

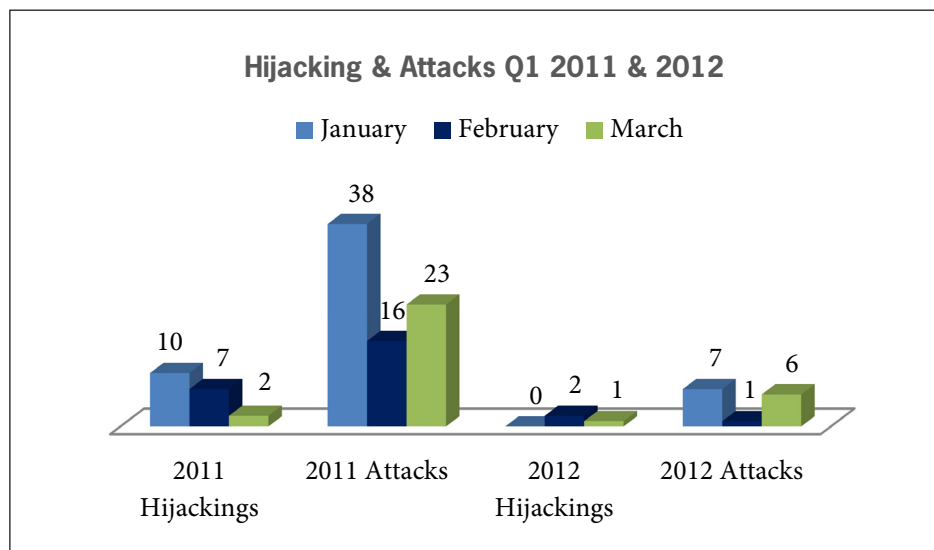
ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

MARITIME SECURITY BRIEFING #1 | SPRING 2012

Piracy and Hijacking Developments in the Indian Ocean High-Risk Area (HRA) in Q1 2012

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The first quarter of 2012 paints a somewhat confusing picture with regard to the state of piracy threat in the high risk areas (HRA) of the Indian Ocean. Initially, given the low level of attacks for the first six weeks of 2012, it seemed the threat against merchant shipping had receded dramatically. However, though there were even fewer attacks in February, two hijackings of merchant vessels within a week of one another raised alarms amongst shipping companies and naval commands, and warnings to be prepared for more attacks were sent out. Nevertheless, compared to the same period in 2011, the threat of piracy attacks has indeed greatly diminished, and there has also been a notable reduction in the number of successful hijackings.



In all of the attacks and hijackings in Q1, pirates have continued use of aggressive fire-for-effect tactics—assault rifle fire at the bridge and superstructure followed (where possible) by attempted boarding. However, the widespread use of armed security teams on board merchant vessels—many of which have been forced to return fire to deter attacks and boarding attempts - has made life difficult for the piracy attack groups (PAGs), particularly in the Gulf of Aden. To date, the only hijackings in and around the internationally recognized transit corridor (IRTC) have been trading and fishing dhows, which are highly vulnerable to hijacking as they are rarely hardened against boarding and cannot evade attackers that approach in high-speed skiffs. It is likely that several of the dhows hijacked so far this year are still being used as motherships, given the lack of merchant vessel motherships available to the pirates.

Of the three merchant vessels hijacked in Q1, two were in the Arabian Sea well away from any naval assistance, and the third was just 35 nautical miles off the Omani coast. All three cases reveal that Somali pirates still have the capacity to attack at extended ranges from their bases. Furthermore, there is no evidence that security teams were on board the hijacked vessels, which makes it likely that anti-piracy best management practices had not been fully implemented.

Non-Dhow Hijackings in Q1 in the Indian Ocean HRA

Date	Position	Vessel Type	Incident
02 Mar 12	21:27N 062:37E	Chemical Tanker	The Chemical tanker, ROYAL GRACE, was attacked by a single skiff and then hijacked.
15 Feb 12	17:14N 056:30E	Roll-on/Roll-off	The Ro-Ro vessel, LEILA, hijacked off the coast of Oman east of Salalah, Oman.
07 Feb 12	13:32N 058:36E	Bulk Carrier	The bulk carrier, FREE GODDESS, hijacked in the western-central Arabian Sea.

Attacks against Merchant Vessels in Q1 in the HRA

Date	Position	Incident
24 Mar 12	20:49N 062:27E	VLCC Cosmic Jewel attacked in Arabian Sea. Security team fired warning shots. Skiff retreated to mothership. No weapons sighted.
19 Mar 12	05:39N 053:20E	Container vessel, MSC ANAFI, fired upon approx. 520 nm NE of Mogadishu by six pirates. Security team returned fire.
17 Mar 12	05:47N 053:50E	Container vessel BELGICA attacked by one skiff 392 nm south of Socotra. Security team returned fire and the skiff retreated.
17 Mar 12	13:09N 048:45E	LPG tanker, TRANS CATALONIA, attacked by single skiff 51 nm SSW of Mukalla. On board security returned fire; attack aborted.
11 Mar 12	13:13N 057:56E	Container vessel, ESTELLE MAERSK, attacked by 5 armed pirates east of Socotra. Attack lasted 15-20 mins. Attack aborted.
06 Mar 12	14:20N 052:45E	Product tanker, ADVANCE VICTORIA, attacked by single skiff approx. 212 nm SW of Salalah. Armed team on board.
22 Feb 12	13:31N 050:22E	Oil tanker, NORTH SEA, attacked in GoA. Exchange of fire between team and pirates. 60 rounds fired by pirates before they aborted.
17 Jan 12	13:32N 055:44E	Pipe Burying Vessel, FLINTSTONE, attacked by armed men 95 nm NE of Socotra. Dutch marines fired warning shots.
16 Jan 12	15:02N 058:14E	VLCC VALDARNO attacked by pirates armed with assault rifles & RPG. Unarmed security engaged skiff with LRAD.
12 Jan 12	14:51N 056:03E	LPG tanker, HAPPY BIRD, attacked approx. 170 nm southeast of Salalah by 2 skiffs. On board armed team returned fire.
12 Jan 12	01:37N 046:00E	Spanish replenishment vessel, PATINO, attacked 49 nm SE of Mogadishu. Pirates surrendered to armed protection team.
05 Jan 12	22:27N 060:59E	Bulk carrier SUNSHINE attacked ESE of Muscat.
04 Jan 12	12:17N 044:10E	Bulk carrier IDA attacked by pirates with assault weapons in Gulf of Aden approx. 50 nm SE of Bab el Mandeb.
04 Jan 12	13:10N 049:12E	Bulk carrier, DELFA, attacked by one skiff in Eastbound lane of IRTC, approx. 110 nm north of Bosaso.

Notable Incidents in the HRA in Q1

Danish warship liberates M/V ARIELLA off coast of Somalia

On Tuesday, 28 February, 2012, following several days of surveillance of a hijacked merchant vessel, the Antigua & Barbuda-flagged M/V ARIELLA - which NATO had suspected of being a Somali pirate mothership - Special Forces from the Danish 'Flexible Support Ship' HDMS ABSALON boarded and re-took the captured vessel in the IRTC. ABSALON had been part of a NATO-led counter-piracy mission off Somalia and the east coast of Africa.

Between the 26th and 27th of February, when the pirates had attempted to break out from the Somali coast, the Danish warship decided to intervene and stop the mothership before it could pose a threat to shipping in the HRA. However, the captain of the ABSALON did not give the order to recapture the merchantman until he had received confirmation from the crew that they had secured themselves in the citadel. The ABSALON's helicopter was launched to provide on-the-scene intelligence and cover before the special-forces team was sent over.

The incident took place approximately in position 8°19'N 50°54'E, some 70 nautical miles north-east of Eyl. Following the recapture operation, 17 Somali pirates were found on board and taken into custody. The crew of 18 (mostly Pakistanis and Iranians) was subsequently released. Despite the efforts of the ABSALON's medical team, two of the crew members from the ARIELLA died of injuries sustained during the hijacking and capture. It is not known if their injuries were sustained prior to or during the rescue operation.

This kind of counter-piracy operation involving coalition naval forces recapturing a merchant vessel is certainly not unprecedented. However, the incident is an important reminder of several key important points with regard to the ongoing threat to merchant vessels in the HRA:

- › The astute position of surface units by coalition commanders can have a vital, effective impact in disrupting PAG operations.
- › Engaging PAGs much closer to their bases on the eastern coast of Somalia enables far better control of the engagement, and greatly reduces the pirates' room for manoeuvre to evade naval forces and escape into deep ocean where they can operate far more freely.
- › If coalition forces are close to the seized vessel and it is in the very early stages of the hijacking operation, the effectiveness of the citadel as a means to protect the crew during a rescue assault is clear. Nevertheless, anyone left outside of the citadel (as in this case) is highly vulnerable to being injured or killed once it becomes clear to the pirates that a rescue attempt is imminent.
- › The combination of using the warship, its helicopter, and specialist boarding/assault teams as part of a triangulated force posture is highly effective, as the ABSALON's commanding officer proved.

Shooting of Indian fishermen off SW Indian coast

In the late afternoon of 15 February, 2012, during a tragic incident that was initially reported as a 'suspicious approach', two Indian fishermen were shot and killed by members of an embarked Italian security team that thought they were armed pirates. At the time of the shooting, the armed security team was protecting the 104,255 DWT crude oil tanker M/T ENRICA LEXIE in position 09°20'N 075°59'E approximately 40 nautical miles southwest of the Indian city of Cochin in the Indian state of Kerala. The shooting occurred in international waters, but inside India's EEZ.

Once the shooting had been reported by the tanker's master, Indian authorities ordered the tanker to Cochin, so that she could be boarded and an investigation initiated. Coast Guard District Headquarters No. 4 dispatched two coast guard cutters (the CGS Samar and the CGS Lakshimbhai) and an aircraft to escort the tanker to Cochin.

The Italian vessel had originally been bound for Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates. The Indian authorities have been treating the incident as murder, and the two Italian marines that fired the fatal shots have been arrested, which unsurprisingly has resulted in a major diplomatic problem for the two countries. The Italian government has been arguing that the marines must be tried in Italy because the incident occurred on an Italian vessel in international waters. The two Italian servicemen remain in the custody of the Kerala police.

Though this case is certainly a tragedy, it is surprising that there have not been more similar incidents given the sheer number of armed vessel protection teams at sea on merchant vessels transiting the HRA, and the very high number of encounters between vessels, PAGs, and fishing fleets. A number of key factors are important to note concerning this incident:

- › Given that the encounter between the fishing boat and the tanker happened during daylight, under conditions of good visibility, and that the fishermen were unarmed, there is absolutely no justifiable reason why the Italian marines should have resorted so quickly to using aimed lethal shots. Rules for the use of force are in place for a reason, which is to enable armed protection teams to diligently ascertain whether a threat exists, categorise the threat, and react in conjunction with any violence that is perpetrated. The use of lethal force is an absolute last resort if all other means to deter attackers have failed.
- › Given that the threat of PAGs nominally extends across the HRA almost to the coast of India, merchant vessels steaming from Singapore to the Persian Gulf or to Suez via the Gulf of Aden are now routinely navigating up the west coast of India before crossing the Arabian Sea further to the north. This is done to mitigate against the threat as much as possible by steaming as far as possible from any potential deep-ocean PAGs looking for targets tempted to cross the Indian Ocean via the more economical and traditional great circle routes. Given the nature of the threat, the Indian navy and coast guard have been mounting increased numbers of patrols along its coast to disrupt any PAGs that might have ventured that far, and this has provided welcome cover for merchant vessels looking to benefit from as much warship protection as possible during the eastern legs of their transits before they turn westwards towards the IRTC.
- › The increased volume of shipping in these waters and the perennially high concentration of fishing fleets in and around the Lakshadweep Islands and the southwestern Indian coast have served to increase the risk of mistaken identity of innocent fishermen. Nevertheless, this incident must serve as a powerful reminder to all armed protection teams to maintain very high standards of due diligence and professionalism when confronted with multiple small boat contacts - most of which are benign.