

## **Piracy Reached Record Level in 2010, Monitors Say**

Despite an international effort to ensure safe passage through the world's most treacherous waters, pirate attacks in 2010 reached an all-time high, striking more ships and taking more hostages last year than in any year on record, according to an annual report on piracy.

The report, by the Piracy Reporting Center of the International Maritime Bureau, found that pirates had taken 1,181 people hostage and killed 8 in attacks on 445 ships over the course of 2010. At least 53 ships were hijacked last year, the bureau said.

Attacks on ships were up 10 percent over 2009, as were the number of hostages. Pirates captured 1,050 people in 2009, with 4 killed.

"At the moment, it looks like it's getting out of control," said Capt. Pottengal Mukundan, director of the maritime bureau, which has tracked incidences of piracy at sea since 1991.

While the report catalogs violent attacks on ships around the world including those off the coast of Nigeria, Indonesia and Bangladesh, the most dangerous waters remain those off the coast of Somalia. Ninety percent of ship seizures occurred there last year, and at year's end at least 28 vessels bearing 638 hostages were still being held for ransom.

Moreover, the bureau's figures, taken from incident reports or provided by [shipping companies](#) certainly represent an undercount, Captain Mukundan and other experts said. Ecoterra International, an organization with offices in East Africa that keeps track of Somali piracy, put the number of vessels of all sizes still being held by pirates at 46, with 800 hostages currently being held.

An international naval presence in the pirate-infested waters of the Gulf of Aden, between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, provided a lone bright spot for those seeking to stem rising piracy. The number of attacks there were cut in half, to 53 last year from 117 in 2009. The number of successful hijackings also dropped, to 15 from 20 in 2009.

But with dozens of naval ships, including those from the United States, patrolling the gulf, many pirates appear to have simply gone elsewhere, extending their reach hundreds of miles from shore into the Indian Ocean and as far south as the Mozambique Channel, and menacing ships across an unprecedented expanse of water, according to the maritime bureau.

In many cases, shipping companies have made the cold calculation that hijackings — even those that result in millions of dollars paid in ransom — are rare enough to be considered a cost of doing business. Higher ransoms, in turn, allow pirates to purchase better equipment and pay more effective recruits. "Success begets success," said Nikolas K. Gvosdev, professor of national security studies at the United States Naval War College.

As recently as 2006, hijackings and attacks had been in decline. Only 188 hostages were taken in 2006.

But attacks began mounting again in direct correlation to the enduring lawlessness on shore in Somalia, Captain Mukundan said. The country has had no functioning central government for nearly 20 years, and many young Somalis find themselves drawn into the piracy business.

Captain Mukundan praised the efforts of the navy patrols but said governments need to refocus on getting some

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administrative structure in Somalia. "Unless that improves," he said, "no matter what we do at sea to contain the problem, nothing will happen."

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