



4 Sep 2020

## **IFC SPOT COMMENTARY 1/20 – Observations of Theft, Robbery, and Piracy at Sea (TRAPS) Incidents in Manila and Batangas Bay, Philippines**

### **OVERVIEW**

1. IFC observed an increase in Theft, Robbery, and Piracy at Sea (TRAPS) incidents with a record of two Sea Robberies, six Sea Thefts, and two Attempted Actions incidents from **Jan to Aug 2020** in both Manila and Batangas Bay, Philippines. This spot commentary aims to provide awareness of the emerging area of concern, including the analytical insights into the incidents and the perpetrators' observed modus operandi.

### **SUMMARY OF FACTS**

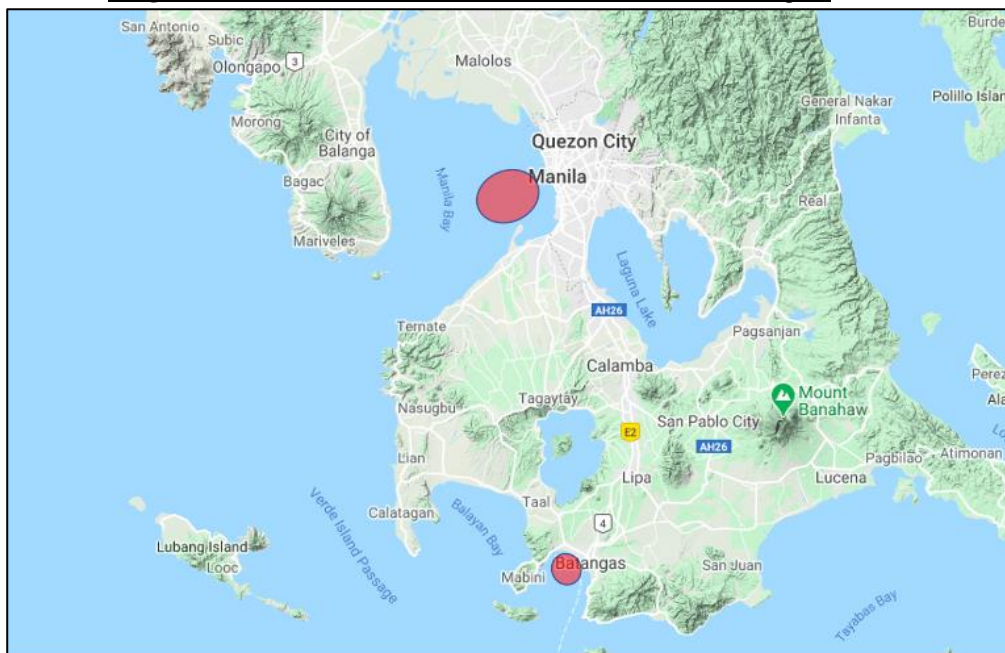
2. Areas of Concern. It is observed that these two locations, Manila and Batangas Bay, Philippines (See **Diagram 1**), are among the "area of concern" with 10 incidents recorded, compared to only two in 2019 and three in 2018 during the same period.

a. Seven incidents were recorded in Manila Bay anchorage, which targeted anchored vessels and occurred within the hours of darkness between 2200hrs to 0430hrs. In all incidents, only small items were reported stolen without any damage to the vessels. Only one (14.3%) incident involving an armed perpetrator was reported while causing no harm to the crew. *Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Manila was given a GREEN Zone for crew change by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in cooperation and approval of the Philippine Government to help seafarers (Filipinos and foreign nationals) take their vacation after being stranded on board ship due to lockdown. As a result, the number of vessels in the designated anchorage areas, particularly in Manila Bay, had increased, comparing it to the past*

*period without the pandemic. Given this condition, this also allows the theft and robbers to conduct their illegal activities by sneaking to the vessels with low freeboards and targeting seafarers onboard who are considered unarmed and non-combatant.*

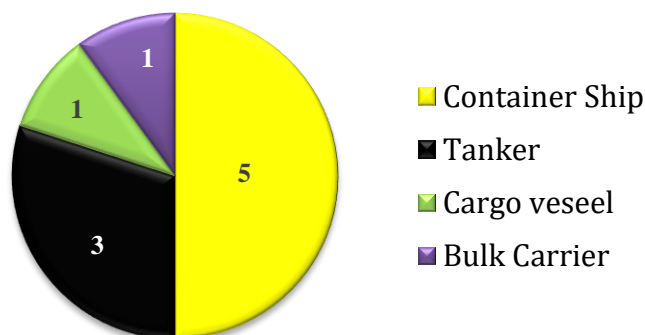
b. Meanwhile, all three incidents in Batangas Bay occurred on board anchored vessels and vessels berthed in port, and within the hours of darkness between 2000hrs to 0300hrs. In all incidents, perpetrators were armed with knives, and in one case (33.3%) crew was harmed by the perpetrators. The perpetrators were observed to be confrontational in these three incidents as compared to past incidents.

**Diagram 1:** Locations of observed TRAPS incidents in Jan-Aug 20



3. Assessed Modus Operandi. A total of five container ships (50%), three tankers (30%), one cargo vessel (10%), and one bulk carrier (10%) were involved in the 10 incidents (See **Diagram 2**). Observations of the perpetrators' actions revealed the following modus operandi (The details of all incidents are at **Annex A**):

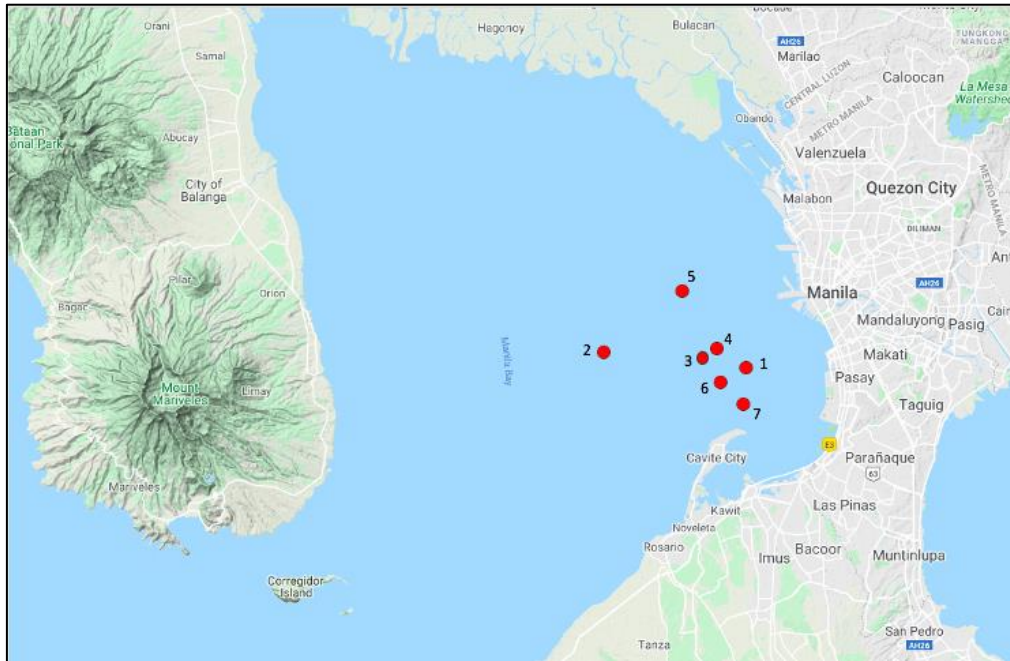
**Diagram 2:** Breakdown of Vessels type



a. Incidents in Manila Bay Anchorages. Five out of **seven** incidents involved anchored container ships (71.4%), and the two remaining incidents involved one cargo vessel (14.3%) and one tanker (14.3%), as shown in **Diagram 3**. All incidents occurred between 2200hrs to 0430hrs. It is important to note that the severity of incidents in this area remains low. In most cases, perpetrators managed to escape with whatever loose material they could get hold off, where no confrontation with the crew took place. In three (42.9%) of cases, the perpetrators took breathing apparatus with them, while the rest of the incidents involved electrical gear, paint, and other smaller things typically found in ship stores. The details of the incidents are in **Annex A**.

**Modus Operandi:** The attacks are assessed to be **opportunistic**, where perpetrators targeted **anchored vessels** with low freeboard during **hours of darkness**. Incidents had involved **small numbers of perpetrators** (less than five) with not armed with weapons; only one case reported the perpetrators seen with knives/ sharp objects. In most cases, the perpetrators were discovered at Bosun and storage rooms, and have targeted ship's equipment and **stores** (paints, hoses, and breathing equipment). Perpetrators were observed **avoiding any confrontation** with the crew. The trending of incidents suggests the same group of perpetrators has targeted a few vessels on the same night to maximise their gains.

**Diagram 3: Locations of seven incidents in Manila Anchorage, Philippines**

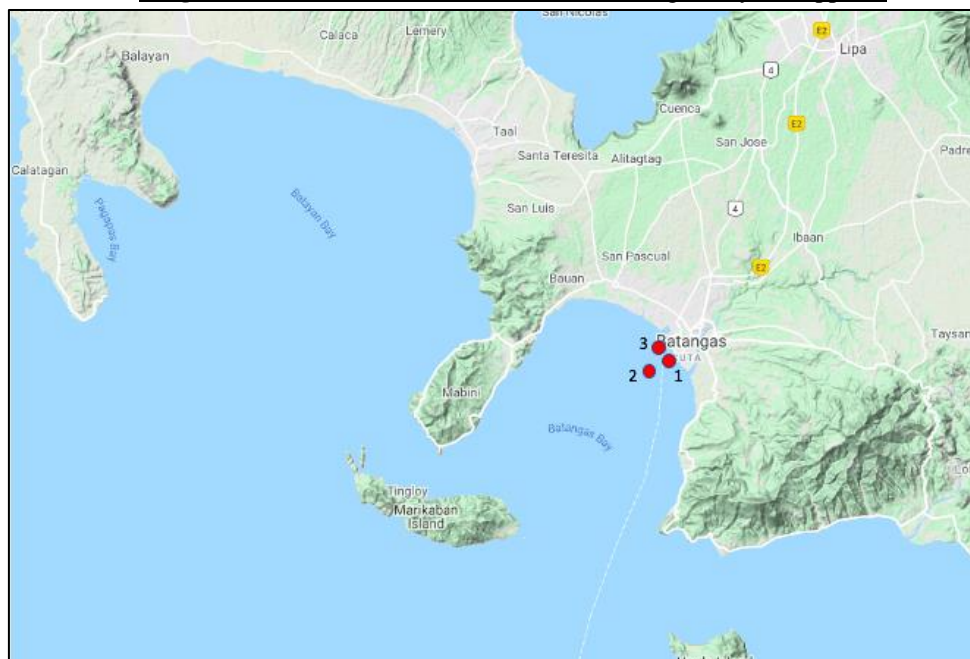


b. Incidents in Batangas Anchorages and Ports. **Three** incidents involving two tankers (66.6%) and a bulk carrier (33.3%) occurred in the highlighted location, as shown in **Diagram 4**. All incidents occurred between 2000hrs to 0300hrs. It has been observed that a change in the trends of incidents happened in this area. The details of the incidents are shown in **Annex A**.

**Modus Operandi:** The attacks are assessed to be **opportunistic**, where perpetrators targeted **anchored and berthed** vessels with low freeboard. Every incident had involved **one perpetrator armed with a knife**. In most cases at ports, the perpetrators were discovered on the upper deck, climbed up the vessels through the mooring lines, and had targeted ship's equipment and personal belongings. Meanwhile, perpetrators approaching the vessels with small boats may use a line with a hook to climb to anchored vessels. The perpetrators were observed to be **confrontational**, with instances of using knives to fight against ship crew that they encountered. The trending of incidents suggests the significant changes of the perpetrator's reactions toward the ship crew with more aggressive posture shown, which **may cause severe injury to the crew**. The similarity of incidents suggests the same person or group of perpetrators may again try to conduct these kinds of attacks in the near future if the situation permits.



**Diagram 4:** Locations of three incidents in Batangas Bay, Philippines



## ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4. Actions by the Philippine Authorities. The Philippine authorities, particularly in Manila Bay and the Coast Guard Station - Batangas, have increased their security monitoring and patrolling in the said areas to tackle the increased numbers of incidents.

## IFC RECOMMENDATIONS

5. These incidents underscore the importance of maintaining a proper and vigilant lookout, adhering to ship security standard operating procedures, and reporting incidents to local authorities. Shipmasters are reminded to contact the local authorities and the IFC immediately when they sight suspicious activities (including suspicious small boats approaching) and not confront the perpetrator when boarding had occurred. Details of IFC recommendations are found in **Annex B**. The contact details of local authorities are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1:** Contact Details of Local Authorities

Country	Contact Details	
Philippines	MMS Radio Channel	16
	Phone Number	+63 917 743 682 (Philippine Coast Guard Action Center)
	Email	pcgcomcen@coastguard.gov.ph
IFC	Phone Numbers	+65 9626 8965 +65 6594 5728
	Email	IFC_DO@defence.gov.sg

6. Masters and operators are encouraged to participate in the IFC's Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) program as this allows vessels to receive timely information from the IFC on reports of incidents in the IFC's Area of Interest (AOI).

## **CONCLUSION**

7. While efforts and measures have been taken by the local authorities in the region to counter illegal activities, maintaining vigilance, adopting strong deterrence measures, and timely reporting remain key to mitigating such incidents' risks from proliferation.

Annex A to  
Spot Commentary 1/20  
Dated 4 Sep 20

**Incidents in Manila Anchorages**

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Vessel Name/ Flag/ Vessel Type/ Movement	No of Perpetrators	Armed/ Unarmed	Items Stolen	Remarks
1	Sea Theft	200340H (UTC+8) Jul 20	Container Ship/ Libra Flagged/ Anchored	Not reported	Not reported	Ship stores and paints were reported missing	No one injured
2	Sea Theft	262217H (UTC+8) Jun 20	LNG Tanker/ Bahamas Flagged/ Anchored	Four perpetrators	Unarmed	Three Immersion suits and fire hoses were reported missing	No one injured
3	Attempted Actions	130325H (UTC+8) Jun 20	Container Ship/ Hong Kong Flagged/ Anchored	Unknown perpetrators	Not reported	Nothing stolen	Not reported
4	Sea Theft	130400H (UTC+8) Jun 20	Container Ship/ Portugal Flagged/ Anchored	Not reported	Not reported	Ship stores were reported missing	Not reported
5	Sea Theft	140310H (UTC+8) Apr 20	Cargo Ship/ Singapore Flagged/ Anchored	Two perpetrators	One armed with a knife	Ship stores and breathing apparatus were reported missing	No one injured
6	Sea Theft	290335H (UTC+8) Jan 20	Container Ship/ Hong Kong Flagged/ Anchored	Several perpetrators	Not reported	Ship stores and breathing apparatus were reported missing	No one injured

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7	Sea Theft	250415H (UTC+8) Jan 20	Container Ship/ Portugal Flagged/ Anchored	Several perpetrators	Not reported	Ship stores and breathing apparatus were reported missing	No one injured
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**Incidents in Batangas**

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Vessel Name/ Flag/ Vessel Type/ Movement	No of Perpetrators	Armed/ Unarmed	Items Stolen	Remarks
1	Sea Robbery	202021H (UTC+8) Aug 20	Bulk Carrier/ Hong Kong Flagged/ Anchored	One perpetrator	Armed with knife	Nothing stolen	The duty crew suffered a cut on his right palm
2	Sea Robbery	140100H (UTC+8) Aug 20	Tanker/ Hong Kong Flagged/ Berthed	One perpetrator	Armed with knife	Personnel Belongings	No one injured
3	Attempted Actions	230255H (UTC+8) Mar 20	Product Tanker/ Panama Flagged/ Anchored	One perpetrator	Armed with knife	Nothing stolen	Perpetrator escaped upon hearing the alarm. No one injured



## **IFC Recommendations**

1. The IFC recommends the following measures to be implemented while transiting or anchored:

- a. Activate the ship's Automatic Identification System (AIS) at all times.
- b. Timely reporting to the local authorities.
- c. Increase vigilance in watch-keeping and deploy additional lookouts. Be wary of suspicious small boats approaching. Take a photo of the suspicious boat and send it to IFC.
- d. Participate in the IFC Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) System and provide a status update, while in transit, as much as possible.
- e. Use CCTV cameras for coverage of vulnerable areas (if available)
- f. Keep ship's whistle, searchlights, and foghorn ready for immediate use.
- g. Secure or lift external ladders to prevent their use and to restrict external access to the bridge.
- h. Deploy Self-Protection Measures (SPM), eg. Rig the water spray hoses and foam monitors in a fixed position. Evasive manoeuvres have also been proven to deter perpetrators in the areas of concern.
- i. Secure all doors and hatches, providing access to the accommodation and machinery spaces.
- j. Rig safety precautionary measures on the anchor cable hawse pipe while anchored.