

Piracy

Piracy has been around for hundreds of years, with the earliest documented instances in the 13th century BC. The Irish pirate queen was Grace O'Malley. You can read about her on [Follow the Fleet's Grace O'Malley page](#).

Piracy today

Every year, there are many pirate attacks on transport and other vessels, with estimated worldwide losses of US \$13 to \$16 billion per year.

One of the most dangerous areas for vessels is in an area called the Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Africa. This area is one of the world's major shipping routes used by shipping companies, with 30,000 cargo ships passing through each year on their way to the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal is in Egypt and was opened in November 1869. It allows water transportation between Europe and Asia without navigating around Africa or carrying goods overland between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.



Heavily armed pirates from Somalia have been striking vessels in busy Indian Ocean shipping lanes and in the Gulf of Aden, capturing dozens of vessels, taking hundreds of hostages and making off with millions of euros in ransoms. There are now 800 pirate groups operating along 3,000 km of this coastline.

Pirate gangs are mainly made up of local Somali fishermen, ex-militiamen, and technical experts who operate equipment such as the GPS devices.

What do pirates attack?

Modern pirates use small boats to attack their targets, and take advantage of the small number of crew members on board modern cargo vessels. They will attack most vessels but cargo ships are their preferred choice, as these ships may carry millions of euros of goods.

One of the most recent high profile pirate attacks was when the captain of the Maersk Alabama, Richard Phillips, was held hostage on a lifeboat for several days after he volunteered to go with the pirates in exchange for the crew. He was rescued when US Navy snipers killed three of the pirates.

Pirates are usually heavily armed, often with machine guns and rocket launchers. They use ladders with hooks to climb onto ships and take the crew hostage. The pirates then demand a ransom in return for the safe release of the hostages, and the vessel.

Ransom money is paid to the pirates in US dollar bills. It is delivered to them in sacks which are either dropped from helicopters or cased in waterproof

suitcases loaded onto tiny skiffs. Ransom money has also been delivered to pirates via parachute

The effects of piracy/ why piracy is a problem

Pirate attacks have

- disrupted UN aid supplies,
- Driven up insurance costs by \$400m a year for merchant navys.
- Ship owners have also had to double the wages of crews.

Piracy has forced some firms to consider rerouting cargo between Europe and Asia around the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, instead. This would result in much longer transport times and increased costs, as the ships have to stay longer at sea.

There is also a danger that with the amounts of weapons that are being fired about by pirates, including rocket-propelled grenades, there is a risk that one day the hull of an oil tanker will be broken, and there will be a major environmental disaster.