

Gard – Piracy in Gulf of Mexico

24th April 2020



Norway-based marine insurer [Gard has noted that the first three weeks of April 2020 had seen a high number of piracy attacks](#) on offshore support vessels in the southern rim of the Gulf of Mexico. It is therefore advising ships to exercise caution when operating in the region.



On April 17th the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued an alert, warning that a maritime threat had been reported in the vicinity of Ciudad Del Carmen and Dos Bocas, Mexico, in the Bay of Campeche area in the southern Gulf of Mexico. The nature of the threat was a series of four piracy incidents that took place between April 4th and April 14th 2020. All four incidents involved attacks on offshore support vessels, and some involved crew injuries and theft.

Masters were therefore advised to exercise additional caution when their vessels were operating in or transiting the Ciudad del Carmen region.

Gard noted that piracy and armed robbery incidents in the southern rim of the Gulf of Mexico were reportedly not uncommon.

While the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC) has recorded only four incidents in the Southern Gulf of Mexico in the previous 12 months, various media reports describe a steep increase in the number of attacks on maritime oil infrastructure in Mexico since 2016. Some have referred to an average of 16 attacks a month between January and September 2019. Gard said that, although these numbers were unconfirmed, they did suggest that there could be a significant degree of under-reporting of incidents in the Gulf of Mexico.

According to the incidents recorded by the IMB PRC, the perpetrators typically use small boats capable of reaching high speeds. They are armed and tend to be violent. Their targets are mainly offshore support vessels; the organization has not recorded any attacks on larger commercial vessels in Mexico during the past 10 years.

The modus operandi seems to be a maritime extension of organized crime. Sophisticated equipment is often stolen and resold, and crews are robbed.

Gard warned that piracy and armed robbery against ships were not restricted to only known 'high

risk regions' such as Gulf of Guinea, waters of South East Asia and the Indian Ocean.

According to the IMB PRC, Peru was one of top five locations in terms of number of incidents recorded in 2019. Ten incidents were recorded at Callao anchorage in Peru in 2019, with five reported during Q4. Three further incidents had been recorded in this location in the first quarter of 2020.

There had also been reports of recent attacks in Ecuador. So far this year the IMB PRC had recorded two incidents near Guayaquil, both involving attacks on container vessels that were underway.

Its latest five-year statistics for South and Central America and the Caribbean waters, shown in the figures below, indicates a tripling of the total number of incidents since 2015, said Gard.

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