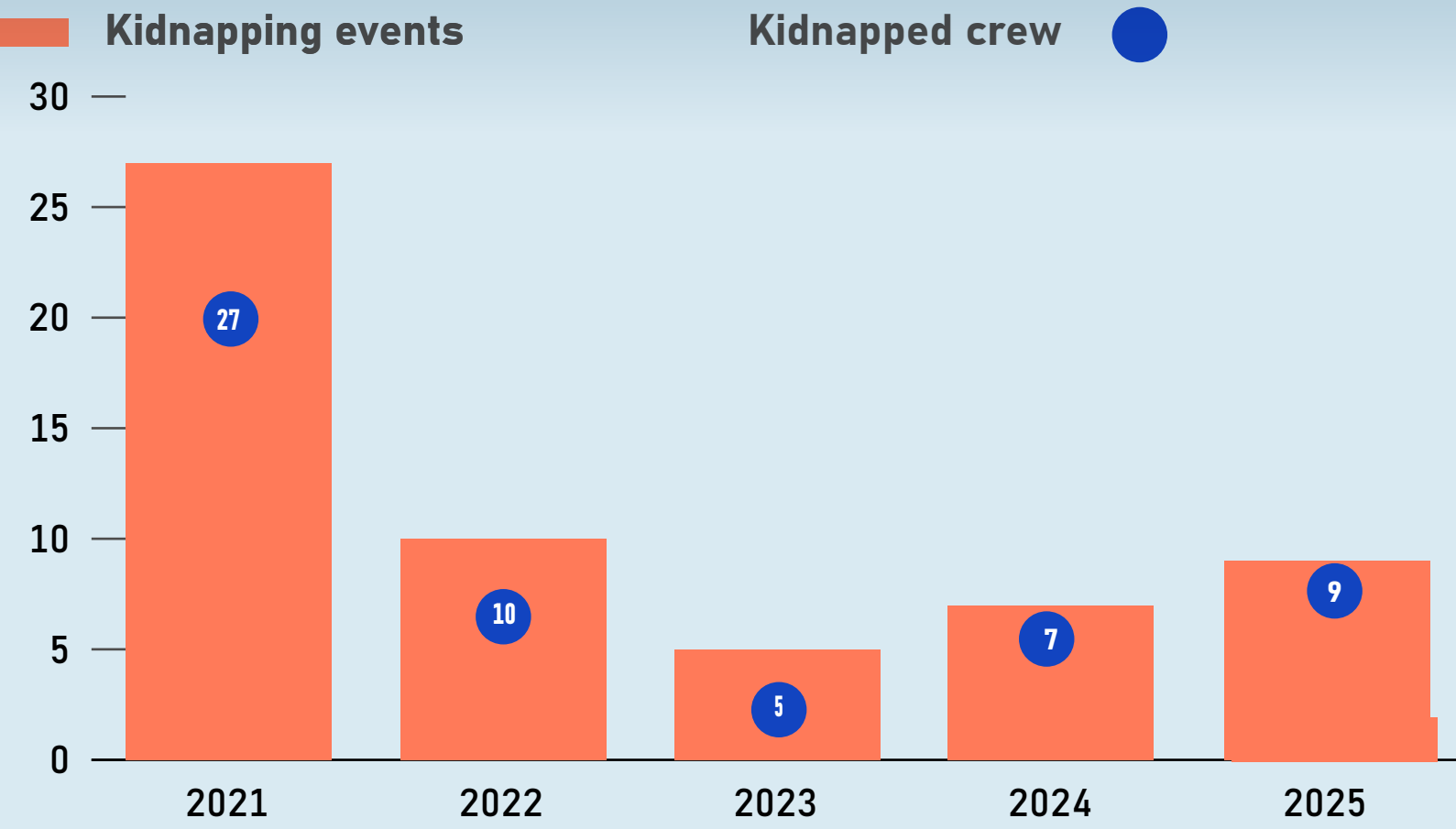


West Africa



Suspected Limpet Mine Attacks Target Tankers in Mediterranean

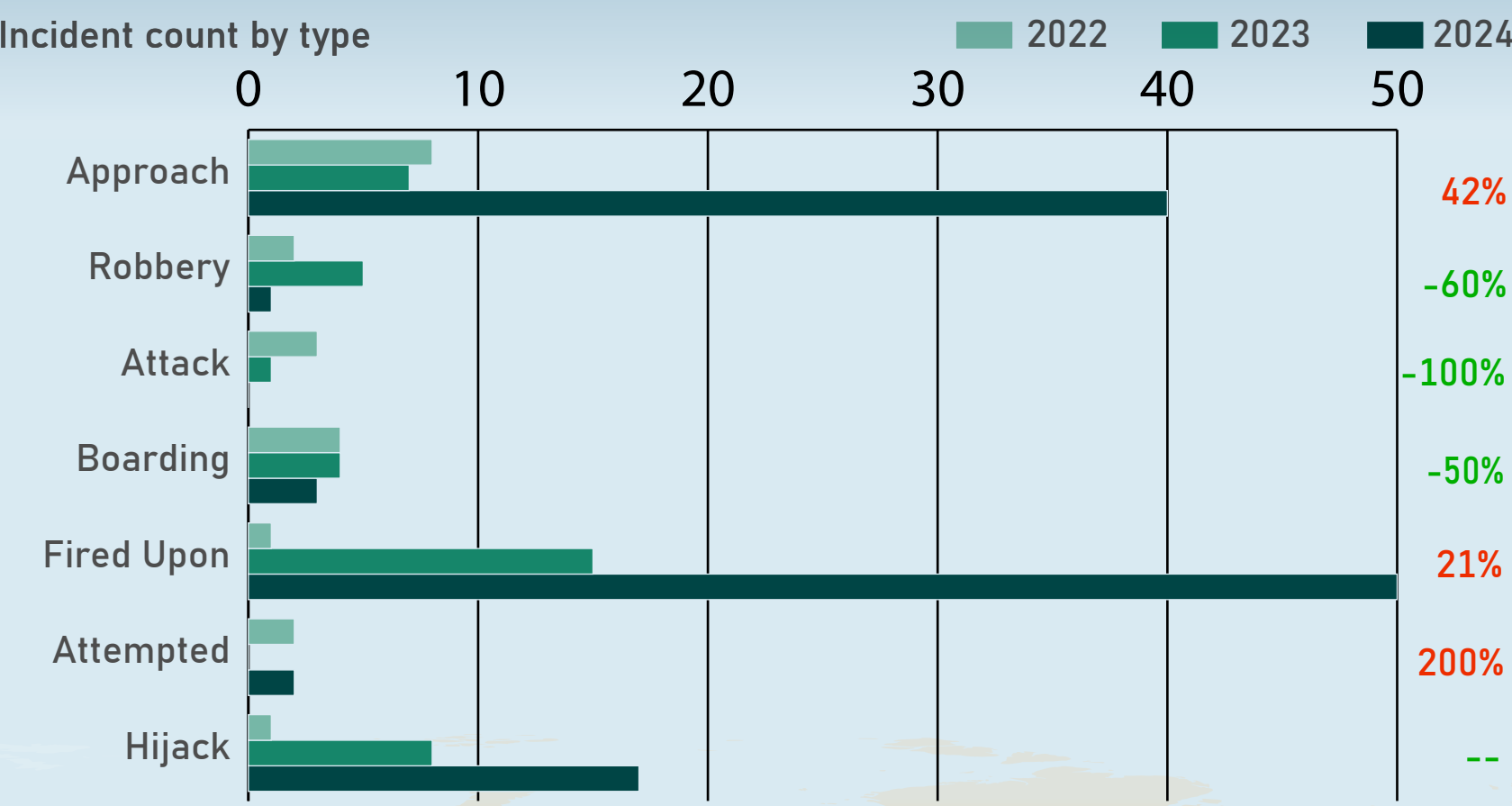
A series of suspected limpet mine attacks on commercial vessels in the Mediterranean Sea throughout 2025 has heightened maritime security concerns, with all incidents linked to vessels that recently called at Russian ports suggesting a targeted campaign tied to geopolitical tensions over Western sanctions on Russian oil exports.

On 29 June 2025, the Malta-flagged crude oil tanker VILAMOURA, operated by a Greek company, suffered a powerful explosion off Libya's coast near Benghazi, causing severe engine room flooding and rendering the vessel "out of control" before it was towed to safety. The ship, which visited Russian ports amid heavy GPS jamming, showed signs of a possible limpet mine attack, though Greek and Libyan investigators, analyzing hull damage, have yet to confirm this, with findings expected by July 2025. No crew injuries were reported. On 15 February 2025, the Malta-flagged SEAJEWEL was rocked by two explosions while anchored off Savona-Vado, Italy, resulting in a 2-foot by 4-foot hull breach and dead fish signaling an underwater blast. Italian prosecutors, alongside the Hellenic Coast Guard, are probing potential terrorism, with debris suggesting Soviet-era BPM-1 or BPM-2 limpet mines; a report is due by August 2025, and no injuries occurred. In late January 2025, the Marshall Islands-flagged SEACHARM sustained a 3-foot hull breach from an explosion at Ceyhan, Turkey, with Turkish and Greek authorities recovering fragments indicating a limpet mine, though unconfirmed, with findings expected in July 2025; no crew was harmed. In early February 2025, the Liberia-flagged GRACE FERRUM faced a severe explosion off Libya near Tobruk, requiring salvage operations. Liberian and Greek investigators suspect a limpet mine, with a report due by September 2025; no injuries were reported.

Investigations into the suspected limpet mine attacks on tankers all link to recent port calls at Russian ports (Ust-Luga and Novorossiysk), indicating a targeted threat to vessels involved in Russian oil trade, likely driven by geopolitical tensions surrounding Western sanctions. Authorities' investigations suggest Soviet-era BPM-1 or BPM-2 limpet mines, based on hull breaches and debris analysis, though no definitive confirmation or perpetrator attribution has been established. The risk for vessels with Russian port calls is rated as MODERATE, allowing oil exports despite EU sanctions but increasing vulnerability to sabotage by organized state-sponsored actors or proxy groups during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The use of magnetically attached, timer-activated limpet mines indicates sophisticated planning and military-grade expertise, distinguishing these incidents from opportunistic criminal acts. Despite the Mediterranean's relative stability, vulnerabilities persist during transit or at less secure anchorages, where oversight is limited. To enhance maritime security, operators are recommended to conduct routine underwater hull inspections using divers or remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), particularly after high-risk port visits, and consider acoustic or sonar-based detection systems for real-time threat identification. Secure access controls, crew training on limpet mine recognition, and continuous CCTV monitoring of critical areas like engine rooms and hull perimeters are advised. Strategic route planning to minimize calls at geopolitically sensitive ports, coordination with local authorities for enhanced security, and use of encrypted AIS signals or selective deactivation in high-risk areas can reduce tracking risks. Monitoring advisories for sanctions compliance and rehearsing contingency plans for explosive incidents with regional coastguards are recommended. Robust security at ISPS-compliant ports and international cooperation provide significant safeguards, but proactive adoption of these measures is critical to address this evolving threat effectively.

Indian Ocean



South East Asia

