

Forum: Middle School Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)

Issue # 2: Addressing the role of maritime crime in international organized crime

Written by: Gisele S.L & Sarah Villegas

Chairs: Gisele S.L & Sarah Villegas



Guiding Questions as you Read

How has maritime crime impacted countries around the world and their relationship with each others?

What are the different types of maritime crimes and how can these impact a nation or group?

In what way does maritime crime connect to a country's society or economic status?

How can maritime crime impact the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals?

Key Terms

Piracy
Hijacking
Profit
Trafficking
Unregulated
Unlawful
Alliances

Introduction

Crime at sea is a concerning issue which has been happening throughout time in different ways, with the most common one being pirates. Piracy is an organized effort that has been taking place since the early 1700s and involves groups of criminals hijacking boats to steal money, and resources, or simply to threaten people or groups. Advancements in technology, as well as information, have allowed criminal groups around the world to become more organized and strategic about the crimes they commit.

Compared to decades like the 1950s, the number of pirate attacks has decreased by 26% (Statista). Nevertheless, with wars, political turmoil, poverty as well as unemployment rising around the world, more people have begun committing crimes like piracy as a way to profit, and as a result, piracy rates have started to rise again. Many piracy groups often collaborate with criminal groups in an effort not only to get more resources but also for the safety and income that well-established crime can bring.

Trafficking is another worrying maritime crime, which is the illegal transportation of substances, weapons, and humans. 90% of all the world's trade is transported by sea, meaning that mafias, gangs, and cartels are easily able to transport illegal things as cargo under the guise of legal trade (INTERPOL). The vastness of the ocean often makes it hard for authorities to identify illegal boats or activities like unregulated fishing, making it easier for criminals to do unlawful activities without any authority to stop them.

Some nations have enabled maritime activity by accepting organizations' bribes and allowing illegal operations to happen as a result of governmental corruption (UNODC). On the other hand, the losses in goods and safety represented by maritime crime have

led many countries to form navy alliances to monitor and protect these areas. Many international organizations like the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have also recognized maritime crime as a rising concern and have started to implement global strategies. Countries have created networks to share data amongst nations, improving law enforcement and providing governmental support in efforts to end the branch of criminality that is maritime crime (INTERPOL).

Comprehension Question(s):

Why do maritime crimes impact global security?
How are maritime crimes linked to criminal organizations?

Definition of Key Terms

Piracy: The practice and/or act of attacking and stealing from ships in the sea (Merriam Webster).

Hijacking: The crime of forcefully taking control of a ship while it is in transit. Hijacking is a type of piracy that typically has the end goal of stealing cargo and taking hostages to make demands (Britannica).

Trafficking: Illegal transport of goods (drugs, weapons, etc) or people through ships (Oxford Dictionary).

Unregulated: Uncontrolled or unsupervised by laws and regulations. In the context of

maritime crimes, unregulated commonly means fishing activities that violate international laws on marine resource conservation (National Marine Fisheries Service).

Profit: Financial gain, specifically the difference between the amount spent buying and producing and the amount earned (Oxford Dictionary).

Maritime Crimes: A Range of illegal activities that occur at sea. These include piracy, drug smuggling, etc. (INTERPOL).

Navy: A Branch of a nation's military that conducts operations at sea (Oxford Dictionary).

Cargo: Refers to goods carried on a ship; these can be money, electronics, food, etc. (Oxford Dictionary).

Current Situation



Maritime crimes have recently been on the rise, with a 35% increase since the beginning of 2025 (Baird Maritime). This rise has been caused by a number of reasons, one of them being the rise in economic instability, which has worsened due to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Piracy

In recent years, piracy has developed more advanced tactics, shifting its focus from

kidnapping a ship's crew for ransom to hijacking ships with oil cargo. This is all to adjust to new political and technological advancements. Maritime security teams have integrated advanced surveillance technology, such as satellite tracking and automated identification, which has helped these teams to identify suspicious maritime activity early on and prevent potential pirate attacks (Maritime Fairtrade).

Maritime Cybersecurity

With the increase of digitalization, maritime crimes have reached the digital world. Pirates have started targeting vulnerabilities in maritime cyber systems such as Operational Technology (OT), which controls shipboard functions (navigation, propulsion, etc). Geopolitical tensions (tensions between countries) have driven state-sponsored cybercrime operations that threaten maritime security. These cyberattacks destabilize both global trade and economies. Cyber attacks threaten maritime and state security, which is why maritime crimes are an important issue to address (Dryad Global).

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Indonesia

Indonesia's 17,000 islands are positioned within the straight of Malacca, an Indian-Pacific ocean passage through which 30% of all global trade passes (CIMSEC). Despite the economic benefit brought by trade, the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) does not provide enough for its large population and puts it 158th in the world for money per citizen (CIA). As a result, piracy has become attractive to 60% of its population that lives by the sea and has led to 23 successful and attempted pirate attacks in the country, accounting for 26.2% of all piracy in the world (Statista). Since

2020, Indonesia's government has chosen to cooperate with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Skylight, a maritime imagery company, to crack down on distinct piracy operations. In turn, operations have stopped suspicious behavior and communication, especially between fishing boats, helping to combat piracy organizations (UN).

Singapore

The Singapore Strait has become most recently the global hotspot for piracy, seeing as it had 51.2% of the world's piracy reports in 2024 alone (Statista). Over 37 crew members of several boats have been taken hostage, and as a result, 13 have been kidnapped (The Maritime Executive). Increases in crime have been associated with poverty and unemployment found on the coast of Singapore's neighboring countries of Malaysia and Indonesia. Authorities from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore have organized security measures and kept themselves in communication through initiatives like the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, commonly referred to as ReCAAP (Marine Public).

Somalia

Being located in the Gulf of Aden makes Somalia a strategic position in which to interfere with global trade routes traced with the use of the Suez Canal (Amnesty International). As a result, Somalia has endured large amounts of maritime piracy, even coming to be named the most heavily pirated waters on earth. Despite trends of decreasing piracy globally, Somalia has been flagged as a nation that maintains its rates of ship hijacks constant. Attacks on fishing and commercial ships in the region are something many analysts believe to be the work of organized crime, resulting from unemployment in the country and discontent with wars in the region (gCaptain). As a

maritime authority in the area, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) has called for emergency meetings on the sudden topic. As a result, monitoring and naval forces have increased, but attacks continue due to their message of protest against local conflicts (BBC).

Netherlands

The Netherlands is a key transit point for drugs and other illicit goods, making it a gateway into the European market due to its strategic location. The Netherlands has a well-established legal framework to combat organized crime, which includes maritime-related crime. The government's efforts to combat organized crime include stopping drug smuggling as close to the source as possible (cooperating with countries in which drugs are produced) making port employees more aware and resilient to criminal influences to intercept drugs that have made it on to Netherlands soil, and preventing drugs that have reached the Netherlands from leaving the country. The Netherlands has shown strong efforts to try and stop maritime crimes from occurring in their country (Government of the Netherlands).

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a United Nations (UN) branch dedicated to monitoring sea safety, protecting marine laws, and tracking pollution, all with the idea of helping achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Past and present concerns about piracy have led the organization to publish monthly reports of piracy around the world to bring attention to the issue since 1982. As of 2025, the IMO counts with 176 member states with 3 associate members, which, through the organization, coordinate maritime efforts with the navies and resources they each have (IMO).

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has combated this issue by establishing the “Counter Piracy Programme” in 2010 as an effort to end piracy cases in the Horn of Africa on the rise in the region. From the programme came a ‘piracy persecution model ’ which helped establish a maritime criminal justice system in the Indian Ocean region. The programme soon grew to cover more crimes and nations, becoming what today is known as the Global Maritime Crime Programme. Effective cooperation between regional states as well as successful efforts to persecute criminals at sea through the provision of infrastructure, material, and information, has led to extend itself throughout 109 in six oceans (UNODC, 2025).

Other branches of the UN, like the Security Council, have also acknowledged and attempted to resolve the issue of maritime crime. Resolution 2634 (2022) called upon nations in the piracy hot spot regions, such as the Gulf of Guinea, to criminalize piracy, amongst other maritime crimes. UN offices within western and central Africa have also come to play a great role in constructing regional and functional programmes against piracy by creating documents such as their ‘Code of Conduct’. The code has been signed by several nations in the area to align laws regarding maritime crime and facilitate naval coordination amongst them (ECCAS, 2013).

Timeline of Events, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of Event
120 BCE	The first cases of piracy took place in the Mediterranean Sea, where kingdoms and governments often paid or motivated pirates to attack other nations. Pirates even came to occupy high-ranking military positions, which

made them very powerful in times of war (World History Encyclopedia).

- November 1, 1974 **The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)** was first drafted in 1914 after the sinking of the Titanic and was amended significantly until 1974 when it reached its 14-chapter version detailing regulations for maritime transportation, which received its most recent chapter as of 2024 (IMO).
- December 10, 1982 **The United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** was made in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to set rules for the distribution of territorial waters, marine resources, commercial flow, and many more topics, working as what many call “a constitution for the oceans” (Britannica).
- March 10, 1988 **The Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts at Sea** is a document that was made in response to high amounts of kidnappings, hijackings, and explosions happening at sea. The convention was made with the intent of providing international rules as to how to regulate and penalize maritime criminals (IMO, 2010).
- February 1988 **The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances** has helped set a global framework for combating international organized crime by establishing ways to identify illegal money and trade. Crimes at sea and how they play a role in traffic were accounted for and helped motivate the establishment of structures for international cooperation (UN, 1988).

2013 **The Maritime Security Programme (MASE)** is an initiative started by the European Union (EU) and INTERPOL aimed at promoting security in the South-Eastern region of Africa. It provides several developing nations with financial incentives to develop intelligence units and form maritime police units.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

NATO Maritime Security Program

NATO's Maritime Security Program focuses on keeping sea routes and maritime infrastructure secure across the Euro-Atlantic region. It achieves this through the constant presence of the navy, strengthening the capabilities of countries that are members, and promoting cooperation between its members to prevent and respond to threats at sea. This program protects freedom of navigation by tackling piracy, terrorism, and the safety of undersea infrastructure. The program relies on the shared resources and expertise of NATO's allies, with ongoing operations and training led by naval forces and specialized task groups. In recent years, NATO has expanded these efforts in response to rising geopolitical tensions and growing risks to maritime security (NATO).

The Maritime Security (MASE) Program

The main objective of this program is to increase maritime security in Eastern and Southern Africa as well as countries bordering the Indian Ocean (ESA-IO region). It does this by strengthening the capacity of this region to implement the Regional Action Plan against piracy (Commission de l'océan Indien). The European Union funds this program, which began in 2013. It was initially planned for this program to end in 2020; however,

due to its great impact on maritime security, it was granted an extension. The MASE program targets 5 specific goals; Alternative Livelihood through vocational development and advocacy against pirates, improving legal and judicial capacity for the arrest and trial of pirates, strengthening regional capacity to break pirate financing and reduce economic vulnerabilities linked to piracy, improving national and regional capacity to fight against maritime crime, and establishing regional coordination and exchange of information to enhance maritime domain awareness (European Union External Action).

The International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) Code

This code entered the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) treaty in 2004. ISPS is the basis for the safety of international shipping, and its main goal is to establish an international framework that promotes cooperation to detect potential security threats to ships or port facilities used for international trade (IMO). This code also ensures that there is an early and efficient exchange of maritime security information at an international level. Additionally, it provides a method for ships and port security assessments to provide security plans and procedures to respond to varying security levels. Since the publication of this code, there has been an increase in the implementation and development of comprehensive technical cooperations worldwide (IMO).

Possible Solutions

A possible solution to address maritime crimes would be to strengthen law enforcement capacity to combat piracy and other maritime-related crimes. This would be achieved through specialized training to support the navy, coast guard, and police forces in

affected regions. The specialized training would enable law enforcement to rapidly respond to criminal activities such as piracy and smuggling.

Another solution would be to provide advanced maritime domain awareness technology to ports and ships worldwide. Technology such as satellite monitoring would positively impact the ability of ships and ports to rapidly detect threats and minimize criminal activity at sea.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Maritime crimes and their relationship with organized crimes relate greatly to SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. SDG 8 aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable environments that provide productive employment and decent work for all. The goal greatly relates to the fact that maritime crime affects, above all else, those who work at sea and often have their safety or livelihood put at risk due to suffering criminal attacks. Economic growth also incentivizes education and employment of those who need it, and therefore helps improve the conditions at sea by making life on land more beneficial for all.

Useful Links for Research (Appendix)

In the appendix, chairs provide delegates with helpful resources to access during their research process.

<https://www.imo.org/>

Source A: The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a United Nations Agency dedicated to the safety and security of shipping. This website contains an overview of their mission, past actions, works, etc.

<https://maritimefairtrade.org/piracy-hotspots-in-2025-trends-and-prevention-measures/>

Source B: This website contains useful information about global piracy trends and prevention measures. Great place to start past action research

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_70759.htm

Source C: Gives a general overview of NATO's plan to defend against any threat in the maritime domain.

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/GPTOC/Issue Paper - TOC at Sea.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/GPTOC/Issue_Paper_-_TOC_at_Sea.pdf)

Source D: This source is an Issue paper published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It gives a very good overview and provides extensive information about organized crime occurring at sea.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Law-of-the-Sea>

Source E: Britannica provides an in depth analysis of law of the sea. This is a great place to start research on the general overview of the topic.

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