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Marked rise in piracy

The number of pirate attacks on ships has risen by 35% over the last 12 months, with 266 incidents being recorded in the first half of 2011, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has revealed.

A report, entitled Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships, published by the IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre highlights the growth in attacks and notes that around 60% of incidents involved Somali pirates.

In the report, the IMB indicates that there have been 266 attacks in 2011 so far, which compares to 196 attacks in the first half of 2010.

In a global context, piracy accounted for seven deaths and 36 injuries over the six month period in the report. Also, it states that, in the first half of the year, 99 ships were boarded, 76 were fired upon and attacks on 62 ships were thwarted.



The IMB report noted a marked rise in piracy but also a growing trend of ship hardening and naval intervention

Attacks by Somali pirates were said to have risen from 100 reported incidents in the first half of 2010 to 163 incidents in the same period for 2011.

Illuminating the extent of Somali piracy, the IMB reported that, as of June 30, Somali pirate gangs had hijacked 20 vessels and held 420 crew members hostage.

However, actual hijacks by Somali pirates were said to have fallen by 22% over the last 12 months due to increased naval intervention and also ship hardening.

The Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea were viewed as a hotspot for pirate activity, although the report does indicate a growing number of disturbances and attacks in West Africa, particularly on tankers off the coast of Benin.

The IMB said the West African incidents were "particularly violent" as well as "highly organised".

Furthermore, the report shines a light on the arms race among pirates over the last five years. During this time, pirates have gone from brandishing hand guns and knives to rocket-propelled grenade launchers and semi-automatic machine guns.

"In the last six months, Somali pirates attacked more vessels than ever before and they're taking higher risks," said IMB director Pottengal Mukundan.

"This June, for the first time, pirates fired on ships in rough seas in the Indian Ocean during the monsoon season. In the past, they would have stayed away in such difficult conditions. Masters should remain vigilant."

By [Chris Sloley](#) in London

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