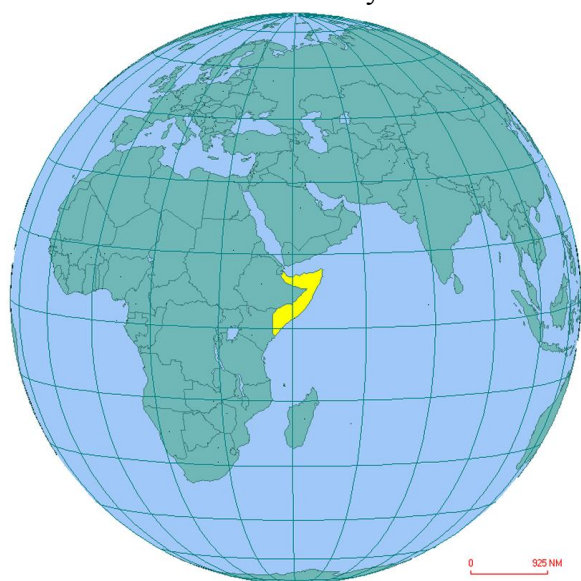


The Pirates of the Somali Coast

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Since ancient times Somali sea merchants are a common sight plying their trade across the Arabian and Red Seas. Piracy was a thriving business in Azania (Somalia) according to Roman astronomer Claudius Ptolemy in 150 AD.



During Somalia's post-independence period (1960-), the Somali Navy conducted maritime patrols which prevented foreign ships from illegally infringing on Somalia's maritime borders. In 1991, the Somali military government was ousted by a clan-based armed group, which resulted in various factions struggling for power. The fighting over the past two decades, caused countless numbers of casualties and reduced the capital city Mogadishu to rubble. The collapse of the military government in 1991 resulted in the disintegration of the navy and of the country's coast guard, leaving

Africa's longest coastline unprotected, which created a perfect opportunity for piracy. Throughout the ensuing civil war, tens of thousands of Somalis endured war, severe droughts and endemic poverty. During this desperate time Somalis turned to their coastal areas to form fishing communities so as to provide for their basic needs. Fishing became their only means of survival.

In 1992, a contract was established between the Swiss firm 'Achair Partners' and the Italian firm 'Progresso' with Nur Elmy Osman the then acting Somali Minister for Health, under the interim government headed by Ali Mahdi Muhammad (warlord). Osman had allegedly entered into an \$80 million contract with these two firms in December of 1991, allowing them to build a 10 million ton storage facility for hazardous waste, according to Italian magazine *Famiglia Cristiana* (1997). An Italian Green Peace report (2010) revealed that between 1989 and 1994 there were 94 attempted /actual cases of hazardous waste exports to Africa – over 10 million tons of toxic residue. According to environmental group 'Legambiente' (1997): "*Somalia's inland waste dumps are among the largest in the world*".

Over the past three decades various European governments have successfully blocked any request made by the European Parliament to implement harmonized benchmarks for environmental inspections and for an enforcement of waste law, predominantly on waste shipments to 'third

countries'. High regulatory standards throughout Europe and the equally high costs of disposing industrial hazardous waste, brought about the growth of a secondary and very lucrative waste dumping industry. Western countries began exporting their 'problem' to developing countries where environmental and workplace legislation were neither sufficient nor enforceable. The environmental risk, which originates from toxic waste, threatens the lives of millions of people who are often unaware of the dangers. This criminal act is a clear indication of the international acceptance of wealth, inequality and poverty. Somalia's vast amount of unused land, the absence of a national government, low public awareness of the misuse of the national environment, and a general acceptance of local officials (warlords) and of individual business owners to disregard the dangers of wanton environmental degradation in exchange for financial gain, made it the perfect destination.

United Nations official, Nick Nuttall, said the deadly waves of the 2004 Tsunami, which originated off Indonesia, damaged toxic containers in northern Somalia and spilled the waste into the open sea, from where it spread further either by wind and/or tide, causing a wide range of diseases. There were reports from villagers of a wide range of medical problems such as mouth bleeds, abdominal haemorrhages, unusual skin disorders, breathing difficulties and even sudden death after inhaling toxic materials. According to a UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) report in 2005, Marine

ecologists and international environmental organizations such as Greenpeace continue to sound warnings that over-fishing and the dumping of industrial toxic waste are the biggest threats facing the marine ecosystems today because this will dangerously deplete sea life around the African continent. The United Nations and World Bank put together a 'Joint Needs Assessment' plan in 2008 for Somalia's eventual return to the status of 'functioning nation'. The United Nations and World Bank recommended that \$42.1 million be set aside for environmental activities, ensuring that all 'toxic waste is found and removed'. However, the plan failed to include the cost of human suffering.

In 1998, the northeast region of Somalia (the semi-autonomous state of Puntland) resumed authority for the issuing of licenses to fishing vessels under conditions local coastal communities accepted.



As a consequence, piracy diminished considerably. Reports of illegal commercial scale fishing, illegal foreign vessels destroying fish stock and equipment that Somali coastal communities depend on, were often too common. Somali coastal residents who saw their livelihoods under threat formed the *National Volunteer Coast Guard* and took up arms – a desperate act of

survival against others who disregard their basic needs.

Somali pirates claim that they are the only national defence of the country's territorial waters against invading illegal foreign vessels. Research conducted by an independent Somali news site (WardherNews) stated that a staggering 70% of local coastal communities support the Somali pirates who are local fishermen, ex-militiamen and technical experts. This strong support is due to several factors the key factor of which is the perception that the United Nations is 'subtly protecting' illegal foreign vessels and thereby failing to protect the sovereignty of Somali waters.

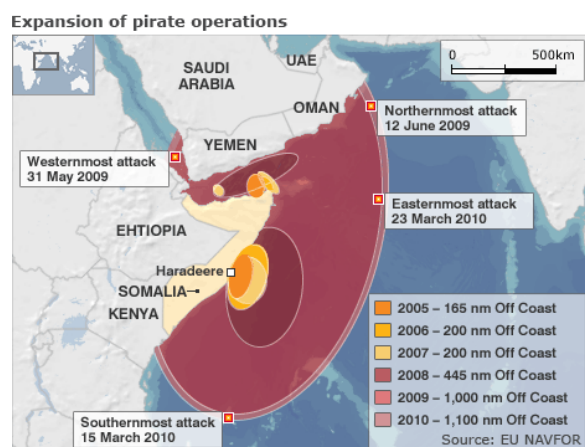
Somali pirates have attacked hundreds of vessels in the Arabian Sea and in the Indian Ocean however, most of the attacks are unsuccessful. But, according to the International Maritime Board's Piracy Reporting Centre (2011), "*Somali pirates were holding 26 vessels and 522 hostages. Also in May, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported that ransoms totalling more than \$112 million were paid to pirates in 2010.*"

The majority of Somali pirates are young men who join piracy due to the failed state's harsh and unacceptable living conditions. A BBC report (2012) claimed that Somali pirates have both a negative *and* positive effect on local coastal communities. Some local coastal residents complain about the number of armed men present in their communities, while others complain about

the excess consumption of drugs. On a positive note, entire communities have transformed into veritable boomtowns with residents and local shop owners using their gains to purchase items that once were undreamt of. Channel 4 news (2009) reported that marine stocks have risen back to levels that are more acceptable and that Kenyan fisherman are thanking their Somali friends for frightening away illegal foreign vessels who deprived them of their livelihood for the past two decades.

The United Nation's counter-piracy policy in Somali is unrealistic as it only provides temporary solutions. The United Nation's failure to establish a strategy to bring those responsible for looting and destroying Somali waters to justice, will support anti-Western *sentiment which is already high in the region. Nevertheless, the United Nation's failing to protect Somali waters, is benefiting Somali pirates*, illegal foreign vessels and Islamic terrorist groups like Al-Shabab which take full advantage of the political situation. A Geopolicity Inc. (2011) report stressed that "*piracy is an emerging market in its own right*". According to the International Maritime Bureau, piracy's cost to the shipping industry was valued at \$6.9 billion in 2011. This year however, the number of global pirate attacks fell by 28 percent in the first quarter, which evidently is an indication that naval interventions reduce incidents off the coast of Somalia. The decline is encouraging, however, piracy threats remain high and incidences off the coast of Nigeria in West Africa have actually increased. The presence of

international naval forces in the Arabian Sea is vital to easing the Somali maritime situation. The only real long-term solution to piracy is a strong Somali government because as long as terrible economic conditions continue, the booty of piracy will persist to haunt the coast of the Horn of Africa.



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Images accessed 02/05/2012 –

Somalia:

http://ukscblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/globe_somalia.jpg

Somali pirate:

<http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2010/11/14/1289761862163/An-armed-Somali-pirate.-006.jpg>

Extent of Somali piracy:

http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/47574000/gif/47574605_somali_pirates_466_2.gif