

Policy paper

July 2024

OUR VIEW

It is important that Denmark continues to allocate counterpiracy resources to maintain the pressure on piracy in West Africa and off the coast of Somalia.

The Danish embassies in Nigeria and Ghana support the efforts in West Africa, and have built up knowledge, network and competences in the region.

There continues to be a need for enhancement of the security situation for the merchant vessels and their crews, including Danish crewmembers, in the Gulf of Guinea. Danish Shipping was therefore very pleased that Denmark during the winter of 2021 to 2022 sent a frigate to the region on a counter-piracy mission.

Denmark should work actively with international partners in providing maritime assets to counter-piracy operations and the establishment of a naval operation in the Gulf of Guinea, to enhance maritime surveillance and security, and build up the necessary regional capabilities via advice and training together with the West African countries.

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Piracy

Piracy continues to be a serious problem since a significant proportion of the world trade passes through waters where piracy is a threat. Piracy creates insecurity for seafarers and their families, inflicts high costs on the shipping industry, and hinders the affected countries' development.

Piracy continues to be a threat, especially off the Western coast of Africa, in East Africa and in Southeast Asia. To defeat piracy, it is necessary to protect the commercial ships and include preventive actions on land.

Danish Shipping has provided input to the development of the different Best Management Practices (BMP) and participates in the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Crime and the G7++ Friends of Gulf of Guinea. It is recommended that for companies with ships passing through piracy-threatened waters, bespoke risk assessments are completed, which in turn informs the implementation of appropriate measures to protect crews and the ships against potential attacks. Guidance can be found in the BMPs or other area specific guidelines. Ships should also report to the international reporting centres.



WEST AFRICA

Piracy and other maritime threats have been most dominant off the coast of West Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea. The situation is more complex than at the Horn of Africa. The piracy threat stems mainly from Nigeria, but spreads to many countries in the region. Nigeria has been among the top kidnapping countries in the world for the past decade. The pirates originate primarily from Nigeria and are well organized, heavily armed and relentless in their efforts to board the vessels.

Ships are targeted both on their way in or out of harbours, in the deltas, and in international waters far from the coast. The pirates target all types of ships, and

actions range from petty theft to armed robbery of entire cargos, typically refined oil - or kidnapping the crew. Danish companies have invested in intelligence, protecting their communication, escorts, and changing planned routes at short notice. Because of the high threat from piracy, the Danish authorities have raised the Security level to TWO (out of three) for Danish flagged vessels in the region.

In 2016, Denmark reopened the embassy and trade office in Nigeria. The piracy threat development in West Africa does not only affect the shipowners, but it also affects the West African countries, whose export to especially Europe is deeply dependent on seaborne trade.

MDAT-GoG should be better at exchanging information with shipowners, that are experiencing an attack, about what actions that are being taken and what assistance that can be expected.

There is a need for further strengthening coordination and cooperation under the auspices of EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea.

Danish Shipping urges Denmark and other European countries with naval units deployed to the Gulf of Guinea to establish handover agreements with West African countries for prosecution in the region of apprehended suspected pirates.

Danish Shipping urges West African countries to safeguard their territorial waters and allow shipping companies operating in the region the option to choose providers of private armed guards.

Danish Shipping is a signatory to the Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy and encourages all relevant stakeholders to become signatories.

The European Union has shown leadership with its extensive military Operation ATALANTA off the coast of Somalia. It is important that the operation is extended beyond its current mandate that runs to the end of 2024.

EAST AFRICA

The piracy threat off the coast of Somalia has been suppressed for years. Coordinated international efforts decreased the number of attacks and hijackings drastically. However, recent incidents show that Somali criminals still possess the ability and willingness to conduct piracy attacks on merchant ships, as confirmed by a number of attacks and hijackings of two merchant ships (late 2023 and beginning of 2024). The latest hijacking of a merchant vessel before that was dated back to March 2017 close to Somalia's coast and a number of failed attacks on larger merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden during 2017 and 2018. It is still too early to assess if the criminals that

had turned to other profitable criminal activities, now will focus on piracy again. Therefore, it is important to have a continued presence of military naval vessels, aircraft and helicopters, and companies still have to follow the guidance in the BMP and retain the use of armed guards whenever assessed necessary.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

The threat of piracy in Southeast Asia has existed for many years. Local shipping has primarily been targeted, and crew members have been kidnapped. It is important that countries in the region are active and work together to fight piracy, so it does not develop.

FACTS

- At any given time there are app. 70 Danish controlled and owned ships in the North-western part of the Indian Ocean including the Gulf of Aden, and around 30 ships in the Gulf of Guinea.
- From May 2012 till the end of 2023, no merchant vessels were hijacked off the coast of Somalia except one incident in March 2017. However, on 14 December 2023 and 12 March 2024 merchant vessels were hijacked, and a number of failed attacks on merchant vessels have been reported recently. In addition, hijackings of some cargo / fishing dhows have been reported during this period.
- In 2023, the number of incidents recorded in West Africa ended with 22 compared to 19 in 2022. Three out of the four globally reported hijackings took place in the Gulf of Guinea. However, the total number of incidents is still lower than 2020 where it peaked at 84. In 2021 35 incidents were recorded. Not all attacks are reported.
- Among Danish operated and Danish owned ships, there have been 4 pirate attacks since the winter of 2020 in the Gulf of Guinea. The most recent was the attack on the Monjasa Reformer on 25 March 2023, where 6 hostages were taken from the ship into the Niger Delta, where they were held captive for over a month.
- A marked increase was seen in Piracy related activities, especially kidnap for ransom, in the Gulf of Guinea from 2018 and until the beginning of 2021.
- The Danish authorities raised the Security level to TWO (out of three) for Danish flagged vessels in a defined area of up to 200 nautical miles off the coast of Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroun and Equatorial Guinea in the beginning of 2020. In 2023, the area was further expanded to cover from the Ivory Coast in the west to Congo in the south.
- A reporting centre for West Africa (Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade Gulf of Guinea - MDAT-GoG) was created in the summer of 2016. The centre provides a 24-hour manned service of military experts. The MDAT-GoG receives reports, shares important updates and provides guidance on ship operating patterns and security risks with the Gulf of Guinea maritime community. Ships trading in the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA) are encouraged to send regular reports to the MDAT-GoG as per the reporting format.
- In 2019, the EU launched a pilot case called Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea to support the right to free and safe navigation for international shipping in the Gulf of Guinea, i.a. by promoting coordination between EU military units deployed to the region. The military units operate under national command.
- The Information Fusion Centre (IFC) in Singapore, which has international liaison officers from the navies and law enforcement agencies of more than 15 countries, works on early warning, information sharing and operational response.