



The Changing Threat from Somali Pirates and their Major Centers of Activity in 2012

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Maritime piracy emanating from the Somali coast came to the world's notice abruptly in late 2008 with the hijacking of the *M/V Faina*, which was carrying a cargo of heavy weapons, and the Saudi oil tanker *M/V Sirius Star*, which was subsequently ransomed for millions of dollars. Since that time, the international community and maritime industry have worked together to combat this menace that is threatening global trade, regional security, and Somalia's own recovery from two decades of devastating internal conflict and repeated humanitarian disasters. Somali piracy is a particularly ugly form of hostage taking for ransom, victimizing both the seafarers and families whose lives are disrupted and sometimes destroyed by their brutal captivity and the ship-owners and shipping countries that deliver cargo ranging from food aid destined for the some of the world's poorest populations to goods upon which the global economy depends.

The concerted international response to this plague has yielded impressive results. Nations, coalitions and alliances mounted naval counter-piracy patrols at sea that have disrupted countless attacks and made specific sea lanes much safer to travel. The maritime industry has developed and continues to press for implementation of a wide range of protective and preventative vessel security actions, collectively known as Best Management Practices (BMP), that have dramatically reduced ships' vulnerability to pirate attack. States have increasingly embraced the employment of armed security on commercial ships, ranging from military or paramilitary Vessel Protection Detachments (VPDs) to privately contracted armed security personnel (PCASP). Together, these actions have reduced the success rate of pirate attacks by about 70 percent; as of this writing in mid-April 2012, Somali pirates hold 9 ships and 215 hostages, down from a historic high in January 2011 of 31 ships and 710 hostages.



Somali pirates, in response, have adapted their tactics. Formerly given to using large pirated vessels with hostage crews at gunpoint as mother ships from which they could launch wide-ranging attacks using multiple skiffs, pirates have recognized that navies can more easily monitor, intercept, and disable these large platforms, and are increasingly shifting to the use of dhows from which to mount their attacks. Dhows can more easily blend in with legitimate fishing fleets, and while they are more limited in range, they are more mobile and less vulnerable to interdiction by naval counter-piracy patrols. Somali piracy is largely a crime of opportunity, and pirates go where naval patrols are absent; as a result, there are increasing numbers of attacks northward near Oman, southward off the coast of Seychelles, and eastward as far as India – in fact, across much of the Indian Ocean and its outer extremities. With the decrease in success rates in maritime attacks, kidnappings on land are increasing, either perpetrated by or involving Somalis from clans associated with maritime piracy. There have been several cases in recent months of aid workers and tourists being kidnapped by or sold to pirate gangs for hostages. Furthermore, hostages are increasingly being held for longer periods and subsequently ransomed for smaller amounts of money, which indicate that the pirates are modifying their own goals and aspirations, probably due to the pressure exerted by their dwindling success at sea.

The international community also continues to adapt to the changing circumstances of piracy. Recognizing early on that naval counter-piracy forces could not adequately protect shipping spread over more than a million square miles of ocean surface; national governments have increasingly welcomed the employment of private armed security personnel on commercial ships. Reversing longstanding policies regarding the carriage of arms on merchant vessels, this acceptance was simply a recognition that self-protection is both a right and a responsibility of vessels who sail, of necessity or choice, into areas where the danger of piracy ranges from significant to acute. Armed security is effective; not a single ship protected by armed guards has been hijacked to date. However, it is not without its challenges. Littoral states are grappling with policies and processes dealing with the introduction of weapons into national ports, and insurance companies are debating how to deal with the potential liabilities incurred by the presence of protective armed teams. The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia



(CGPCS) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) are working in concert to define the legal and policy aspects of private armed security on commercial ships, even as increasing numbers of companies employ them and states are enacting national legislation, regulations and/or policies to enable and oversee their use. In the meantime, pirates have taken notice of the presence of these teams on ships, typically breaking off approaches when confronted with armed security and seeking softer targets to attack. Roaming over an extremely large maritime territory in their mother ships, even using mid-size dhows, pirates seek victim ships travelling less-obvious routes that are less likely to be protected by naval forces, to be armed, exercising security Best Management Practices or otherwise able to defend themselves against the predators who are searching for them.

The international counter-piracy community has coalesced around the understanding that piracy, while occurring at sea, has its origins on-shore in the networks that plan, finance, and facilitate piracy, and in Somalia's institutional weakness, which renders local authorities unable to deal with them. There is now a serious and concerted international effort to identify and disrupt these shore-based networks and their leaders through the sharing of military and financial intelligence and law enforcement information. One notable success was the conviction on April 27, 2012 of Mohammed Saaili Shibin in Norfolk, Virginia on charges related to attacks on the German *M/V Marida Marguerite* and the American sailing vessel *S/V Quest*, in which four U.S. citizens were murdered by their Somali captors in February 2011. Shibin faces mandatory life sentences on four of the fifteen charges, including conspiracy to commit piracy, of which he was convicted. He is not the first and will not be the last pirate hostage negotiator to be brought to justice for his crimes. In a bold collaboration, the small Indian Ocean island nation of Seychelles and the United Kingdom have announced the establishment in 2012 of the Regional Anti Piracy Prosecution Intelligence Coordination Center, which will serve as a focal point for the collection, analysis and dissemination of piracy-related information for the purpose of building prosecutable cases against pirate organizers and financiers. A number of nations, including the United States and the Netherlands, have already announced their support for this novel counter-piracy prosecution center.



In another positive trend, Somalis themselves are beginning to push pirates out of the coastal communities that have historically offered them safe haven, in their growing understanding that piracy is degrading the fabric of traditional Somali society. As many as 15 percent of the men who go to sea on pirate missions –hundreds of men, young and old - never return, either lost at sea or captured and sent to prisons outside of Somalia. There are reports that Somali women and girls are being enticed or forced into prostitution to service pirate gangs, wrecking any prospect for themselves of better lives. The political processes that hold the only real hope for Somalia’s economic and social recovery are being corrupted by a flood of ransom money into this stressed economy.

The net effect of these negative factors is a noticeable shift in Somali attitudes against piracy. No longer defending kidnapping and hostage-taking for ransom as a legitimate reaction to illegal fishing and toxic dumping – which they certainly never were – Somalis are beginning to take action themselves against pirates, and the international community stands ready to help them do so. Millions of honorable Somalis, both in Somalia and among the large Somali diaspora, are understandably offended by the damage that pirates are wreaking on their reputations and their homeland, and are starting to take action against the criminals in their midst. The international community should applaud and materially aid those who are working to force pirates out of their communities.

Through a range of capacity-building efforts, many administered by the United Nations, the European Union, and various bilateral assistance programs, donors are working with Somalis to re-establish the regional and national institutions that will eventually allow Somali authorities to control their coastal and seaward territories and bring an end to this vicious form of maritime crime. This will take time, effort, and patience, but the international community and Somalia itself are committed to this cause. Maritime piracy has no place in the 21st century, and the international community is collectively taking the measures necessary to end it.



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