# REPORT ON ARMED ROBBERY AND PIRACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
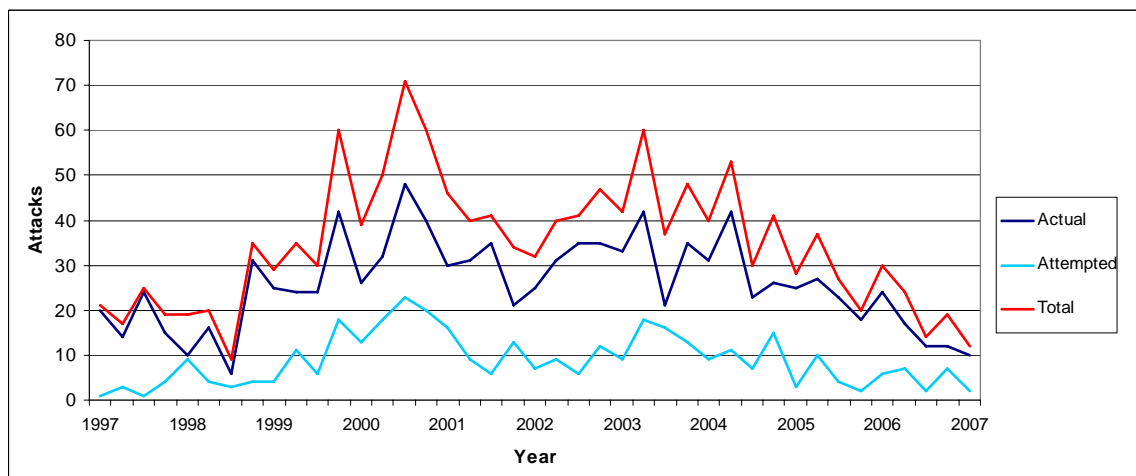## 1st QUARTER 2007

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**Regional Trend**

There were a total of 12 reported armed-robbery and piracy incidents in Southeast Asia during the 1st quarter of 2007. Of these, 10 were actual attacks whilst the remaining 2 were attempted incidents. These figures continue to suggest that the overall number of attacks in the region appears to be trending downward. (Refer to Figure 1) The 1st quarter of 2007 has recorded the lowest number of armed robbery and piracy activities in the region in the last 5 years. In fact, the numbers of actual attacks reported were amongst the lowest in the last 10 years. 1998 recorded some of the lowest quarterly figures in the last 10 years. Similar to 1st quarter of 2007, there were 10 actual attacks reported during the 1st quarter of 1998, whilst only 6 actual attacks were reported during the 3rd quarter of the same year. Figures of the 1st quarter of 2007 also reflected the general trend of 1st quarterly dip after the often high numbers of reported cases during the 4th quarters each year in the last 10 years. The 1st quarter of 2006 was the only exception whereby not only did the number of reported attacks exceeded figures of the 4th quarter the year before, it also recorded the highest number of quarterly reported incidents of that year.

## Figure 1
### Regional Trends by Quarters 1997-2007

## Types of Attacks

Theft and/ or robbery remained the main type of attacks being carried out in the 1st quarter of 2007. 7 of the 10 actual attacks reported were theft and/ or robbery cases, whilst the remaining saw pirates and/ or robbers boarded the ship but were forced to leave empty handed by alert crewmembers. (Refer to Figure 2) Not only did the 1st quarter of 2007 recorded the lowest number of attacks, when compared to the same quarters over the last 5 years, the number of reported attacks has actually fallen by 50%.

Figure 2

**Types of Actual Attacks - 1st quarterly attacks 2002-2007**
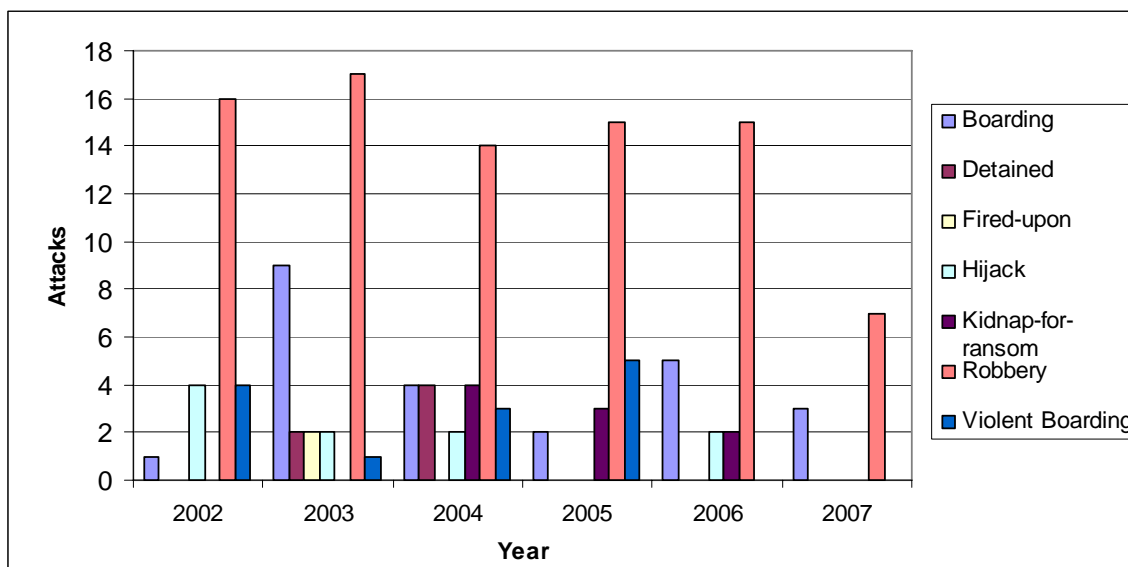
**Types of Weapons**

50% of the reported cases in the 1st quarter of 2007 either omit or provided insufficient information with regards to the types of weapons used during an attack. Knives remained the weapon of choice in 3 of the 5 informed cases; whilst 1 other incident saw the perpetrators armed both with guns and knives. The number of fire-arms being used during an attack in the last 2 quarters (i.e. the 4th quarter of 2006 and the 1st quarter of 2007) has greatly reduced, whereby only 2 of the total number of reported cases during these 2 quarters involved the use of guns. (Refer to Figure 3) Be that as it may, one cannot negate the fact that the use of small arms may be getting increasingly common. Arguably, the intention to use knives by some may be similar to those who eventually ended up using steel/ iron rods or even wooden stick by; it was more likely to be the weapon of convenience than the weapon of choice.

Figure 3

**Use of Guns in Actual Attacks 2002-2007**
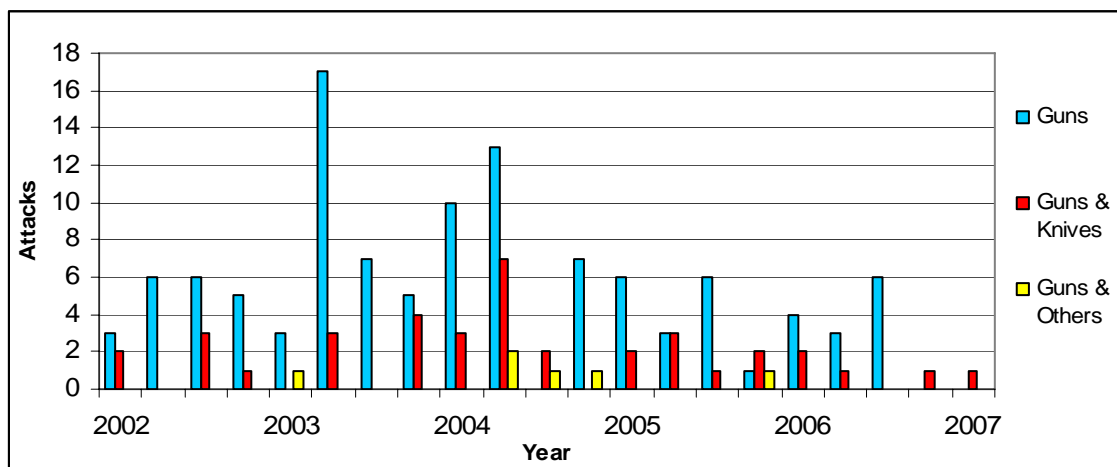
## Location of Attacks

Ports and anchorages were the targeted areas of attacks during the 1$^{st}$ quarter of 2007. (Refer to Figure 4) More than half of the attacks took place whilst the vessels were at anchor. Despite the fact that assistance may be nearer for vessels in distress within the port vicinity, it has not acted as a deterrent, especially where theft and/ or robbery cases are concerned.

Figure 4

**Location of Actual Attacks in Southeast Asia – 1$^{st}$ quarter 2007**



## Types of Vessels

Figure 5 shows that during the 1$^{st}$ quarter of 2007, more than half of the actual attacks were committed against tankers. Although the general trend over the last 5 years shows that bulk carriers were the most common targets in the region for obvious reasons, tankers were the prime targets during the 1$^{st}$ quarter of 2007. Arguably this has to do with the location of where the attacks took place. Both Balongan and Dumai port and/ or anchorages contributed to the bulk of tankers being targeted. This was in turn a reasonable outcome as it reflected the nature of business of these ports and/ or anchorages. Balongan Terminal is one of the main oil export terminals in Indonesia, and crude palm oil is one of the main commodities passing through the Dumai Port.

Figure 5

**Actual Attacks by Types of Vessels 1$^{st}$ quarter 2007**



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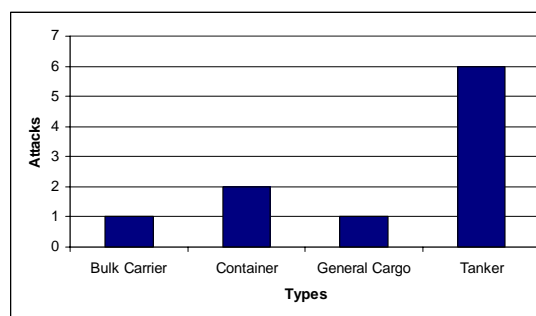
## Malacca Strait

There were 3 reported cases of piracy and armed robbery attacks along the Malacca Strait during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2007. 2 of which were actual attacks, and both took place at Dumai Port and Anchorage, Indonesia. (Refer to Figure 6) Both vessels involved were tankers. Fortunately in both cases, the purported perpetrators only went as far as boarding the vessels. An interesting point to note though was that both cases took place in the evening around 6pm, way before the fall of darkness. Thus, it served as a reminder that it is vital to maintain a certain level of security measures on the vessel regardless of time and location

Figure 6

**Location of Actual Attacks in the Malacca Strait – 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2007**



## South China Sea

There were no reported piracy and armed robbery attacks in the South China Sea during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2007. (Refer to Figure 7) In fact, there were no reported cases of any attacks in the waters of the South China Sea since the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2006. However, there was 1 actual attack that took place within the territorial waters of Vietnam, where a container was robbed of some ship stores. A general cargo ship was also robbed of its ship stores at the Bintulu general cargo anchorage, Malaysia.

Figure 7

**Location of Actual Attacks in South China Sea – 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2007**
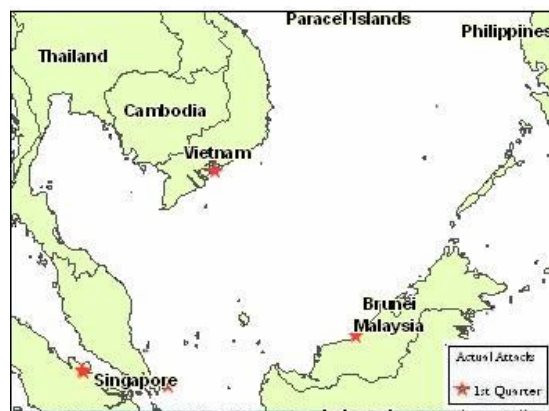
## Indonesia

More than half of the total number of actual attacks in the Southeast Asia region during the 1st quarter of 2007 took place within Indonesian waters. The Indonesian ports and anchorages remained the regional hotspots for armed robbery and piracy activities. During the 1st quarter of 2007, such illegal activities were not confined to the ports and anchorages along the Malacca, Sunda and Makassar Straits.

## Sunda & Makassar Straits

There was only 1 reported case of piracy and armed robbery incident reported within the vicinity of the Sunda Strait during the 1st quarter of 2007. Figure 8 shows the location of the actual attack. A container was robbed of ship's stores at the Tanjung Priok anchorage, Indonesia. Similarly at Makassar Strait, there was 1 reported attack at the Pulau Laut Anchorage, Indonesia. A bulk carrier was also robbed of its ship's stores. (Refer to Figure 9)

However further off the Sunda Strait, into the Java Sea, just East of Jakarta, was where most of the attacks within the region took place. In fact, 1/3 of the reported armed robbery and piracy attacks within the Southeast Asian region took place within the vicinity of the Balongan Terminal, Indonesia. There were a total 4 reported incidents, of which 3 were actual attacks. As Balongan is one of Indonesia's main oil

terminals, it was not surprising that all reported incidents involved tankers.
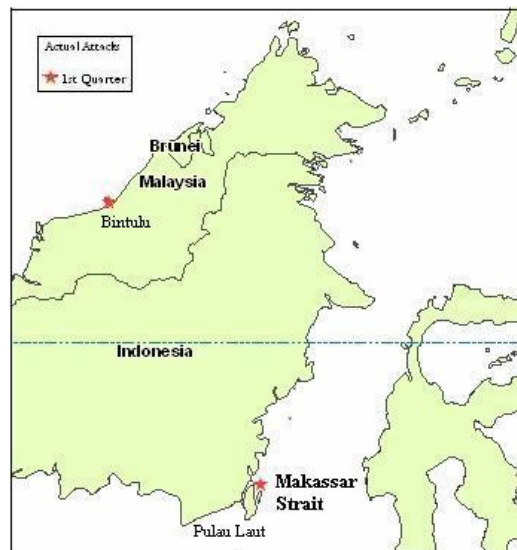
Figure 8

**Location of Actual Attacks in Sunda Strait – 1st quarter 2007**



Figure 9

**Location of Actual Attacks in Makassar Strait – 1st quarter 2007**

## Conclusion

Considering all main factors being discussed above, i.e. the types of attacks, the types of weapons being used and the location of the attacks, it clearly shows that these reported attacks in the 1$^{st}$ quarter of 2007 were small scale operations, and were perhaps less discriminating when it came to selecting potential targets. Thus, suggesting that these attacks were opportunistic in nature and ultimately more difficult for the authorities to track down as the profiles were far too common and often too similar to the everyday fishermen trawling the waters of the region.

Apart from the risk of falling victim to piracy and/ or armed robbery activities, fishing vessels trawling the Malacca Strait had also reportedly been fired at by naval vessels. The most recent incident reported only on the local daily in Malaysia took place on the 19$^{th}$ March 2007. The attack purportedly took place at the Northern tip of the Malacca Strait, within Malaysian waters. The owner of a victimized vessel narrated that they were being pursued and fired upon by a naval vessel, causing serious damage to his vessel. Fortunately no crewmembers were injured during the ordeal. Other fishing vessels that went on to rescue the crew also mentioned that this was not the first time such attacks had taken place in that area of waters. The fact that the incident was only reported in the newspapers and not by the relevant authorities clearly reflected the discrepancy in the official facts and figures collated by these agencies. The problem of under-reporting of attacks especially when involving smaller vessels, e.g. fishing trawlers, has been somewhat problematic. Similarly even when reports were made, very often insufficient information would be provided to give a clearer picture of the purported incidents.

It was obvious that vessels traveling within the region were often on high alert taking all security measures they could afford to. However, it is often a difficult task balancing the need to be vigilant yet not overreacting by taking extreme measures unnecessarily. The *Sinar Merak* incident in January 2007 was one of such example. In this case, whilst taking evasive action against approaching fishing vessels, *Sinar Merak* collided with one of them, only to find 2 unarmed men onboard. Upon further investigation in Singapore, it was established that the 2 men were actually survivors of the incident This case effectively showcase some of the actual challenges ship masters had to confront in carrying out his/ her responsibility to protect the vessel at all cost; and in the course of doing so, may potentially victimize and/ or endanger other innocent sea-users.

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