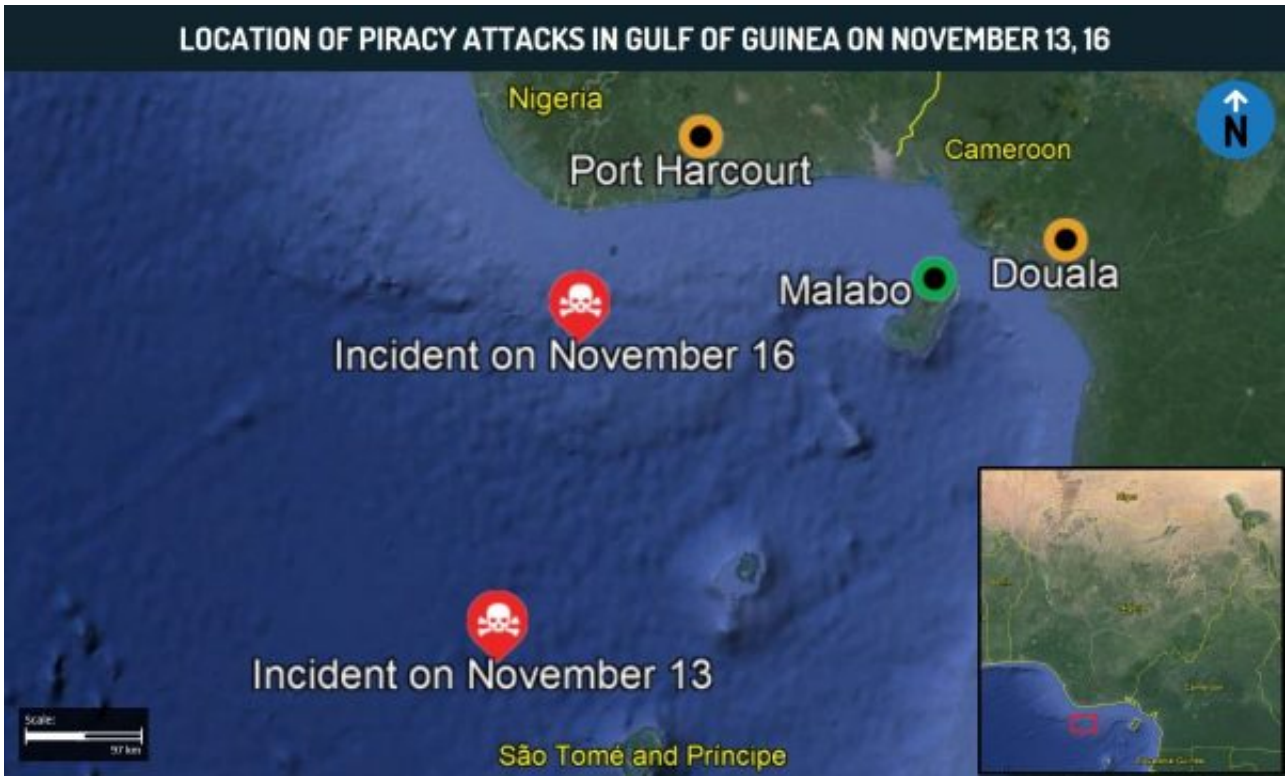
Piracy

17
NOV
14:45 UTC

Gulf of Guinea Alert: 14 Chinese nationals, five Ghanaian nationals abducted in two pirate attacks on November 13, 16

Please be advised

- Reports indicate that a Ghana-registered general cargo vessel was boarded by six or seven pirates approximately 81 km south off the coast of Brass, Nigeria's Bayelsa State at around 04:00 (local time) on November 16.
- Five crew members of Ghanaian nationality were allegedly kidnapped, and the pirates damaged the communication and navigation equipment. The vessel has subsequently resumed moving with two crew members left on board.
- Separately, reports noted that a Chinese-owned heavy load carrier sailing under a Liberian flag was attacked by pirates 144 km northwest from Sao Tome at approximately 15:00 on November 13.
- 14 crew members of Chinese nationality out of a total of 27 personnel were reportedly kidnapped. Another crew member was injured. As of November 15, the vessel was escorted by an Italian navy ship towards Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.
- Further details regarding these incidents remain unknown.



Assessments & Forecast

1. These incidents are indicative of the entrenched piracy threat across the Gulf of Guinea, especially south off the Nigerian coast, with nine piracy-related incidents reported since the beginning of November alone and over 100 crew members abducted in about 22 incidents during 2020. The abduction of the Chinese nationals aligns with the pirates' modus operandi of engaging in kidnap-for-ransom schemes. To that end, the abduction of Ghanaian nationals is notable given that African crew members are targeted with relative infrequency due to the perception of being less lucrative targets. **FORECAST:** Ultimately, the release of the abducted crew members can be expected through ransom payments over the coming weeks. This is poised to encourage pirates to continue engaging in similar kidnap-for-ransom attacks across the Gulf of Guinea in the foreseeable future.
2. Meanwhile, the fact that an Italian navy ship escorted an attacked vessel demonstrates the international presence and awareness of the deteriorated security landscape in the Gulf of Guinea amid ineffective security response by the countries of the region. While international actors such as the US and the European Union (EU) are known to be supporting efforts through training and equipment of regional naval forces to curb piracy, these actors seem to have usually refrained from engaging directly. **FORECAST:** Regardless, this may result in a growing willingness by international forces to take an active role against piracy. Such an involvement may lead to better and faster response to piracy attacks, which, in the longer term, has the potential to deter pirate attacks. In the meantime, regional maritime security bodies, such as the Nigerian navy, can be expected to enhance their presence in the region, albeit with limited success in effectively deterring recurring attacks.

Recommendations

Those operating ships through the Gulf of Guinea are advised to maintain heightened vigilance and take necessary precautions to prevent successful attacks given the high

risks of piracy and kidnappings. This includes being aware of NATO Shipping Center alerts and keeping watch for suspicious vessels.