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MARITIME SECURITY | SOMALIA

PUNTLAND'S COUNTER-PIRACY SURGE

Two Tankers Recovered in Nine Days

A concentrated late-September campaign has demonstrated an ability to pursue and recover pirate-held merchant vessels at unusual tempo. The question now is whether tactical success is beginning to change pirate behaviour along the Puntland coast.



PMPF officer during the MT HONOUR 25 operation, 29 Sep 2026. Source: PMPF official account.

KEY JUDGMENT

ASSESSMENT
Puntland forces have demonstrated increased tactical effectiveness and an unusually high operational tempo. The evidence does not yet establish strategic suppression of Somali piracy across the Gulf of Aden or western Indian Ocean.

9 DAYS **20–29 SEP** Concentrated campaign window	2 TANKERS **RECOVERED** SIBU 1 and HONOUR 25	7 DEAD **6 WOUNDED** Updated reported toll; Puntland account	HIGH **TACTICAL** Capability and tempo confidence

REPORTING CUTOFF | 29 SEPTEMBER 2026 | 22:15 BST
POST-CUTOFF CASUALTY UPDATE | INITIAL: 5 DEAD / 8 WOUNDED | UPDATED: 7 DEAD / 6 WOUNDED

EVIDENCE BASE

What the evidence supports

Two recoveries in four days—inside a campaign announced nine days earlier—show that Puntland maritime and ground elements can find, pursue and regain control of pirate-held vessels close to the Puntland coast. The significance lies in the concentration and tempo of successive operations, not in the emergence of an entirely new capability.

DATE	EVENT	VERIFIED POSITION	ASSESSMENT
20 SEP	**Campaign begins**	PMPF units began intensified coastal and maritime operations against piracy and associated maritime crime.	Sets the operational frame.
25 SEP	**SIBU 1 recovered**	PMPF reported a planned 48-hour maritime operation and all 20 crew safe. Local reporting says the vessel moved south toward Mudug, Puntland forces maintained pursuit, and owner-linked armed personnel also assisted.	Successful pursuit; not exclusively unilateral.
25–28 SEP	**Custody failure**	From 41 reported detainees, local/AFP-linked reporting says 28 escaped during transfer to Garowe; 13 were later recaptured, one fatally wounded. Exact local accounts differ.	Recovery did not deliver a secure legal finish.
29 SEP	**HONOUR 25 recovered**	PMPF recovered the tanker near Dharin-baar, Bandar Bayla, after more than five months. Puntland initially reported five crew killed and eight wounded. Later reporting said two of the wounded died, updating the reported total to seven dead and six wounded. The circumstances remain unresolved.	Persistence confirmed; hostage risk remained acute.
29 SEP	**Detentions disputed**	Puntland's first detailed account reported 16 suspected pirates captured. Later PMPF-linked reporting gave 21. Both figures remain attributable and unreconciled.	Do not use a definitive total.

THE LEGAL FINISH

Interdiction at sea is only one part of effective counter-piracy. Secure custody, evidence preservation, investigation and prosecution determine whether vessel recovery translates into durable disruption. The reported SIBU 1 escape is therefore an operationally material counterindicator.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

PMPF's experience predates the present campaign. In December 2012, Puntland forces recovered MV ICEBERG 1 and freed 22 surviving hostages after a two-week operation. The current significance is the speed and concentration of successive 2026 recoveries.

SOURCE HIERARCHY

PMPF/Puntland statements establish the official account. Reuters, EUNAVFOR/MSCIO and local reporting are used to corroborate, contextualise or identify unresolved discrepancies.

KNOWN GAPS AT CUTOFF

No independently reconstructed timeline for the HONOUR 25 deaths; no reconciled detainee total; no confirmed prosecutorial status for SIBU 1 suspects; no official EUREKA confirmation.

ASSESSMENT

Tactical success; strategic effect unproven

WHAT HAS CHANGED

- PMPF has shown an ability to locate, pursue and recover pirate-held merchant vessels at relatively high tempo.
- SIBU 1 and HONOUR 25 indicate persistence across maritime and coastal operating areas.
- If EUREKA was abandoned because forces were approaching, pressure may be beginning to affect pirate decision-making and nearshore holding practices.

WHAT HAS NOT BEEN PROVED

- Seven reported deaths aboard HONOUR 25 show that stronger enforcement does not automatically reduce hostage risk.
- The SIBU 1 transfer failure exposes weaknesses after interdiction and before prosecution.
- Campaign durability, prosecution capacity and the ability to prevent displacement southward or farther offshore remain unresolved.
- Sustained suppression across the wider western Indian Ocean is not established.

COMMERCIAL-MARITIME IMPLICATION

The immediate piracy threat remains. If pirate groups can no longer hold captured vessels for months close to Puntland's coast while ransom negotiations proceed, their economics and operating model may begin to change. Plausible adaptations include relocation of holding areas, shorter ransom timelines, greater use of motherships or more coercive treatment of hostages—each creating a different risk profile for merchant shipping.

CONFIDENCE LADDER

HIGH	Increased tactical counter-piracy capability has been demonstrated.
HIGH	Successive operations have been conducted at unusually high tempo.
MODERATE	Current pressure is degrading pirates' ability to hold vessels close to Puntland-controlled coastline.
LOW–MODERATE	Pirates are already abandoning vessels because of Puntland pressure; EUREKA confirmation is required.
NOT ESTABLISHED	Sustained suppression of Somali piracy across the wider western Indian Ocean.

DEVELOPING INDICATOR | EUREKA

Late 29 September reporting said pirates may have abandoned the vessel as Puntland forces approached and the crew may be safe. This was not confirmed by PMPF, EUNAVFOR or MSCIO at cutoff. It is not counted as a third recovery.

PRINCIPAL WATCH ITEM | ASANA

ASANA remains the principal outstanding vessel in the pirate-held cohort at the reporting cutoff. Any verified movement, release or coercive escalation would materially affect the assessment.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THE ASSESSMENT

EUREKA	CUSTODY	PROSECUTION	DISPLACEMENT
Official confirmation that abandonment followed an approaching force.	Reconciled detainee totals and demonstrably secure detention.	Charges, evidence continuity and court outcomes.	Verified relocation southward, farther offshore or into mothership operations.

SOURCES AND EDITORIAL NOTE

PMPF official statements/posts (25 & 29 Sep) • Reuters (25 & 29 Sep) • Horseed Media (20, 25, 27 & 29 Sep) • Hiiraan Online / AFP-linked reporting (28 Sep) • EUNAVFOR / MSCIO incident record • Arab News Pakistan (29 Sep) • Puntland Government, MV ICEBERG 1 release (23 Dec 2012)

Method and risk note: Open-source assessment. Originating PMPF/Puntland claims are distinguished from secondary reporting; discrepancies are retained. "Suspected" is used for detainees. The initial and updated HONOUR 25 casualty totals are attributed to Puntland official reporting; the timing and circumstances of the deaths have not been independently reconstructed. No motive is assigned. No AI-generated imagery or geography has been used. Image: official PMPF post, 29 Sep 2026.