

# **SOMALIA PIRACY: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT CAUSE AND TAKING APPROPRIATE ACTION**

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## **Abstract:**

One of the main concerns for the ship-owners as well as for the ship operators when sailing at the open sea is piracy threat. Those pirates usually choose the important choke points to operate, where all the ships have to pass by at one point or another. Hundreds of ships were hijacked, together with millions of seafarers and civilians were held hostage. Ransom payments for each case reached billion figures, causing incalculable consequence to the shipping industry, military force and international's wealth. Infamous example would be in Gulf of Aden with the Somalia pirates. Nevertheless, many countries and world international body has been cooperating with continuous efforts in attempt to fight against and prevent piracy once and for all. In order to effectively achieve such goal, one first must understand the root cause of the issue then the appropriate actions could be taken. Thus, this study examine the main causes of the piracy, particularly in Somalia context, namely the attractiveness of the sea-going ships, due to the high frequency and high value of international trade. Additionally, whilst the weak government of the Somalia country has allowed the freedom of piracy operation, the collaboration with terrorist group al-Qaeda has also leveled up the dangerousness of them. Nonetheless, the study also shows the sharp declined sign of the pirates in Horn of Africa in the recent year, and it even might be terminated completely.

**Keywords:** Maritime piracy, Gulf of Aden, Somalia, Horn of Africa, pirates

## **1. Introduction**

Piracy is not new, Somalia piracy attack is not new either, however the concern and media attention about this issue never faded away, at least until the current year. Since 2005, the infamous pirates in Gulf of Aden has made numerous of attack, causing hundreds of ships were hijacked, millions of seafarers and hostage were captured, billions of ransom payment had been made, and incalculable consequence to the shipping industry, military force and international's wealth. This report addresses some key topics related to the Somalia piracy issue, starting by recalling the history of trade as well as the history of piracy since the legendary era of the Vikings. Along with the geographically advantages of Somalia, other reasons which contributed to the explosion of the piracy activities such as the corruption of Somalia and the shameful action of illegal fishing and dumping wastes by some countries' vessels, which is believed to be the main reason for the piracy. Some important events were listed, which account for a very small amount of piracy activities in total, are to show the growing dangerousness of Somalia piracy. However, the world did not stand still when facing with this issue. Everybody, from the United Nation, EU and NATO, international, regional and individual nation naval force, the regional authorities in Somalia, the shipping industry, the ship owner to the ship's crew member has taken steps in preventing piracy or at least how to handle if it ever occurs. It results in a sharp decrease in the first half of 2012, and the good news continues to prolong until the third quarter of the year. This report specifics these actions acquired by each separate division. It also looks at the pirate sides in the current time which may explains contributed reason to the decline of Somalia piracy. Nonetheless, battle against Somali piracy is in a long-run, where full attention and effort from everyone in the globe are needed for the counter-piracy missions.

## **2. Importance of trading and root causes for piracy**

Trading is non-implementable without efficient transportation network. Economic development, particularly from Pacific Asia and China, has resulted in increase in improvement of international transportation systems to match with the growing in both demand and distance of carried freight

(Rodrigue, 2012). Maritime transportation has played an important role in global freight trade, in which it handles 90% of the global trade. The statistic of 8400 millions of tons of international seaborne trade, 170 millions of TEUs of container trade and approximately more than 103,400 ships operating in 2010 (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2011) has proved the massive development of sea transportation. Therefore, “globalization is the realm of maritime shipping” (Rodrigue, 2012)

For that reason, it is easy to understand why ocean ships are attractive to pirate. The history of piracy can be traced back from the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Viking pillaged Spanish galleons to the recent attacks at the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia. Raunekk (2010) has described that piracy in Somalia are one of two “gruesome problems facing the world today”

It originated from the civil war in Somalia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Before that, Somalia was actually a flourishing fishing hub. However, due to its widespread unemployment, poverty and famine, Somalia had been desperately calling help from other nations and they had responded by supporting Somalia’s fishing industry. Many Somalis entered the fishing the business, leading to an increase in fishing activities as well as the civil war as a foreseeable result from having an unstable government and lack of controlled maritime law. Other countries (France, Spain, South Korea, Taiwan, Egypt, Kenya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Belize and Honduras) had used this misfortune to exploit illegally Somalia’s marine resources. The problem became worse when international vessel also dump chemical wastes which led to the erosion of the fish stock in Somalia coast. Consequently, local fisherman decided to protect their resources. The profitability from ransom payment had, however, encouraged some financiers began to fund pirate activities and split the profit with the pirates. Thus, Somalia’s piracy was born (Raunekk, 2010; Massip, 2009).

Besides that, the weak government had also contributed to the outbreak of piracy in Somalia. In 2008, Somalia’s government was admitted to be “on the verge of total collapse” (“Somali government ‘near collapse’” 2008). The Islamists had taken over almost every corner of the nation, the rest were under daily attack by the al-Shabaab who presented themselves “as an alternative government” (“Somali government ‘near collapse’” 2008). The chaos continued to threaten the Somalia’s peacefulness in 2010 caused by the dispute between the nation’s Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke and President Sharif Ahmed as well as the undergoing attack from al-Shabaab (“Rift threatens Somali government” 2010).

The Somalia pirates are operating in the narrow channel known as The Gulf of Aden. This particular Gulf is a major global shipping route where roughly 20,000 ships pass through it annually (Kraska & Wilson cited in Sterio, 2010, p. 1451). Moreover, since Somalia has a longest coastline in Africa, the patrol activities is more difficult for naval force. The method for hijacking a ship is done routinely. They are usually forming a group of 10 members, including ex-fishermen and ex-militias, using a small but fast speedboat and carrying RPGs and small arms to intimidate the crew members of the ship. They then launch hook up and rope ladders to hijack the ships (Zijlma, 2012).

Those above are only a few specific cases among a hundreds of attacks under the Somalia piracy activities. There were reportedly 111 attacks and 42 vessels were made by pirates in 2008. The figure increase significantly in 2009, almost 10 times higher than during the same period. 275 attacks took place in 2011 (“Piracy attacks,” 2012) It was said that “almost daily attacks in March [2009]” (“Pirates hijack,” 2009). Billions of ransom payment has been made, as much as roughly \$125 billion a year (“Maritime piracy costs,” 2011). Originally, it was believed that the pirates do not kill hostages and will release them immediately after receiving the ransom payment. However it was not the case anymore where there were as much as 35 hostages has been killed (“Report analyzes”, 2012)

### **3. The declined sign of Somalia piracy**

There were reported that the piracy attack has been gradually decreasing due to the anti-piracy effort of community. In the report by ASI Global Response (2012) Somalia pirate’s attack decreased 56% in the first quarter of 2012 compared to the same period in 2011. Ship owners, the crew members and the international naval forces have contributed to the decrease. Ship members have been increasing the vigilance, joining the anti-piracy training courses to handle in piracy attacks. Note that the pirates in Somalia came from poor and un-educated environments, the weapons they are using, despite its dangerousness, are rusty and improperly equipped. Therefore, it is not difficult to deal with piracy situation. Shipping companies are also paying higher attention to the security technology. Ships

today are equipped with long-range radar device or satellite tracking device. Ships now are allowed to have private armed guards on the ships, although it was discouraged at first due to its complication when carrying weapon (Gloystein, 2011).

Moreover, the military are showing a strong response to the Somalia piracy by cooperating internationally. The Combined Task Force 150, Combined Task Force 151 and the EU naval task force are three main current international naval task forces in the region. 13 members of EU have contributed to the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) in numerous ways.

The United Nations is one of the main organizations that have great influence on the anti-piracy missions. It introduces the counter-piracy program (CPP) in 2009 in response to the growing incidents of Somalia piracy, mainly to support piracy prosecutions (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). Many resolutions has been adopted by the UN Security Council, including allowing force to be used against pirates ("New Somalia piracy resolution," 2008), granting the consent for authorizing nations to enter Somali territorial waters to combat piracy and empowering land operations against Somali pirates ("UN empowers land operations," 2008).

In fact, Nairobi (2012) reported in his article that piracy activities dropped to zero in August 2012 for the first time in 5 years and that was the "longest unbroken stretch of peaceful transit through the waters off Somalia" and explained that could be attributed by the strengthen naval patrol activities, as well as the bad weather.

Besides that, one of the factors contributes to the decline of piracy activities in Somalia is the pirates themselves. They are tired of their non-stop dissipation that is destroying their life. Many Somalis who enter pirate's life have ended being killed or in jail. The pirate investors are getting more impatient when seeing more failed mission, meaning less money is received. One of the financier funding for the Somalia piracy activities have to give up due to their bankruptcy, and many former pirates are either unemployed or have return to their old job (Guled & Straziuso, 2012).

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Somalia piracy had reached its peak, and now decreases significantly in the year 2012. It is due to the countless actions made by everybody in the maritime community, from the international naval forces and other individual nation's naval forces, the local government of Somalia, to the ship's owner and crew member. Each one has taken their own appropriate steps to either prevent, avoid or against the piracy attacks. The result of sharp decline in 2012 and drop to zero attack in the August 2012 of Somalia piracy activities have further encourage their efforts. However it will be too soon to declare victory. Another piracy territory, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea, is raising the media concern. All must be in high awareness when transit through the Somalia coast, as well as other areas that are potential for piracy attacking. The defenses of merchant vessels should be increased, including the basic anti-piracy training provided for the crew members. The multinational naval forces should be continued to patrol around the region. Counter-piracy activities and the improvement of security along the Somalia coast must be paid attention than ever, so that the piracy could be swiped off once and for all.

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