



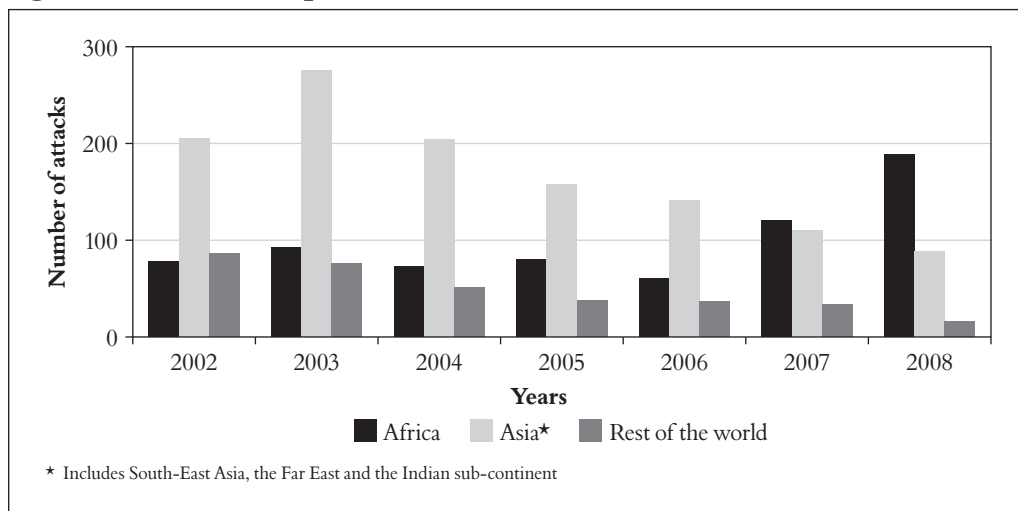
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Maritime piracy in Africa: The humanitarian dimension

Donna Nincic

Introduction

Maritime piracy has been a challenge for mariners as long as ships have gone to sea. In ancient times, Julius Caesar was captured and held for ransom by pirates. More recently, but still in the historical past, pirates have challenged merchant shipping from the Spanish Main to the Barbary Coast, and in Asia the famous ‘pirate queen’ Cheng I Sao commanded a fleet of hundreds of vessels. However, until the much-publicised attacks off the coast of Somalia in recent months, few were aware that maritime piracy has continued into current times, with an estimated 5,9 merchant ships attacked for every 1 000 voyages.¹ In 2008, there was, on average, one reported pirate attack roughly every 31 hours;² in 2009 this increased to roughly one attack every 29 hours.

Figure 1 Global maritime pirate attacks, 2002–2008*

Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships: annual reports 2006, 2007, 2008*, <http://www.icc-ccs.org/imb>; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships, 2001–2008*, <http://www.imo.org>

Until very recently, maritime piracy has been largely concentrated in Asia (figure 1). However, in 2007, for the first time since statistics on pirate attacks have been kept, the number of pirate attacks in Africa surpassed those in Asian waters. This continued into 2008, with attacks in Africa double those in Asia; and the trend is likely to continue into the rest of 2009 as well.

Maritime piracy in Africa: recent trends

Maritime pirate attacks in Africa, while concentrated in Nigeria and Somalia, are by no means limited to these countries. Of the thirty-three littoral countries in sub-Saharan Africa, twenty-four experienced pirate attacks during 2001–2008 (the years for which the International Maritime Organisation and the International Maritime Bureau have collected detailed country-specific data) (see table 1).

As can be seen in table 1, maritime piracy in Africa has not been evenly distributed. Between 2001 and 2008, the majority of attacks (54 per cent) occurred in West Africa (31 per cent in Nigeria alone), and only eleven nations experienced ten or more attacks during these years. Nigeria and Somalia, with 213 and 206 attacks respectively, stand out as the most significant, followed by Tanzania with 58. Eight littoral African nations experienced no reported pirate attacks at all during this timeframe. In the last three years, between 2006 and 2008, the geographical concentration has been even starker: four countries (Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania) accounted for 85,8 per cent of all pirate attacks in Africa (table 2), with the vast majority (73 per cent) occurring in Somalia and Nigeria.

Table 1 Pirate attacks in littoral sub-Saharan Africa, 2001–2008

Central Africa: 10					
Democratic Republic of Congo	8	Republic of Congo	2		
East Africa: 274					
Kenya	10	Tanzania	58	Djibouti	0
Eritrea	2	Somalia	206*	Sudan	0
Southern Africa: 21					
Angola	12	Mozambique	7	Namibia	0
South Africa	2				
West Africa: 370					
Benin	1	Cameroon	21	Côte d'Ivoire	30
Equatorial Guinea	1	Gabon	8	Gambia	1
Ghana	31	Guinea	21	Guinea-Bissau	3
Liberia	4	Mauritania	4	Nigeria	213
Senegal	18	Sierra Leone	10	Togo	4
African island nations: 8					
Cape Verde	0	Comoros	0	Madagascar	8
Mauritius	0	São Tomé and Príncipe	0	Seychelles	0
Total: 683					
* Includes Gulf of Aden and Red Sea					

Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships*; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships*

Table 2 Recent piracy trends in Africa

	2006	2007	2008	Total
Ghana	3	1	7	11
Nigeria	12	42	40	94
Somalia	20	44	110	174
Tanzania	9	11	14	34
Other Africa	13	21	18	52
Total				365

Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships*; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships*

The pattern of pirate attacks in Africa has tended to be different from that in Asia, with mariners more likely to be kidnapped for ransom and more likely to be victims of violence in African waters than in Asian waters. Of the 889 crew members taken hostage in 2008 worldwide by pirates, 815 were taken in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. Pirates operating in Africa are more frequently armed with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and AK-47s than the crowbars and knives more typical of Asian attacks: of the 139 attacks in 2008 in which guns were reported being used, 122 (87,8 per cent) occurred in Africa (120 in Nigeria and Somalia alone), compared with 12 in South-East Asia. Of the 32 crew members reported injured globally, 14 were in Nigeria. Of the 11 crew members reported killed by pirates in 2008, four were in Somalia and Nigeria.

While most pirates operate very close to shore, if not actually within the port areas while ships are at anchor or berthed, Somali pirates have been known to venture well over 200 nautical miles offshore in search of their targets. Pirates in Nigeria are increasingly operating farther offshore as well, with at least one incident reported 80 kilometres from the coast.

While attention has been paid to the violence of current pirate attacks in Africa (Nigeria) and the hijacking for ransom phenomenon (Somalia), very little has been done in the way of highlighting the humanitarian causes and costs of maritime piracy in this part of the world. Humanitarian crises, under certain conditions, can be a breeding ground for maritime piracy (and all kinds of criminal activity), and maritime piracy itself can exacerbate already dire humanitarian conditions.

The full costs of maritime piracy in Africa

The costs imposed by maritime piracy are significant. In 2006, the International Maritime Bureau estimated that maritime piracy resulted in US\$13–15 billion a year in losses in the Pacific and Indian oceans alone.³ Costs stem from stolen goods and cargo (and sometimes the theft of the ship itself), and also from delays in port and increases in insurance rates when transiting known pirate waters.⁴ For example, insurance rates have now increased up to ten-fold for ships transiting the Gulf of Aden. Costs can also include alternative routes – this is the case for shippers who avoid the Gulf of Aden by voyaging around the Cape of Good Hope. For those shippers for whom the longer route is not feasible, increases in crew wages impose an additional cost: some crews now demand double wages to sail near Somali waters. These costs typically are added on to the value of the goods being shipped, resulting in higher prices for consumers.

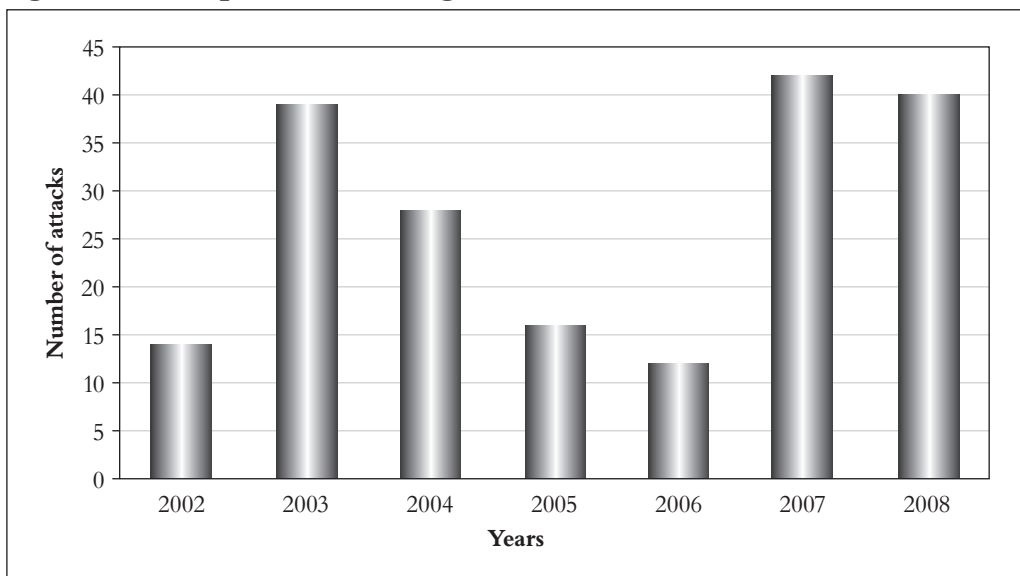
While the cost of maritime piracy to the international community is important, the costs maritime piracy can impose on the countries in which the piracy occurs is less frequently considered, and can be significant as well. Maritime piracy frequently has its

roots in weak or fragile states, where humanitarian conditions are dire and economic opportunities are limited. In turn, piracy can itself worsen humanitarian conditions. This is particularly true in Nigeria and Somalia, where maritime piracy is exacting a toll on weak and fragile economies, exacerbating or threatening the well-being of the countries' citizens. Of future concern is the spread of maritime piracy to the increasingly fragile states of Kenya and Tanzania.

The domestic costs of maritime piracy in Nigeria

Maritime piracy in Nigeria is directly linked to oil development and the resulting economic, social and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta. Some pirates – particularly those from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, or MEND – claim to be fighting for a fairer distribution of Nigeria's vast oil wealth, and as a protest to the damage caused by oil production in the Delta. While the federal government of Nigeria and the oil companies split profits roughly 60–40, and the federal money is supposed to be disbursed to local authorities to benefit the Delta inhabitants, this rarely occurs. As a result, destitution is rampant. Pollution from oil-production facilities has decimated local fisheries and farmland and gas flaring has caused chronic respiratory problems, especially among children.⁵ A 2006 report called the Niger Delta 'one of the five most severely petroleum damaged ecosystems in the world'.⁶ By some estimates, 1,5 million tons of oil has been spilled in the Delta over the last fifty years, or the equivalent of one *Exxon Valdez* spill per year.

Figure 2 Maritime pirate attacks in Nigeria, 2002–2008



Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships*; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships*.

Not all pirate attacks in Nigeria are politically motivated. Massive unemployment and the lack of meaningful economic opportunities, especially in the Delta region, have drawn young people into all sorts of maritime criminal activities, including bunkering (oil theft), kidnapping and piracy. There are many armed groups in the Delta region that view maritime crime as a purely money-making endeavour.⁷ In a country where the majority of the population live on less than a dollar a day, kidnapping for ransom has become a lucrative business. Pirates are often young unemployed men without job opportunities who admit they were enticed into pirate gangs by promised riches, fancy cars, luxury consumer goods and weapons.⁸

As recently as 2004 Nigerian waters were declared ‘the most deadly in the world’ due to the increasing intensity of attacks in the Niger Delta region.⁹ Since 2006, the majority of attacks have been motivated by financial and not political gain,¹⁰ and attacks in Nigerian waters have only increased (see figure 2).

The costs of maritime piracy to Nigerian society and the economy have been significant, not only to the oil industry, but to local fisheries and regional trade as well.

Impact on oil production

As a result of pirate attacks on vessels and other incidents, oil production in Nigeria has dropped 20 per cent since 2006 and piracy and other illegal maritime activities have cost the Nigerian economy US\$202 million between 2005 and 2008.¹¹ A recent report commissioned by Royal Dutch Shell estimates that 10 per cent of Nigeria’s daily oil output (about 100 000 barrels) is stolen every day. This is worth about US\$1,5 million and would buy enough weapons and ammunition to sustain a 1 500-strong fighting force for two months.¹² Over the last fifty years, the value of the oil stolen or wasted has amounted to between US\$300 and US\$400 billion.¹³ While much of this cost is borne by the oil companies and the federal government, the loss in revenue also means less for the social and economic development so necessary for the Delta region.

Impact on fishing

Maritime piracy also imposes significant costs on the country’s important local fishing economy. Fishing is the second highest non-oil export industry in Nigeria, and pirate attacks on fishing trawlers have reached the point that many fishing boat captains refuse to sail. The attacks range from minor harassment to theft of fish cargoes, engines and other material on board; financial shakedowns; and the killing of fishermen.¹⁴ Pirate attacks worldwide are considered to be vastly under-reported, and Nigeria is no exception, particularly when it comes to attacks on fishing vessels. The Nigerian Maritime Security Task Force on Acts of Illegality in Nigerian Waters (IAMSTAF) reported at least 293 documented sea robberies and pirate attacks between 2003 and 2008 on the country’s

fishing vessels alone;¹⁵ the International Maritime Bureau reported 177 attacks during these years. Another source reports 100 attacks on fishing vessels just in 2007.¹⁶

As of March 2008, over 170 fishing trawlers were idle because fishing boats were afraid to put to sea, threatening approximately 50 000 jobs. All told, Nigeria stands to lose up to US\$600 million in export earnings due to piracy threats to its fisheries.¹⁷

In addition to the impact on Nigeria's export economy, seafood prices have skyrocketed due to the scarcity of fish caused by fewer fishing vessels being willing to put to sea. Prices have more than doubled and even quadrupled in some places, placing this important protein source out of the reach of most of the average citizens. Increasingly, Nigerian pirates are reported to have effectively taken over the coastal waters of the country, and similar piracy problems are reported among fishermen elsewhere in the Gulf of Guinea region.¹⁸

Regional impacts and effects on shippers

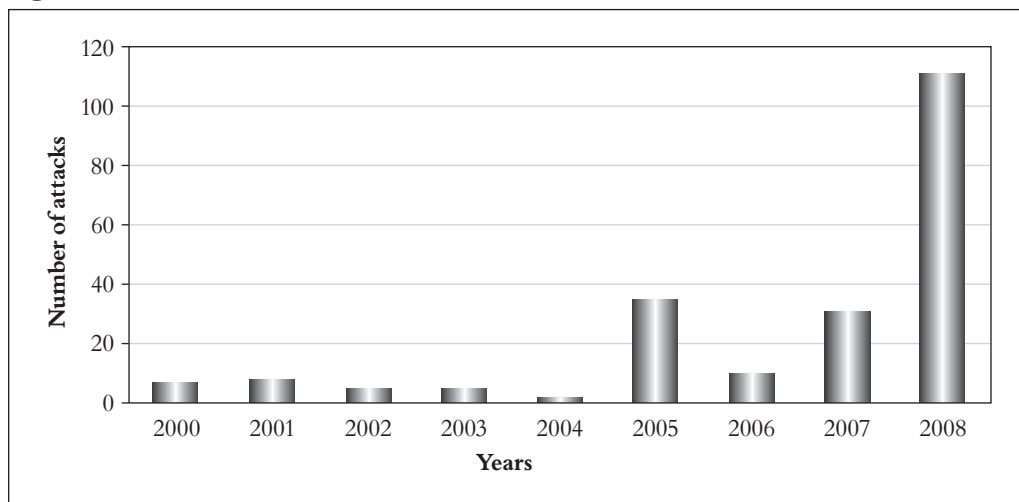
Nigeria accounts for over 60 per cent of the total seaborne traffic for the 16 nations in the West Africa sub-region. As warnings to mariners in and near Nigerian waters become more common, increased shipping costs for Nigerian and Gulf of Guinea destinations are likely as shippers begin to factor higher insurance premiums into their pricing. Because increased shipping costs are typically passed on to consumers, there are likely to be inflationary pressures for vital goods and services throughout the region as long as Nigerian piracy persists.

Despite the attacks on Western oil interests, piracy in Nigeria receives less attention than in other regions of the world. Without external pressure, and with a federal government either unwilling or unable to act, piracy is likely to increase; as a result, conditions in the Delta region will continue to deteriorate for many of its inhabitants, providing more incentive for individuals with limited economic opportunities to turn to maritime crime.

Somalia: relief aid in the Horn of Africa

While the first pirate attacks in Somalia of any significant number were only recorded in 2000, the roots of the current crisis date back to 1991 when Mohammed Siad Barre was overthrown, leaving the country without an effective central government and locked in civil conflict. Taking advantage of the power vacuum, rival warlords have carved out influence over regional territories – first on land, and then increasingly at sea. Fishermen, dismayed at the inability of the central government to protect their country's exclusive economic zone, and at the number of foreign fishing vessels illegally

Figure 3 *Pirate attacks in Somalia, 2000–2008*



Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships*; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships*.

exploiting their traditional fisheries, took matters into their own hands. Initially arming themselves to chase off the foreign invaders, they quickly realised that robbing the vessels was a lucrative way to make up for lost income. Seeing their success, land-based warlords co-opted some of the new pirates, organising them into increasingly sophisticated gangs.

As can be seen in figure 3, pirate attacks have increased dramatically from 7 in 2000 to a staggering 111 in 2008, over three times the number in 2007, making Somali waters the most dangerous in the world last year.

Despite a 2005 IMO resolution encouraging UN member states with naval vessels in the region to be ‘vigilant’ for piracy incidents, prior to 2006 the international community took little interest in addressing the piracy problems in the region. Vessels supporting the US-led coalition in the global ‘war on terror’ patrolled the area in support of anti-terrorist operations (for example, firing missiles at suspected al-Qaeda terrorists) but were often visibly reluctant to become involved in anti-piracy operations.

This began to change with the rise to power of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2006 and its subsequent ouster in early 2007. While the ICU was in power, the US and other Western nations began to fear links between the ICU and al-Qaeda and subsequently between piracy and terrorism. After the collapse of the ICU, there was a substantial increase in the violence and incidence of pirate attacks culminating in over 100 attacks in 2008, and including an attack on a US-flagged and -crewed vessel in early 2009. Lastly, there were persistent and unrelenting attacks on UN-chartered relief vessels responding to the humanitarian crisis in the country.

During their brief tenure in power, the ICU took a firm stand against maritime piracy. They were also able to extend their military control over the known 'pirate bases' of Harardheere and Hobyo. The capture of Harardheere was particularly significant: the Somali Marines pirate group operating there had the most sophisticated capabilities of any of the pirate groups operating in the country. With the ability to operate the furthest offshore, they were believed to be responsible for most of the attacks on larger vessels, including hijackings for ransom.¹⁹ As the ICU exerted its control, they declared piracy a crime and imposed strict penalties (including cutting off both hands); as a result, piracy dropped to only ten attacks in 2006.

After the ICU was ousted and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) returned to nominal power, Somalia soon became one of the world's major piracy 'hot spots' and came to be considered a safe haven for al-Qaeda. Calls for the United States to take a larger role in combating maritime piracy were made in the context of fighting terrorism, or preventing terrorists from gaining a stronghold in the deteriorating region. While not all analysts agree on the pirate-terrorist link, others began to argue that piracy should be seen as a form of terrorism. As al-Qaeda operatives are widely believed to have remained in Somalia in support of the ICU and its continued efforts against the UN- and Ethiopian-backed TFG, the United States began to take a more active role in the region, paying closer attention to maritime piracy.

After the ouster of the ICU and the restoration to power of the TFG, there was a sharp increase in the number and violence of the attacks. Attacks resumed up to and beyond the 200 nautical miles warning given by the IMO, leading many to conclude the Somali Marines were back in action. Supported by a suspected 'mother ship', they began attacking vessels with a vengeance, sometimes up to three or four vessels in a 48-hour period. More and more mariners began to heed the UN warning to stay beyond 200 nautical miles from the Somali coast when transiting. Nevertheless, by Autumn 2008, the situation took a dramatic turn, with the pirates becoming bolder and more audacious. In September, the MV *Faina*, a Ukrainian tanker carrying tanks and weapons, was captured off the Somali coast, and in December, the Saudi-flagged MV *Sirius Star* was hijacked – the 330 m very large crude carrier (VLCC) was the largest vessel ever captured by pirates and was attacked over 400 nautical miles from shore.

The humanitarian crisis and attacks on relief vessels

Civil war, combined with a series of devastating droughts, has created a dire humanitarian crisis in Somalia. There are more than one million internally displaced persons in the country, with the conflict pushing more than 20 000 people from their homes in Mogadishu per month.²⁰ At the height of its relief efforts, the United Nation's World Food Programme (WFP) was carrying 32 000 tons of food each month into the country. More than 2,6 million people in Somalia were dependent on food aid in 2008

alone.²¹ This number now stands at 3,25 million people, or one third of the country's population. Life expectancy at birth is 46,2 years. A quarter of children die before they reach the age of five. One in six children under the age of five is acutely malnourished. Combined with record high food prices, hyperinflation and continued drought, the humanitarian situation in Somalia is now believed by some experts to be worse than that in Darfur.

Between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of food aid for Somalia arrives by sea, as land-based alternatives are problematic; for example, it can take three weeks for a truckload of food to arrive in Mogadishu from Mombasa and drivers and their escorts are often attacked. The World Food Programme is one of the major food suppliers to the country; the International Committee of the Red Cross, CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam and other NGOs are also active in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance. However, in 2005, pirates began targeting WFP-chartered ships carrying relief supplies, forcing the UN agency to suspend all deliveries of food assistance by sea to Somalia for weeks and further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country. All told, more than half a dozen vessels carrying relief aid have been attacked off the Somali coast (see table 3 on page 12).

Because of the increased dangers faced by humanitarian relief vessels in Somali waters, the WFP reported in 2007 that the number of ships willing to carry food aid to the country had been cut by half.²³ In March 2007 the WFP had over 2 400 tons of food supplies waiting on a dock in Tanzania ready for delivery and was having difficulty finding ships to hire. Ship owners feared their vessels would be seized by pirates and their crews held for ransom. Relief agencies began to warn of 'an impending humanitarian catastrophe' and the secretary general of the IMO and the executive director of the WFP warned that piracy off the coast of Somalia could seriously threaten the supply line for food assistance to the country.²⁴ In March 2008, some 40 relief agencies including World Vision and Oxfam said they were unable to help millions of Somalis due to dangers and other impediments to their work.²⁵

Due to the highly publicised attacks on relief vessels, and the deteriorating conditions within the country, the international community agreed to provide military escort to vessels carrying WFP aid. Between November 2007 and June 2008, French, Danish and Dutch frigates escorted enough WFP food assistance to Somalia to feed nearly one million people for six months.²⁶ In June, the WFP asked for additional security assistance, and military escorts for the humanitarian relief vessels were taken over by the Canadian Navy in August 2008.

In October 2008, the UN Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for the deployment of more international forces in the region to ensure that UN food aid reaches the more than three million people threatened with starvation in Somalia. The

Table 3 Humanitarian relief vessels attacked in Somalia, 2005–2009

June 2005	The MV <i>Semlow</i> was chartered by the WFP and carried 850 tons of rice, food aid for victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami in Somalia. After taking control of the ship, the pirates stole US\$8 500 from the ship's safe, ransacked the crew's cabins, and demanded US\$500 000 in ransom for the return of the vessel. Diplomats from Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and the UN negotiated with the transitional government and clan elders and warned that food aid could be halted unless the <i>Semlow's</i> crew was released. The ship and crew were eventually released in September. The WFP denied paying any ransom, but the shipping agency responsible for the vessel admitted they had paid US\$135 000 to the pirates
October 2005	The MV <i>Miltzow</i> was carrying over 800 tons of food aid for the Lower Juba Valley, which had been repeatedly affected by droughts, floods and civil conflict. It had offloaded about half of its cargo of 703 tons of maize, 108 tons of beans and 30 tons of vegetable oil in the port of Merca when it was stormed by pirates and forced to leave port. Less than two days later, the vessel and its ten crew members were released after negotiations with a Somali businessman. No ransom was reported paid
February 2007	The MV <i>Rozen</i> , a vessel chartered by the World Food Programme to deliver UN food aid to Somalia, and its twelve-member crew were hijacked by armed pirates off the Somali coast. The Somali authorities were notified and intercepted the ship, but despite a heavy exchange of gunfire, the authorities were not able to board the vessel and the pirates escaped. After intervention by tribal elders in Puntland and subsequent mediation efforts, the <i>Rozen</i> was subsequently released in early April, with its crew unharmed
May 2007	The MV <i>Victoria</i> was attacked 60 nautical miles from the port of Merca. It issued a distress call, resulting in two boats dispatched by the ship contractor. While these boats were able to intercept the pirates before they could board the <i>Victoria</i> , one guard was wounded in a gunfire exchange and later died
March 2008	Two UN World Food Programme boats were stolen from the southern Somali port town of Merca. Police said they had arrested five suspects and found one of the boats crashed in Jazeera (pirates sometimes steal boats to use in their operations)
May 2008	The cargo ship MV <i>Victoria</i> was attacked again; this time it was hijacked off Mogadishu. The vessel was carrying a cargo of sugar from India donated by Denmark and was bound for Somalia
October 2007	Pirates attempt to hijack the Comoran-flagged MV <i>Jaikur II</i> some sixty miles off the coast of the port of Brava, south of Mogadishu in Somalia. The cargo ship, which had just offloaded over 7 000 tons of food aid from the UN World Food Programme, was able to evade the pirates and return to Mombasa
April 2009	The US-flagged and -crewed MV <i>Maersk Alabama</i> was carrying food aid for Somalia, Kenya and Uganda where the WFP is attempting to feed almost eight million people in 2009 because of drought and high food prices. The ship was attacked on its way to Mombasa, Kenya, a port critical for WFP programmes throughout the Horn of Africa since it serves as a point of entry for food aid for Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, southern Sudan and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2008, more than 500 000 tons of WFP food assistance was delivered onboard more than 200 ships through the port. ²² This was the first time a Mombasa-bound ship was attacked, raising concerns about security for relief supplies distributed through Kenya
April 2009	The Togo-flagged vessel MV <i>Sea Horse</i> was attacked 700 kilometres from Mogadishu on its way to pick up 7 000 tons of maize for the WFP from Mumbai, India
Apr 2009	The US-flagged MV <i>Liberty Sun</i> was carrying 27 000 tons of food for the WFP for relief efforts in Somalia, Southern Sudan and Kenya, and 3 000 tons of food for World Vision and for NGOs in Uganda (Eagle). It was attacked by pirates after it had made a food delivery at Port Sudan. While damaged by rocket propelled grenade fire, it was not boarded and it headed to Mombasa under US escort

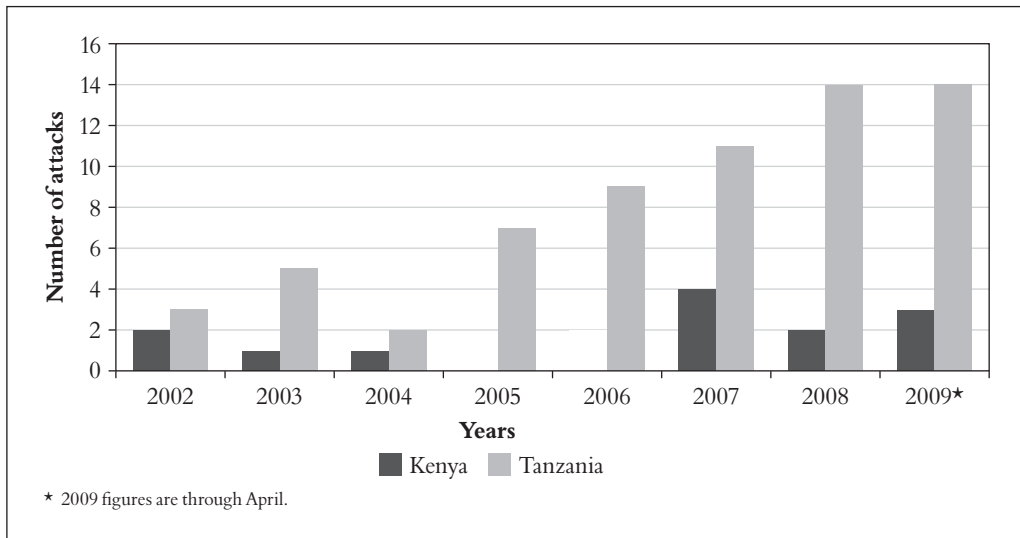
resolution also called on all countries with naval vessels and military aircraft operating off the Somali coast to use ‘the necessary means’ against acts of piracy. In response, seven NATO warships were deployed off the Somali coast as part of ‘Operation Allied Provider’ to help combat piracy, and specifically to protect UN World Food Programme ships transporting humanitarian relief supplies to the country.

While military escorts have provided some level of security for relief vessels bringing humanitarian assistance to Somalia, it is clear they are not a solution to the complex problem of maritime piracy. As we have seen in Nigeria, without economic opportunities offering viable alternatives to the lucrative business of maritime piracy, with ransoms paid for hijacked vessels ranging between half a million to three million dollars, and without law and good governance to act as a deterrent, there will be strong economic incentives for an impoverished and destitute people to turn to maritime crime. Also, as we have seen in Nigeria, while maritime piracy in Somalia imposes much-publicised costs on the shipping community, it also extracts a deep toll from the population itself. Food aid stolen by pirates, or left rotting because it is being held for weeks or months on hijacked vessels, does not reach those who need it most.

Emerging concerns: Kenya and Tanzania

According to the World Food Programme, the Horn of Africa is currently facing its worst humanitarian crisis since 1984.²⁷ Despite the decline of prices of key commodities on global markets, food prices continue to increase, particularly in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. In addition, lower than average rainfall, livestock diseases, conflict throughout the region, deteriorating infrastructure and hyperinflation will contribute to ‘increased malnutrition, heightened vulnerability, school drop outs, displacement, resource conflicts, and migration of pastoralists in search of water and pasture’.²⁸ All told, some 16 million people in the region will require emergency food and nutrition assistance in 2009, most of which will have to be delivered by sea.

Kenya and Tanzania, while not experiencing the levels of piracy anywhere near that seen in Somalia, are nonetheless affected by piracy in that country. Many of the pirate attacks reported in these two countries are actually committed by Somali pirates operating farther and farther from their own shores. For example, as already mentioned, the *Sirius Star* was captured off the Kenyan coast and the *Maersk Alabama* was attacked en route to Mombasa. After an attempt on a Dutch container ship over 500 nautical miles east of Dar es Salaam, the International Maritime Bureau issued an alert to all ships off the coast of Tanzania to be on a strict anti-piracy watch. The attackers, believed to be Somali pirates, were armed with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. The Dutch vessel managed to repel the attack, but it caused concern as it showed the pirates were becoming bolder and extending their reach further from their base in Somalia.

Figure 4 Maritime piracy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, 2002–2009*

Source International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and armed robbery against ships*; International Maritime Organisation, *Reports on acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships*.

While most of the attacks are currently reported in Tanzania, Kenya is also a concern due to the importance of Mombasa as a regional humanitarian assistance distribution hub. According to the WFP, if food assistance cannot arrive through Mombasa for Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, southern Sudan and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, millions of people will go hungry and the already high malnutrition rates throughout the region will rise.

Concerns for Kenya and Tanzania go beyond the impact on humanitarian food distribution networks. Increased piracy on the Tanzanian sea route is jeopardising commercial shipping in general due to increased costs of operations. The shipping company Maersk Tanzania has already introduced an emergency risk surcharge for sea-borne cargo destined for Tanzania to compensate for any piracy incident. Insurance premiums, which are on the increase throughout the region due to piracy, can lead to hyperinflation in vulnerable economies like Tanzania. It is a normal practice by shippers in the country to pass the extra transportation costs they incur to consumers, making the domestic market inflationary.²⁹ This is at the same time that the country's export trade, led by traditional exports commodities like cotton, cashew nuts, and coffee, has been hit by the global economic downturn that has depreciated the international prices of the commodities. Additionally, oil companies have warned that Tanzania may suffer a fuel shortage (with a subsequent rise in fuel prices) as a result of maritime piracy off the coast of East Africa, since petroleum shippers do not want to risk having their tankers hijacked and held for ransom. As mentioned previously, decreased export earnings and the increased price of imports threaten to weaken an already fragile economy.

Conclusion

Maritime piracy imposes direct costs on the immediate victims of the attacks – the crews, the ships and their cargoes, and the shipping companies. Merchant seamen may be injured or killed; ships and cargoes stolen, and higher insurance rates and operating costs borne by companies. At the same time, the indirect costs of maritime piracy are substantial, particularly in humanitarian terms. Nowhere is this more true than in Africa. In Somalia, maritime piracy impedes the delivery of relief aid necessary to sustain and nourish a substantial part of the population. In Nigeria, piracy threatens the vital fishing industry and regional trade, and along with bunkering, reduces oil revenue and therefore potential financial support for the Delta region. At the same time, while piracy in both countries threatens the fragile living conditions of some of the world's poorest people, piracy itself has its roots in these fragile economies. Maritime piracy cannot adequately be addressed and eradicated unless it is seen as both a *cause* of social and economic hardships and an *effect* of social, political and economic destitution as well.

Notes

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