

GA Topic A Update Paper

Since 2019, when the background guide was authored, maritime piracy has remained a persistent challenge to global shipping, seafarer safety, and international maritime security. While increase of naval deployments around Somalia led to a decrease of piracy in that region, other parts of the globe have seen significant increases and the tactics of maritime piracy have changed.

According to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB), global piracy and armed robbery incidents increased from 120 incidents in 2023 to 137 in 2025.¹ Most of these were classified as low-level boardings or robberies, but the overall increase underscores persistent threats to international shipping.

Regionally, there have been shifts in piracy incidents, with piracy levels surging in the Singapore Straits and around Southeast Asia and the Gulf of Guinea remaining an area of concern. Data from ReCAAP has highlighted a surge in early morning piracy incidents in the Singapore Straits with areas where ships have to slow due to the shallowness of the water, such as the Phillip Channel, particular hotspots for incidents.² The Gulf of Guinea has continued to be an area of concern, particularly in terms of kidnapping for ransom and crew safety; though reported numbers in 2025 remain relatively low overall compared to peaks in past years.³ Efforts by regional authorities and international partners have helped reduce some metrics, but kidnappings still account for a disproportionate share of global crew abductions.

Across all regions, the safety and wellbeing of seafarers have become central concerns. Despite many incidents being low-level, armed confrontations, kidnapping for ransom, and crew hostage situations reflect the evolving severity of attacks. The maritime domain has seen piracy narratives intersect with broader geopolitical disputes. Controversies over naval interdictions—such as high-profile oil tanker seizures labeled as “piracy” by affected states—underscore how definitions of piracy and maritime security operations are now entangled with diplomatic and legal debates. In particular, seizures of ships carrying Venezuelan oil by the United States in 2026 raise questions over what constitutes an act of piracy.⁴ While piracy is commonly thought to look like Somalia pirates hijacking commercial ships, some countries feel the actions of the United States constitute piracy.

While the absolute number of maritime piracy incidents remains below historical peaks of the early 2010s, recent years show a dynamic and regionally asymmetric threat landscape. Ongoing risks to crew safety, combined make maritime piracy a multidimensional security issue.



¹ “Global maritime piracy and armed robbery increased in 2025.” *International Chamber of Commerce*. <https://tinyurl.com/3bf68m6m>.

² “Surge in Piracy and Ship Robbery in Asian Waters in Early 2025.” *Maritime Fair Trade*. <https://tinyurl.com/mr2f46za>.

³ “Gulf of Guinea sees 25% rise in piracy attacks in 2025.” *The Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/business-services/gulf-of-guinea-sees-25-rise-in-piracy-attacks-in-2025/>.

⁴ “When economic warfare meets gunboat diplomacy: What to know about the US seizures of shadow fleet tankers.” *The Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/when-economic-warfare-meets-gunboat-diplomacy-what-to-know-about-the-us-seizures-of-shadow-fleet-tankers/>.