

REPORT ON ARMED ROBBERY AND PIRACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FIRST QUARTER 2008

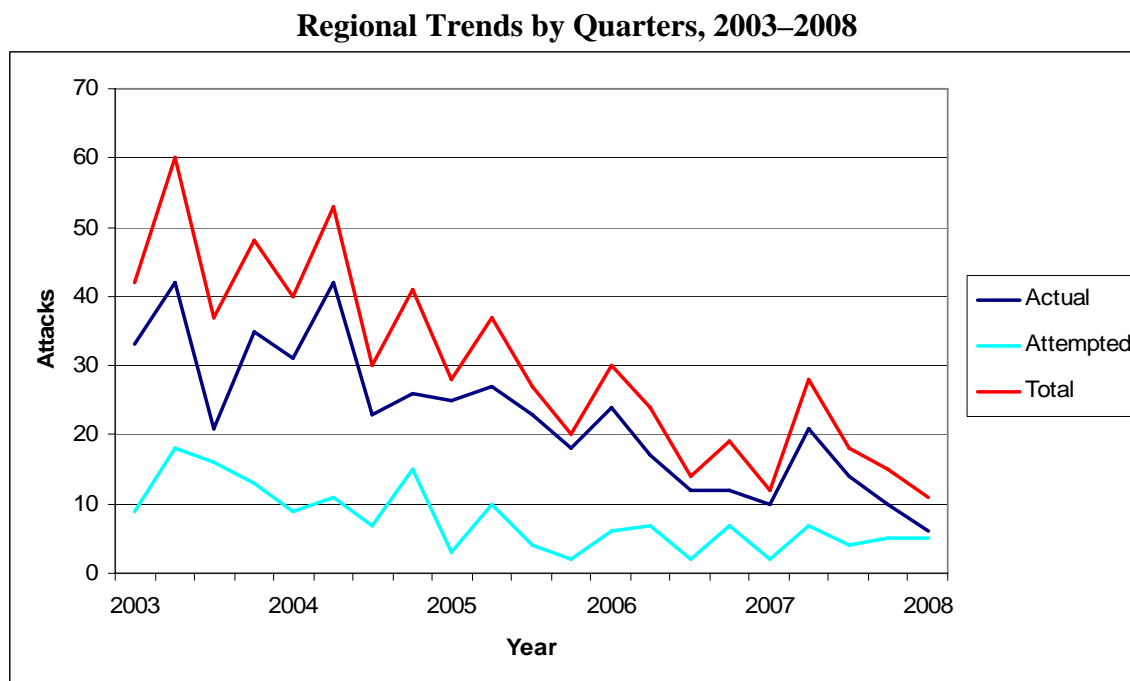


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Regional Trend

While world figures on cases of reported piracy and armed robbery seem to be increasing, figures within the Southeast Asia region continue to suggest that the overall number of attacks in the region is steadily trending downward (refer to Figure 1). There were a total of 11 reported armed-robbery and piracy incidents in Southeast Asia during the first quarter of 2008. Of these, six were actual attacks while the remaining five were attempted incidents. The first quarter of 2008 recorded the lowest number of armed-robbery and piracy activities in the region in the last five years. In fact, the number of actual attacks reported was equal to figures of the third quarter of 1998, where only six actual attacks were reported, the lowest number of actual attacks in the last 10 years. However, the same cannot be said of the steady numbers of attempted attacks being reported in the region.

Figure 1



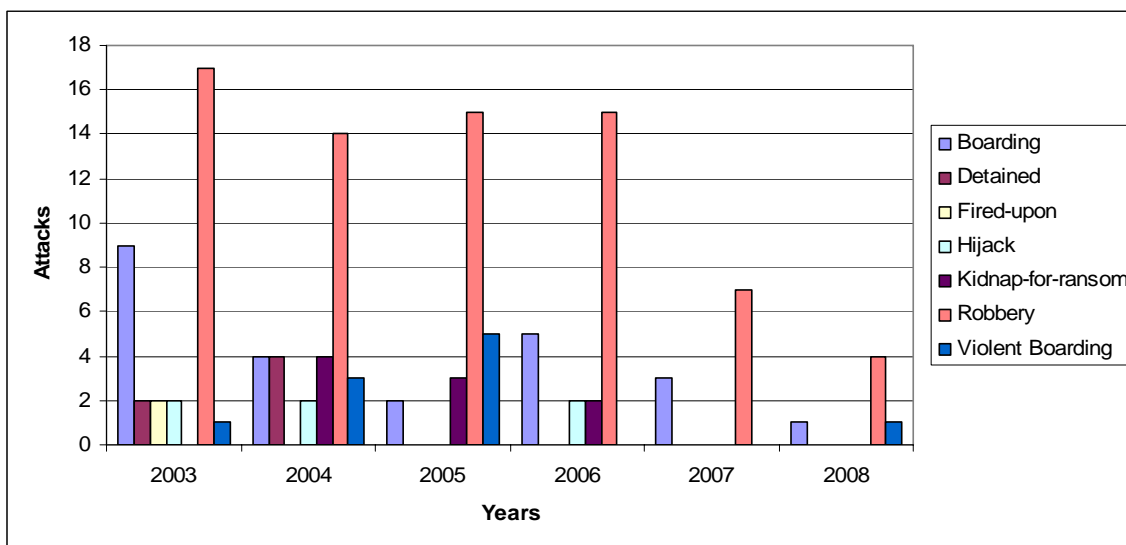


Types of Attacks

Although theft and/or robbery still make up the main type of attacks in the first quarter of 2008, one of the reported attacks turned violent, resulting in three fatalities and two injuries. As four of the six actual attacks reported during the first quarter of 2008 were theft and/or robbery cases, the violent boarding incident served as a harsh reminder of the possible level of violence one can face in an attack at sea. A first-quarterly comparison over the last five years saw a consistent pattern of the types of attacks being perpetrated in the region (see Figure 2). Based on previous analyses of the modus operandi common to this region, it was often concluded that such attacks were by and large opportunistic in nature. However, details of recent reports on attempted attacks seem to suggest a rather different trend. All five of the attempted attacks saw two or more hostile vessels operating concurrently, suggesting a planned and synchronized operation. Fortunately, all five possible targets were vigilant and engaged appropriate and timely evasive manoeuvres to avoid such attacks.

Figure 2

Types of Actual Attacks, First Quarterly Comparison, 2003–2008



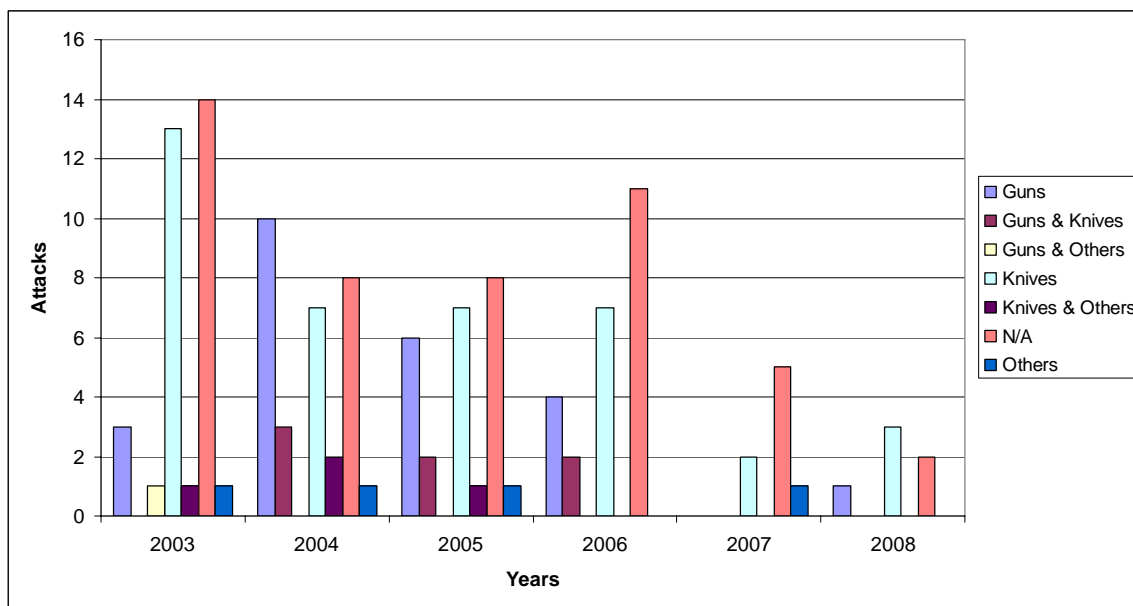


Types of Weapons

Of the six reported actual attacks, three saw the perpetrators armed with knives. Unfortunately, the only reported attack that saw the use of guns resulted in three fatalities and left two others injured. Knives were used in half of the reported incidences during the first quarter of 2008. First-quarterly comparison over the last five years saw a similar gun-knife ratio being used during those quarters (see Figure 3). More reports during those selected quarters provide information of the types of weapons being used as opposed to the annual figures where more than half of the reported incidences do not furnish such information. Information on the types of weapons used during attacks is an important gauge of the trend and potential violence that take place in regional waters.

Figure 3

Types of Weapons, First Quarterly Comparison, 2003–2008





Location of Attacks

The locations of the few reported cases of piracy and armed robbery attacks during the first quarter of 2008 in the Southeast Asia region do not reflect a particular hotspot within regional waters (see Figure 4). Although ports and anchorages were the most commonly targeted areas of attacks in Southeast Asia (where more than two-thirds of the attacks took place while vessels were at anchor and/or at berth), the regional trend seems to suggest that the more serious attacks almost always took place further offshore, targeting steaming vessels on local voyages. The most serious reported attack during the first quarter of 2008 was perpetrated in the body of water between the mainland and Polillo Islands, Philippines. Drawing from the attempted attacks reported during the first quarter of 2008, all cases seem to suggest coordinated attacks targeting steaming vessels further offshore. As all of these reported attempts were successfully evaded, it seems to suggest that crews were in a better position to defend themselves against piracy and armed robbery attacks while at sea.

Figure 4

Location of Actual Attacks in Southeast Asia, First Quarter, 2008



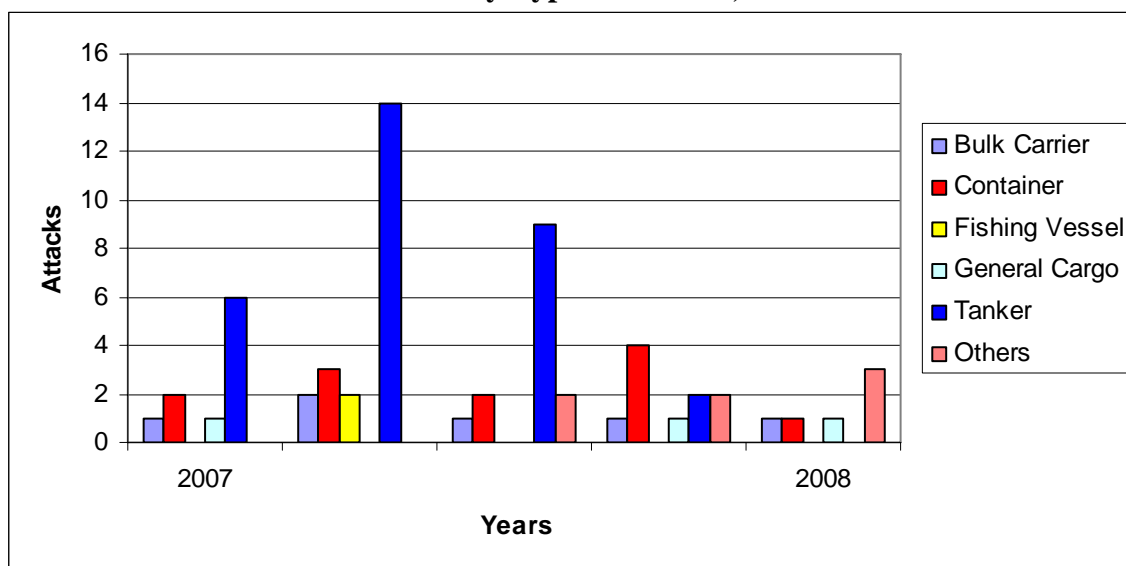


Types of Vessels

While tankers were the primary targets in Southeast Asia in 2007, vessels targeted during the first quarter of 2008 were varied (see Figure 5). As most of the reported actual attacks were theft and robbery cases while the vessels were at anchor or at berth, the targets were most likely those that were engaged in the lowest level of security measures onboard. A passenger boat was the target of the only violent boarding incident during the first quarter of 2008. Most of these attempted attacks were targeted at bulk carries and tankers of sorts. Fortunately, these targets were vigilant and were able to engage in a high level of security measures to avoid potential attacks.

Figure 5

Actual Attacks by Types of Vessels, 2007–2008





South China Sea

Figure 6 shows the location of actual attacks at or within the vicinity of the South China Sea. There has been no actual piracy or armed-robbery attack being reported in the South China Sea during the first quarter in the last five years (see Figure 7). As most of the cases that took place during the first quarter of 2008 were in fact perpetrated within the vicinity of ports and/or anchorages, it shall be highlighted that two of the five attempted attacks in the region took place within the waters of the South China Sea.

Figure 6

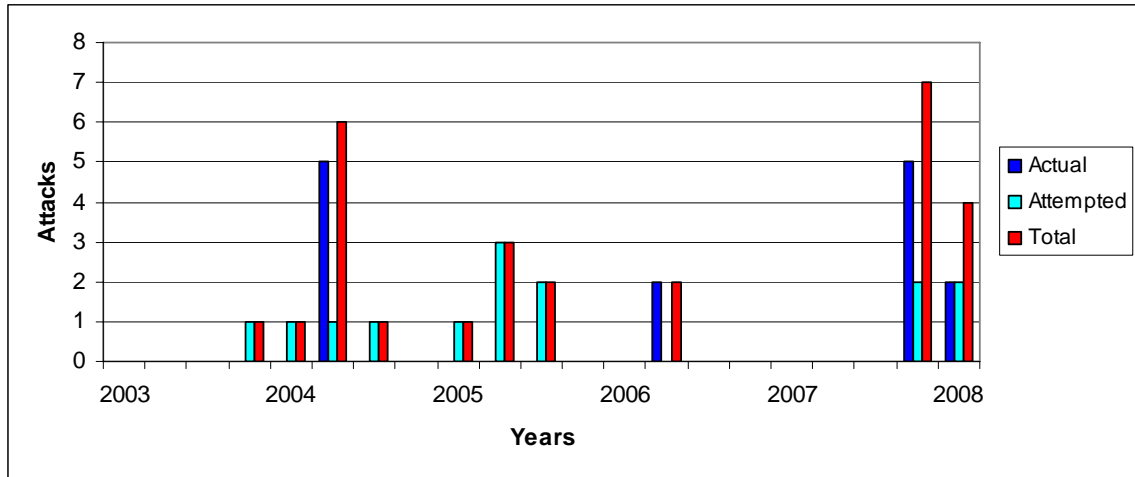
Location of Attacks in the South China Sea, First Quarter, 2008





Figure 7

Types of Actual Attacks in the Vicinity of the South China Sea, 2003–2008





Malacca and Singapore Straits

There were only three reported cases of piracy and armed-robbery attacks in the Malacca and Singapore Straits during the first quarter of 2008, and only one was an actual attack (see Figure 8). A chemical tanker was boarded at Belawan Port, Indonesia. Similar to the first quarter of 2007, the Malacca and Singapore Straits recorded one of the lowest numbers of piracy and arm-robbery attacks in Southeast Asia during the first quarter of 2008. However, these figures are not reflective of the occasional peak in the number of attacks that often take place during the second quarter of each year (see Figure 9).

Figure 8

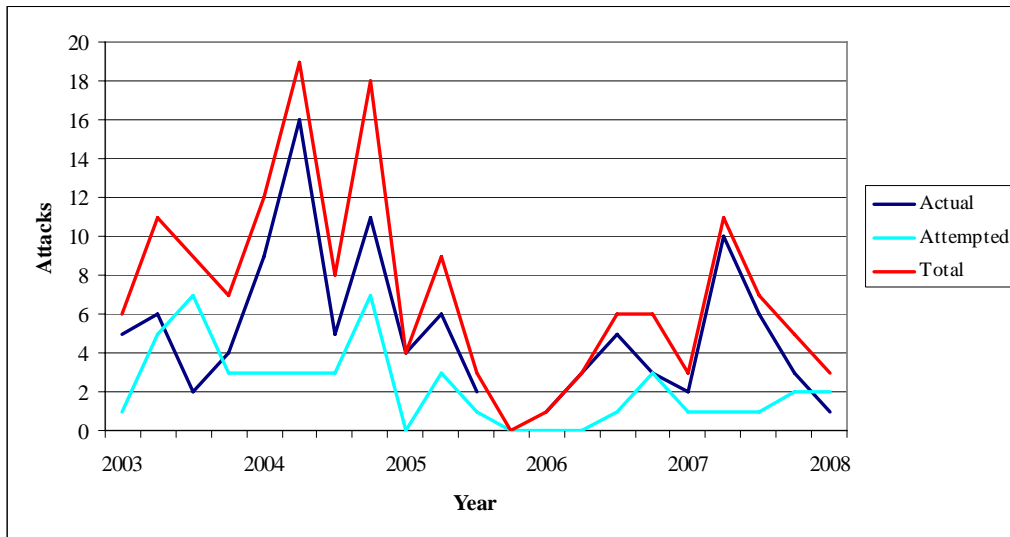
Location of Attacks in the Malacca and Singapore Straits, First Quarter, 2008





Figure 9

Quarterly Trend in the Malacca and Singapore Straits, 2003–2008





Indonesia

Half of the total number of actual attacks in the Southeast Asian region took place within Indonesian waters. The first quarter of 2008 recorded three actual attacks being committed within Indonesia's jurisdiction (see Figure 10). Despite the figures recorded during second quarter of 2007, there have been significantly fewer reported cases in the Makassar Strait since the second quarter of 2006. The figures of the first quarter once again highlight that Indonesian ports and anchorages remain the weakest link within a region that is prone to armed-robbery and piracy activities.

Apart from the one reported incident in Belawan Port along the Malacca Strait, Figure 11 shows the location of two other actual attacks perpetrated within Indonesian waters. As previously mentioned, the type of vessels targeted in the region varied, and cases reported in Indonesia reflected that trend. A bulk carrier was attacked at the Pulau Laut anchorage while a tug was attacked when it was steaming in the vicinity of the Karimata Strait.

Figure 10

Trends of Attacks, 2006–2008

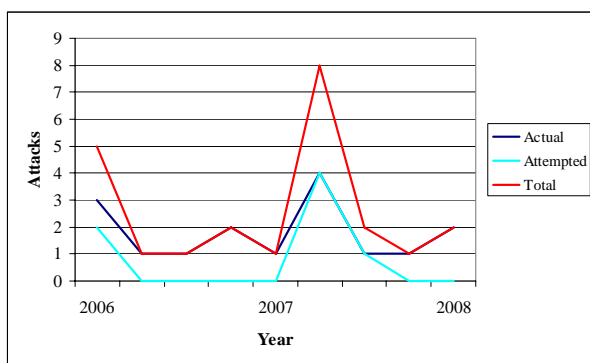


Figure 11

Location of Actual Attacks in Indonesia, First Quarter, 2008





Conclusion

There was one major incidence that ought to be highlighted during the first quarter of 2008. A passenger boat was attacked at gun-point, resulting in three fatalities and two others wounded. More importantly, the incident did not take place in one of the usual hotspots, highlighting the fact that apart from keeping the ports and sea lines of communications safe, all other regional waters are equally important and equally prone to potential attacks.

Having mentioned the above, regional figures on reported piracy and armed-robbery attacks in recent years have been generally trending downwards. This is despite the occasional hike in reported figures, usually during the second quarter of the year. With reference to the lower number of reported cases during the first quarter of 2008, there is less of a pattern in terms of the specific details useful in the study of the issue. For example, the types of vessels being targeted were varied in contrast to 2006 and 2007, where a specific type of vessel was more prone to attack than others. Generally, vessels with a weak level of security are prone to attacks, regardless of the make. Also, if we look at the location of the attacks, it does not reflect a particular hotspot within the region. Be that as it may, it is also obvious that security in the vicinity of the ports and anchorages within the region leaves much to be desired.

There is no doubt that littoral states, with the support of some user states, have dedicated much effort and resources in trying to overcome the problem. One such recent effort was the launch of a new data-sharing system, the Malacca Strait Patrol Information System (MSP-IS), which allows the sharing of shipping information between the littoral states. Although the number of actual attacks in the region has often been speculated to be under-reported, it is vital to recognize that until there is a system that allows for 100-per-cent reporting, current published figures remain the only gauge of the problem at hand, and as it stands, it seems to be under control.

Sources

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