

Somali pirates use swarming tactics

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- by [David Osler](#)

Multi-skiff attacks becoming more common as two chemical tankers are targeted in latest incidents

SOMALI pirates are still taking vessels despite the onset of the monsoon season, and starting to adopt swarming tactics that see between six and ten skiffs converge on a single ship, counterpiracy specialists have told Lloyd's List.

Confirmed incidents include an unsuccessful attack on a Hong Kong-flag chemtanker at 0750 on Sunday, and the hijack of a Singapore-flag vessel of the same type today, marking the first seizure in nearly four weeks.

Usually reliable sources also report a co-ordinated multi-skiff attempt to take an eastern European vessel with a particularly sensitive cargo on Sunday, which was repelled following a one-hour gun battle with Russian military personnel on board. Official channels could not immediately be contacted for confirmation.

The captured chemtanker has been named as 2010-built, 14,445 dwt *Golden Blessing*, which the Lloyd's List Intelligence database associates with Jakarta-based *Berlian Laju Tanker*. The ship, laden with glycoethylene, was en route from India to Saudi Arabia.

According to a statement on the EU Navfor website, the seizure took place in the early hours of this morning some 60 miles off the northern Somali coast.

EU Navfor added: "On notification from the master of *Golden Blessing* that pirates were on board, the EU Navfor German warship *Schleswig-Holstein* immediately launched its helicopter and reported sighting suspected pirates on board *Golden Blessing*.

"*Golden Blessing* has a crew of 19 Chinese; there are no reports of injuries. The vessel is under pirate control but remains unmoving at present. EU Navfor is monitoring."

Golden Blessing is the first ship to be held since the 15,220 dwt, 1978-built QSM *Dubaiwas* hijacked on June 2 inside the internationally recommended transit corridor while en route from Brazil, according to the London-based antipiracy watchdog the International Maritime Bureau.

Meanwhile, three separate security experts highlighted the increasing trend towards multi-skiff attacks, which have previously been rare. Such a move would mark an escalation of the situation, they fear.

"When you've got between six and ten skiffs having a pop at someone, you haven't got much chance of fending them off without some bullets," said one.

Another argued that the Somalis have been remarkably adept at changing their approach whenever there was a need to do so. Improved defensive measures on the part of shipping have probably prompted another rethink.

A third pointed out that legitimate fishing activity in areas such as Bab al Mandeb, so the craft can group without attracting suspicion. It also provides shelter from the poor weather.

"There have been a number of multiple attacks involving more than two or three skiffs. We have also heard rumours that gangs are taking advantage of the traffic separation scheme to catch ships as they go through.

"They will also seek to decoy escorting warships and confuse the intelligence picture. It is something they are going to try a lot more."

The IMB's Cyrus Mody said that weather conditions usually entail a decline in pirate activity in the northern hemisphere summer.

"June, July, August and probably the beginning of September sees the southwest monsoons in the Indian Ocean, which effects the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea as well," he said.

But he went on to warn operators not to be complacent, as pirates will continue to grab ships where they can. Swells will be limited to about 1.5m for the next month or so.



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