

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

Statistics reveal that Piracy on the high seas has shrunk from 237 incidents in 2011 to 15 incidents in 2013. The April 2009 incident, involving the container ship Motor Vessel Maersk Alabama, triggered the events that followed. If you remember the captain was taken hostage with a rescue by our military personnel. The Maersk Alabama was again attacked in November of 2009 and twice more in 2011 but all three assaults were thwarted by an armed security force now stationed aboard the ship. According to the Navy League magazine "Seapower" there are a number of reasons for the dramatic decline. One is the introduction of armed security, small in number but highly trained in defense tactics, traveling aboard ships sailing in hazardous shipping lanes. There are some problems that complicate their operations. Many of the African countries, on both East and West coasts, do not allow weapons aboard ships within their territorial waters so the security companies have to spot barges (which are floating arsenals) outside the territorial waters for the pickup and drop-off of weapons and personnel. Another reason for the decline in attacks is the multinational naval operations in the affected areas. Both are positive factors but who knows how long the foreign navies, or even our own, will keep ships in place. A "not-so-positive" factor that leaves one a bit confused is the change in tactics by the bad guys. Piracy happens on international waters. As soon as you move into territorial or sovereign waters of a country the acts of Piracy become armed robbery or illegal actions taken against the vessels. The crime then falls within the laws of the nation involved, not under international law. The bad guys know, as well as we do, that many of these countries can hardly keep order within their land boundaries let alone their territorial waters. The incidents taking place are kidnappings of Western officers for ransom, and theft of cargoes. For instance, they will board a loaded oil tanker, take command and move the ship to a hidden anchorage where the oil will be off loaded. As soon as the transfer is made, they release the ship and the crew. Theft runs from minor to major and authorities have found that an untold number of the minor incidents are not reported by shipping companies involved for various reasons such as increased insurance premiums and loss of business to competitors. It is very difficult to spot trends and follow the criminal activities without these reports and is a problem. Shipping centers are able to track about 80 percent of the traffic entering high risk areas of Africa's East coast, which are about Forty Two Hundred ships a month. I wonder, have incidents of marine crime really been reduced or are we just calling it by another name?

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