

Maritime Piracy Event & Location Data Project



Trends in Piracy: Piracy in Bangladesh November 2015

This is a report from the Maritime Piracy Event & Location Data project. The focus of the report is pirate activity in and around Bangladesh from 1993 to 2015. The geographical area under scrutiny includes the northern part of the Bay of Bengal, the port of Chittagong, and the mouths of Ganges River.

Reports from the International Maritime Bureau record piracy incidents in and around Bangladesh since the early 1990s, though the number of attacks was fairly negligent before 1998. After this year, pirate activity increases fairly dramatically with at least 55 incidents occurring in 2000 and 56 in 2003 (see Figures 1 and 2). In fact, when one looks at total incidents in territorial

waters over the past 20 years, Bangladesh is second behind only Indonesia. To be clear, most piracy in and around Bangladesh is armed robbery, occurs while ships are at port or anchor, and seems mostly opportunistic in nature. Chittagong has been in the past labeled one of the most dangerous ports in the world and although piracy and armed robbery has dropped since the early 2000s, it remains a problem. In 2015 the number of incidents occurring in the waters of Bangladesh (11 through October), while down compared to 2014, is higher than the average over the past several years. Most incidents in 2015 have occurred at the Chittagong facility, typically at outer anchorages.

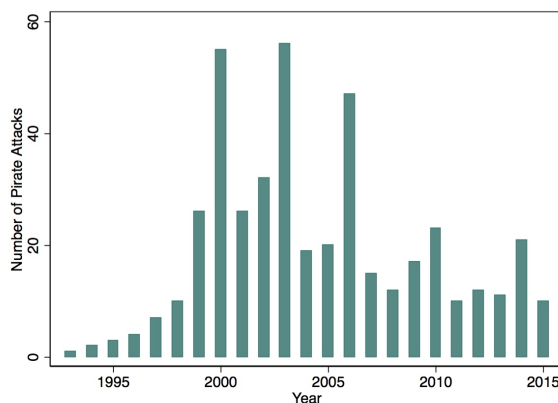


Figure 1. Bangladesh incidents by year (1993-2015)

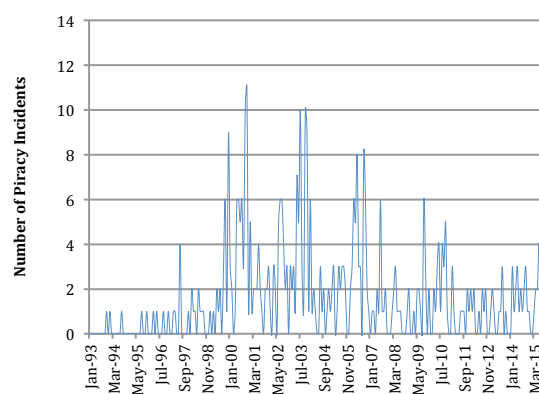


Figure 2. Bangladesh incidents by month (1993-2015)

Characteristics of Piracy in Bangladesh

Despite Somali piracy generating most media attention, Bangladesh has been and

continues to be one of the most piracy-affected countries. However, unlike the attacks in the Greater Gulf of Aden involving

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steaming ships and hijackings, most piracy in Bangladesh occurs while ships are anchored at the Chittagong Port facility or in the deep swamps around the Ganges delta where pirate groups hide and prey upon fishers (Murphy 2010). Figure 3 maps the incidents reported to IMB from 1993-2014. It is easy to see that a large majority occurs on the far southeastern side of the country near and around the Chittagong Port as well as within the swamps and streams of the Ganges Delta.

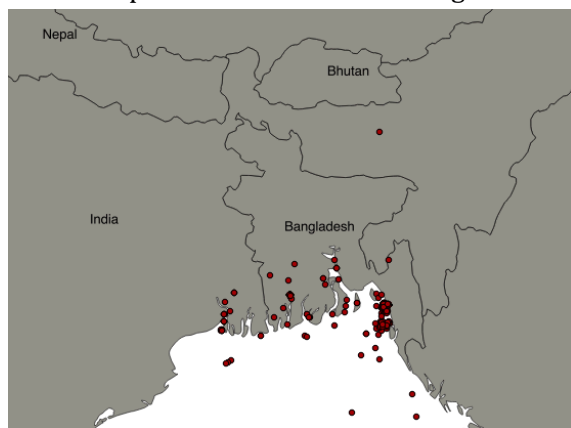


Figure 3. Map of Piracy incidents 1993-2014

Similar to piracy in Indonesia, most attacks occur while ships are stationary, typically at offshore anchorages. Figure 4 illustrates that nearly three quarters of all incidents in Bangladesh occur as ships wait to have their cargoes unloaded. This frequently takes several days because the Chittagong Port does not have sufficient facilities to move cargo quickly or store the goods in warehouses on land (see Menefee 2010; also see Hoque and Biswas 2007). In comparison, 63% of piracy incidents in Indonesia and 57% of incidents in Nigeria occur at ports or anchorages. Nearly all Somali piracy occurred while ships were steaming. We also find that in the Greater Gulf Guinea, the sophistication of pirate groups has likely increased because from 2012-2014 close to 80% of pirate attacks occurred while ships were steaming and so not the typical opportunistic kind occurring when ships are

berthed or anchored. It should be noted that Bangladesh markedly improved its port facilities over the past several years. Vessel turnaround time was reduced to 3.4 days in December 2013 from 12 days in 2005. Container dwell time dropped to 4 days in 2013 from 18 in 2005. Still, this does not compare favorably to most ports in China and the United States that have turnaround times less than 1 day and many less than half a day (Ducruet, Itoh, and Merk 2014).

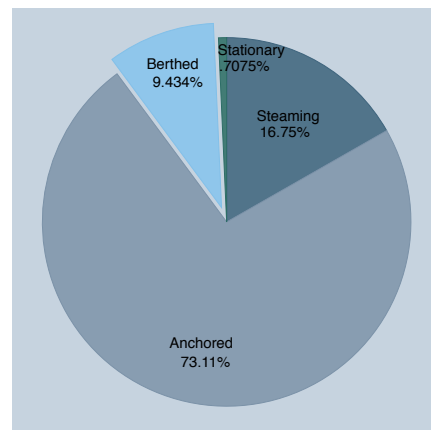


Figure 4. Percentage of Incidents by vessel status (Bangladesh)

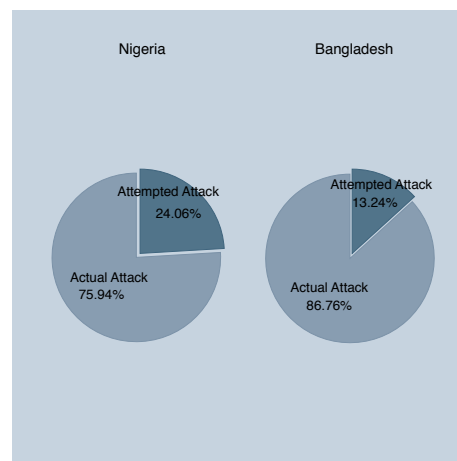


Figure 5. Percentage of Incidents by incident status (Bangladesh)

We also see that partly as a consequence of the opportunist nature of Bangladesh piracy the success rate of pirate attacks is very high (close to 90%). In Nigeria that rate is 75% and in Indonesia the success rate is

approximately 80% (see Figure 5). In contrast, most of the pirate attacks off the coast of Somali were unsuccessful. Most incidents in Bangladesh are characterized as petty theft and the thieves target easily removable equipment that can be resold on the black market, such as communication and navigation equipment as well as ropes, nets, and engines.

In many places piracy and armed robbery at sea have become increasingly violent. This is the case for Nigeria where conventional weapons and illegal drugs have proliferated throughout the region. In Bangladesh about 50% of the incidents involve violence while in Nigeria that number is closer to 70%. While piracy-violence clearly fluctuates over time (see Figure 7a), it is more likely when attacks occur as ships are steaming (see Figure 7b). This makes sense, as attacks against moving ships are more difficult and dangerous, requiring greater organizational capacity, resources, and resolve.

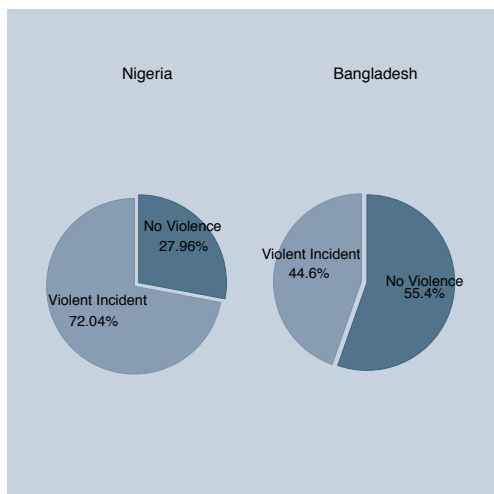


Figure 6. Piracy and use of violence in Bangladesh

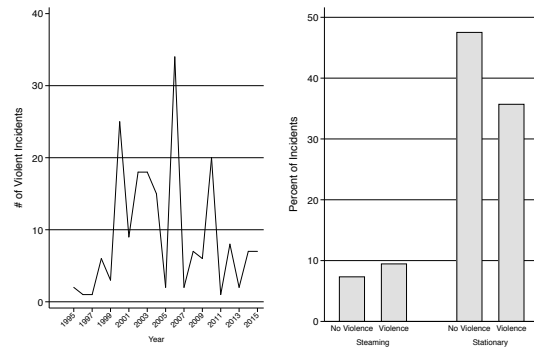


Figure 7a& b. Piracy and violence in Bangladesh

Most piracy and armed robbery at sea occurs after the sun has gone down. Globally, approximately 50% of incidents from 1993-2014 occur between the hours of midnight and 6am local time. Attacks in Bangladesh also fall during the early morning hours (see Figure 8).

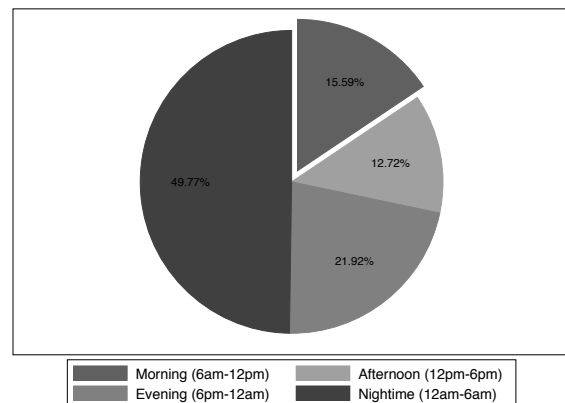


Figure 8: Time of Day when Piracy Occurs (Bangladesh)

Opportunistic piracy in Indonesia, Malaysia and Nigeria follows this same pattern. However, attacks against steaming ships occur more frequently during daytime hours and piracy off of Somali during the height of the crisis from 2009-2013 involved many attacks during late morning and early afternoon.

Unlike piracy in the Greater Gulf of Aden, which showed clear seasonality, the opportunistic-armed robbery on ships that

characterizes Bangladesh remains fairly stable over the course of a year (see Figure 10). July and October represent the two months with the most pirate activity. But the onset of the summer monsoon does not push piracy down nor does the end of the rainy season push piracy up. In fact, just the opposite appears to be true. Armed Robbery on ships increases slightly during the months of May through September when the monsoon rains are the strongest. Perhaps the difficulty fishing during the rainy season prompts fishermen to seek alternative means of income generation and petty theft on ships offers a familiar environment for their illegal activities.

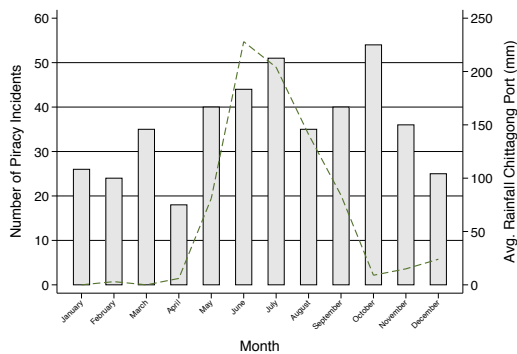


Figure 10. Piracy and rainfall in Bangladesh

We observe that many of the vessels pirated in the waters of Bangladesh register in surrounding countries, such as Singapore, Bangladesh, and Malaysia (see Figure 11). Other registers include flags of convenience that enable ship owners to reduce registration costs, lower a company's tax burden, and avoid ship and labor regulations imposed by the ship owners' country of origin. According to the International Transport Workers' Federation, Antigua and Barbuda, Liberia, Panama, and Malta all represent flag states of convenience. This pattern does not differ drastically from other piracy centers, such as Indonesia and Nigeria. Flags of convenience, such as

Panama, Liberia, and Malta also dominate ship attacks in the waters of these countries as well.

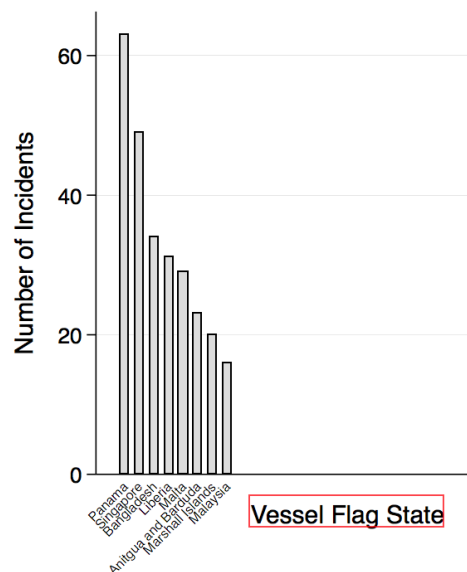


Figure 11. Vessel Flag State

Bangladesh & the Drivers of Maritime Piracy

We've noted in past MPELD reports that poverty, IUU fishing, government corruption, regime weakness, and population size all correlate globally with pirate activity. We also see political violence in other forms, such as insurgency, accompanying maritime piracy and armed robbery on ships. Bangladesh scores high on many of the structural indicators that correlate with piracy. It is a poor country, with a large population, and significant political corruption. The World Bank scores Bangladesh a -.91 on government corruption on a scale from -2.5 (very corrupt) to +2.5 (very little corruption). It is not as corrupt as Somalia or Nigeria but more corrupt than both Indonesia and India. In comparison, OECD countries Australia and the United Kingdom score 1.87 and 1.73 respectively. The United States scores a 1.32 in 2014.

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Bangladesh also suffers from significant domestic conflict in the form of strikes, purges, riots, and anti-government demonstrations. Such instability is associated with weak states that have difficulty policing their territory. Now admittedly Bangladesh has several coastal craft, frigates,

	SFI Score 2014	GDP Per Capita 2014 (PPP)	Population 2014 Millions	Government Corruption	Ports	Coastline kms	Weighted Domestic Conflict Index (Banks)
Bangladesh	13	\$3,400	169	-0.91	2	580	7,938
Nigeria	17	\$6,000	182	-1.27	25	853	21,688
Indonesia	9	\$10,600	256	-0.58	43	54,716	3,938
India	12	\$5,900	1,250	-0.46	46	7,000	19,500
Somalia	20	\$600	10.6	-1.69	5	3,025	9,312

Table 1: Country level information

and corvettes to monitor its maritime zone, which is perhaps why so little piracy observed in Bangladesh is on the open water while ships are steaming but rather occurs at ports and anchorages. Others note, however, that Bangladeshi coast guard forces remain too small to fully address the problem of piracy, especially within the Ganges Delta (Chakma 2014).

Conclusions

This report has reviewed the characteristics of piracy and armed robbery on ships in Bangladesh. We observe, as have others, that piracy here remains mostly opportunistic, centered on the port facilities in Chittagong and the swamps and creeks at the mouth of the Ganges River. Long turn around times at Chittagong, along with government corruption, enable pirates the time and space to steal aboard ships and remove valuable equipment. Concealment and the difficulty policing deep within the Ganges delta also provide space for pirate gangs to emerge and survive. Attempts to reduce corruption and improve the rule of law over the past decade have had some success. Government effectiveness has improved and the country sees less violence than it has in the past. Reports also note that Bangladeshi authorities have made piracy a higher priority and have boosted funds for coastal forces (BDnews24.com). Still, attacks against fishers continue, damaging a critical industry in Bangladesh. Just this past summer pirates kidnapped over 50 fishermen and three trawlers were taken. This is just one example of many of the lawlessness that continues both in the Ganges Delta and at the port facilities of Chittagong.

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