



# MSR Viewpoint

## The Piracy Equilibrium

By Paul Gibbins

It's business as usual for the shipping industry following the IMO gathering in May. Another IMO circular is expected soon adding more detail to the provision of the armed deterrent and despite the pushback from some quarters of the industry that this temporary solution is becoming permanent, armed is commonplace through high risk areas.

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**Maritime  
Security  
Review**

*In the first of the MSR Viewpoint series, maritime security consultant Paul Gibbins examines the possible consequences of EUNAVFOR's raid on Somali soil and comments on the need for long-term solutions to Somali piracy.*

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But it's not all about the private sector; the international military counter piracy efforts in the Indian Ocean have also had effect. Take the EUNAVFOR raid on the Somali coast. It's timing can't have been accidental, to coincide with the opening of the IMO session in London; 'about

time too' was the general comment in the international and maritime trade media.

Whilst this operation was broadly welcomed, it does little to address the root of the problem and in the longer term more likely to have a counter productive effect.

Understandably, the EU Naval Force and other international Navies operating in the Indian Ocean have been operating in an invidious position, countering piracy and other maritime criminal activity from the sea, until recently, without being allowed to pursue these criminals onto the beach.

However, in an increasingly militarized region of ocean, their presence has given new meaning to maritime security; but will NATO, the Combined Task Forces and the other independents, like Russia or China, follow EUNAVFOR's example?

So what has changed in the narrative of Somali Piracy? In the short term, not much at all. We've witnessed the welcome release of some hostages and listened to a call from Somali fishermen to stop the EUNAVFOR attacks on the Somali coast, concerned that they too might have their craft targeted.

It is natural to assume that the pirates will go to greater lengths to avoid detection, blurring the distinction of pirate vessel and fishing boat. But will EUNAVFOR's actions actually dissuade pirates from plying their trade?







But the Shipping Industry alone cannot be responsible for providing the solution to piracy.

In June 'another' maritime security conference heard from a leading shipping owner state that whilst he's 'gone armed' and is very pleased with the product safeguarding his seafarers, he feels it is wrong for Governments and Nation States to abrogate their responsibility of delivering maritime security of sea-lanes to the private sector.

And yet there is still reluctance from the international community to get involved from arrest, prosecution, trial and imprisonment of these criminals.

Destroying boats on the beach might quench the despair of the international community and a beleaguered shipping industry, but it hardly addresses the geo-political

Certainly, it will be harder, but the prizes are still there, albeit a minority of commercial ships, transiting without any security at all through the high-risk areas.

The private sector has contributed significantly to reaching a point of equilibrium in controlling piracy attacks. Shipowners' implementation of Best Management Practice and the embarkation of Private Armed Security have stemmed the tide of successful attacks.

Both of these have proven effective, particularly the latter, and has bought the shipping sector some time trying to do business through very difficult economic times.

There is also growing stability in the quality of armed guards, where the sector is facing the introduction of an International Standards Organisation (ISO) grading of maritime security companies.

Despite all the associated risks of the armed option, it is working and the private maritime security sector continues to provide a high quality service in an increasingly crowded and competitive market.

issues affecting the region and is unlikely to stop disaffected Somalis from going to sea to hijack and ransom seafarers and their vessels.

Piracy affects all states, be they coastal or inland. History has proven that piracy cannot be totally eradicated. The private sector is exercising a greater proportion of maritime security to maintain sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean. Whilst coastal nations cannot change geographical chokepoints channeling vessels into high-risk areas, they could exercise a greater rule of law reducing the pirates' impunity to operate.

Until a comprehensive approach is taken on land and offshore, piracy and maritime criminal activity will continue.

Destroying pirate vessels is punitive and equipment is easy to replace. Persuading an individual not to take up arms in the first place is far harder.

So while the international community wrestles with the Horn of Africa, the private maritime security sector will continue to meet the challenges of controlling of piracy at sea.

### About the author



**Paul Gibbins** is a freelance consultant to the Maritime Security sector. Formerly the Director of Communications for a leading UK maritime security company and an ex Royal Marine, he has worked on various public relations projects on behalf of the United Nations, the US & UK Governments in Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo.

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