

Maritime Security Assessment – Nigeria and Bay of Guinea

Nigerian waters and Lagos

Nigerian waters were the single most exposed area in the Bay of Guinea region to piracy and armed attacks in 2007. After a significant decrease in the number of reported incidents during the period 2003 to 2006, the number of reported attacks increased sharply in 2007, totalling 42 actual and attempted attacks – an increase of 250% from 2006. The numbers of ships, including berthed ships attacked in Nigerian waters are more than ten times that of any other territorial waters in the Bay of Guinea region. This has some relation to the number of vessels present, but it also indicates the large number of pirates, their abilities and the lack of law-enforcement by the Nigerian authorities.

In regards to type of incidents and use of force/violence there are indications of more powerful equipment and less hesitation to use violence. There were 51 incidents of crewmembers being injured or taken hostage in 2007, compared to only 1 in 2006. Reports also indicate that pirates are generally better armed and have evolved a new type of speedboats enable to outrun law enforcement vessels as regards both speed and range. This has enabled the pirates to increase the rate of boarding of steaming vessels as well as quick escape from anchored vessels

Steaming ships

Steaming ships represent a higher risk than moored ships to the pirates, both in regards to operational complexity and the execution of the attacks. Nevertheless, steaming ships represent nearly 25% of all attacks in Nigerian waters for 2007, giving a good indication of the resources, capacity and skills among these pirates. The total number of attacks on steaming ships more than doubled from 2006 to 2007.

It is likely that the increase in the number of attacks in Nigerian waters reflects the pirates' general increasing ability to conduct various types of operations. Their resources seem to have improved in the form of better boats, more weapons, navigations systems and other equipment essential for conducting offshore operations. The pirates are in possession of high speed boats with an operational range up to 220 km without refuelling. These boats enables them to target ships some distance off the coast and leaving their "safe havens" in the delta, in the knowledge that Nigerian government officers and coast guards are not able to chase them. Capacity has been added in the form of new equipment and co-operation between several boats. In addition, the pirates' overall skills seem to have improved, both individually and as a group. It is likely that the improvement in capacity and skills are reflected in the statistics which show an increase of almost 100% in the total number of attacks on steaming ships and a decrease in failed attempts from 50% to 10%.

Anchored ships

Nearly 60% of all reported incidents of actual and attempted attacks in Nigeria in 2007 were carried out towards anchored ships. Anchored ships are easy and low risk targets for obvious reasons. They do not move, they are in calm waters beyond the range of port security. In addition, reports from several incidents indicate that there is often no response from the authorities when distress calls are sent from the attacked ship. From 2006 to 2007 the total number of attacks rose fivefold, from five to twenty four.

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Berthed ships

In 2007, Lagos was the port with the single most reported number of attacks on ships worldwide, including both berthed and anchored ships. The number of reported incidents for Lagos, including anchored and berthed ships, was in 2007 more than four times that of 2006, despite a continuous decrease in the number of incidents between 2003 and 2006. No incidents reported for berthed ships in 2006, whilst five actual attacks were reported in 2007.

The sudden increase in the number of attacks on berthed ships in 2007 may indicate a weakening of Nigerian control and law enforcement in harbours in general and in the follow-up of ISPS measures in particular. When comparing statistics over several years, it is clear that the total number of reported attacks on ships have a tendency to peak every four years around the time of general elections. Nigeria held general elections in 2003 and 2007, both representing peaks in the number of reported incidents. Election years are also characterised by riots and general disturbances, and should these disturbances affect piracy statistics, they would be reflected in the statistics for berthed ships, as these attacks do not require special resources, planning or skills.

Use of violence

The use of violence against crewmembers has increased in 2007 compared to 2006. This is a natural consequence of the fact that the total number of attacks have increased significantly in the same period. However, this development can also be seen as a result of more aggressive behavior by the pirates in general. The increase in the use of arms during the attacks, both guns and knives, are higher than the increase in the number of attacks. The increase in number of injured crewmembers during attacks also supports the assessment of an increased use of violence. Aggression has a tendency to increase over time, as the criminals conduct repeated attacks and compete with each other. The chances of conducting successful attacks without interference from national coast guards or other law enforcement authorities are high and tend to lead to more criminal groups, willing to take their chances in piracy related activities.

Conclusion

The security situation in the Bay of Guinea, and the Niger Delta in particular, has been marked by an increase of security related incidents. Especially during the run up for the election in 2007 and the following period the increase is substantial. Anchored ships take the toll of the piracy incidents, but we have also seen an increase in incidents from berthed and steaming ships. There is no significant information indicating a distinct change in the way the attacks are performed. However, there are indications of an increased operational capacity. There are also indications of increased aggressiveness, but considering religion, history and operational tactics of the armed groups we do not see willingness to die for the cause. The Niger Delta gunmen are in a position to indirectly influence international oil prices with attacks halting the Nigerian oil production which leads to a security situation where companies shut down their production activity and pull people out of the region.

It is a general view that the situation will not improve significantly in the next 3-6 months. A possible reduction in the number of attacks in the near future is likely to increase again shortly thereafter.

We are grateful to Bestia Risk Consulting for the above information. www.bestia.no

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