

Circular From GARD**Date: 5 June 2020****Piracy in the Gulf of Mexico**

As the first three weeks of April 2020 has seen a high number of piracy attacks on offshore support vessels in the southern rim of the Gulf of Mexico we advise ships to exercise caution when operating in the region.

The US Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued an Alert on 17 April 2020 warning that a maritime threat had been reported in the vicinity of Ciudad Del Carmen and Dos Bocas, Mexico, in the Bay of Campeche area in the southern Gulf of Mexico. The nature of the threat was a series of four piracy incidents that took place between 4 April and 14 April 2020. All four incidents involved attacks on offshore support vessels, some involved crew injuries and theft.

Masters are therefore advised to exercise additional caution when their vessels are operating in or transiting the Ciudad del Carmen region.

The security situation in the Gulf of Mexico

Each MARAD alert reports on an immediate threat in a specific region at a given point in time and these alerts are therefore short lived. However, piracy and armed robbery incidents in the southern rim of the Gulf of Mexico is reportedly not uncommon. While the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Center ([IMB PRC](#)) has recorded only four incidents in the Southern Gulf of Mexico in the previous 12 months, various [media reports](#) describe a steep increase in the number of attacks on maritime oil infrastructure in Mexico since 2016 - some even refer to an average of 16 attacks a month between January and September 2019. Although these numbers are unconfirmed, they do suggest that there could be a significant degree of under-reporting of incidents in the Gulf of Mexico.

According to the incidents recorded by the IMB PRC, the perpetrators typically use small boats capable of reaching high speeds, are armed and tend to be violent. Their targets are mainly offshore support vessels and the organization has not recorded any attacks on larger commercial vessels in Mexico in the previous ten years. The *modus operandi* seems to be a maritime extension of organized crime as sophisticated equipment is often stolen and resold and crews are robbed.

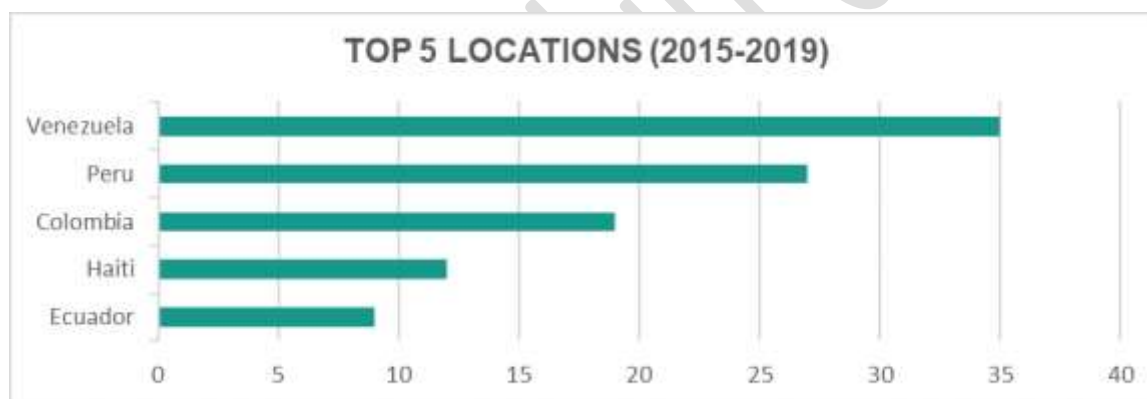
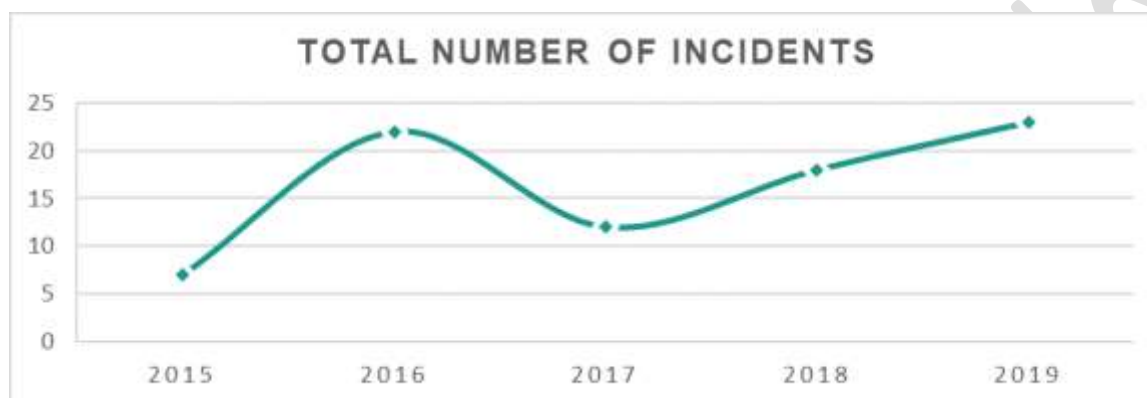
Incidents in South and Central America and the Caribbean waters

Piracy and armed robbery against ships are some of the modern day challenges of the maritime industry and are not restricted to only known 'high risk regions' such as Gulf of Guinea, waters of South East Asia

and the Indian Ocean.

According to the IMB PRC, **Peru** was one of top five locations in terms of number of incidents recorded in 2019. Ten incidents were recorded at Callao anchorage in Peru in 2019, with five reported in the last quarter of that year. Three further incidents have been recorded in this location in the first quarter of 2020. There have also been reports of recent attacks in **Ecuador**. In the first half of April 2020, the IMB PRC recorded two incidents near Guayaquil, both involving attacks on container vessels underway.

Its latest five-year statistics for South and Central America and the Caribbean waters, shown in the figures below, indicates a tripling of the total number of incidents since 2015.



Warning to stay alert

Members and clients with vessels operating in South and Central America and the Caribbean waters are advised to:

- Closely monitor the situation via the [IMB PRC website](#) and by staying in close contact with their local agents as well as with regional authorities.
- Carry out a voyage specific threat and risk assessments prior to entering the region, review the Ship's Security Plan and adopt relevant preventive measures, following the [Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers](#).

- brief the crew on the security arrangements identified in the Ship Security Plan and conduct drills prior to arriving in an area of increased risk. Many attempted piracy and armed robbery attacks are unsuccessful, countered by ships' crew who have planned and trained in advance. All ships are advised to report all attacks and suspicious sightings to local Authorities, flag state and to the IMB PRC as per [IMO MSC.1/Circ. 1334](#).
- And last but not least, keep a proper, visual lookout! According to the Global Counter Piracy Guidance, this is the most effective method of ship protection. It can help identify a suspicious approach or attack early on, allows defences to be deployed and, can serve as an effective deterrent to would-be attackers.

It is also important to cooperate with other operators, military forces, law enforcement bodies and welfare providers in the region when necessary - both before, during and after an attack.

Source of Information: The Gard P&I Club