



RiskIntelligence

Gulf of Guinea piracy: Threat analysis and trends

Whitepaper | March 2021

Risk Intelligence A/S
Strandvejen 100
2900 Hellerup
Denmark

Tel: +45 7026 6230
info@riskintelligence.eu
www.riskintelligence.eu

Gulf of Guinea piracy: Threat analysis and trends

Introduction:

Several piracy incidents in recent months, particularly kidnappings of seafarers, have highlighted the threats to commercial shipping in the Gulf of Guinea. While the situation has not escalated out of control as some reports have suggested, some trends are major concerns for crews on merchant vessels operating in the region.

All types of ships may come under attack –successful boardings in recent months have even taken place on vessels underway with a substantial freeboard. Moreover, while attacks remain more likely closer to the Niger Delta, the threat has spread to large parts of the Gulf of Guinea, affecting countries from Ghana to Gabon.

This whitepaper looks at three aspects that ship operators should take into consideration for any type of operation in the Gulf of Guinea: the distance of high-profile attacks from the Niger Delta, differences between daytime and nighttime attacks, and increasing concerns among seafarers, highlighted by the increasing number of reports about suspicious activities.

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Frontpage image: US Navy / Wikimedia Commons

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Spread of attacks throughout the Gulf of Guinea

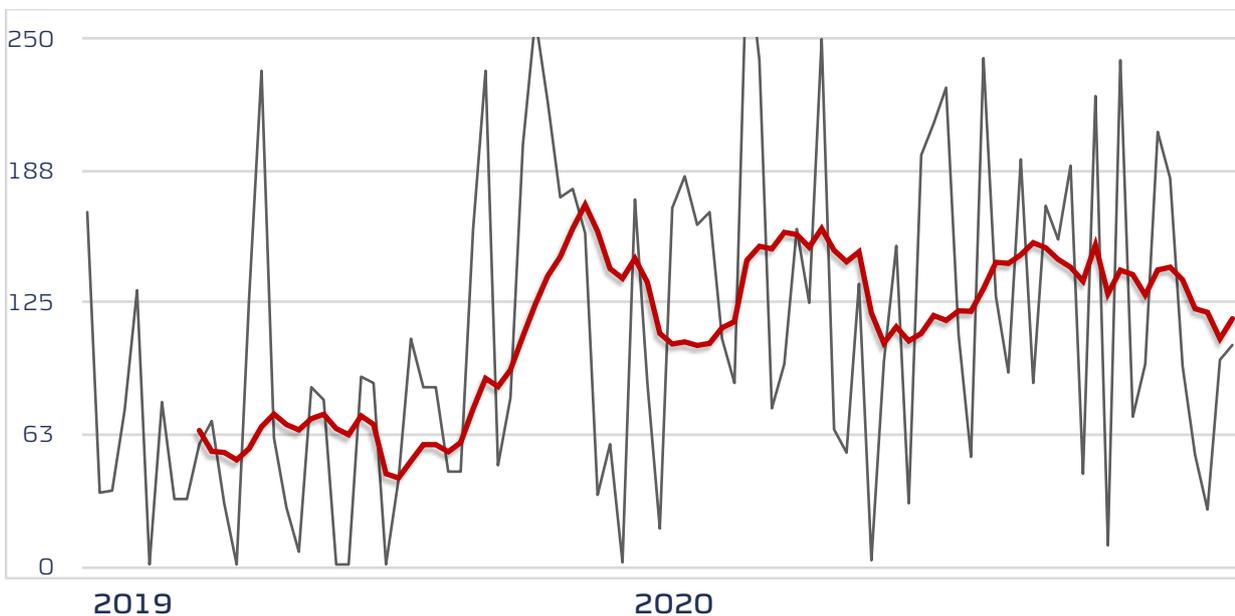
The most concerning trend for merchant shipping in the Gulf of Guinea has been the spread of attacks over a larger area.

Between 2016 and mid-2019, virtually all successful and failed kidnap-for-ransom attacks in the region took place relatively close to the southern and western Niger Delta, up to 120 nm from the coastline. The average distance of attacks from the Niger Delta then

increased significantly in the last quarter of 2019. Throughout 2020, attacks took place both close to Nigeria but also at significant distances from the Niger Delta coastline, affecting countries from Togo to Gabon.

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Gulf of Guinea kidnap-for-ransom attacks 2019-2020



Distance of failed and successful kidnap-for-ransom attacks from the closest point on the Niger Delta coastline (in nm). The red line shows the moving average over the previous 10 incidents (Source: Risk Intelligence System).

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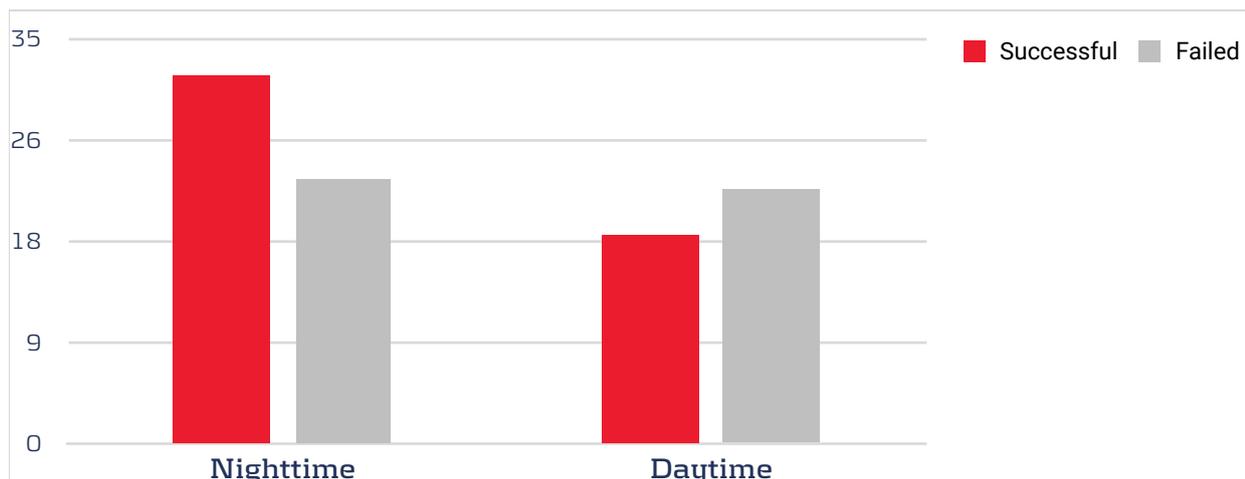
Despite various reports suggesting the contrary, it is not the first time that criminal groups from Nigeria have carried out operations throughout the Gulf of Guinea. Similar patterns could already be observed between 2010 and 2016. At the same time, attacks aimed at kidnapping seafarers are still exclusively carried out by Niger Delta-based groups. There are no indications that similar attacks can be carried out from other countries.

Successful attacks more likely at night

Attacks with the aim to kidnap seafarers may occur at any time. Successful attacks, however, are much more likely during hours of darkness. Moreover, at least some of the successful attacks during daytime are strongly

suspected to be linked with other illicit activities. It is therefore very likely that the respective ships were not targeted at random during the day.

Time of day of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea



Time of day during successful and failed kidnap-for-ransom attacks in the Gulf of Guinea between in 2019 and 2020 (Source: Risk Intelligence System).

Overall, the higher success rate of attackers at night can largely be attributed to the fact that crew members are more likely to detect hostile speedboats relatively early during the day. Early detection allows for more time to

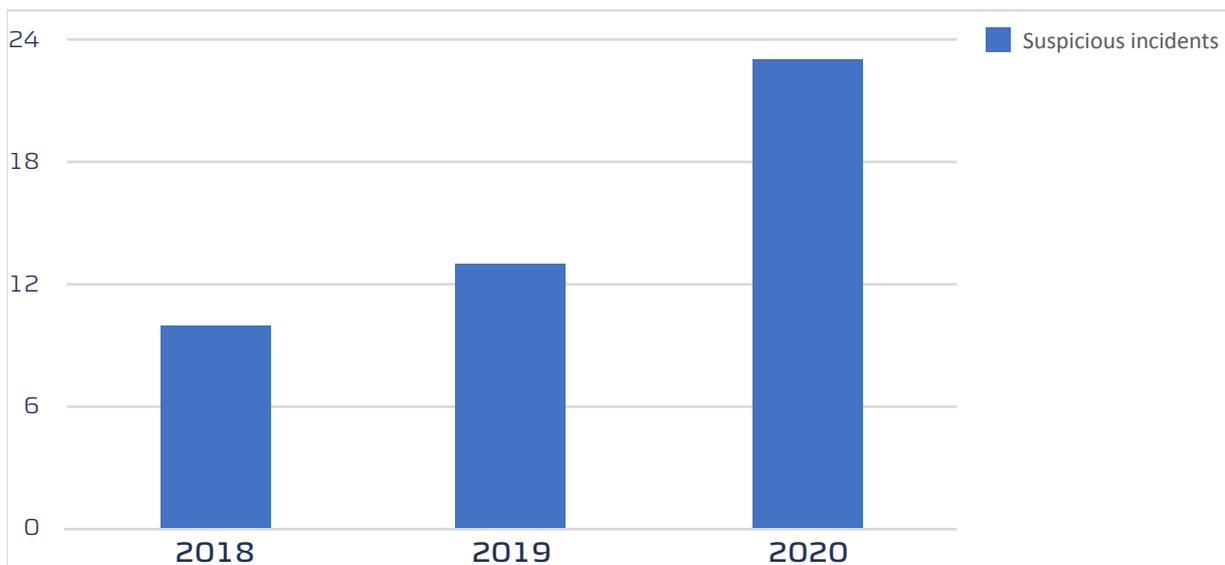
increase speed and conduct evasive manoeuvres while all crew members can also assemble in the citadel to wait for a naval response if the ship is boarded by the attackers.

Seafarers are increasingly concerned

Over the past 24 months, the number of reports about activities that were at least perceived as suspicious has increased significantly. This is a clear indication that crews on merchant vessels operating in the region are increasingly concerned about potential attacks.

In many incidents that have been reported by other organisations, it has been obvious that these were merely related to normal patterns of life in the region, for example to widespread fishing activities.

Total reported suspicious incidents in the Gulf of Guinea by year



Number of reports about suspicious incidents per year in West Africa (covering all countries from Senegal to Angola) as recorded by Risk Intelligence (Source: Risk Intelligence System).

These cases were not recorded as incidents on the Risk Intelligence System and are therefore not included in the figures shown here. However, even such

reports highlight the anxiety among seafarers, particularly among those who may not be familiar with operations in the Gulf of Guinea.

About Risk Intelligence

Risk Intelligence is a leading, trusted and reliable partner, providing end-to-end risk assessment and planning. We specialise in analysing threats from the interaction between piracy, organised crime, terrorism, insurgency and military conflicts - since 2001. Our team is dedicated and resourceful, drawing from international experience and a diverse range of background.

The Risk Intelligence System provides clients with real-time intelligence and situational awareness that will assist in avoidance of various types of security threats in areas of operational concern around the world.

Moreover, Risk Intelligence provides assistance to companies aiming to be better prepared for potential emergencies of all types. Among other services, this includes bespoke guidelines and procedures, internal workshops as well as risk management exercises to test internal procedures in a simulated emergency situation.

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