

Pirates of the horn

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Piracy in Somali waters saw a drastic increase from two attacks in 2004 to 35 in 2005. So far in 2006, there have been eight attacks and attempted attacks. Somali waters have been amongst the most pirate-infested in the world, but due to the Islamic courts this is changing.

Somalia, located on Africa's horn, is in many ways a 'black hole' when it comes to information. Pictures from the American intervention in 1993 dominate people's impression of the country. Somali politics, although confused and complex, are far from as anarchic as many believe them to be. Warlords, several regional administrations and recently, the Union of Islamic Courts, (UIC), have created zones of relative stability that have reduced or even eradicated pirate attacks. Most of the larger faction leaders, warlords and regional administrations have been engaged in negotiations with outside

partners. As they want to position themselves in the peace process they are keen to satisfy the interests of the major international stakeholders. The main pirate attacks were concentrated in areas where no major factions held control, but the expansion of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) has changed this picture dramatically. Somalia is currently separated into four areas. Somaliland and Puntland are autonomous, while major parts of the central and southern regions are under control of the UIC. The remainder falls under control of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

Territorial control and frequency of pirate attacks

Several Somali factions and regional authorities have some degree of control over their territories. This enables the factions in control to punish suspected pirates once they come ashore and, in some instances, even to chase them at sea. On 7 November, the UIC conducted a boarding operation, where a hijacked ship, the *MV Veesham 1*, was secured by its forces. There are notable differences in the frequency of pirate attacks in Somali waters. Piracy seems to be related to the size and strength of the factions controlling the adjacent land.

Small factions have no prospects of gaining power in the international peace negotiations or in the ongoing power struggle between the UIC and the TFG. Larger warlords and regional administrations have a potential interest in quelling piracy in order to maintain cordial relations with key external states, such as Kenya, the U.S., Ethiopia and Eritrea. They have stakes in the current peace process and many have informal alliances with foreign powers. Smaller factions hold no similar interest, which perhaps explains the disparity in attack frequency between different areas in 2005 and during the first half of 2006.



The cruise liner *Seaborn Spirit* anchors in the Seychelles after being attacked by Somali pirates, November 2005



Importantly, the waters adjacent to the strongest military and political actor in Somalia, Somaliland, did not see any piracy incidents in 2005. Somaliland, located in the northwest of Somalia, has been peaceful for the last ten years and generally functions as a democracy.

Bordering Somaliland to the east is Puntland, which although less stable than Somaliland, enjoys relative peace. However, due to increased instability since 2002, the frequency of pirate attacks increased. The incidents were mostly located in a limited area around Caluula, indicating that one group might have been behind most of the attacks. Suspicions abound that some high-ranking figures within the Puntland administration were implicated, as the cousin of the Somali President, Abdullahi Yusuf, has been previously involved in piracy and there was a 'shoot out' over pirate money in Garrowe, the capital of Puntland, in March 2005.

However, a Saudi-owned company, Al-Habiibi Marine Service has been appointed coast guard in Puntland by the administration in December 2005, but has not been able to take up the position. Another company, SOMCAN, (Somali Canadian Coast Guard), which had the contract from 2002 to 2005 still claims to be the official coast guard for Puntland. Three officers from this company were apprehended by Thai authorities while claiming to protect a Thai fishing vessel

and brought to trial in Thailand, where they were given a prison sentence of ten years each for piracy. Recently, a Thai national was kidnapped in Puntland as retaliation. In addition, a maritime security company, Northbridge Marine Services, was appointed by the Transitional Federal Government this year to handle Somalia's maritime security issues. Since most of the coastal areas fell under the control of the UIC in August and September this contract has not been fulfilled and it is highly unlikely that it will in the foreseeable future.

The areas south of Puntland to within the southern border were far more promising for potential pirates. Until the UIC took control of the area in August there were no power structures similar to those held by the strong warlords of Mogadishu, the Puntland administration, the UIC and the Somaliland administration. In the regions of Mudug and Galguduud, the political situation was influenced by the frequent

THEY HAVE ATTACKED UNITED NATIONS SHIPS WITH RELIEF AID AND ACCUSED THEM OF FISHING ILLEGALLY, ALTHOUGH THEY LACKED FISHING EQUIPMENT

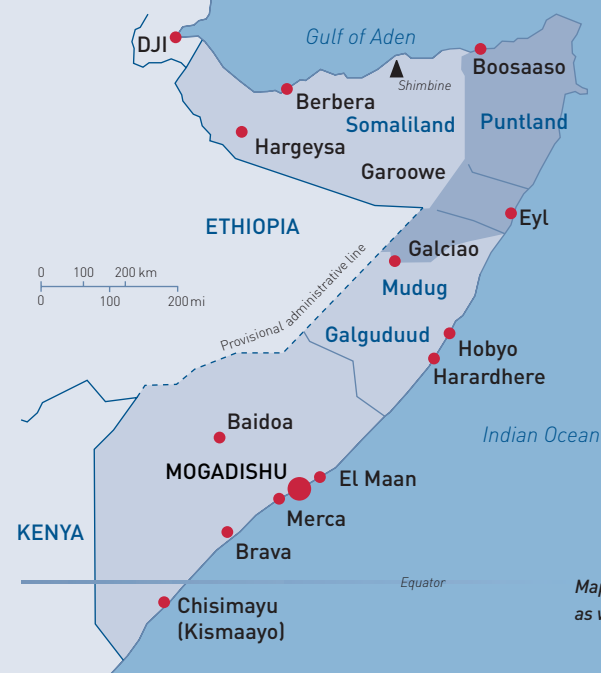
fighting between militias. These factions are too small to have an interest in the ongoing peace process and can not be punished by international sanctions against their representatives. Indeed, it was in the coastal waters of Mudug and Galguduud

Somali pirates with rocket launchers look for a new target

that pirate attacks were most frequent during 2005 and the first half of 2006.

One of the areas in the region, Harardhere, was generally viewed to be the base of several pirate attacks. A number of ships captured by pirates in 2005, such as the Grenadines-registered *Semlow*, and the Somali-owned *Ibn Batouta*, have been towed to Harardhere, and many ships, such as the *San Carlos*, have been attacked close by. Many ships have been hijacked by the so-called 'Somali Coast Guard'. Despite having an official spokesperson, Mohammed Hassan, the 'Somali Coast Guard', had no connections with regional administrations, and bears the hallmarks of an illegal organisation. They did, for example, attack United Nations ships with relief aid and accused them of fishing illegally, although they lacked fishing equipment. On August 14, the UIC took control of Harardhere and deprived the pirates of their base.

The area further south around Kismayo was dominated by the Juba Valley Alliance, led by Barre Hiiraale. Nonetheless, it failed to control the area fully – traders in Kismayo have successfully resisted its taxation attempts, and Kismayo harbour was out of its reach. Kismayo, including the areas south of the city, was the second most dangerous area in Somali waters with four reported successful



Map of Somalia 2006. (Developed from CIA map by adding borders of Somaliland and Puntland areas as well as a number of small coastal cities mentioned in the article.) Protocol 2006

attacks in 2005. These areas used to be the fishing waters of Somalia, and the local population had many ships that could be used for piracy. The fishing grounds also made illegal fishing a justification for piracy. The area was occupied by the UIC on 25 September and the Juba Valley Alliance was pushed inland. Piracy effectively ceased from this point.

To pay or not to pay

For shipping companies, pirate attacks interrupt business and cost money. When the ship is off-hire this creates significant losses for the shipping company. Of the ten largest vessels hijacked in 2005, the average 'off hire time' for these vessels

was 35 days, which adds up to several million dollars. In addition, it is likely that the shipowners paid a minimum of approximately USD 200,000 with reported sums of up to USD 700,000. It is also plausible that crews might experience psychological strain after incidents, which could add to the total cost.

Somali-style piracy presents the shipowner with many dilemmas. It's imperative to think about the security of the crew on the captured ship, which makes many owners pay the ransom. However, by paying ransom, the shipowner might increase the problem of piracy itself. It is reasonable to believe that some of the ransom is invested in new weapons

and new vessels, expanding the efficiency and range of the pirate group in question.

Countermeasures

One of the current responses offered by the international society is Task Force 150. The Djibouti-based Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 that patrols the waters off Somalia consists of warships from Germany, Holland, France, Pakistan and the United States. The unit was established at the start of Operation Enduring Freedom to fight terrorism, and it has actually cooperated with local authorities in curtailing piracy. Together they have been successful in stopping several pirate attacks.

The success of Somaliland, and previously Puntland, in curtailing piracy indicates that partnering with local authorities might be an efficient way of fighting the problem. One strategy could be to support the new Islamic courts that rule in the middle and south of the country, but this risks destabilising the newly established balance of power between the appointed government, the UIC, Puntland and Somaliland.

An additional strategy suggested by the Indian Navy, that declared its willingness to intervene after the hijacking of an Indian cargo carrier *Bhaktisagar* on 26 February 2006, is to make a request to the new government and the UIC for permission to chase pirates in Somali



Somali factions often use force to retain order

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waters. This is perhaps a more viable option due to the fact that the prime minister of Somalia called for naval assistance from neighbouring countries last October.

As for private security companies' involvement, the internal conflict in Puntland in 2001–2002 made the Hart Security Company withdraw. Similar conflicts are not unusual in the areas where piracy is most common. In this sense, the aid of private security groups might be most efficient in relatively stable regions, such as Puntland. A related solution is to use personnel from these groups as security on-board ships sailing close to Somali waters to serve as a deterrent, although this also increases shipowners' costs. A Korean trawler adopted this strategy successfully this year.

It is also important to remove the major justification for piracy locally, namely illegal fishing in Somali waters. The international community should strive to catch the culprits behind this lucrative business, which angers Somalis and can provide covering legitimacy for Somali pirate groups.

Due to UIC's new stronghold in Somalia, the Islamists will most likely continue to



Somali police graduates present arms during their passing-out parade at Manyani training camp in Kenya, July 2006

crack down on piracy in the middle and south of the country. The Sharia laws are strict and the courts have the military strength to keep a certain control.

Task Force 150's apprehension of a substantial number of pirates will probably also decrease the frequency of attacks, but given the opportunities offered by piracy in Somalia, specifically income and a safe haven from prosecution, it is likely that piracy could remain a problem in the future. The situation is undecided at the moment meaning a new war could erupt and once more aid the pirates in avoiding prosecution.

Protocol is a private security intelligence company operating from Denmark, Norway and USA and serves clients within the private and governmental sectors.

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