

PAG Believed to be Responsible for String of Attacks in Gulf of Guinea

Officials in the Gulf of Guinea have released an alert warning of a possible pirate action group (PAG) operating in the Gulf of Guinea, specifically in a region from the coast of São Tomé & Príncipe north towards Nigeria. The PAG is believed to be behind at least five incidents that have occurred in the region in recent days.

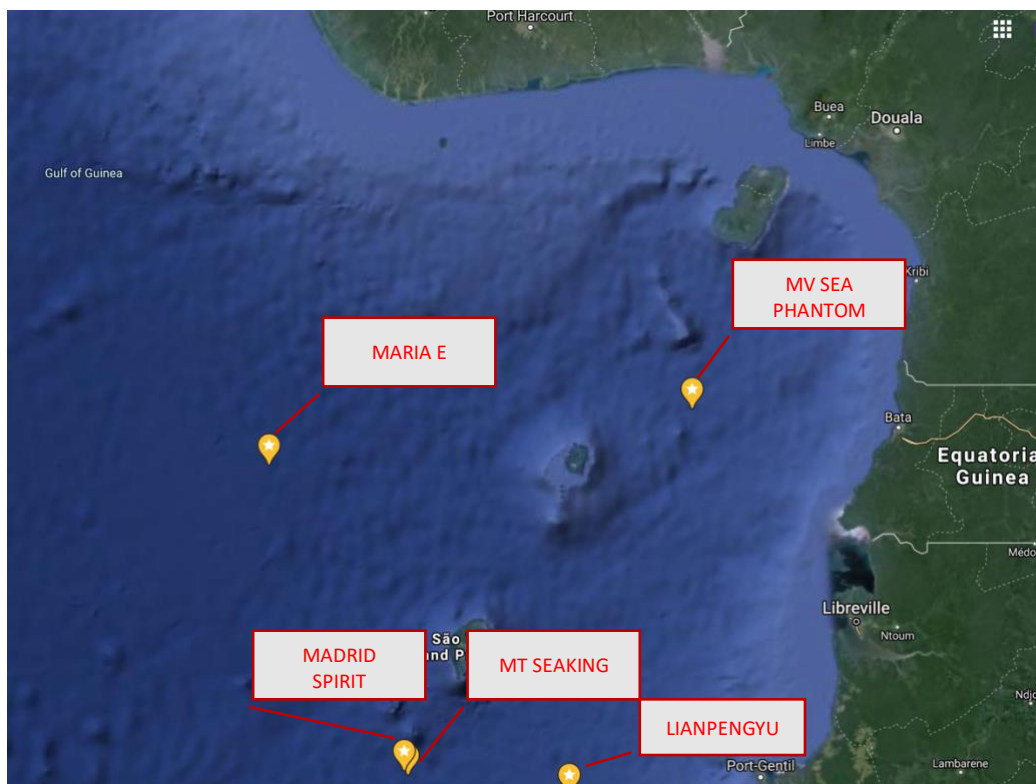
The PAG is believed to have made its first attempted attack on a vessel on 6 February when it approached the product tanker *SEA PHANTOM*. The incident occurred at around 23:30 UTC approximately 115 nautical miles off the coast of Cameroon. The tanker, which was traveling east, carried out evasive manoeuvres in a bid to avoid the pirates. However the PAG was successful in boarding the vessel. The crewmembers on board the tanker retreated into the citadel and a coordinated response by naval vessels and helicopters resulted in at least eight pirates fleeing the scene when the helicopter responded to the distress call.

Maritime officials believe the PAG next launched an attack on fishing vessel *LIANPENGYU* on 7 February. The Gabon-flagged vessel had been reported to be fishing tuna in the region with a crew of 14 - 18 Chinese nationals onboard. The vessel was attacked and boarded, with the pirates believed to have not only kidnapped the crew but also to have hijacked the vessel. It is currently believed that the vessel is being used as a mothership for the pirates as they seek additional opportunist targets in the region. Oil tanker *MT SEAKING* reported sighting a small boat being launched from a mothership that is possibly the fishing vessel *LIANPENGYU*. The pirates attempted to board the *SEAKING* by using ladders, though the tanker was able to carry out evasive action to avoid the pirates. This attack occurred on 8 February off Port Gentil, Gabon.

The PAG is believed to have next targeted the Panamá-flagged Greek product tanker *MARIA E*. The vessel was boarded at 1220 UTC on 9 February, approximately 100 nautical miles northwest of São Tomé, while en route from Lomé, Togo. The group has also been linked to another approach in the region, this one targeted the LPG carrier *MADRID SPIRIT*. The vessel was heading south from Nigeria when it was approached at around 1658 UTC on 8 February, some 47 nautical miles south of São Tomé Island. The vessel was approached and attacked by a speedboat with several

perpetrators on board. Shots were fired against the vessel, though the carrier managed to undertake evasive action to avoid boarding.

The situation in the Gulf of Guinea, and notably in waters off the coast of São Tomé and Príncipe north towards Nigeria, remains a critical concern and additional incidents are likely to take place in the coming days/weeks as this PAG continues to



look for opportunist targets. The PAG is believed to be headed north, though all vessels transiting this region are advised to remain aware of any suspicious activity at all times. Vessels should be on the lookout for the fishing vessel, which has a blue hull and white superstructure and is believed to be sailing at speeds of up to 9 knots. Officials have noted that vessels in the region have adopted a “stealth mode navigation,” and have turned off their AIS signal, though this has not prevented vessels from being attacked by the PAG.