, with the support of the Barbary States of northern Africa, would capture merchant ships, terrorize their crews, and hold the ship for ransom. In response, the United States launched the Barbary wars, the first successful effort by the young republic to protect its citizens from a ruthless, unconventional enemy by fighting a protracted struggle overseas. Today, the international community fails to realize that sea piracy still has not been eliminated. Not only has piracy never been eradicated, but the number of pirate attacks on ships off the coasts of Somalia, Nigeria, and the Malaccan straights has tripled in the past decade elevating piracy to its highest level in history. And contrary to the stereotype, intelligence has revealed that today's pirates are often trained fighters aboard speedboats equipped with satellite phones and global positioning systems and armed with automatic weapons, antitank missiles, and grenades. Many of these so called pirates have ties to their regional terrorist organizations.

Most disturbingly, the scourges of piracy and terrorism are increasingly intertwined: piracy on the high seas is becoming a key tactic of terrorist groups. Unlike the pirates of old, whose sole objective was quick commercial gain, many of today's pirates are maritime terrorists with an ideological bent and a broad political agenda. This nexus of piracy and terrorism is especially dangerous for energy markets: most of the world's oil and gas is shipped through the world's most piracy-infested waters. As the world's need for oil, natural gas and goods swell in today's economy, the need for intelligence concerning the pirates and their home base of operations becomes ever inerrably important. Terrorist incidents have an adverse impact on Maritime shipping throughout the world.

Maritime Terrorism

Terrorism on the other hand is relatively easy and simple to define. In the context terrorism can be defined as:

[the] unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against people or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives¹.

Many Western Intelligence Agencies have reported that certain Islamic terrorist groups have declared that they are intent on bringing down the economies of the West in order to further their own religious aims. These statements infer that these terrorist groups will utilize piracy as an instrument to damage the World economy. The *raison d'être* for these attacks are to inflict economic damage. The result is that it is easy to detect the indirect benefit piracy can have to terrorist groups. Valuable shipping lanes such as the Suez, Strait of Hormuz, or the Malacca Strait, could be targeted by Terrorist groups by sinking a vessel in a maritime chokepoint, and although terrorist groups would undoubtedly claim responsibility, their method of attack would probably be similar to that of a pirate attack. Western Intelligent Services still do not have any evidence to suggest that terrorists are actively pursuing piracy as a deliberate method of conflict. There is no evidence that the attack on the USS Cole and MV Limburg was an act of piracy but

¹ Terrorism definition is from the United States Department of Defense. There are many other agency definitions however the DOD encompasses all the points.

rather the results of the following investigation indicate that it was a terrorist attack. These were specific terrorist attacks aimed at specific targets, both military and economic (Homeland Security, 2005).

In 1985, the Palestine Liberation Front's (PLF) seized the passenger ship Achille Lauro, and the taking of its crew (331), and passengers (120 of 754), as hostages. The initial aim of the hijacking was to seize the vessel and use it to conduct a terrorist attack on an Israeli oil terminal in the port of Ashdod, but when that attack was thwarted the hijackers, pirates, or terrorists (using whichever terminology you wish) opted to demand the release of Palestinian prisoners. The aftermath of the Achille Lauro incident saw a significant downturn in the cruise liner industry, with a resulting economic effect on the countries frequented by cruise ships. That the incident has not been repeated, owes much to luck rather than increased security such as the utilization of the Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) defensive weapons. The PLF did not intend for any economic downturn to occur, but as previously said, certain terrorist groups could actively seek to put pressure on some fragile Western economies. An attack now, some twenty years after this event, could not only have an adverse effect on the cruise industry, but could also contribute to any downturn in the global economy. It could be argued that the attack on the Achille Lauro was not an act of piracy, and was purely an act of terrorism, and the perpetrators had a political motive, rather than a private agenda.

Is there a Nexus Between Piracy and Terrorism?

Terrorist groups could see their aims furthered by pirate activity, and some have used techniques similar to those that have been used by pirates during attacks. However, the previously mentioned terrorist attacks have been quite specific in their targets, whereas pirate

attacks appear to be random and uncoordinated. It is extremely doubtful that terrorist groups would form an alliance with any external groups including one with pirates. Terrorist groups are very closely knit, suspicious of outsiders or those who are unknown to them, especially if they do not share the same ideology. It is probable that terrorists would conduct their own piracy campaign rather than using any criminal group. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is based in the Southern Philippines, has been linked to hijacking and kidnapping for ransom, including raids from the sea on holiday resorts. International reporting has indicated that the line between piracy and terrorism is narrow and that the group is believed to have moved from being an Islamic separatist group to a criminal enterprise. If that is the case, then the group is moving from political ends to private ends in its criminal enterprises. This does not suggest that the ASG has moved away from terrorism. ASG claimed responsibility for the attack on the Superferry 14 in early 2004. This suggests that the group will continue to engage in acts of terrorism, while engaging in piracy to raise funds to continue to conduct a campaign of terror.

Another Southeast Asian group that has been linked to piracy is the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka; GAM). GAM seeks the removal of Indonesian government structures and forces from the Aceh region of Sumatra. The Indonesian and Malaysian authorities have linked this group to acts of piracy in order to raise funds. The main maritime operating area for this group is within the confines of the Malacca Straits, and it is probable that they are involved in a vast number of the incidents that are reported in the region. It has not been possible to assess the full extent of this activity, as GAM has denied some of the attacks attributed to it. It has been reported that pirate groups in the region have copied GAM's uniforms and tactics, leading to an inflated number of attacks being attributed to GAM. This is supported by reports that GAM funding has mainly come from other sources (International, 2006).

In another piracy hotspot, the Horn of Africa, the indigenous terrorist organization Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) may be involved in piracy. AIAI is a very loose arrangement of individuals, whose tribal loyalties, and shifting external alliances, produce a wide spectrum of terrorist and criminal acts, from banditry to piracy and sea-jacking. AIAI seeks to establish an Islamic nation in the Horn of Africa (HOA). There have been reports that suggest that they have engaged in acts of piracy in order to raise funds. The majority of reported incidents in the HOA, however, have been conducted by armed gangs, whose loyalty is clan based rather than linked specifically to AIAI. These gangs are heavily armed and, in the true sense of the word, pirates, not terrorists. In recent months, piracy in the HOA has escalated: ships attempting to bring food aid into the region have been taken, along with their crews, and have been held hostage by armed militia — sometimes for several weeks, even months. In order to reduce the likelihood of an attack, and under the instructions from the IMO, ships not bound for HOA destinations have been navigating further and further from the coast. Though this may prevent attacks in coastal waters, it may subsequently drive the pirates farther out to sea as well (Luft & Korin, 2004).

In West Africa the Ijaw militias are conducting a civil war and are also involved in intertribal conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Over the last two years, there have been increasing reports of piracy in the region, including attacks against oil-support vessels and off shore installations. This has helped turning the region into one of the most reported in terms of piracy, second only to the Malacca Straits. The attacks have been accompanied by theft and kidnapping for ransom, and those involved have become more violent in their methods. Because of the level of corruption in the region, the amount of money that the oil industry is making has enabled criminal gangs to move into what was hitherto thought to be a political conflict against the government. Those attacks attributable to the Ijaw militia are possibly being committed in

order to raise funds in order to support their continued attacks on the Nigerian government and the country's oil industry. However, it is likely that many of the attacks reported are criminal, and motivated much by political corruption. The remainder of the incidents is acts of petty theft and have little to do with piracy in its general description.

There has been much speculation about the role that Al Qaeda have had in the incidents of piracy and terrorism. In the immediate post-9/11 analysis of the maritime domain, government agencies reporting, coupled with a plethora of press reports, identified Al Qaeda (AQ) as having a fleet of ships that were ready to attack ships and ports throughout the world. The organization undoubtedly has links to the maritime industry, but that is through ship owners and operators who are sympathetic to Islamic rather than terrorist aims. There is little evidence to suggest that a fleet of hundreds of vessels and phantom ships is anything more than speculative. Evidence in the trial of Wadi Al Hage, who was convicted of involvement in the embassy bombings in East Africa, identified that a vessel had been used for logistics purposes, MV Sky 1. Intelligence agencies targeted the holding companies and vessels linked to them, which provided a framework of suspect vessels considered to be linked to terrorism. In the years that followed, none of these suspect vessels have been linked to terrorist acts, and just a few have been linked to illicit activity such as human trafficking and contraband smuggling. Al Qaeda operators have obviously been linked to the bombings of the USS Cole and MV Limburg, but they have to date, never been linked to any act of piracy (Johnston, 2005).

There are two terrorist organizations who have known maritime links, and those are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and the Lebanese group Hezbollah. LTTE has an established maritime arm, the "Sea Tigers," which has been linked to acts of piracy against

foreign-owned commercial vessels. It has recently been reported that LTTE no longer requires funding from illegal activities such as piracy, but there remains a determination to conduct maritime terrorist acts. Hezbollah are known to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean, but they are not linked to piracy and they have not been involved in any terrorist attacks on Western shipping interests in the region. There is no doubt that they have the capacity and the expertise to conduct such terrorist attacks and may well be predisposed to do so (Molyneux, 2003).

Attacks in South East Asia are almost always attributed to terrorism, rather than piracy. In March 2003, the MV Dewi Madrim, a chemical tanker was boarded by pirates while underway, and it has been speculated by many that these pirates were in fact terrorists. Reports were circulated that suggested that they had not been after “booty,” but had boarded the vessel to gain experience in ship handling, prior to conducting an attack using a similar vessel against U.S. naval vessels in port. There were also reports that suggested that certain members of the crew were taken as hostages in order to teach the terrorists ship-handling techniques. In the aftermath there has been much speculation by alleged maritime-security experts that this was a terrorist attack, but there is little evidence to support this view. It was probable that the pirates had sufficient skill to steer the ship anyway, and had reduced speed to a minimum in order to maintain steerage way, and to enable the pirates’ own vessel to stay alongside. The pirates had left the vessel after approximately one hour taking cash, personal property, and ship’s equipment with them, when they absconded (Luft & Korin, 2004).

Trends

The total number of incidents reported in 2007 indicates an overall increase in the number of attacks as compared to 2006. Compared to 2006, there has been an approximate

10% increase in the total number of attacks reported to the Piracy Reporting Centre. The significant increase in the incidents can be directly related to the increase in the reported incidents in Nigeria (42) and Somalia (31) as compared to the attacks reported in Nigeria (12) and Somalia (10) in 2006. This rise can be attributed to the increased ability of the pirates to attack vessels further out at sea as well as being better armed, organized and last but not least the lack of proper law enforcement.

Nigeria has recorded the second highest reported incidents in 2007 with the highest number of vessels boarded (35). The attacks and kidnappings are all being justified under the umbrella of political change. From the shipping industries point of view this is nothing short of being criminal. Somalia has seen the highest hostages taken (154) in eleven hijackings. The recent intervention of the international community and the coalition forces may prove to be the only way forward in curbing the enthusiasm of the pirates who have until now shown complete disregard for the law. On the brighter side, there has been a steady decrease in incidents reported in SE Asia (See Figure 1).

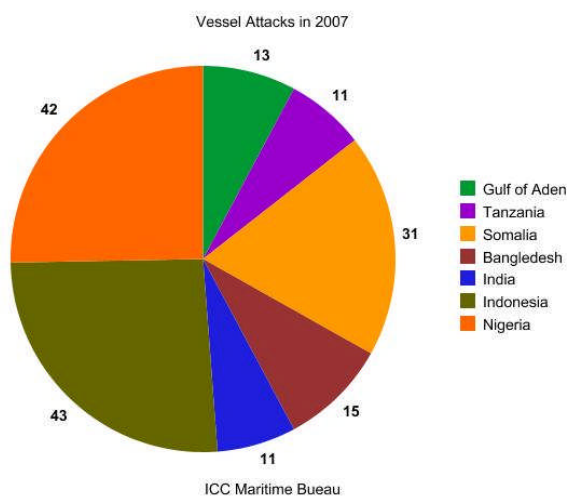


Figure 1

Over the last five years, there has been a significant drop in the incidents reported in Indonesia, where in 2003, there were 121 reported incidents and in 2007, there have been only 43 incidents. Malaysia, Malacca Straits and Singapore Straits have also seen steady decrease in reported incidents. This welcomed reduction has been the cumulative result of increased vigilance and patrolling by the littoral states and the continued precautionary measures on board the ships. Authorities in Bangladesh have to be commended for their efforts in reducing the reported incidents from 47 in 2006 to only 15 in 2007. This should however, not be taken as an indication that the threat has ceased to exist. Masters are advised to maintain strict anti piracy watches especially while approaching the anchorage and while anchored. The nature of the attacks indicates that the pirates / robbers boarding the vessels are better armed and they have shown no hesitation in assaulting and injuring the crew. The total incidents in which guns have been used are 72. The total number of crew assaulted and injured is 64 as compared to 17 in 2006 (Morgan O'Rourke, 2005).

This rise in the incidents indicates a breakdown in the capability of certain countries to address the problem. The IMB strongly believes that unless continuous worldwide pressure on the law enforcement agencies and governments is exerted the governments will not give this crime the priority that it requires. Piracy not only affects the crew on board the vessels, traders and governments but also, at the grass route the common man who may probably be deprived lot of much needed aid being shipped.

The IMB therefore strongly urges all ship Masters, Owners, shipping industry and the respective flag states to report all incidents of actual and attempted piracy and armed robbery to the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre. These reports are extremely important to indicate to the law enforcement agencies and the governments the severity of the problem in their waters hence urging them to take appropriate action. The IMB is aware that a number of incidents go unreported each year due to various problems (Morgan, 2007).

Ship Board Defenses

Piracy is a crime and is not something that can be eradicated by the private sector. It will take the strong determination of all nations to work together and assist each state to bring a close to this horrific crime spree. The private sector may help prevent piracy in some of the following ways:

CONVOYS:

As in the days of the North Atlantic in World War II, the merchant marine vessel had to defend itself from German U-boats by the use of convoys. Safety in numbers is a key aspect of

anti-piracy practice. Vessels traveling in a convoy present as a much harder target for pirate vessels. One problem with this solution is that convoying is costly to smaller in the terms of burning extra fuel to maintain uniform speed.

VARIANCE:

As with the avoidance of crime, it is important to vary routines as much as possible to avoid piracy. Unfortunately, many vessels are unable to vary their schedule due to strict deadlines or lack of feasible alternative routes. However, even the appearance of variance may be beneficial should your vessel be the target of a planned attack. One example would be the removal of exact time and date information from online cruise line itineraries, easily accessible by all Internet users (Turbiville, 2005).

SHIFTING CARGO:

Some companies have kept routes but have either cut down on the number of runs or have changed the cargo aboard their vessels to items less attractive to pirates. In Nigeria, one bank with branches on islands only accessible by boat had experienced a rash of cash-in-transit robberies on the waterways between their main location and their branches. Bank management decided to maintain only electronic transactions at their branches, allowing them to stay in business; electronic transactions meant no cash was necessary, and all cash-in-transit deliveries were rendered obsolete.

OFFENSIVE MEASURES

Many vessels are now equipped with various measures of combating maritime attacks that are already underway. The highest profile of these measures is currently the Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) that was deployed by the *Spirit* in November. The LRAD produces high frequency sirens that force pirates without auditory protection to retreat, and in the case of the *Spirit*, the LRAD afforded the cruise ship enough time to gain speed and outrun its assailants. The effectiveness of both devices diminishes with both distance from the ship and the use of ear protection. The use of sophisticated ear protection will significantly decrease the effectiveness of both LRAD and MRAD by blocking the frequency that would temporarily or otherwise disable any potential attacker while still enabling the attacker to hear nearby voice commands.

Inventus UAV

The Inventus UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) is a state-of-the-art reconnaissance system packaged in a highly efficient, highly stable flying wing form. Outfitted with cameras, the Inventus flies and covers a large ocean area and relays a real-time data link back to the ground station. This link provides real-time aerial surveillance and early warning of suspect or unauthorized craft movements to the coastal or law enforcement authority. Inventus is fully autonomous and can be launched and recovered even from a seagoing or patrol vessel. There are gas and electric formats and both fly in all weather conditions.

Secure-Ship :

Secure-Ship is the most recent and effective innovation in the fight against piracy. It is a non-lethal, electrifying fence surrounding the whole ship, which has been specially adapted for maritime use. The fence uses 9,000-volt pulse to deter boarding attempts. An intruder coming in contact with the fence will receive an unpleasant non-lethal shock that will result in the intruder abandoning the attempted boarding (Luft & Korin, 2004).

Conclusion

Maritime terrorism is without doubt a major problem, and reporting suggests that an attack by terrorists in the Malacca Straits, Nigeria or the Horn of Africa is inevitable. But before jumping to conclusions, is the increase in piracy linked to terrorism? There are some who would say that there is no link between the two. Piracy is not known to be linked to terrorism and vice-versa. I am certain that it is not, but there is no evidence to support this; conversely, there is no evidence to refute it either. The major Western navies are spending large sums of money in combating maritime terrorism, while piracy goes unchecked and thrives. We equip our law-enforcement agencies to combat organized crime in our cities, but do little to combat organized crime on the high seas. The sea, and the waterways that the merchant fleet use, are largely unregulated in developing countries, while in the North European maritime domain, they are relatively well administered, and the maritime industry does much of its own policing.

All the major navies and law enforcement entities need to have a specific policy on dealing with, and taking action against, pirates. Rules of Engagement should allow for vessels to

take strong and decisive action. The regional navies and law enforcement agencies should be equipped for what they need to do, and advised accordingly.

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