

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

Issue: Combating piracy in the region of Somalia

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INTRODUCTION

On the high seas, thieves known as pirates attack and plunder ships in search of their valuable cargo. Hence, piracy is considered to be a serious crime that puts the lives and livelihoods of seafarers all over the world in danger. The history of piracy is lengthy and rich, going back many centuries. Piracy has long posed a threat to international maritime trade, from the infamous Golden Age of Piracy in the 17th and 18th centuries¹, when bandits roamed the seas from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean, to the recent pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia. Our modern world has nowadays glamorized the concept of piracy through films, such as Captain Jack Sparrow, not showcasing the reality of the situation.

Piracy off the coast of Somalia has been a serious issue for more than ten years². In detail, over the past six years piracy off the coast of Somalia has flourished, with 239 actual and attempted hijackings reported in 2011³ and a further seventy attacks during the first nine months of 2012. Although the rate of attacks decreased significantly in 2012, the western Indian Ocean region remains the world's most pirated waters⁴. The overall costs of Somali piracy are estimated to be between **seven and sixteen billion** dollars per year. Somali pirates have also taken thousands of seafarers hostage, holding many of them for several months, or even years. Although most hostages are eventually released after a hefty ransom is paid, unfortunately, each year some of these sailors are murdered, and innocent lives die.

The problem has drawn attention internationally because piracy jeopardizes the stability and security of the world by interrupting global trade.

¹ Cartwright, M. (n.d.). *Golden age of piracy*. World History Encyclopedia. www.worldhistory.org/Golden_Age_of_Piracy/.

² *Piracy in Somalia: Understanding the causes, impact, and solutions*. (2023, April 26). The World in Context. www.worldincontext.com/piracy-in-somalia-understanding-the-causes-impact-and-solutions/.

³ Digital Commons University of South Florida <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1218&context=jss>.

⁴ Digital Commons University of South Florida <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1218&context=jss>.

Piracy off the coast of Somalia occurs in the **Gulf of Aden, Guardafui Channel, and Somalia.** As portrayed in the images below:



A complex confluence of socio-political factors, such as poverty, and a dearth of efficient governance, can be blamed for Somalia's high rate of piracy. The Horn of Africa, a strategic location for shipping lanes connecting Europe to Asia, is where pirates in Somalia operate.⁵

To understand piracy off the northeast Somali coast today, one must delve into its historical roots. The socio-cultural and economic patterns of community interplay show that classical onshore piracy set the stage for contemporary offshore piracy. Offshore piracy, as the name explains itself, takes place off the shore, in the high seas. Pirates typically target large commercial vessels, which can carry high value cargo and large crews. Hence, offshore piracy influences international shipping lanes and disrupts the course of global trade. In onshore piracy, the attacks take place near the coast, which facilitates the pirates to escape and hide within local populations. Offshore piracy is more likely to have an extensive economic impact and prolonged hostage situations. Whereas onshore piracy has a higher chance of of immediate violence and local socio-economic destabilization. The degree of risk ultimately depends on the particulars of each attack, the efficiency of the counterattack, and the success of the preventive measures put in place.

Contemporary pirates are the progeny of the classical pirates who were notorious for their depredations on the Cape Guardafui coast during the nineteenth century.⁶ Classical Somali piracy has not received the attention given to contemporary Somali piracy in the glare of publicity over

⁵ *Piracy in Somalia: Understanding the causes, impact, and solutions.* (2023, April 26). The World in Context. <https://www.worldincontext.com/piracy-in-somalia-understanding-the-causes-impact-and-solutions/>.

⁶ (n.d.). 403 Forbidden. https://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/vol23/tnm_23_239-266.pdf.

attacks on merchant vessels carrying supplies for humanitarian aid intended for relief of the recent famine that devastated the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Subsistence pirates

Subsistence pirates are individuals or groups engaged in piracy primarily to meet their basic survival needs, rather than for profit or power. These pirates typically come from impoverished or marginalized communities and turn to piracy as a means of obtaining food, water, and other essential resources.

High Seas

The parts of the ocean that are not under the sovereignty of any country.

Seafarer

A person who travels over the ocean, also known as a mariner.

Bandit

A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or in groups.

Successful Pirate Attack

When the pirate and his crew manage to attack and steal the ship, without facing the consequences of their illegal actions.

World Food Program

The World Food Programme is an international organization within the United Nations that provides food assistance worldwide.

Global Hunger Index

The Global Hunger Index is a tool that attempts to measure and track hunger globally as well as by region and by country, prepared by European NGOs of Concern Worldwide.

Flag state

The flag state of a merchant vessel is the jurisdiction under whose laws the vessel is registered or licensed, and is deemed the nationality of the vessel.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical factors

The increase in pirate activity off Somalia has not occurred in a steady linear progression, but instead has taken place in three separate phases. The first phase, which lasted from the 1990s until the mid-2000s witnessed relatively low levels of pirate activity mainly concentrated in the Gulf of Aden. The second phase, which began in 2005, involved a much higher frequency of attacks carried out off Somalia's Indian Ocean coast by larger and more organized pirate groups, such as the Somali Marines. Since 2007, Somali pirates have again — and even more dramatically — increased both the number and range of their attacks. This most recent manifestation represents a third phase of Somali piracy. Although the number of successful attacks carried has declined since 2011, Somali pirates are still capable of hijacking large merchant vessels hundreds of miles offshore.⁷

Causes of piracy

Favorable geography

Piracy is only sustainable in places that offer a combination of rewarding hunting grounds, acceptable levels of risk and proximate safe havens. Ships that are stationary in ports, harbors or anchorages are the favored targets. The level of thieving always depends on the circumstance, it may be minor or violent.

Conflict and disorder

Socioeconomic factors are one of the primary causes of piracy. Some of the causes of people becoming pirates include poverty, unemployment, and a lack of job opportunities. For many years, Somalia's coastal communities have struggled with poverty and other economic problems, such as overfishing. Only 0.04% of Somalia's land is used as routine arable farms, meaning they rely on fish and imports. Some people have turned to piracy as a means of survival due to the lack of alternative sources of income.

The impact of piracy

At the most basic level, attacks constitute a direct threat to the lives and welfare of the citizens of a variety of flag states. Piracy's negative effects on people cannot be overstated. Hostages are frequently imprisoned for protracted periods of time and occasionally subjected to

⁷ Jakobsen, P. V. (2023, September 27). *Somali piracy, once an unsolvable security threat, has almost completely stopped. Here's why*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/somali-piracy-once-an-unsolvable-security-threat-has-almost-completely-stopped-heres-why-213872>

torture, beatings, and sexual assault. Piracy may also be the cause of deaths. Seafarers often face hazardous and stressful working circumstances, which are made worse by the possibility of piracy.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Russia

Russia has been a major player in the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia. Russian warships have been sent out to monitor the waterways and escort commercial boats through high-risk zones as part of the Russian Navy's active participation in several international anti-piracy operations. In order to maintain maritime security in the area, Russian naval troops have also taken part in operations like the NATO-led Operation Ocean Shield and the European Union's Operation Atalanta. Not only does Russia provide escorting and patrolling services, but it also takes active action against pirates. For example, Russian naval forces demonstrated their dedication to and competence in handling piracy occurrences in May 2010 when they successfully liberated the tanker MV Moscow University, which had been captured by Somali pirates.⁸

United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom (UK) has been instrumental in achieving a decline in the number of pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia. The UK plays a leading role in the Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, the foremost international body that addresses piracy in this area providing support, assets and personnel to international naval operations. At the same time the government is working with industry and international partners to establish the Maritime Trade Information Sharing Centre for the Gulf of Guinea, which will facilitate information sharing and act as an early warning system for vessels in the area.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

For two decades, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been helping make the world safer from drugs, organized crime, corruption and terrorism. We are committed to achieving health, security and justice for all by tackling these threats and promoting peace and sustainable well-being as deterrents to them.⁹

⁸ (n.d.). Oxford Academic. <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/95/5/1037/5537420>.

⁹ *About UNODC*. (n.d.). United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/index.html>.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1992	300,000 Somalis were killed due mostly to several food crises
September 1994	Merchant vessel Bonsella was attacked by a party of 26 pirates
December, 26, 2004	An earthquake off the Indonesian coast of Sumatra resulted in a tsunami
April, 11, 2005	Pirates carried out thirty-five attacks in Somali waters, as well as an additional ten in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden 2005
February, 25, 2007	World Food Program (WFP) was about to deliver a supply of supplies to the port of Berbarra in Somaliland when the Rozen was hijacked
September, 25, 2008	Ship Faina was taken over by Somali pirates
December, 16, 2008	UN Security Council Resolution Nr.1851 was adopted by the Security Council at its 6046th meeting
January, 14, 2009	"The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia" (CGPCS) was created
January, 29, 2009	Adoption of the Djibouti Code of Conduct
2010 – 2012	260,000 Somalis perished from severe drought
2010	"The Global Maritime Crime Programme" was established

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Security Council Resolution Nr.2608¹⁰

In the resolution, the Security Council welcomed that there were no successful piracy attacks off the coast of Somalia in the prior 12 months and noted that joint counter-piracy efforts have resulted in a steady decline in pirate attacks and hijackings since 2011, as well as no successful ship hijackings for ransom since March 2017. However, it also recognized the ongoing threat of resurgent piracy and armed robbery at sea, noting the letter of 2 December 2021 from the Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Somalia to the United Nations requesting international assistance to counter piracy off its coast.

UN Security Council Resolution Nr.1851¹¹

In summary, the resolution calls upon States, regional and international organizations to take part in the fight against piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia consistent with this resolution, resolution 1846 (2008), and international law. Furthermore, it encourages them to establish an international cooperation mechanism to act as a common point of contact and recalls future recommendations on ways to ensure the long-term security of international navigation and a possible coordination and leadership role for the UN. Moreover, the resolution at hand encourages them to consider creating a centre in the region to coordinate information; decides that for a period of 12 months from the date of adoption of resolution 1846, States and regional organizations may undertake all necessary measures that are appropriate in Somalia pursuant to the request of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS)¹²

“The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was created on January 14, 2009, pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1851. This voluntary, ad hoc international forum brings together countries, organizations, and industry groups with an interest in combating piracy. Participants seek to coordinate political, military, industry, and non-governmental efforts

¹⁰ *Resolution 2608*. (n.d.). UNSCR - Search engine for the UN Security Council Resolutions. <https://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2608>.

¹¹ *Resolution 1851*. (n.d.). UNSCR - Search engine for the UN Security Council Resolutions. <https://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1851>.

¹² (n.d.). International Maritime Organization. <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/SecretaryGeneral/Pages/Contact%20Group%20on%20Piracy%20off%20the%20Coast%20of%20Somalia.aspx>.

to bring an end to piracy off the coast of Somalia and to ensure that pirates are brought to justice. In November 2013, the Contact Group met for the first time in the Horn of Africa in Djibouti. Its four Working Groups meet regularly around the world to develop and implement national counter-piracy policies and programs.

Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151)

CTF 151 is a multinational force. Command is rotated between participating nations on a three-to-six-month basis. Countries that have led ctf 151 assign vessels, aircraft, and personnel to the task force. In conjunction with EUNAVFOR Somalia, and together with independently deployed naval ships from nations such as China, CTF 151 helps to patrol the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC).¹³

NATO - Operation Ocean Shield (August 2009 – December 2016)

Operation Ocean Shield ¹⁴was approved by the North Atlantic Council on 17 August 2009 and it was terminated on 15 December 2016. Operation Ocean Shield started out focusing on at-sea counter-piracy operations, building on the two prior NATO counter-piracy missions. NATO ships, for instance, carried out helicopter surveillance flights to locate and identify nearby ships. They also assisted in suppressing armed robberies and preventing and disrupting hijackings. At the UN's request, NATO also consented to accompany the supply ships of the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) to the port entry in Mogadishu, Somalia.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Strengthening International Cooperation

Improving coordination between naval forces through information-sharing platforms such as the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) ¹⁵mechanism can enhance the efficiency of anti-piracy operations.

Enhancing Maritime Security Practices

¹³ CTF 151: Counter-piracy. (2024, May 30). Combined Maritime Forces. <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>.

¹⁴ NATO. (2023, December 1). Counter-piracy operations (2008-2016). https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48815.htm.

¹⁵ The 51st shade International Conference. (n.d.). EUNAVFOR. <https://eunavfor.eu/news/51st-shade-international-conference>.

Through its Enhancement of Maritime Security capacity-building program, the Maritime Security Section of the IMO's Maritime Safety Division works to support Member States in better implementing the IMO's special measures to enhance maritime security with the goal of bolstering global economies.

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