



PIRACY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE HIGH RISK AREA REVISION

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The phenomenon of piracy attacks in the Horn of Africa against commercial vessels by mostly Somali-based pirates is not a new one. From 2008 to 2012 this kind of assaults presented an excessive incline creating a major problem for international commercial shipping in this part of East Africa and onwards. The continuous instability in this area and the strong feeling of insecurity and anxiety of the seafarers sailing through this route and especially in the Gulf of Aden created a certain necessity for some official anti-piracy action. Under those circumstances a specific region has been characterized as the Piracy High Risk Area and detailed instructions have been issued for the ships that would approach it.

The protective measures (as described in the [latest BMP version](#)) suggested the presence of armed security guards on-board, combined with passive protection imposed on each ship - like razor wires in possible points of entrance or a protocol that the captain should follow when suspicious activity was spotted nearby. In addition a Coalition of International Naval Forces has been formed and deployed in the area in order to cope with such incidents. The commercial vessels that were to sail through the Gulf of Aden were advised to follow a specific route, the so-called International Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) where the presence and patrols of the Coalition Force minimized the chances of a piracy attack.

Apparently all this action brought major results in the area and gradually the piracy threat almost disappeared. However some countries and particularly India kept pressing for the reshaping of the HRA, claiming that its limits created a problematic situation for the territorial sea and internal waters of the country causing major losses on maritime economy and especially on the fishing industry. All this pressure combined with the vital decline in piracy incidents finally did manage to get the competent authorities convinced and agree to a reduction of the HRA limits. The new revised High Risk Area is going to be officially applied and recognized from 1st of December 2015. But what impact would such a change have in the international maritime industry?

Initially let's take a look at the very causes of piracy in first place. The rise of piracy in the Gulf of Aden is merely connected to the economic problems of Somalia and Yemen. Regarding Somalia, unfortunately the attempts and plans for restoration of its economy literally failed, making things even worse than the previous years and leaving no ambitious potential for the near future. Meanwhile in Yemen the non-stopping conflict between the government and the Huti rebels has led the country to an unofficial civil war. Thus the future of Yemeni economy seems rather grim. Briefly the present situation rather encourages the locals to turn to illegal activities, with piracy being in the top of them.

Furthermore a precursor of Somali piracy had been the long-time illegal fishing of local fishermen. The essential evolution of this law-breaking action has been the piracy attempts and attacks that seemed to be a much more profitable kind of "business". During the 2012-2015 period, when some serious efforts against piracy took place, illegal fishing activity has been remarkably reduced. However during the last months such incidents tend to be reported in the area on an increasing basis.

To make a long story short, one would say that the piracy problem in the horn of Africa never stopped existing; just has been dormant for a long time. The revision of the HRA, which consequently means the gradual withdrawal of the Navy Forces and maybe the prohibition of armed security teams on board may be just the suitable circumstances for the rising of piracy once again. Regarding the problematic situation in South-East Asia, where attacks on unprotected commercial ships are a daily reality, it seems that what encourages the piracy activity is the total absence of armed personnel on board or nearby the ship; either military or private. Under those circumstances a new wave of successful pirate attacks, in the long-time “safe” east African region may be just a matter of time.