MARITIME PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY EVOLUTION IN 2008-2017

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Abstract: Maritime piracy and armed robbery against ships are one of the contemporary challenges to the shipping and have global impact on maritime trade and security. Following the boom of Somali piracy in 2009-2011, there has been a downward trend since 2012, resulting mostly from the international counter-piracy efforts, with reaching its lowest value for the last 20 years in 2017. However statistics show doubling the number of attacks in some other regions in the last several years accompanied by increased levels of violence. This report presents a survey of maritime piracy and armed robberies over the last ten years (2008-2017) by regions and countries, as well as by type of attacks on ships, personnel and cargo, with the purpose to outline the trends in contemporary marine crime.

Keywords: MARITIME PIRACY, MARITIME ARMED ROBBERY

1. Introduction

Maritime piracy is not a new phenomenon in the human history. With periods of peaks and relative lulls, piracy never ceased to exist. As a result of the increased activity in the beginning of 21st century, the piracy attracted considerable attention and was recognized as a modern transnational threat.

The world economy relies on the sea routes for 90% of its trade. Maritime piracy and armed robbery against ships are one of the contemporary challenges to the maritime industry and have a global impact on maritime trade and security. In addition to the economic losses, the pirate attacks also have a significant human cost for the captive sailors and their relatives.

Following the boom of Somali piracy attacks in 2009-2011, there has been a downward trend since 2012, with reaching its lowest value for the last 20 years in 2017. It is reassuring to see historically low piracy levels off Somalia and in the Indian Ocean, resulting from years of international counter-piracy efforts, however statistics show doubling number of attacks in some other regions, as well as increased levels of violence. "While pirate attacks have been on the decline off the Horn of Africa, piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea has been a cause of increasing international concern, as the attacks often involve great risk to the crew on the captured ships, whose lives are often secondary to the value of the cargo for the pirates". [1]

This report presents a survey of maritime piracy and armed robberies over the last 10 years (2008-2017) by regions, as well as by type of attacks on ships, personnel and cargo, with the purpose to outline the trends in their development in the coming years.

2. Definition and types of pirate attacks

The two sub-sets of maritime crime are armed robbery at sea, occurring within a nation's territorial sea, and piracy, which takes place in waters beyond the territorial sea. Various definitions of piracy can be found in different sources. One of the most common definitions describes piracy as the act of boarding any vessel with intent to commit theft or any other crime, and with an intent or capacity to use force in furtherance of that act. In other words piracy is an act of robbery or criminal violence at sea through illegal use of force by non-state actors known as "pirates".

According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), *piracy* is defined as any of the following acts: a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft; (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State; (b) any act

of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft; (c) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b). *Armed robbery against ships*, according to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) definition, consists of any of the following acts: (a) any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, other than an act of piracy, committed for private ends and directed against a ship or against persons or property on board such a ship, within a State's internal waters, archipelagic waters and territorial sea; (b) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described above". [2]

The term "piracy" encompasses two distinct sorts of offences: the first is robbery or hijacking, where the target of the attack is to steal a maritime vessel or its cargo; the second is kidnapping, where the vessel and crew are threatened until a ransom is paid. [3]

• *Maritime robbery* differs little from armed robbery on shore. A few men with knives can easily overpower an unarmed crew and take their belongings. Since the value of this booty is rather limited, these crimes are opportunistic, occurring when the vessel is at port or if the pirates' plans for a bigger venture go wrong. If hostages are taken, it is to ensure a clean escape, not to extort ransom.

• *Hijacking* is an attack intended to steal the vessel or the cargo. Such offence is a profitable, but in general difficult operation. The crew of the target vessel, rather than being the object of the attack, is simply an impediment, to be offloaded as quickly as possible. As a result, many of these attacks involve violence as the pirates need unobstructed withdrawal to repaint the abducted ship or unload the cargo. Finally, there must be a nearby market for either second-hand ships or cargo of questionable provenance.

• *Kidnapping* for ransom is usually the most profitable, but very difficult to carry off successfully. It requires intelligence to locate target vessels far out at sea; heavy armament, to subdue the vessel and deter rescue; long-term commitment and shore support, to weather the protracted negotiation process; money laundering, to allow the ransom (in international currency) to be digested. [3]

The incidents categorization in accordance to the effect on crew, vessel and cargo, proposed by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), includes 3 levels:
➢ Level I: accidents which have direct impact on crew: crew being taken hostage, injured, kidnapped, killed, missing, threatened; hijacking where the command of the ship is taken over by those boarding; accidents where the crew retreats into the citadel.
➢ Level II: includes a vessel being fired upon, security team firing against approaching threat, robbers/pirates identified with weapons (violence is offered) whether boarding or otherwise.
➢ Level III: incidents which does not fall into either Level I or Level II.

3. Statistical data and methodology used

Statistical data used are taken from the annual piracy and armed robbery reports of the IMB[1] in the period 2008-2017 - [4-13].

Methodology of the study consists of the following. Initially, the statistics from the IMB annual reports for the 10-year period were collected and summarized. Then data concerning attacks by regions for the entire 10-years period were analyzed. The number of attacks by the countries having the big share in world maritime crime in periods 2008-2012 (the peak of piracy activity - during the boom of Somali piracy) and 2013-2017 (the period after the successful eradication of Somali piracy) were analyzed and compared to data for the same countries in the last 2 years (2016-2017). The character of attacks in regard to their effect on vessel, cargo and crew was examined for two 5-year periods: 2008-2012 and 2013-2017 in order to compare the character of attacks in these periods, and interpreted also by countries and regions. Special attention is paid to the last 2 years of the period of review in order to outline the trends in contemporary piracy.

4. Results and discussion

Attacks by regions and countries

In 2008-2012 pirate attacks were largely confined to four major areas: the Gulf of Aden, near Somalia and the southern entrance to the Red Sea; the Gulf of Guinea, near Nigeria and the Niger River delta; Malacca Strait between Indonesia and Malaysia; and off the Indian subcontinent, particularly between India and Sri Lanka. [14]

Unprecedented growth of pirate attacks off the coasts of Somalia (a country with a 3,300-kilometer coastline, Africa's longest) in 2009-2011 caused international concern over the new piracy due to its high cost to global trade. Multinational naval forces were formed to patrol in the region, which led to a steady drop in the number of incidents since 2012. The number of incidents in Southeast Asia, which demonstrated significant growth in 2012-2015, also declined in 2016-2017 compared to the previous 4 years. On the other hand, the West Africa, especially the Gulf of Guinea (a key gateway for oil shipments from Nigeria and Angola), has become the new piracy hotspot since 2014.

The number of pirate and armed robbery acts reported to IMB within the period 2008-2017 is presented by regions in Table 1 and Fig.1. The annual report of IMB for 2017 indicated 180 incidents - the lowest annual number since 1998 when 188 incidents were reported.

Table 1. Number of pirate and armed robbery attacks by regions

Region	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
SE Asia	54	45	70	80	104	128	141	147	68	76
East Asia	11	23	44	23	7	13	8	31	16	4
Indian Sub-cont.	23	29	28	16	19	26	34	24	17	15
South America	14	37	40	25	17	18	5	8	27	24
Africa	189	266	259	293	150	79	55	35	62	57
Rest of World	2	6	4	2	0	0	2	1	1	4
Total	**293**	**406**	**445**	**439**	**297**	**264**	**245**	**246**	**191**	**180**

[1] The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) is a division of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) established to act as a focal point in the fight against all type of maritime crime and malpractice. A key service of the IMB is reporting the piracy and armed robbery at sea incidents. IMB is publishing comprehensive quarterly and annual reports detailing piracy statistics.
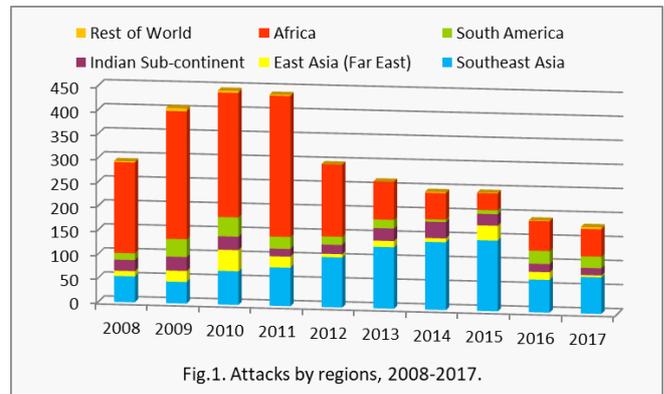

Fig.1. Attacks by regions, 2008-2017.

The share of attacks by countries on the total attacks over the world for the periods 2008-2012, 2013-2017 and 2016-17, is shown in Fig.2.
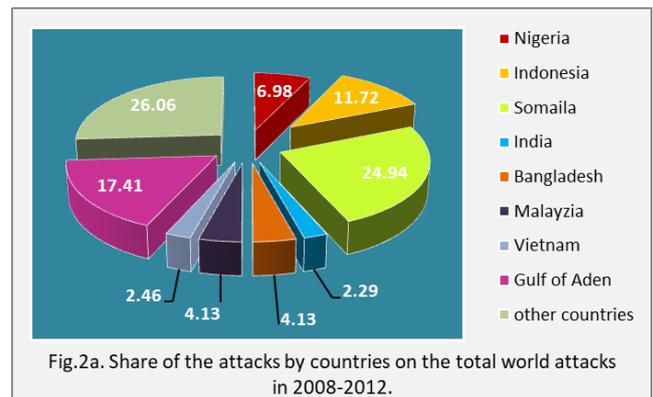

Fig.2a. Share of the attacks by countries on the total world attacks in 2008-2012.
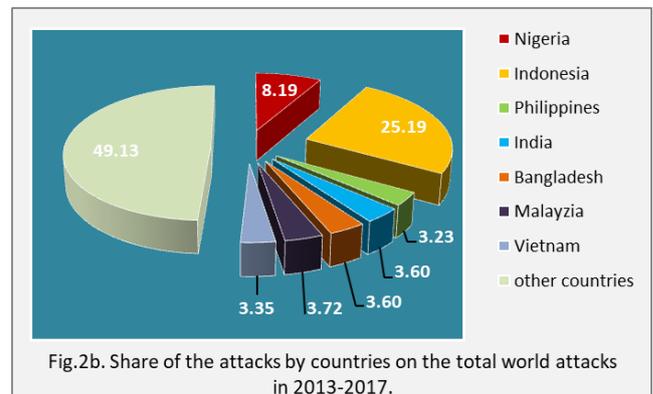

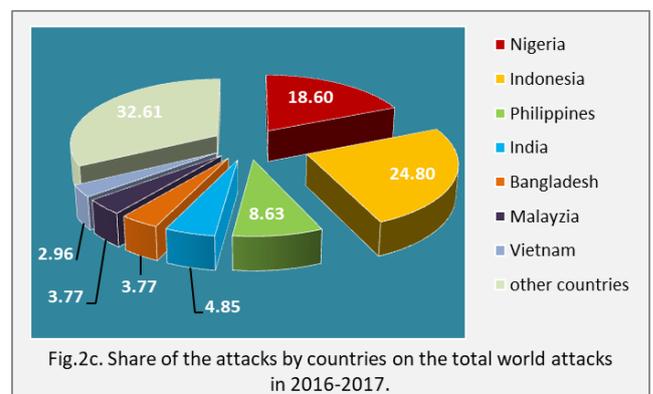Fig.2b. Share of the attacks by countries on the total world attacks in 2013-2017.

Fig.2c. Share of the attacks by countries on the total world attacks in 2016-2017.

The largest amount of pirate attacks in the 10 years surveyed was registered off Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, which represented almost half of the pirate attacks around the world in 2008-2012. After the peak in this period, a drastic decline has been observed in the region in the next period. Among the rest countries with the greatest number of pirate attacks, Indonesia was leading for the

entire period. In the last 5 years, Indonesia has invariably ranked first with 406 attacks (over 100 attacks yearly in 2013-2015, and twice decreased number in 2016-2017). Nigeria occupied the second place with 210 attacks in 2008-2012 and 132 in 2013-2017, regardless of significant decrease in 2014 (less number of attacks than Bangladesh and Malaysia) and 2015 (when it takes the third place after Indonesia and Vietnam). The Philippines appeared within the "top 5" of the list in 2016, and, with number of attacks doubled in 2017 compared to the previous two years, occupied the third place for 2016-2017 at the expense of India, where attacks have dropped significantly over the previous four years. The relative share for the other countries of the group having the greatest "contribution" to global piracy remained almost unchanged within the entire period. The number of attacks in Nigeria and Philippines, respectively their relative shares, has increased more than 2 times in 2016-2017 compared to the previous few years.

Types of attacks against vessels and crew

Modern pirates tend to attack and hijack cargo ships and fishing vessels, which have commodities readily sellable on the black market, and therefore rarely direct their attention towards cruise ships. "Smaller pirate gangs, who do not have the resources to seize the cargo being transported, instead often board a ship to steal substantial amounts of the cash ships carry for payroll and port fees, and the recent trend is more frequent kidnappings of crewmembers to be exchanged for ransom money". [15]

Globally, the number of boarded ships in the period 2008-2017 varies in relatively narrow boundaries on the background of the significant changes in overall attacks during the period, as is seen on Table 2 and Fig.3. The number of vessels hijacked and fired upon drastically falls in years following the peak of Somali pirates' activity, marking minimum values in 2016-2017. An interesting observation can be made concerning the ratio of unsuccessful attacks (attempted and firing upon ships) and actual attacks (boarded and hijacked ships): in 2009-2011 approximately half of attacks has been unsuccessful, while 79-89 % of the attacks in the years following 2012 have succeed. Most likely explanation for the more frequent failures of pirate attacks during their peak activity is the powerful international naval presence in the region with the highest concentration of pirate attacks, together with increased vigilance and security measures on vessels off Somalia coast. Besides, in the second half of the period under review, low-level (low-risk) attacks worldwide are prevalent.

The period 2008-2012, with the boom of Somali piracy, is characterized by a significant share of hijacking ships and keeping crew as hostages. The Somali piracy is unique in that almost all attacks involved hostage situations, which were often long lasting (an average 6 months to get large ransoms), with patience and strategy. "Somali piracy has been largely free of violent tactics because it is in the pirates' interest to keep their hostages alive". [14] In the Gulf of Guinea, pirates usually hijacked ships for several days and after stealing cargo, sailors were released. Preferred pirates' targets in this period were oil tankers. "Pirates conceal boats and stolen commodities in the thousands of inlets, rivers and mangroves that comprise Nigeria's coast. Crude oil is unloaded to criminal partners and resold on the local market through government and non-government facilitators". [16]. In Southeast Asia, piracy was focused on the ransacking cargo and fishing products from vessels like tugs, trawlers and passenger boats. Hijacking occurred mostly in Malaysia, Indonesia and Strait of Malacca. "In Southeast Asia, pirates are increasingly hijacking ships to steal oil from slow-moving tankers but rarely seek to ransom the crew. They capture tankers, sail them to a mother ship and siphon off the fuel, then release the boats with their equipment smashed and, at times, the crews badly hurt. (Because the crews are generally not ransomed, analysts say, they may be likelier targets for violence than was the case in East Africa.)". [17]

Table 2. Type of attacks against vessels

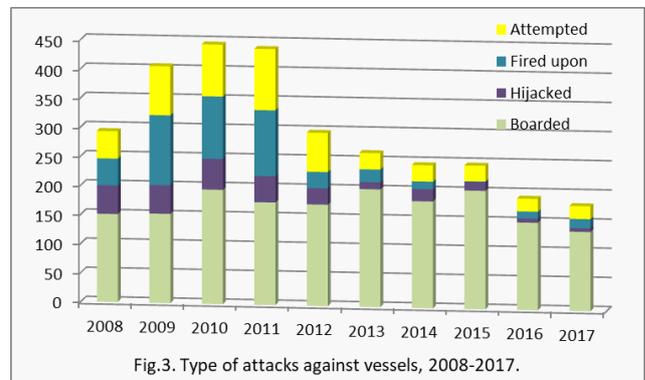| Vessels	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Boarded	151	153	196	176	174	202	183	203	150	136
Hijacked	49	49	53	45	28	12	21	15	7	6
Fired upon	46	120	107	113	28	22	13	1	12	16
Attempted	47	84	89	105	67	28	28	27	22	22
Total	**293**	**406**	**445**	**439**	**297**	**264**	**245**	**246**	**191**	**180**

Fig.3. Type of attacks against vessels, 2008-2017.

Since 2013 the majority of incidents were low level attacks (robberies). Only a few incidents in the Somali pirates' area of activity were registered till 2016, but 3 vessels have been hijacked in 2017, demonstrating that Somali pirates still had willingness and capabilities to attacks. The rest 3 cases of hijacking in 2017 were in Malaysia and Indonesia. In the Gulf of Guinea, after the downturn in oil prices, pirates are expanding their hostage-taking to include off shore supply vessels and general cargo ships. Pirates of the West coast of Africa are often well armed and violent and have hijacked and robbed vessels, and kidnapped and injured crews along the coast, rivers, anchorages, ports and surrounding waters. The violence to crew is illustrated in Table 3 and Fig.4.

Table 3. Type of violence to crew

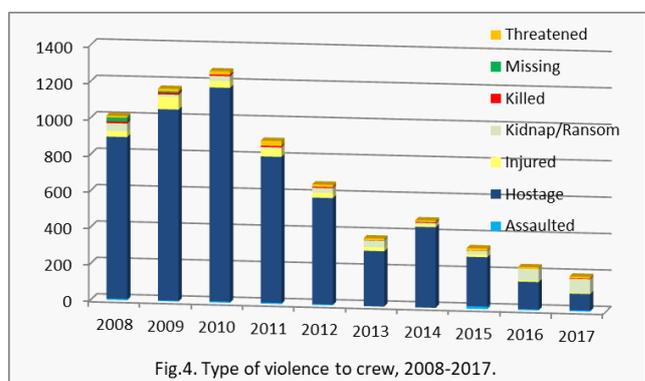| Crew	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Assaulted	7	4	6	6	4	0	1	14	5	6
Hostage	889	1050	1174	802	585	304	442	271	151	91
Injured	32	69	37	42	28	21	13	14	8	6
Kidnap/Ransom	42	12	27	10	26	36	9	19	62	75
Killed	11	10	8	8	6	1	4	1	0	3
Missing	21	8	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Threatened	9	14	18	27	13	10	9	14	10	10
Total	**1011**	**1167**	**1270**	**895**	**662**	**373**	**479**	**333**	**236**	**191**

Fig.4. Type of violence to crew, 2008-2017.

Statistical data show significant decrease of the number of crew held hostages in the last 5 years. On the other hand, since 2016 the

share of kidnapping has risen several times compared to previous 7 years. Pirates off Nigeria are leading in kidnappings with 29 crew members abducted in 2016 and 65 (of the world total 75) in 2017. The rest cases of kidnappings in 2016-2017 are in Malaysia (2016) and the Philippines (both years).

For the first months of 2018 (1 January – 31 March) the IMB reported 66 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships which is considerably higher value than that for the first quarter of 2016 (37 incidents) and 2017 (43 incidents). Worldwide 39 vessels are boarded and 4 are hijacked, 100 crew members taken hostages and 14 kidnapped. "As a region, the Gulf of Guinea accounts for 29 of the 2018 Q1 incidents and all four of the vessel hijackings. With the exception of one crew member, all crew kidnappings and hostages taken occurred in the Gulf of Guinea. As a country, Nigeria recorded 22 incidents". [18] Attacks in the Gulf of Guinea are against all vessels. Crews have been taken hostage and kidnapped from fishing and refrigerated cargo vessels as well as product tankers. In January-April 2018 two pirate attacks against tankers, which have been thwarted by the armed guards onboard, are registered in the Gulf of Aden.

5. Conclusion

In 2008-2012 pirate attacks were largely confined to four major regions: the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Guinea, the Malacca Strait and off the Indian subcontinent. Unprecedented number of attacks was registered off Somalia coast and the Gulf of Aden in 2009-2012, most often aimed hijacking ships and crew for ransom, with crew kept hostages for several months. Growing number of attacks was observed in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia. Most attacks over the world in this period, except the area of Somali pirates operations, were low-level incidents (robberies). Hijackings were targeted mostly at tankers and cargo ships with the intent to steal and sell the cargo, often with significant violence against crews. In 2012-2017, regardless the significant reduction of overall number of attacks after eliminating Somali piracy, the number of attacks in most of the other hot spots remained almost constant, with predominant low-level incidents. Since 2014 the Philippines appeared amongst countries having the biggest shares of the world piracy. In 2016-2017 the number of attacks in Indonesia has decreased compared to the previous several years, however in the Gulf of Guinea attacks increased more than twice. The number of hijacked ships and crew kept hostages over the world decreased significantly in the last two years. In result, 2017 is the year with the lowest level of maritime crime for 20 years. On the other hand, there is an alarming increase of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea near Nigeria, especially kidnapping crew for ransom, in the last two years and the beginning of 2018. The escalation of kidnapping and hijacking in West Africa since 2016 is a cause for serious concern and gives reason to conclude that piracy tends not only to increase, but to become more violent, and is likely to give a new impetus to piracy and armed robbery at sea across the globe.

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