

Piracy Reports in 1999

By [Mark Bruyneel](#)

☛ Number of Attacks so far in 1999

A record 59 ships were attacked and another seven were the target of attempted attacks during the first quarter of this year, according to a report by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB)³². During the second Quarter of 1999 47 piracy incidents have been reported by the International Maritime Bureau^{3,6,20}. This makes a total of 113 reported incidents from 1st January to 31st June 1999. In reports of July - November²¹⁻²⁵ new incidents are reported: 30, 24, 9, 34 and 10. The total number of reported incidents over 10 months (Jan - Nov) is therefore: 217. Since the beginning of December The Commercial Crime Services department of the International Chamber of Commerce has started to publish Weekly Piracy Reports on the internet^{28-31,33}. The total number of reported incidents in these reports, from 30 November to 31 December, is 27. The total figure for 1999 is therefore: 218+27= 245. The total number has surpassed that of last year: 192. The total number of piracy incidents has surpassed the total for 1996 and may even challenge the all-time high of 1997. Most of the attacks in 1999 took place waters in the areas: South East Asia, West Africa, East Africa and South America. The new annual report that is published in January 2000 contains an updated number of incidents. The total number of incidents in this report is: 285³².

☛ The upsurge of Piracy in South-Asia in 1998 + 1999

According to an article in Lloyd's list² poor freight rates and difficult economic conditions are leading to an upsurge in fraud and piracy in southeast Asian waters.

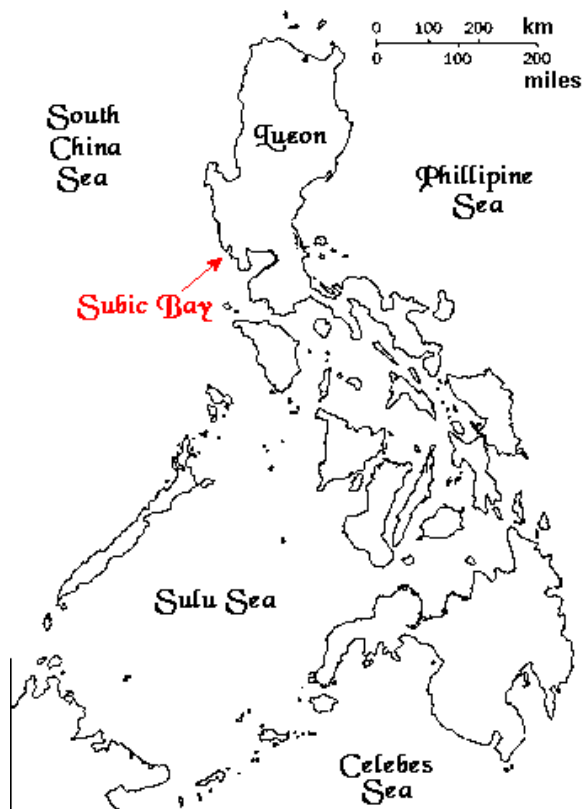
The International Maritime Bureau has claimed Criminals linked to China's powerful Triad gangs have moved into shipowning and are even colluding in the murder of crews⁵. An article in "Safety at Sea" states that the Asian economic recession has increased the number and severity of piracy attacks in that region³. In 1998 attacks on shipping left 67 seafarers confirmed dead and a further 35 seriously injured. These numbers are reported in the Annual Report of the ICC International Maritime Bureau²⁷. The amount of violence has also not decreased since last year. Smuggling of weapons is the driving force behind the recent upsurge in violent acts of piracy, according to an article in last week's London Sunday Time¹⁶. If organized crime is involved in the smuggling of weapons it is even more likely that violence will increase, especially if large quantities of arms are involved. Smuggling weapons may be a profitable business when the situation in East Timor and the rest of Indonesia remains unstable and local militia go fighting each other (by keeping some pirates out of view and flying a flag of another country). These days the pirates disguise themselves sometimes as Marine police or officials, by wearing military uniforms and helmets. This sometimes leads to speculation on involvement by (for example) Chinese Authorities, but so far this has never been proven. Some officials, however, have admitted that some rogue officials may sometimes have been involved in the past. According to Hunter¹⁹ in 1999 a Chinese daily issued a warning to seafarers against pirates operating disguised as Marine Frontier Police.

☛ Measures taken in 1999

In 1997 the Company Maritime Risk Management S.A. set up a service that includes Specialist Response Teams to react and combat piracy incidents¹. In 1999 what appears to be a similar service, was announced by a dutch company. The dutch company announced its intentions to set up a mercenary task force to combat piracy. This task force will consist of up to 225 elite Netherlands ex-marines⁴. According to the director of the company Satellites Protection Services

(SPS), A. Melein, the task force will be set up in the Phillipines. The center of operations will be an old base of the US which lies in the Subic bay (See picture on next page).

A newspaper article in "De Volkskrant" mentions (in August of 1999) that a first group of 93 ex-marines will soon be send to the Phillipines⁸. Other activities include the seizure and arrest of two men by Chinese authorities after a long and widespread search in 12 provinces and municipalities. These men, Weng Siliang and Zhu Youwang, are suspected of being the heads of a gang that murdered 23 chinese seafarers in December 1998. Weng is thought to have been personally invol-ved in the attack on the vessel. The 23 seamen were on board the general cargoship "Cheung Son" when the tragedy took place^{9,10}. At an ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) ministerial meeting in June of this year an agreement was reached to set up a new unit which will liaise with other criminal investigation units.



The new unit is called: Asean Centre For Com-bating Transnational Crime^{7,26}. Another positive action in 1999 was the action taken by China's Public Security Ministry: it ordered local police forces to form anti-piracy units. These units are also ordered to work closely with courts, customs, port authorities and harbour masters. This will be welcome news for nations who in the past were dissatisfied with China's actions with regard to piracy³⁴. A Japanese company, Sumitomo Marine & Fire Insurance Co. is now offering an insurance policy that covers (among other things) offhire from piracy problems as well as detentions due to smuggling investigations. This policy is the first of its kind in Japan and appears to sell well to Japanese shipowners. The policy is comparatively cheap but requires additional coverage against damage caused by war¹⁴. This kind of policy is another step in the right direction to combat piracy. It may increase the speed of the investigations into incidents as well as an increase in reports of incidents by Crews and Shipowners. In an editorial of the Asashi Evening News Naoyoshi Ishikawa (= former shipping line official) has suggested another method for combatting piracy in Southeast Asia: the formation of regional patrols under the flag of the United Nations. The vessels should be manned by sailors from countries in the area. Such a maritime police force could operate in territorial waters from all nations in the area which will make it harder for pirates to escape^{11,19}. In Decem-ber the International Chamber of Commerce has announced that it will post weekly piracy reports about attacks in the East and Southeast Asian Region on its website. A new report will be posted on the website each Tuesday in the section of the Commer-cial Crime Services. The source for the data in these reports is the Regional Piracy Centre (of the International Mari-time Bureau) in Kuala Lumpur^{15,18,28}.

🚢 Success against pirates

A tanker called "Alondra Rainbow" was attacked and disappeared after it had left Indonesia on Oct 22. The

ship carried Aluminium ingots as cargo and had a crew of 15 Filipinos and two Japanese sailors. They were set adrift in a life raft and after 11 days were picked up by a Thai fisherman on 9 November. The Captain and Chief engineer were back in Japan on Saturday 15 November. The Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) was informed of the incident and immediately issued a warning to all mariners and coastal authorities. After receiving several reports of sightings the PRC informed the authorities of Sri Lanka and the Indian coastguards of where to look for the vessel. Fifteen Indonesian pirates had taken control of the vessel and appeared to be bound for the port Fujaira on the coast of Saudi Arabia when they were noticed by the Indian Coast Guard. The Alondra Rainbow was freshly painted and upon interrogation of the crew by radio they became suspicious. A Dornier aircraft was sent after her and two patrol boats were sent in pursuit. The patrol boats were able to catch up to it after the Dornier had found the vessel. When the patrol boats got nearer the pirates increased their speed from 8 knots to 14 knots. On November 14 the patrol boat caught up with the Alondra. The patrol boats repeatedly warned the pirates to stop and subject itself to an examination as provided under the UN Law of the Sea. Warning shots were fired across the bow of the Alondra but the pirates refused to give up. The Coast Guard then requested the assistance from the Indian Navy. The missile corvette INS Prahar was sent and it arrived at midnight the same day. After firing warning shots across the bow the gunboat fired its AK-630 cannons and its 76.2 mm main gun. The pirates soon gave up soon after the attack started. After taking the pirates prisoner the small fire that had started was put out by the boarding party. Several leaks were also discovered by the Coast Guard and plugged immediately. It was also discovered that 40% of its 7000 tonnes cargo of aluminium ingots was offloaded before its capture by the Indian Navy^{11-13,17}.

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