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International Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea

Hindering Maritime Trade and Water Transportation Around the World

by Matthew Chambers

Over the 11-year period, 1998-2008, more than 3,600 acts of international piracy and armed robbery at sea have occurred. Figure 1 clearly shows that piracy affects all corners of the globe—from the Caribbean, to the Mediterranean, to the South China Sea. In 2008, East Africa accounted for the greatest number of incidents with 134, followed by the South China Sea (72 incidents) and West Africa (50 incidents). Table 1 shows the overall number of attacks has been on the decline in many parts of the world with acts of piracy occurring at a rate of about 25 per month in 2008, down from a peak of nearly 40 incidents per month

in 2000. This decline was global in nature with one notable exception—the waters surrounding East Africa (e.g., Gulf of Aden, Red Sea) saw a 123 percent (74-incident) increase from the prior year (see box 1).

The Costs of and Factors Affecting Pirate Attacks

Pirates commit crimes against persons and property when they unlawfully board ships that are either underway on the high seas or at anchor. These crimes can be costly in terms of any resultant injuries, loss of life, theft of cargo,

Table 1: Incidents of International Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea, 1998-2008

| Year | East Africa | Indian Ocean | Malacca Strait | Mediterranean Sea | South America ¹ | South China | West Africa | Total |
|--|-------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1998 | 19 | 25 | 6 | 2 | 38 | 94 | 22 | 210 |
| 1999 | 16 | 51 | 37 | 4 | 29 | 136 | 36 | 309 |
| 2000 | 29 | 109 | 112 | 2 | 41 | 140 | 33 | 471 |
| 2001 | 22 | 86 | 58 | 2 | 23 | 120 | 58 | 370 |
| 2002 | 23 | 66 | 34 | 3 | 67 | 140 | 47 | 383 |
| 2003 | 22 | 96 | 36 | 1 | 72 | 154 | 67 | 452 |
| 2004 | 13 | 41 | 60 | 0 | 46 | 113 | 57 | 330 |
| 2005 | 47 | 51 | 20 | 0 | 26 | 97 | 23 | 266 |
| 2006 | 31 | 53 | 22 | 1 | 31 | 66 | 31 | 240 |
| 2007 | 60 | 40 | 12 | 3 | 25 | 67 | 60 | 282 |
| 2008 | 134 | 26 | 2 | 2 | 19 | 72 | 50 | 306 |
| Compound annual growth rate, 1998-2008 | 19.40% | 0.40% | -9.50% | 0.00% | -6.10% | -2.40% | 7.70% | 3.50% |

NOTES: Incidents include attempts and threatening actions. Details may not add to totals because of missing categories.

¹ South America includes incidents in the Caribbean Sea.

SOURCE: International Maritime Organization, *Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships, Annual Report* (annual issues), MSC.4/Circ.133, available at <http://www.imo.org/home.asp> as of December 2009.

Box 1: Shifting Piracy Hotspots

Incidents of piracy and armed robbery have been rising in East African waters (e.g., Gulf of Aden, and Red Sea) in recent years as the numbers of incidents in other parts of the globe have generally stabilized.

In 2008, acts of piracy that occurred in East African waters were more than double the number from the prior year and comprised 44 percent of incidents worldwide. In the 11-year period from 1998 to 2008, yearly totals in these waters rose from 19 to 134—an increase of 605 percent. In contrast, in 2000, when global incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea peaked at 471, only 6 percent occurred in East African waters while acts of piracy in the South China Sea, Malacca Strait, and Indian Ocean accounted for 77 percent of incidents across the globe (table 1).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2010 based upon the International Maritime Organization, Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships Annual Report (Annual Issues), MSC.4/Circ.133, available at <http://www.imo.org/home.asp> as of December 2009.

Figure 1: Incidents of International Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea, 1998-2008

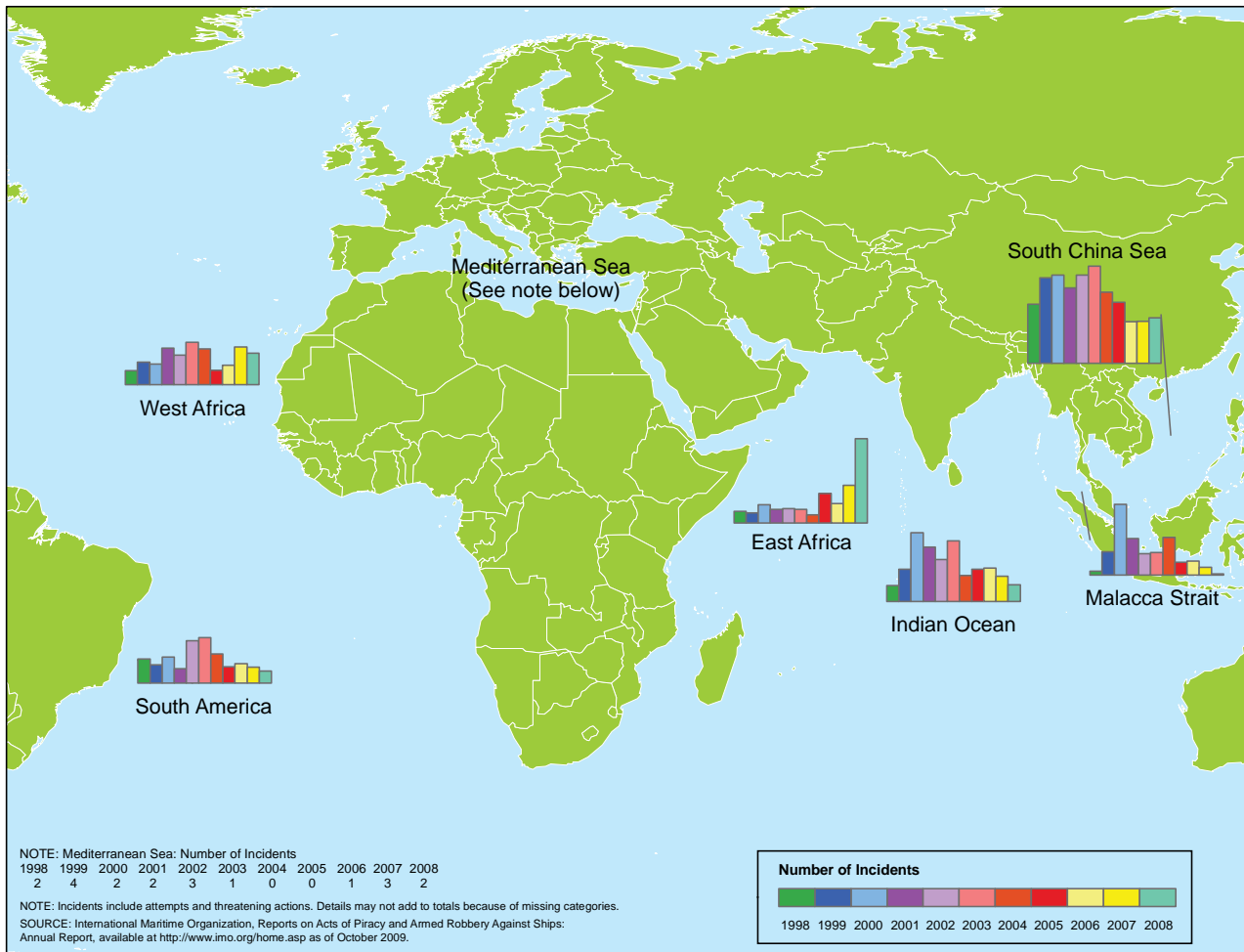
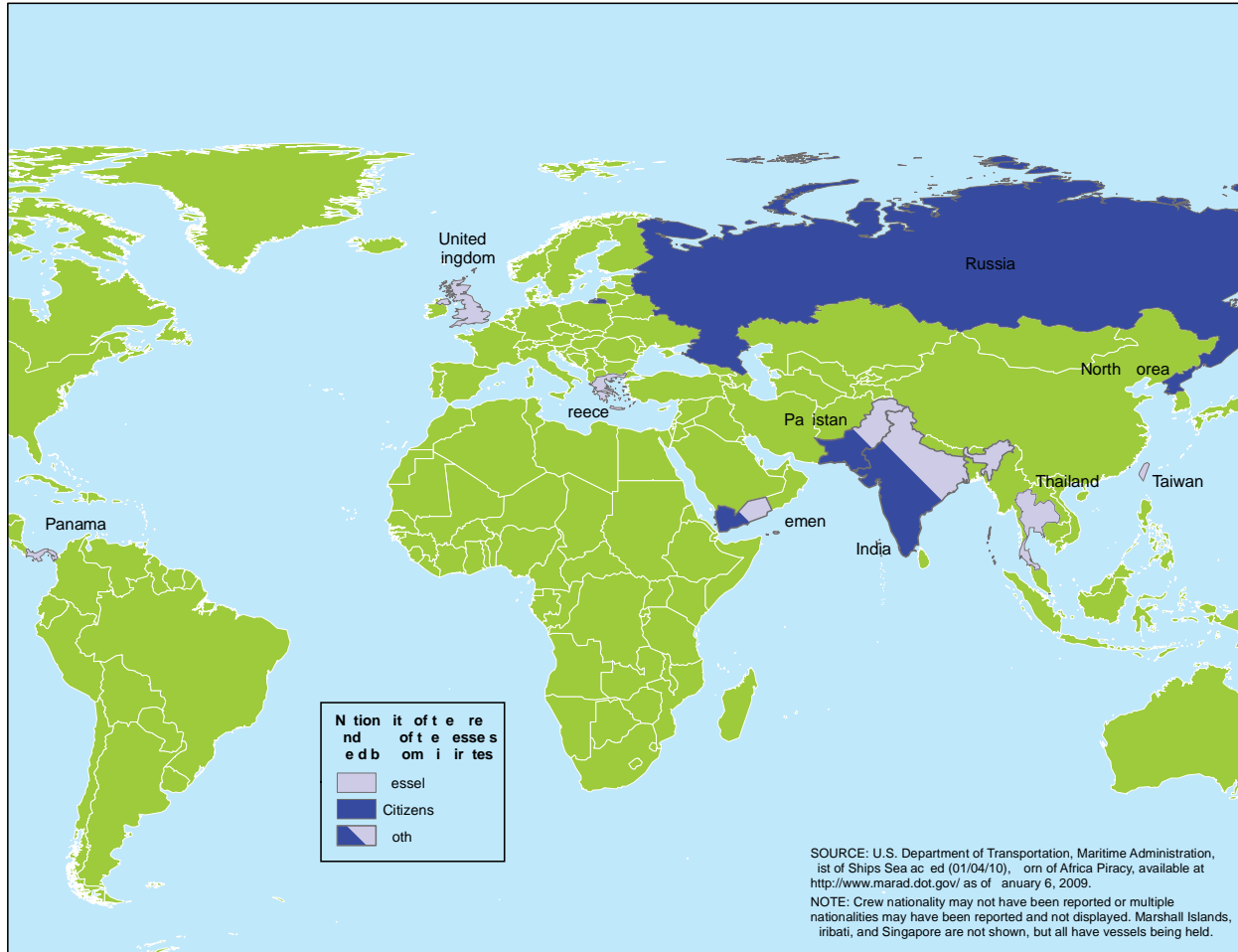


Figure 2: Nationality of the Crew and Flag of 13 Vessels Being Held by Somali Pirates from Incidents Spanning April 6, 2009 to January 2, 2010 (as of January 4, 2010)



environmental damage, and increased vessel-operating costs. For example, a ransom of \$3 million¹ was paid to Somali pirates to recover the tanker *Sirius Star*, which was carrying 2 million barrels of crude, worth an estimated \$100 million.²

Even though pirate attacks and attempts are rarely directed at U.S.-flagged vessels, they still affect the U.S. economy because most U.S.-related maritime trade takes place aboard foreign vessels. The U.S.-flagged fleet accounts for less than 1 percent of the world fleet.³ Figure 2 shows the

nationality of the crews and flags of vessels seized from around world.

Pirates prey upon targets of opportunity. Given optimal conditions (e.g., calm weather, slow cruising speed, and daylight⁴) relatively small, fast vessels (e.g., containerships) may be no less at risk than large, slower vessels (e.g., crude carriers). The vessels held by pirates can range from 2,000 to 100,000 deadweight tons.⁵

¹ British Broadcast Corporation. *Saudi tanker "freed off Somalia"* (Jan. 9, 2009), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> as of Jan. 13, 2010.

² Matlin, Chadwick. *Hitting the High Seas: Check Your Pirate Insurance* (Nov. 23, 2008), Washington Post, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com> as of Jan. 13, 2010.

³ U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, *National*

Transportation Statistics, Table 1-23, available at <http://www.bts.gov/> as of Jan. 13, 2010.

⁴ United States Navy, Office of Naval Intelligence, *Horn of Africa: Threat Factors for Commercial Shipping and Forecast of Pirate Activity Through 2009*, available at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/> as of Jan. 7, 2010.

⁵ U.S. Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration, *List of Ships Sea Jacked* (01/04/10), Horn of Africa Piracy, available at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/> as of Jan. 6, 2009.

International Community Response

Acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea have incensed the international community and brought about a sense of cooperation among nations, international law enforcement, and treaty organizations. In turn, this has led to information sharing and joint naval patrols.

The International Maritime Bureau established the Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The PRC serves as a mechanism for coordinating response by local authorities and providing incident reports to mariners.⁶ In addition, 15 nations in South East Asia have signed the *Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia*.⁷

In 2000, the waters of the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca totaled the highest number of attacks. However, the nations in South East Asia surrounding these two bodies of water with the support of the international community have made great strides in decreasing the number of incidents. By 2008, the combined number of incidents had decreased in the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean by 87 percent from their peak in 2000.

⁶ International Chamber of Commerce, Commercial Crime Services, International Maritime Bureau, Piracy Reporting Centre, *IMB Piracy Reporting Centre*, available at <http://www.icc-ccs.org/> as of Jan. 5, 2010.

⁷ Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP); available at <http://www.recaap.org/> as of Jan. 14, 2010.

Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was established on January 14, 2009 to facilitate discussion and coordination of actions among states and organizations to suppress piracy off the coast of Somalia. The CGPCS includes representatives from over 50 countries and international organizations and it acts as a point of contact on aspects of combating piracy and armed robbery at sea off Somalia's coast. The CGPCS reports to the United Nations Security Council on a regular basis concerning the progress of its activities. A CGPCS working group has produced a best management practices document for owners, operators, managers, and masters of vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden and along the coast of Somalia.⁸

Twenty nations now participate in the Combined Maritime Force, which established Combined Task Force 151 to conduct antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea.⁹ The goal of this coordinated reporting and response is to turn the tide on the growing number of East Africa incidents. 🌐

⁸ Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), *Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Coast of Somalia* (Version 2: August 2009), available at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/> as of Feb. 3, 2010.

⁹ United States Navy, *New Counter-Piracy Task Force Established* (01/08/09), available at http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=41687 as of Dec. 28, 2009.

About This Report

Matthew Chambers, a Senior Transportation Specialist, in the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) prepared this report. Dominic Menegus, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Analyst, provided special assistance creating the maps. BTS is a component of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA). Special thanks to Robert Brown of the Maritime Administration and Chip Moore, RITA, for their assistance

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Publications –

- U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics; *Ocean Passenger Vessels: migrating south for the winter*, available at <http://www.bts.gov/>.
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics; *U.S. Ocean Passenger Terminals: serving larger vessels closer to home and central transit connections*, available at <http://www.bts.gov/>.