

● THREAT LEVEL: HIGH

THE RETURN OF SOMALI PIRACY

Warships have moved north to the Red Sea and Hormuz, and pirates are back in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin.

REPORTING TO
6 October 2026

COVERAGE
Gulf of Aden · Somali Basin · Yemeni coast

BOTTOM LINE

Somali piracy is back at its highest level since 2013

EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta logged 25 piracy incidents off the Horn of Africa between January and mid-September 2026, almost three times the nine recorded in all of 2025. Six merchant ships have been hijacked since late April.

The trigger is offshore. The warships that kept piracy down for a decade have been pulled north to the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. The conditions on land that produced the 2008 to 2012 crisis never went away, and pirate groups have gone back to work.

25

incidents to mid-September, against 9 in all of 2025

6

merchant ships hijacked since 21 April

5

crew killed aboard *Honour 25*, the first such deaths in over a decade

60+

seafarers held hostage at the summer peak

KEY JUDGEMENTS

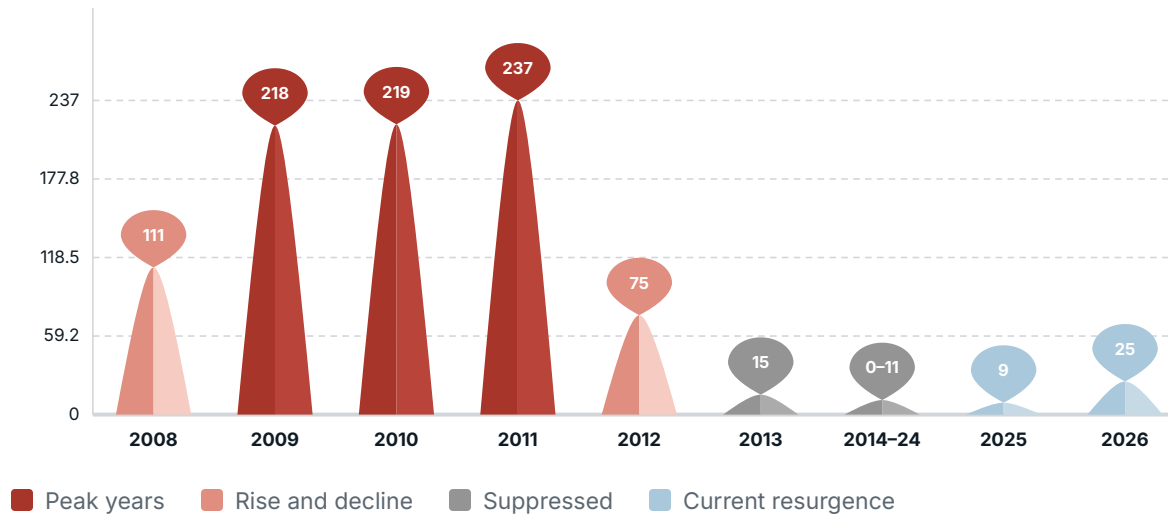
- 01 The naval vacuum is the trigger.** Atalanta is down to about two ships. India moved its frontline ships north on 23 March, and the surge began the next day.
- 02 Hormuz changed the incentives.** The blockade cut smuggling routes, so groups "needed to go back to piracy", according to Atalanta's commander.
- 03 Not a replay of 2011.** Volumes are a tenth of the peak, but targeting is selective: tankers, sanctioned and disputed ships.
- 04 Violence is rising.** Five crew of *Honour 25* died during the 29 to 30 September rescue.
- 05 Peak risk is now.** October and November are the post-monsoon window, and summer ransoms will fund new groups.

THREATRATE THREAT LEVEL: GULF OF ADEN & SOMALI BASIN


INCIDENT TRENDS, 2008 TO 2026

Nearly three times last year, still a fraction of the peak

ATTACKS OFF SOMALIA AND IN THE GULF OF ADEN



2008 to 2014: International Maritime Bureau (IMB) annual reports. 2025 to 2026: EUNAVFOR Atalanta.

2025 AGAINST 2026

2025, full year

9

2026, to mid-September

25

0 10 20 30 40

The dashed outline shows the full-year total of about 35 if the current pace holds.

Two counts, one trend. EUNAVFOR counts every attack, boarding, approach and dhow seizure. AFP's analysis of IMO data uses a narrower definition and found 15 attacks by 27 August against 5 in 2025.

237

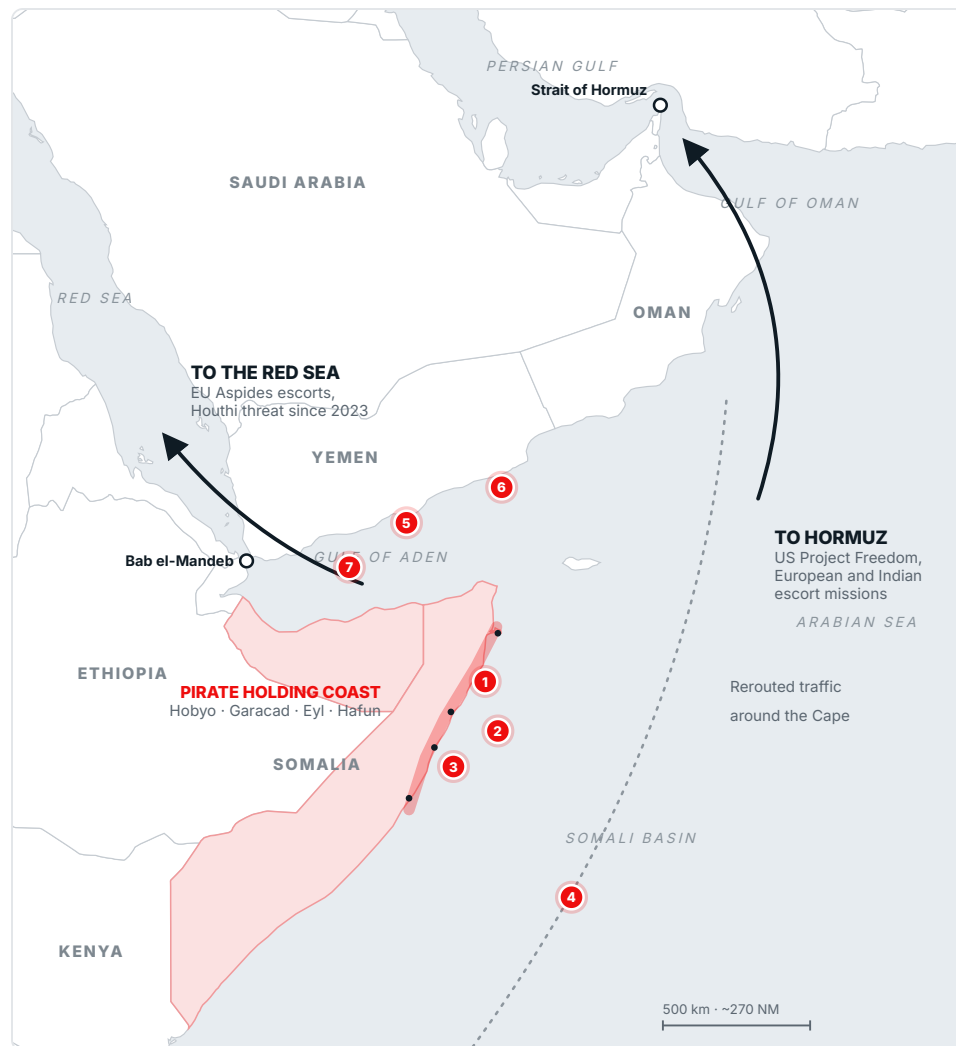
attacks at the 2011 peak, when piracy cost the world about \$7 billion

+178%

rise in incidents on 2025, with three and a half months still to run

~35

incidents in 2026 if the January to September pace holds



Map: ThreatRate, based on open-source reporting to 6 October 2026. Positions approximate.

21 APRIL ONWARDS

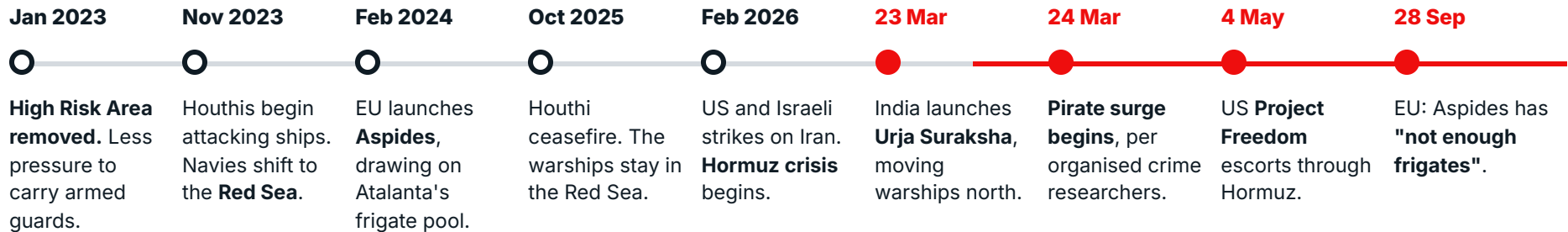
From opportunism to a campaign

The surge began with a 30-man assault on the tanker *Honour 25* north of Eyl on **21 April**. Within twelve days, pirates had taken *Sword* and *Eureka* and probed a tanker 500 NM out to sea. A captured ship then served as a mothership for further raids.

AREA	REPORTED ACTIVITY
Inshore basin	<i>Honour 25</i> (21 Apr) and <i>Sword</i> (26 Apr) hijacked. <i>Elfriede</i> 's armed guards drove off an attack (23 Apr).
Offshore	Mothership and two skiffs approached a tanker 500 NM east of Mogadishu (28 Apr).
Yemeni coast	<i>Eureka</i> boarded at anchor off Qana (2 May). <i>Sibu 1</i> seized 136 NM east of Mukalla (20 Aug).
Gulf of Aden	<i>Glamor</i> boarded (10 Sep). Crew held the citadel until warships and aircraft arrived.
Holding coast	Ships taken to anchorages at Hobyo, Garacad, Eyl and Hafun.

HOW THE NAVAL UMBRELLA WAS DISMANTLED

Navies moved north. Pirates moved in.



THE RED SEA PULL

From late 2023 Western navies concentrated on Bab el-Mandeb. Aspides needed at least ten ships, taken from the same European pool that served Atalanta. The ships stayed after the October 2025 ceasefire.

THE HORMUZ PULL

The Iran war drew in the rest. India sent more than five frontline warships to escort energy cargoes, the US launched destroyer escorts, and a European mission sent frigates and minehunters to the Gulf.

WHAT WAS LEFT

Atalanta has about two ships plus aircraft to cover a 3,300 km coastline and hundreds of miles of open ocean. Japanese aircraft and occasional Indian and Turkish ships fill some gaps. There is no coordinated coalition response.

~2

Atalanta warships left to patrol the Somali Basin

1

day between India's redeployment and the start of the surge

0

ships hijacked in 2026 that carried armed guards

WHY THEY CAME BACK

Two pressures behind the surge

1 • THE HORMUZ SQUEEZE

Many piracy networks had moved into smuggling fuel, weapons and people between Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. The Hormuz blockade cut those routes. In the words of Atalanta's commander, Vice Admiral Ignacio Villanueva Serrano, **"the pirates decided they needed money"**.

2 • SOFTER, RICHER TARGETS

About half of Asia to Europe traffic now avoids Suez, and Cape-bound ships pass Somalia's coast. Higher oil prices made tankers more valuable. With the High Risk Area gone and costs rising, many operators dropped armed guards. Aid cuts, illegal fishing and rising prices on land supply willing recruits.

THEN VS NOW

FACTOR	2008 TO 2012	2026
Naval cover	Dense, multinational	Spread thin across three theatres
Armed guards	Industry standard	None on any hijacked ship
Targets	Any ship within reach	Tankers, sanctioned and disputed ships

THE CRITICAL EXTERNAL VARIABLE

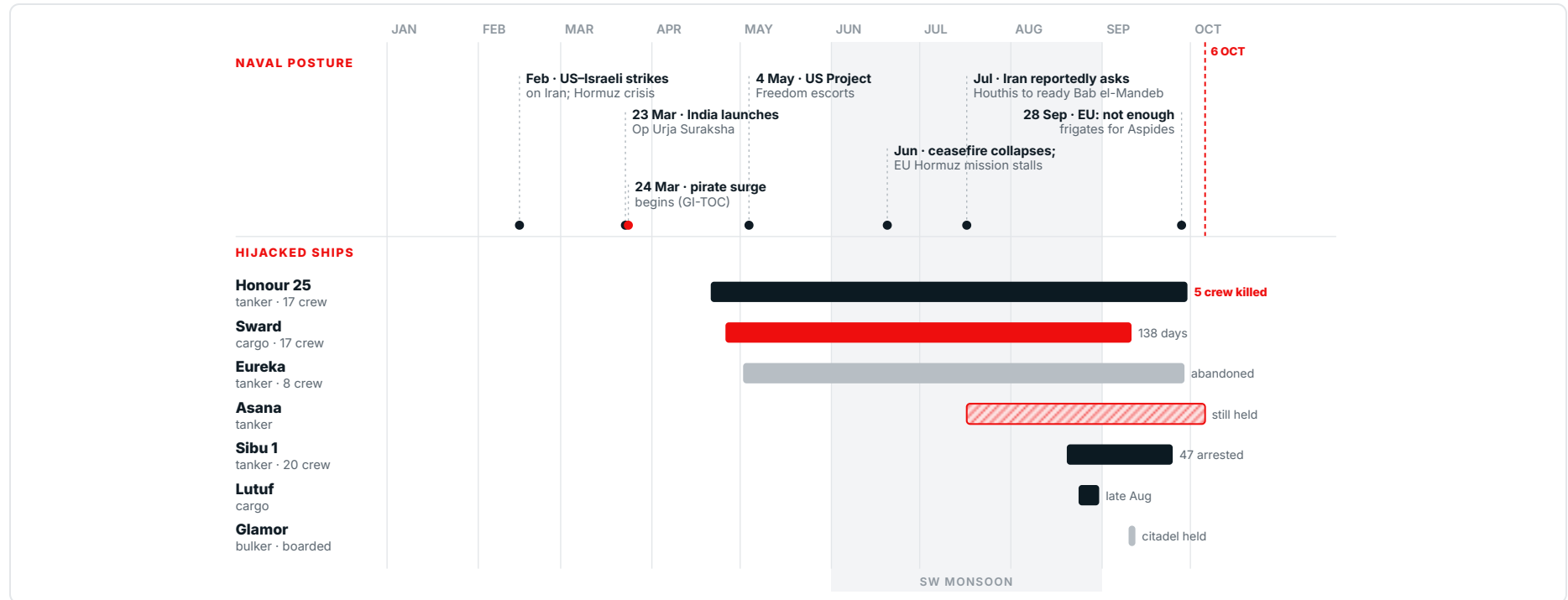
The Houthi and Al-Shabaab nexus

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a London defence and security think tank, cites reports that the Houthis gave Somali groups training, equipment and money, and may have joined the *Eureka*, *Asana* and *Sword* hijackings. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), a Geneva research network, reports an alleged coordination meeting in Yemen in mid-June. The Soufan Center, a New York security research group, describes Al-Shabaab stepping up piracy in return for Houthi weapons. None of this is confirmed.

COMMERCIAL ONLY	Piracy stays a ransom business that guards and navies can deter.
INDIRECT SUPPORT	Weapons, training and finance give groups reach and staying power.
DIRECT ROLE	Hijackings become a proxy tool in the Red Sea conflict.
CRIMINAL BUSINESS PROXY INSTRUMENT	

HOLD TIMES AND OUTCOMES, 2026

Six ships taken, three ways out



■ Released after ransom
 ■ Freed by force
 ■ Abandoned by pirates
 ■ Still held
 ■ Southwest monsoon

138 days

Sward held before a ransom of \$1.7 to 2.7M was reportedly paid

\$10M

Eureka ransom demand, up from \$3M

63

suspects detained in the *Honour 25* and *Sibü 1* operations

1

ship still held: the tanker *Asana*, seized 17 July

OCTOBER 2026 TO MARCH 2027

Three scenarios: the risk peaks before the northeast monsoon

October and November are the main danger window before the northeast monsoon limits small boats from December. Ransom money, proven motherships and absent navies all point to more attacks.

LIKELIHOOD: LOW

Navies return south

A durable Hormuz ceasefire frees escorts. Atalanta and India rebuild patrols and shipowners re-embark guards. Activity falls toward 2025 levels.

Requires: a stable Gulf. Unlikely before 2027.

LIKELIHOOD: MOST LIKELY

Sustained high activity

Escorts stay tied to Hormuz and the Red Sea. Two to four more hijacking attempts by year end, mainly slow tankers and bulkers in the Gulf of Aden and the inshore basin. More forcible recoveries by Somali and Turkish forces.

Consequence: higher hostage risk during rescues.

LIKELIHOOD: LOW TO MODERATE

Bab el-Mandeb closes

The Houthis act on reported Iranian requests to close the strait. Traffic and warships shift again, Houthi-linked groups gain cover and motherships push further east.

Consequence: piracy merges with the Red Sea war.

PUSHES TOWARD ESCALATION

- ▲ Houthi closure of Bab el-Mandeb
- ▲ Confirmed Houthi or Al-Shabaab operational role
- ▲ Large ransom payouts in October and November

PUSHES TOWARD DE-ESCALATION

- ▼ A durable Hormuz ceasefire that frees escorts
- ▼ Armed guards back aboard at-risk ships
- ▼ Sustained forcible recoveries by Puntland and federal forces

Bar length shows relative likelihood (qualitative ThreatRate assessment, not a probability).

SPILLOVER

A Somali problem with global reach

Seafarers

CRITICAL

More than 60 held at the peak. The first crew deaths in over a decade came during a rescue, as assaults replace negotiation.

Gulf of Aden transits

CRITICAL

The busiest attack zone since May, on the route between Suez and Asia. Ships at anchor off Yemen are most exposed.

Shipping costs

HIGH

Piracy adds to war-risk premiums and Cape diversions that already cost about \$1M in fuel per voyage.

Somalia & Yemen

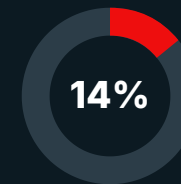
HIGH

Ransoms fund clan networks and possibly armed groups. The Puntland and federal rift complicates any response on land.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The EU is seeking more frigates for Aspides, while Kaja Kallas admits ships are queuing for escorts. Turkey's parliament extended its naval mandate in Somali waters. Puntland's Maritime Police Force and Turkish commandos led the autumn rescues. Atalanta still works with Japan and India on air and sea response.

A GLOBAL CHOKEPOINT



of world maritime trade passes Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden, according to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a London defence and security think tank.

2–3 weeks

added to Asia to Europe voyages diverted around the Cape of Good Hope

~\$1m

extra fuel cost per diverted voyage

3,300 km

of Somali coastline, the longest in mainland Africa, with no national coast guard

WHAT TO DO NOW

Guidance for ship operators, charterers and crews

AREA	RISK	GUIDANCE
Gulf of Aden	EXTREME	Embark armed security and apply Best Management Practices (BMP) Maritime Security in full: speed, freeboard, razor wire, lookouts and a tested citadel.
Yemeni & Somali anchorages	EXTREME	Avoid waiting or anchoring off Yemen and northern Somalia. <i>Eureka</i> was taken at anchor.
Somali Basin to 500 NM	HIGH	Mothership attacks are proven at 500 NM. Keep maximum distance from the coast and maintain speed.
Reporting	HIGH	Register with the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) and report to UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) before entry. Do not assume a warship can reach you quickly.
K&R & sanctions	HIGH	Review K&R and war-risk cover. Ransoms involving Houthi or Al-Shabaab-linked groups carry legal risk.
Arabian Sea	ELEVATED	No 2026 hijackings confirmed, but state-on-state military risk near Hormuz dominates.

0
ships with armed guards ever
successfully hijacked off Somalia

500_{NM}
proven range of 2026 mothership
attacks

Oct–Nov
peak-risk window before the
northeast monsoon

UKMTO
report before entering and if
attacked

EARLY WARNING DASHBOARD

Indicators to monitor

● **Bab el-Mandeb**

Houthi moves to close the strait or renewed attacks on Red Sea shipping.

▲ ESCALATION

● **Ransom payouts**

Large payments for *Asana* or new captures, funding more groups and motherships.

▲ ESCALATION

● **Hostage violence**

Further crew deaths during rescues or executions to force payment.

▲ ESCALATION

● **Armed group links**

Confirmed Houthi or Al-Shabaab roles in specific hijackings.

▲ ESCALATION

● **Forcible recoveries**

Puntland, federal and Turkish rescues: fewer ransoms, but higher crew risk.

▲ ▼ EITHER WAY

● **Naval return**

A Hormuz ceasefire that releases escorts back to Atalanta and the Indian Navy.

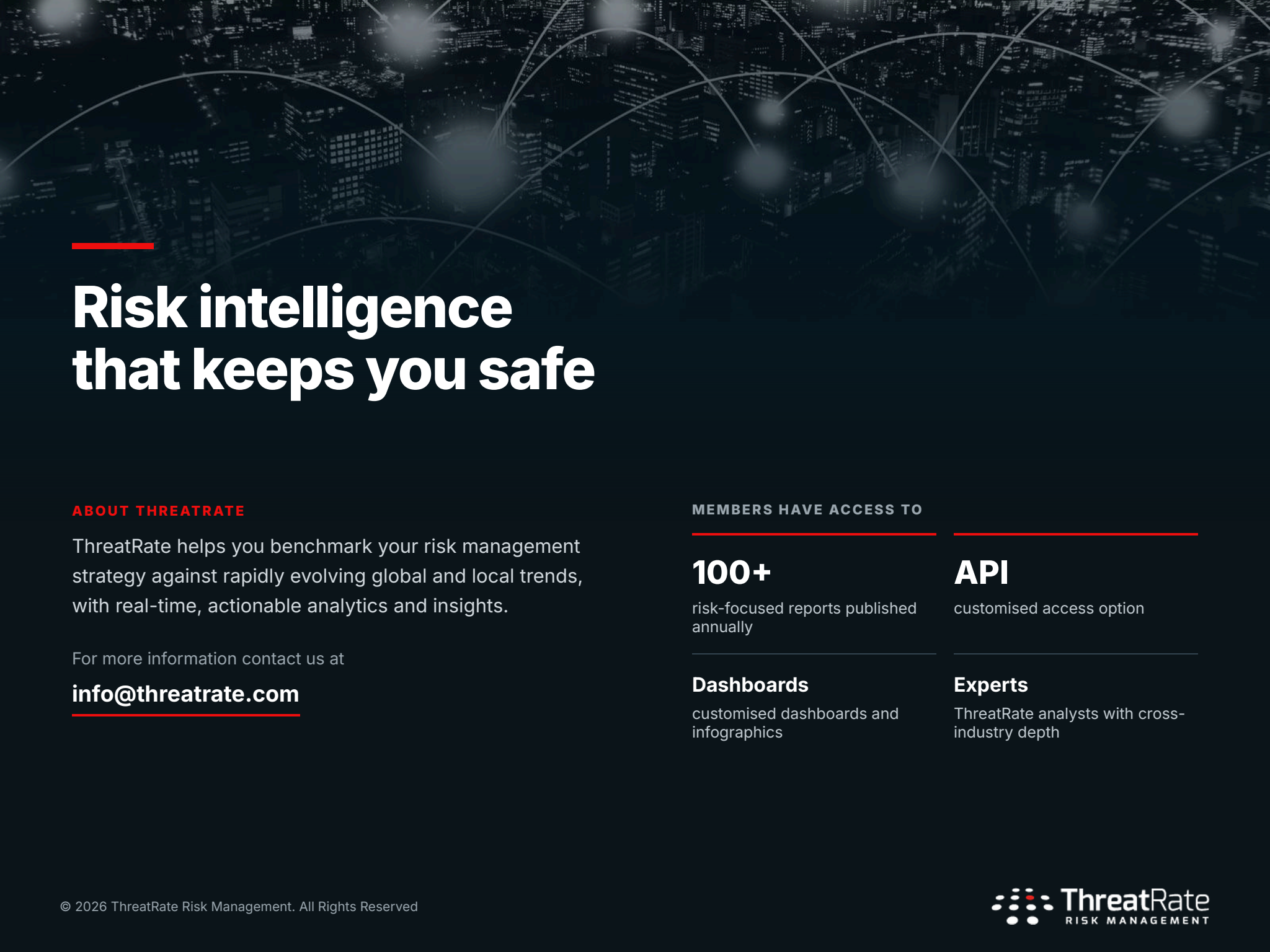
▼ DE-ESCALATION

Somali piracy did not return because conditions on land changed. It returned because the sea was left open.

CONCLUSION

This is not a replay of 2011. Volumes are far lower, but attackers are better targeted, better armed and possibly linked to the Houthis and Al-Shabaab.

The most likely path is sustained high activity while the Iran war and the Red Sea crisis keep navies to the north. The most dangerous is a closure of Bab el-Mandeb that merges piracy with the wider conflict. Lasting suppression needs warships back in the Somali Basin and armed guards back aboard.



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