

# NOT SO “TROUBLED WATERS”

## SOMALI PIRACY

The International Maritime Community is increasingly concerned about the potential resurgence of Somali piracy. This revival poses significant threats to global trade, shipping routes, and the safety of seafarers essential to commerce.

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported 33 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the first quarter of 2024, up from 27 incidents in the same period in 2023. These included 24 boarded vessels, six attempted attacks, two hijackings, and one vessel being fired upon.

Historically, some Somali fishermen turned to piracy over a decade ago due to the destruction of their livelihoods by illegal foreign fishing, leading to hostage-taking and ransom demands, as noted by the World Bank. Current geopolitical conflicts are influencing the situation. Houthi rebels have claimed they will cease attacking ships if Israel ends its conflict in Gaza, a situation that has drawn naval patrols away from Somalia.

Additionally, a diplomatic dispute involving Somalia, Somaliland, and Ethiopia over a controversial port deal could further impair Somalia's ability to combat piracy. The increase in piracy incidents coincides with Houthi missile strikes on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Bab El Mandab Strait. Although there are no direct links between Somali pirates and Houthi militants, the conflict has created a security gap off the Somali coast, which pirates are attempting to exploit.

It is important to implement measures that ensure the seamless flow of goods through international supply chains. Despite the recent surge in attacks, a return to the peak levels of Somali piracy seen a decade ago is unlikely. Enhanced security measures by both companies and states implemented in response to the previous wave of piracy continue to serve as effective deterrents. Naval forces have advanced their detection and response capabilities, Merchant ships in high-risk areas like the Gulf of Aden (GOA) now carry armed guards and employ non-lethal deterrents such as anti-piracy fire hoses, long-range acoustic devices (LRADs), razor wire on ship's decks and water cannons to prevent piracy attempts.

Although the security challenges off the Somali coast persist, remaining pirate groups are expected to focus on vulnerable targets, such as commercial vessels with inadequate security, moving at slow speeds, or outside naval protection. While the concern over further incidents is legitimate, a full-scale resurgence of Somali piracy appears highly unlikely currently.



Source:Gettyimages