

## **Piracy and Peril in Somalia : Economic Despair and Overfishing**

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## Acronyms

FGS.....	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS.....	Federal Member States
UNCLOS.....	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
NATO.....	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
EUNAVOR.....	European Union Naval Force Operation Atlanta
IO.....	Indian Ocean
KIIs.....	Key Informant Interviews
PMPF.....	Puntland Maritime Police Force
IORIS.....	Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing (IORIS)
AIS.....	Automatic Identification Systems
IMO.....	International Maritime Organization
CRIMIRIO.....	Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific
EUCAP.....	European Union Capacity Building Mission

## Abstract

This study examines the resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia, focusing on the Puntland region, by exploring the underlying factors contributing to its reemergence and the impacts on maritime security. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were collected through interviews with 22 key informants, including community leaders, local fishermen, maritime security experts, businesspeople, former pirates, and government officials. This primary data is supplemented by a comprehensive literature review. Thematic analysis using TAGUETTE identified key themes related to piracy impacts and potential interventions.

Findings reveal that modern pirate groups have adapted with sophisticated organizational structures and advanced technological capabilities, originating mainly from impoverished and socio-economically challenged communities. Despite international naval interventions reducing piracy incidents, the root causes such as state collapse, illegal fishing, and economic deprivation remain unaddressed.

Stakeholder responses highlight successes and ongoing challenges in anti-piracy efforts. While naval forces have reduced incidents, these measures are not sustainable long-term solutions. Community leaders and former pirates emphasize addressing economic and social issues, while government officials stress the need for stronger governance and law enforcement.

The study recommends a multifaceted approach beyond military interventions, including protecting maritime resources, providing alternative livelihoods, strengthening local governance, and fostering international cooperation to combat illegal fishing. Investing in community-based anti-piracy programs and regional security initiatives is essential for sustainable solutions and regional stability.

*Key words :Piracy, Somalia , Puntland , overfishing , economic despair.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Piracy, a persistent global challenge, has seen varied international responses governed by frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which recognizes piracy as an international crime and allows all states jurisdiction to prosecute (Chalk, et al, 2009). Article 101 of UNCLOS defines piracy as:

“*any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew of the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft. . . on the high seas against another ship or aircraft. . . [and] any act of voluntary participation [in a pirate ship..*” (UNCLOS 1982).

In circumstances of piracy, article 105 of UNCLOS grants every state the right to seize a pirate ship or aircraft, or a ship taken by piracy, and arrest the persons and seize the property on board, whether on the high seas or in any other place outside the jurisdiction of any state (UNCLOS 1982). This right includes the authority to decide upon penalties and actions to be taken. However, while States have the authority to prosecute suspected pirates, UNCLOS does not provide the specific procedures for such prosecutions. The UNCLOS, though comprehensive, faces challenges in its implementation, particularly in regions such as Somalia, where piracy has emerged as a significant threat to maritime security and international trade. This because, according to Chalk, et al, 2009, the effectiveness of the convention hinges on robust national legislation and international cooperation, which remain inconsistent .

Since the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, piracy has been particularly prominent off the coast of Somalia. It peaked between 2007 and 2011, with 2011 alone recording 275 incidents (World Bank, 2013). These attacks not only imposed an economic burden estimated at \$7 billion in 2011 alone, covering ransoms, increased insurance premiums, and extended shipping routes (Ibid), but also led to substantial trade revenue losses for adjacent nations such as Egypt, Kenya, Yemen, and Nigeria, totaling approximately \$1.25 billion annually (Kellerman, 2011).

The root causes of Somali piracy are deeply intertwined with the state's prolonged failure, which has left its maritime borders unguarded and vulnerable to illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping by foreign vessels (Percy, 2010; Hensen, 2014; Karawita, 2019; Lehr & Lehmann, 2007). This exploitation devastated local marine resources, compelling many former fishermen to turn to piracy as a means of livelihood and as a form of retribution against perceived injustices (Bahadur, 2012; Shariff, 2006; Kellerman, 2011; World Bank, 2013; Omar, 2019).

In response to escalating pirate attacks, a multinational coalition, including navy vessels, maritime patrols, and reconnaissance aircraft, was mobilized and bolstered by a cadre of military and civilian personnel (Guilfoyle, 2009). The intensification of anti-piracy operations was catalyzed by the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolutions 1816, 1846, and 1851, which urged member states to take decisive actions to curtail piracy originating from Somali territorial waters (Gottlieb, 2017; Guilfoyle, 2009).

The international response involved various nations and alliances, including Russia, Japan, India, NATO, and the European Union. They conducted missions such as Combined Task Forces, Operation Allied Provider, Allied Protector, Ocean Shield, and Operation Atalanta (Homan & Kamerling 2010). The naval presence has been strategically designed to act as a deterrent; it aims to prevent pirate attacks through the threat of military intervention, apprehension, and subsequent imprisonment, thereby ensuring the secure transit of commercial and humanitarian shipments through high-risk areas (Tsvetkova, 2009).

Although these concerted efforts significantly reduced pirate incidents by 2012, they did not address the underlying causes of piracy. The resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia highlights the inadequacy of previous efforts to address the root causes of piracy in the region. Despite concerted naval operations that significantly reduced pirate incidents by 2012, the underlying incentives for piracy remained largely untouched. The naval operations alone have little chance of achieving long-term effects if the incentives for piracy are not altered (Sorenson, 2009). As a result, the return of piracy to Somali waters recently highlights the persistence of the problem and the need for a more comprehensive approach to address its root causes.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the underlying factors contributing to the resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia. It examines shifts in pirate demographics, tactics, and organizational structures,

and assessing the economic, social, and security impacts on local communities and the broader international maritime sector. The research is structured into four sections, each designed to dissect the complex and dynamic nature of modern piracy and its extensive implications.

## 1.2 Methods and Materials of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the intricate realities and personal experiences associated with Somali piracy, recognizing that quantitative measures might not fully capture the diverse perspectives and underlying issues. The methodology centers on deep-diving into individual and collective narratives to understand the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing piracy.

A foundational desk review synthesized existing literature, reports, and case studies to build a robust background, refine the study's focus, and craft informed research questions. This review helped identify gaps in the current knowledge base.

Data was primarily gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 22 participants, comprising of community leaders, local fishermen, business members, maritime security experts, former pirates, government and port officials. This diverse group was purposively selected, based on their knowledge, experience and involvement in the piracy issues, to provide a broad spectrum of perspectives on the multifaceted nature of piracy.

The interviews aimed to elicit expert-level responses fostering a nuanced understanding of the impact of piracy and supporting both scholarly and practical solutions to address the issue.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to all interviewees to adopt open and honest discussions. During data analysis, participants were categorized based on their roles to ensure this confidentiality was maintained. All interviews were transcribed word-for-word, and a thematic analysis was performed using qualitative data analysis tools such as TAGUETTE. This analysis identified themes related to the impact on local communities, economic disruptions, and potential interventions.

### 1.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite its comprehensive approach, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

- **Temporal Constraints:** The research was conducted over a specific period, which may not account for the dynamic and evolving nature of piracy activities and interventions. Longitudinal studies could provide more robust data on trends and changes over time.
- **Reliability of Self-Reported Data:** Information obtained from interviews, especially from former pirates and community leaders, may be subject to biases or inaccuracies due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential for social desirability bias.

- **Lack of Quantitative Data:** While the qualitative design provides in-depth insights, the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to measure the extent of piracy activities and the effectiveness of interventions. Integrating quantitative methods could strengthen the study's findings.

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The existing body of literature on Somali piracy has predominantly focused on the period of heightened piracy incidents from 2007 to 2015. Scholars in this field consistently attribute the emergence of piracy to the failure of the Somali state. They argue that the absence of a central authority to govern the territory and provide essential services, coupled with violent attacks on local fishermen, led to the rise of piracy (Percy, 2011; Hensen, 2014; Karawita, 2019; Lehr & Lehmann, 2007). While this explanation is widely accepted, it oversimplifies the complex socio-political landscape of Somalia. State failure alone cannot fully explain the emergence and persistence of piracy; rather, it is a multifaceted issue involving economic, social, and environmental factors.

Economic consequences of Somali piracy have been profound, affecting global trade and security. Reports estimate annual losses from piracy to be between \$6.6 billion and \$12 billion, with significant fluctuations in insurance surcharges for shipping through pirate-infested waters (Bowden, 2010; Bowden & Basnet, 2011; DW, 2009).



Anastasiadis (2012) provides a detailed economic assessment, estimating that piracy costs the global container shipping industry approximately \$3.4 billion annually.

The human cost is also significant, with thousands of seafarers directly affected by piracy through assaults or hostage situations between 2010 and 2012 (One Earth Foundation, IMB, MPHRP, 2012).

Several studies suggest that economic factors play a significant role in motivating individuals to engage in piracy in Somalia, offering financial opportunities and a means of addressing poverty, unemployment, and food price shocks. These conditions create an environment where individuals may turn to piracy as a means of economic survival or advancement (Bueger, 2013; Coggins, 2012; Hastings, 2009). However, these studies often overlook the role of international actors in exacerbating the situation. The illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing by foreign entities not only highlights the weaknesses of Somali maritime governance but also exposes the failures of international regulatory frameworks in protecting vulnerable coastal communities (Bahadur, 2012; Kellerman, 2011; World Bank, 2013; Omar, 2019).

Bahadur (2012) depicts former fishermen and unemployed youth forming coalitions with militias, using piracy as a means to defend marine resources and secure a livelihood in the face of governmental absence and economic desolation. This narrative, while compelling, can romanticize piracy, portraying it as a form of vigilante justice.

Such portrayals risk minimizing the violence and criminality inherent in piracy, which includes hostage-taking, extortion, and sometimes murder.

Additionally, some studies indicate the transformation of piracy into a culturally integrated aspect of Somali society, supported by narratives that portray pirates as local coastguards defending against external threats. This perspective complicates the resolution of piracy, suggesting that military and legal responses alone are insufficient without addressing underlying socio-economic and cultural dynamics (Bueger, 2013; Menkhaus, 2009; Dua, 2013). This suggests that Somali piracy has become a quasi-institutionalized practice, embedded within local power structures and economies. The narrative of pirates as protectors of Somali waters adds a layer of social legitimacy to their actions, posing significant challenges to international anti-piracy efforts.

### III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### 3.1 Overview of Piracy Attacks

According to EUNAVFOR data, from November 2023 to April 2024, 31 piracy attacks were reported off the coast of Somalia. This includes incidents where Somali pirates hijacked 18 fishing vessels, using these boats as motherships to launch attacks on larger commercial ships. Unlike previous practices, these pirates did not demand ransoms for the fishing boats but instead used them strategically to access and hijack commercial ships. Significantly, the Maltese-flagged MV Ruen was hijacked on 14 December 2023 and became the first commercial vessel hijacked by Somali pirates since 2017 (Reuters, 2023).

It was later freed by the Indian Navy on 16 March 2024 (Hassan, 2024). Subsequently, the Bangladesh-flagged MV Abdullah was also hijacked on March 12, 2024, and was released after a ransom of USD 5 million was paid (Chothia, 2024).

**Table 1 January incidents in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean:**

Date	Incident Description	Location	Outcome
02 Jan 2024	Fishing vessel hijacked	Near Qandala, Somalia	Details not disclosed
04 Jan 2024	Liberian-flagged cargo vessel LILA NORFOLK boarded by five armed assailants	530 miles east of Eyl, Somalia	The crew was secured in the citadel, and rescued by an Indian warship; the assailants left before the arrival
10 Jan 2024	Fishing vessel was approached by a skiff	430 nm east of Eyl, Somalia	Armed security team on the vessel deterred the skiff
12 Jan 2024	Two Yemeni fishing vessels hijacked	Off Eyl, Somalia	Further details not provided
27 Jan 2024	Merchant vessel approached by a small craft with four armed persons	780 nm east of Hafun, Somalia	The onboard security team fired warning shots, and small craft retreated
27 Jan 2024	Sri Lankan fishing vessel LORENZO PUTHA 4 reported hijacked	750 nm east of the Somali coast	Last seen heading towards the African coast
29 Jan 2024	Six crew members Sri Lankan fishing vessel LORENZO PUTHA 4 were rescued from the hijackers	230 nm northeast of Mahe Island, Seychelles	Rescued by the Seychelles Coastguard; three suspected pirates detained

Source: Neptune P2P Group (2024).

Another report in April indicated that the attacks of the pirates continued as elaborated in the table below:

**Table 2 April Incidents in the Somali Basin and the Indian Ocean**

Date	Incident Description	Location	Outcome
13 April 2024	The Bangladesh-flagged bulk carrier MV ABDULLAH released	356nm east off Socotra, Yemen	USD 5 million ransom has been paid
09 April 2024	Suspicious Approach	504 miles east of Socotra, Yemen	After 30 minutes of pursuit, the skiffs turned around and the vessel and crew reported to be safe
20 April 2024	Merchant vessels approached by dhow with several green-colored skiffs	570nm east of Socotra, Yemen	The dhow followed the ship for minutes before ending the pursuit
21 April 2024	Merchant vessels approached by three skiffs	50nm southeast Socotra, Yemen	After changing course to stay clear of the skiffs, they stopped their pursuit
26 April 2024	Suspected Drone UAV attack	170nm southeast of Socotra, Yemen	The vessels and crew reported safe
28 April 2024	Commercial vessel approached by small craft with four persons onboard	Not clear	The vessel conducted self-protection measures

Source: Neptune P2P Group (2024).

These incidents collectively indicate a sophisticated adaptation in pirate strategies, exploiting the capabilities of smaller vessels to extend their reach and impact. This resurgence of piracy not only poses a significant threat to maritime security in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden but also highlights the ongoing challenge of addressing the root causes of piracy and ensuring effective maritime governance and security in the region.

### 3.2 Demographics and Dynamics of Piracy Groups

Respondents agreed that the new pirates primarily originate from impoverished coastal communities and inland rural areas, which are affected by adverse socio-economic conditions. This demographic primarily includes individuals aged 20 to 40, with an increasing participation of younger individuals aged 14 to 18. The composition of these groups reflects a diverse background: former pirates re-engaging with criminal networks, local fishermen impacted by ongoing marine resource exploitation, and inland residents who have lost their livelihoods due to recent severe droughts. Additionally, some militia members involved in recent regional conflicts, have transitioned into piracy, offering armed security for hijacked vessels both onshore and offshore. This mixture of seasoned pirates and economically or conflict-driven newcomers underscores the complex interplay of economic deprivation and environmental distress driving their participation in piracy.

The evolution of pirate crew sizes has been marked by significant changes, as evidenced by the data from recent incidents and interviews of the study with former pirates and maritime security experts. Previously, pirate teams were relatively small, generally comprising 6–12 members. However, new groups, such as those involved in the MV Ruen attack, typically consisted of about 20–22 members. In certain cases, the number of pirates participating in an operation has escalated dramatically, with instances of up to 65 pirates reported on board during specific attacks.

An interview with a former pirate highlighted this shift noting: *“The increase in crew size reflects a notable escalation in the scale and coordination of new pirates because they believe that having more members makes them more capable of defending themselves from attacks on land or at sea.”* This quote indicates that the new pirates are becoming more security-conscious as they are aware of increased counter-piracy measures and are adapting to mitigate these threats by having larger forces that can offer greater resistance.

With regard to skills and operational tactics, respondents noted that the skills set within pirate groups has notably evolved. The former pirates often assume leadership roles, leveraging their extensive experience and operational knowledge of piracy to mentor new recruits. This transference of skills has created a quasi-professional structure within pirate groups, where seasoned pirates guide operations and tactics.



Despite these advancements, the fundamental modus operandi of piracy has remained consistent. An international maritime security expert, interviewed for the study, emphasized this stating:

“*The way the pirates operate won't differ that much from the first period only that they have learned what the countermeasures are, and they know how to avoid these. Besides that, they will have better intelligence possibilities.*”

### 3.3 Organizational Structure and Network Operations

Some respondents, including former pirates, reported that modern pirate groups possess an organizational structure resembling formal military or corporate entities, significantly enhancing their operational effectiveness. These groups are led by a team leader who oversees decision-making, coordinates activities, and ensures the operational reach of the group. Additionally, designated individuals handle crucial financial and logistics operations, further streamlining their activities and bolstering their efficiency in conducting piracy operations.

Interviews with top officials from the Puntland Ministry of Fisheries and local police forces revealed that three main pirate networks operate within distinct regions: Eyl in Nugal, Bandar-Bayla in Karkaar, and Hafun in Bari. These networks strategically position their operations away from district administrative centers to reduce the likelihood of confrontation with local authorities and communities.

By setting up bases far from district administrative centers, these networks reduce the risk of detection and enhance their operational secrecy. These locations, often secluded coastal areas, provide ideal launch points for swift maritime attacks and quick retreats, minimizing exposure to law enforcement.

The networks are characterized by a high degree of collaboration, which includes sharing intelligence, exchanging operational experiences, and pooling resources such as arms, particularly when facing threats from security forces. This collaborative spirit was notably intensified following a successful intervention by the Indian Navy against the Maltese-flagged MV Ruen, which resulted in the capture of all involved pirates. This event has heightened the perceived risks of further naval interventions among pirate groups.

Local officials and international observers interviewed for the study expressed increasing concern about the potential expansion of pirate activities into the Bari region. This area includes strategic coastal zones near keyports such as Bossaso, Hafun, Qandala, Bargal, and Alula. The geographical advantages of these areas, including access to busy shipping routes and relative shelter, make them attractive for pirate groups looking to expand their reach. Additionally, there are fears about the emergence of new pirate networks in the southern regions of Somalia, such as Hobyó, Kismayo, and Mogadishu. These areas have historically been pivotal in maritime piracy narratives due to their proximity to international waters and shipping lanes.

### 3.4 Weaponry and Technological Utilization

The weaponry typically used by pirates include AK-47 rifles, RPG-7 rocket launchers, and mortars. Recently, however, there has been a significant escalation in the pirates' arsenal, with the addition of anti-aircraft weapons to their equipped ships. This change followed an incident where Indian Navy commandos conducted a raid, resulting in the capture of 35 pirates and the rescue of the MV Ruen in April 2024. An international maritime security expert interviewed for the study expressed concerns that aggressive military responses, like those undertaken by the Indian Navy, could compel pirates to acquire heavier weaponry and adopt more ruthless tactics.

Additionally, it was disclosed that the current generation of pirates exhibits greater sophistication in intelligence gathering and the use of advanced technologies. They strategically employ this enhanced capability to ensure that targeted vessels are not those carrying cargo for Somali businessmen, thereby minimizing the risk of conflict with local communities. An ex-pirate interviewed for the study also revealed that the new pirates are in a better position compared to the previous ones to access the Automated Information System (AIS) to get the positioning of vessels in real-time so that they can track targets. Commenting on this, a member of the Eyl district council said: *“The new pirates are equipped with advanced boarding ladders, allowing them to quickly board ships. Additionally, they use modern technology such as*

*GPS systems, smartphones and power saving devices to enhance their operations. This technology enables them to selectively avoid ships carrying cargo for Somali businesses, thereby minimizing potential conflicts.*”

### 3.5 Financing Dynamics

Recent shifts in piracy tactics have altered the financial landscape of piracy operations. Modern pirates have adopted cost-effective strategies by commandeering larger vessels, such as Iranian fishing boats, used as motherships. This approach reduces the need for smaller boats and frequent returns to shore for supplies, as these larger vessels can store ample provisions for extended periods at sea, enhancing operational capacity and reach. Despite these efficiencies, initial investments ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 are required to cover weaponry, ammunition, and sustenance, with investors expecting returns of 30 to 40% of ransom payments, reflecting both the risks and the potential profitability of piracy ventures.

The hijacking of the MV Ruen in December 2023 was a key event that boosted financiers' confidence in piracy, leading to more organized attacks. The subsequent \$5 million ransom paid for the MV Abdullah reinforced this trend and even turned some pirates into investors. According to respondents, the increase in ransom amounts was attributed to enhanced security measures by international naval forces and rising costs, including payments for support and protection from armed militias and local clans.

### 3.6 Community Perceptions Towards Piracy

The perceptions of piracy within the coastal communities reveal diverse viewpoints, significantly shaped by local socio-economic impacts along with moral and religious considerations. Some respondents perceived piracy as economic retaliation against illegal foreign fishing, which they believe infringes upon their territorial waters and jeopardizes their livelihoods. These respondents view the piracy attacks as necessary for conserving marine resources. Some respondents rejected the label "pirates" preferring "ilaalada badda" or "marine guards" instead. A respondent argued by noting: "When you call them pirates, you ignore their role as marine guards. Initially, their actions stopped foreigners from plundering our fish and damaging our fishing gear. However, once these attacks ceased, foreign ships returned to our waters to exploit our resources, severely impacting our livelihoods. This has led to a realization of the need to resume these protective actions." This perspective highlights the complex socio-economic factors driving piracy and the view of some community members that piracy is a form of protective action against external exploitation.

Some respondents noted that the relationship with pirates in coastal areas may be motivated by economic benefits derived from piracy. The influx of wealth from ransom payments can create a dependency cycle, where communities rely on piracy-related income.

This can reinforce community support for piracy, despite the potential legal and moral consequences. An interview with a former pirate revealed a historical practice wherein a portion of ransom proceeds, specifically 5% of the total amount, was allocated to local elders and influential community members. This practice, known as "barroosin dhiga" or "anchorage," aimed to secure their loyalty. While the continuation of this practice among newer pirate groups remains uncertain, there is no evidence to substantiate whether the pirates involved in the \$5 million ransom paid for the release of the MV Abdullah adhered to this practice. However, such previous practice is an insight that informs the historical significance of bribery and loyalty-building in shaping the relationships between pirates and their communities.

In contrast, many other members of coastal communities, including religious leaders, vehemently oppose piracy, condemning it as illegal, un-Islamic, and decrying its association with social vices like prostitution, drug abuse, and violence. The opposition is rooted in deep-seated moral and ethical concerns about the legitimacy and repercussions of piracy. Respondents of this group highlighted that the proceeds from piracy are considered haram (prohibited) and argued that the damages inflicted by illegal foreign fishing do not justify piracy, particularly when it targets civilians rather than illegal fishing vessels. A local elder noted saying:



*While we recognize the damage caused by illegal foreign fishing to our fishermen, this does not justify resorting to piracy. The primary targets of piracy are not foreign fishing vessels but civilian ships traversing the high seas. If the intent is truly to combat illegal fishing, then actions should specifically target those foreign vessels involved in such activities, not innocent ships.*

The statement emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between legitimate defense of territorial waters and the exploitation of such defense claims for engaging in broader criminal activities, such as piracy. It highlights a critical debate within affected communities and among stakeholders: while some local groups justify piracy as a necessary response to illegal foreign fishing that depletes local resources, there is a clear moral and legal distinction to be made between defending local resources and engaging in piracy, which typically targets non-military and often commercial vessels.

### **3.7 Links with Armed Islamist Groups**

The potential for collaboration between Somali pirates and armed groups like Al-Shabaab or ISIS highlights a complex dynamic in the region's security landscape. In the past, Al-Shabaab have officially condemned piracy. However, there have been instances where Al-Shabaab exhibited a level of tolerance toward piracy activities in areas under its control. An international expert on maritime law has noted the potential for collaboration between pirates and terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab or ISIS.

He argued that if Al-Shabaab were to consolidate their control over the coastal areas, including key port cities, they might see piracy as a viable revenue source. In such a scenario, he emphasized saying:



*Pirates could potentially operate with impunity on land under the protection of these terrorist groups, in exchange for a share of their profits.*

A former pirate noted that while Al-Shabaab has shown some tolerance toward pirates operating within their controlled areas in Galmudug in the past, the lifestyle and behaviors associated with piracy, such as drug use and engaging in prostitution, could prevent a full alliance with Al-Shabaab, as these are against Islamic principles. He mentioned that intense targeting by international naval forces could leave pirates feeling desperate and powerless, potentially pushing them to seek support from Al-Shabaab. However, A senior Puntland official expressed concerns that Al-Shabaab might view piracy as a lucrative opportunity for funding, indicating a possible shift towards using piracy as a financial resource.

Regarding ISIS, some respondents noted that the group has a limited presence in coastal areas, primarily operating in the remote Bari region mountains. However, a Somali security expert suggested that ISIS could potentially ally with pirate groups forming in coastal towns near the mountainous areas they control. The expert emphasized mutual dependency: ISIS could benefit from the pirates' capabilities in smuggling weapons, while the pirates could utilize the group's tactics and use their controlled areas as refuges to evade government forces.



### 3.8 External Links and Influence

Most respondents, including security experts and government officials, did not note external connections with the current pirates. However, a few mentioned speculative reports about possible cooperation between the pirates and Yemeni Houthi rebels, which could allow pirates to move freely along the coastal areas near Yemen and target vessels in international waters. An international maritime security expert, interviewed for the study, has warned that the severe poverty in Yemen might drive various Yemeni groups, including the Houthis, to form alliances with emerging pirate groups in search of revenue. He elaborated that: *“both Yemen and Somalia share similar conditions that could facilitate such collaborations: the failure of central government authority, the prevalence of armed militias, and extensive geographic areas that are conducive to piracy activities.”* This concern was echoed by several senior officials from Puntland since pirates might eventually ally with external groups like the Houthis, seeing mutual benefits in using piracy as a funding mechanism.

Despite these concerns, many respondents remained skeptical about any collaboration between the Houthis and Somali pirates. They contended that the Houthis function more like a government and focus on politically motivated maritime attacks, particularly against Israeli and western ships, related to the Gaza conflict, rather than engaging in piracy.

Nonetheless, there was some acknowledgment that the Houthis showed a level of tolerance towards pirates operating near their controlled areas in Yemen. This is seen as a strategic move to avoid antagonizing Somali pirates and risking retaliatory actions against local Yemeni fishermen in the Somali territorial waters. Additionally, respondents cited frequent pirate hijacking of Iranian vessels and using them as motherships as a piece of evidence for the absence of collaboration, as any alliance with the Houthis would likely decrease such incidents.

## IV. DRIVERS OF RESURGENCE OF PIRACY

### 4.1 Geographic Location

Maritime experts interviewed in the study underscored the strategic importance of the Somali coastline's proximity to major shipping lanes, particularly those connecting the Red Sea via the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean and onward to the Persian Gulf and the West. These shipping lanes are vital arteries for global trade, facilitating the transportation of oil, goods, and commodities between Asia, Europe, and the Americas. The experts highlighted that this geographic positioning offers Somali pirates significant opportunities to intercept commercial vessels.

The concept of "opportunity" emerges as a central theme in understanding Somali piracy. Experts noted that Somalia's pirates target areas with busy anchorages, shipping lanes, and chokepoints along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

These locations present favorable conditions for piracy, as vessels are often required to slow down or stop, rendering them more vulnerable to attacks.

Furthermore, respondents pointed out the geographical features of Somalia's coastal regions, particularly around Puntland, as contributing to piracy. The area is characterized by numerous inlets and natural harbors that are challenging to patrol and ideal for concealing hijacked ships. An international maritime expert emphasized these challenges, stating : *“These natural features make it challenging for international naval forces to effectively monitor and control pirate activities.”* Consequently, despite ongoing efforts to combat piracy, such as the deployment of international naval patrols, acts of piracy have persisted. While there have been sporadic attacks, the presence of these patrols has generally suppressed piracy activities in the region.

## 4.2 Economic Hardships

The economic situation in the coastal regions of Puntland is described as being as dire, comparable to or even worse than during the peak piracy years from 2007 to 2011. Despite the decline of piracy since 2013, there has been no significant improvement in the economic conditions of communities that were once heavily involved in piracy. These communities continue to face persistent poverty and inadequate infrastructure, which restrict local trade opportunities and largely confine employment options to the fishing industry. This sector is already under threat from overfishing and environmental degradation, compounding the economic challenges.

Infrastructure deficiencies in coastal areas significantly hinder local trade, both by land and sea. Fishermen, despite experiencing periods of abundant catches, face substantial challenges in bartering their catch for essential supplies such as fuel and fishing gear. The lack of proper facilities to process and preserve fish restricts their ability to transport and sell their catch in broader markets, thereby stifling potential trade expansion. Although some collaborations exist between local businesses and fishermen, these partnerships rarely result in substantial growth in trade opportunities.

A fisherman from Eyl, interviewed for this study, highlighted the hardships faced by coastal communities, stating: *“Our coastal areas are neglected by both the government and the international community; we have no infrastructure, no access to education, and no sustainable employment. We see no hope for the future as we rely on fishing as our main livelihood, which is already threatened by foreign illegal fishing. Even during times of good fishing or lobster harvest, there is no viable market, and fishermen are forced to sell their products at low prices. There are no fish processing factories to provide employment and no tarmac road linking the coast to the main towns inland to transport our fish. When fishermen cannot catch fish from the sea, they attribute it to the extensive foreign fishing in our waters.”*

Respondents reported that recent economic pressures, such as the ban on the Somali Shilling by the Puntland government and the depletion of fish and lobster stocks, have exacerbated the economic hardship of coastal communities.

Additionally, environmental challenges, including cyclones and recurrent droughts, have further devastated these areas, leaving many residents homeless and destitute. The absence of government-led projects and the phasing out of numerous development and humanitarian initiatives that previously supported these communities have been identified by respondents as key factors driving many people toward piracy as a means of survival in coastal areas.



### 4.3 Weak Law Enforcement or Guardianship

Despite periods of inactivity, piracy remains a persistent threat in Somalia including Puntland. The underlying structures and networks that facilitate piracy operations, often referred to as "piracy-infrastructure", have persisted according to an international maritime expert interviewed for the study. These include both the logistical frameworks enabling piracy and the socio-political networks that support or tolerate such activities. Even during times when pirate attacks have subsided, the security situation on the coast and at sea has not significantly improved. Under this situation, some respondents noted that pirates remained opportunistic actors who closely monitor maritime security measures and exploit gaps or weaknesses in surveillance, enforcement, and response capabilities. Pirates often target areas with limited or ineffective naval patrols and inadequate law enforcement presence. Consequently, effective law enforcement and judicial capacity on land are essential for investigating,

prosecuting, and deterring piracy in Puntland to combat piracy acts. Such effective law enforcement on the land serves as proactive measures to disrupt pirate networks by targeting their logistical and support structures, such as financing, weapons procurement, and recruitment.

Respondents highlighted that the effectiveness of Puntland's anti-piracy measures heavily depends on international naval collaboration due to local naval limitations. The presence of international forces has been instrumental in mitigating piracy through rigorous monitoring and rapid response to incidents. However, a strategic shift in resource allocation has redirected Western naval efforts towards the Red Sea to address the threat posed by Huthi rebels, significantly weakening maritime security in the waters adjacent to Somalia. This has inadvertently provided pirates with increased opportunities to operate with less oversight.

Additionally, the ongoing conflict with Islamist groups like Al-Shabab and ISIS in the mountainous regions of Bari and Sanag has necessitated a reallocation of the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF) from coastal patrols to counter-insurgency operations, further compromising maritime security. One security officer highlighted the intricate and daunting security challenges confronting Puntland by saying:

 *Puntland security forces are engaged in fighting multiple fronts without effective support from the international community.* 

Respondents have highlighted that corruption within the police and judicial systems, compounded by clan affiliations, significantly hampers the prosecution of pirates in Puntland. Pirates often receive protection or preferential treatment based on their clan ties, embedding piracy within the socio-political frameworks of the region. This situation not only complicates the legal pursuit of pirates but also undermines the overall effectiveness of law enforcement operations.

#### 4.4 Illegal Foreign Fishing

Despite some progress in federal administration and governance in Puntland, Somalia still lacks a comprehensive system to manage the natural resources in its adjacent waters. Sustainable fishing practices are not enforced, with no effective regulation on limits, quotas, or licenses. Somalia's inability to execute effective policing in coastal waters amidst the ongoing war against Al-Shabaab and ISIS leaves its fishing grounds vulnerable to foreign exploitation. The PMPF, which is the only armed formation with maritime capabilities, lacks sufficient vessels and essential equipment to effectively patrol maritime waters. Additionally, they are without vessels capable of operating in more distant offshore areas. This vulnerability leaves Puntland fishing areas open to foreign exploitation, leading to significant discontent among local fishermen.

Respondents, particularly from coastal areas, have highlighted grievances against foreign fishing vessels from Iran, China, Thailand, Spain, India and Yemen.

The vessels reportedly involved in overfishing and damaging the equipment of local fishermen. Additionally, these vessels often employ armed Somali guards who have been reported to aggressively repel local fishermen from territorial waters. A recent incident exemplifies these tensions: in the Marayo village area of the Eyl district, a local fisherman was shot dead by Somali guards aboard an Iranian fishing vessel. The incident occurred after the fisherman protested the destruction of his fishing nets by the Iranian boats, to which the guards responded with lethal force. The case highlights the violent interactions contributing to the exacerbation of local hostilities towards foreign fishing operations within Somali territorial waters.

During the peak of piracy between 2007 and 2011, respondents from the coastal areas reported that they saw a temporary recovery in fish and lobster populations as foreign fishing vessels withdrew. However, with the decline in piracy due to enhanced anti-piracy measures, the influx of foreign fishing vessels in the territorial water subsequently increased. Study participants from Eyl and Bander-Bayla reported that the lights of foreign fishing vessels are seen regularly during the night, this is to show how close the vessels are fishing within the territorial waters. These foreign vessels not only overfish but also damage the nets of local fishermen and use firearms to keep them away from the fishing areas.



One participant emphasized this noting:



*Piracy once chased foreign fishing fleets far from our waters, allowing fish and lobster stocks to recover. However, after pirate attacks stopped, these fleets returned, fishing destructively close to shore with methods like bottom trawling. This technique, which involves dragging a heavy net along the seafloor, not only damages the ecosystem and destroys local fishing gear but also prevents local fishers from competing, despite their continuous efforts.*

Some respondents in the study from the coastal areas have vehemently defended the attacks of pirates terming it as an imposed war on them since the world watches but fails to address the actions of the foreign piracy acts. As such, some maritime security experts had the view that the once-used ideology of defending territorial waters against foreign exploitation could reemerge as a concept of justified self-defense in Islam, especially under the increased overfishing in the Somali territorial waters and the continuation inability of the Federal Government and Regional States to protect its adjacent marine resources against predatory activities. Such a narrative is increasingly emerging that piracy against foreign fishing ships is a legitimate form of self-defense under Islamic principles. This trend was observable in social media reactions following the hijacking of the Iranian vessel Al-Meraj 1 at the end of November 2023.

#### 4.5 Weak Marine Resource Management

In Puntland, government officials from the Ministry of Fisheries acknowledged significant deficiencies in the management and protection of marine resources. The new administration of the Ministry of Fisheries has initiated a review of fishing permits and tariff systems, with plans to introduce seasonal restrictions on fishing-specific marine resources, such as lobster. According to the Ministry officials, these measures are intended to promote sustainable fishing practices, help replenish diminishing fish stocks, and ensure the long-term viability of Puntland's marine ecosystems.

Many respondents were in the opinion that both the Federal Government and the Puntland administration have issued hundreds of fishing permits for foreign fishing without transparency or accountability. The lack of clarity on the number of active ships and their regulatory compliance has led to overfishing and harmful fishing practices by foreign operators who often ignore the rights of local fishermen in the territorial waters. This not only undermines the sustainability of marine resources but also the livelihoods of the local communities.

Respondents voiced their deep concern over the lack of effective regulations on fishing limits, quotas, or licensing because it contributes significantly to the resurgence of piracy.

Respondents expressed frustration with the government's approach, which they perceive as primarily driven by revenue generation rather than promoting sustainable practices and protection of local interests and the marine environment. A local council member from Eyl district further detailed the frustration of the local community towards the granting of fishing permits to foreign vessels by the government by saying:



*We have observed numerous Iranian fishing vessels with licenses issued by the Ministry of Fisheries. When confronted with vacating our territorial waters, they simply present these licenses. This complicity by our government in allowing destructive fishing practices in the territorial waters is unacceptable and appears to condone the plundering of our marine resources.*

In early 2023, a group of local fishermen from Eyl responded to the overfishing by foreign vessels in their territorial waters by attacking and hijacking a dozen Iranian and Yemeni fishing vessels. Although local elders and religious leaders successfully intervened to release the boats and crews, the incident signaled a potential uprising against illegal fishing. This action by the fishermen was a clear sign of a growing sentiment against illegal fishing practices that threaten their livelihoods. However, the incident did not garner the attention it warranted from the Puntland government. This was largely overlooked by both the Puntland government and the international community.

Consequently, respondents emphasized the need for transparent procedures to regulate fishing by foreign companies, crucial for preventing resource over-exploitation and ensuring sustainable fish stocks in Somalia's marine ecosystems. Additionally, transparency in issuing fishing permits promotes trust between the government, foreign operators, and local communities, reducing potential conflicts and the likelihood of piracy.

## V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE PIRACY RESURGENCE

Respondents identified two primary implications of piracy in Puntland, which are detailed in the subheadings below.

### 5.1 Economic Impact

Many respondents noted that increased piracy disrupts maritime transport, leading to significant reductions in the availability of essential imported goods, including petroleum for electricity generation and various food products. This scarcity is expected to drive up the prices of fuel, electricity, and food, exacerbating poverty as the population faces higher costs without a proportional increase in income.

Moreover, the persistent threat of piracy impedes the development and modernization of Somalia's maritime infrastructure and port facilities. The associated risks deter investors, slowing the development of crucial port services and economic progress, and discouraging international investment and cooperation essential for Somalia's integration into global trade networks.

Additionally, the ongoing threat of piracy also makes international agencies hesitant to implement development and humanitarian projects in these high-risk areas due to safety concerns, further isolating the region from necessary global support and resources.

Respondents emphasized that the ports sector is highly vulnerable to piracy, which could significantly impact it in the following ways:

**Increased transportation expenses:** Some Ports in Somalia have reported a marked increase in transportation expenses. According to the management of Gara'ad Port, the transport costs for cargo ships traveling from Dubai to Gara'ad have escalated since January 2024. Specifically, the prices of shipping containers have seen significant increases: the cost for a 40-foot container has risen from \$2,550 to \$3,700, an increase of \$1,150 or approximately 45.1%, while the cost for a 20-foot container has escalated from \$1,450 to \$2,500, marking an increase of \$1,050 or approximately 72.4%. At Bossaso port, there have been no direct reports of increased transportation expenses as a direct cause of the new piracy. However, the businesspeople interviewed noted that Houthi attacks in the Red Sea have led to a slight increase in container shipping at the port. In this sense, it is still too early to determine the impact of the recent rise in piracy on transportation costs in Bossaso port according to the information provided by the respondents from the ports and businessmen.

**Decreased port traffic:** The management of Gara'ad port reported a significant decline in expected revenue due to fewer ships arriving. This decline is largely attributed to the port's recent inauguration and its proximity to areas with active pirate activity. As a result, shipping companies are exercising increased caution, compared to more established ports like Bossaso.

**Economic spillover:** The influx of wealth among pirates, often from ransoms, can distort local economies and exacerbate social inequalities, leading to increased social unrest and contributing to the destabilization of community structures, as it happened in the past.

## 5.2 Security Implications

Respondents unanimously agreed that the security implications of piracy in Somalia are multifaceted, extending beyond the immediate threats to maritime navigation. It influences broader security dynamics through the strengthening of organized crime, the potential support of extremist activities, and the perpetuation of local and regional instability. The key security implications identified by the respondents are outlined below:

**Financing of armed Islamist rebel Groups:** Piracy also potentially serves as a significant revenue stream and recruitment tool for armed extremist groups active within Somalia. These groups may exploit maritime insecurity to finance their operations, procure weapons, and smuggle contraband. This connection between piracy and terrorism magnifies the threat to regional stability and poses substantial challenges to international security efforts.

**Impact on Maritime Security:** Direct threats to maritime security manifest through disruptions in shipping lanes and direct attacks on vessels. Such incidents endanger the lives of crew members and passengers and have broader economic repercussions by disrupting maritime trade routes. The persistent threat to maritime navigation underscores the need for enhanced naval patrolling and international cooperation.

**Link to Transnational Organized Crime:** Piracy is deeply intertwined with transnational organized crime networks, which exploit maritime insecurity to enhance their illicit operations. These activities extend beyond piracy to include arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and human trafficking. An international marine security expert interviewed for the study noted that these criminal interconnections escalate security threats, affecting not just Somalia but the international community as well. This underscores the transnational scope of maritime piracy and its broader implications.

**Exacerbation of Local Conflicts:** At the local level, piracy exacerbates existing tensions among coastal and inland communities in Somalia, particularly in conflicts over natural resources and territorial control. These tensions complicate efforts to establish effective governance and law enforcement, thereby perpetuating cycles of insecurity and instability in Somalia.

## VI. ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES TO THE NEW PIRACY

### 6.1 The Response of the International Community

While acknowledging that it is premature to fully evaluate the international response to the resurgence of piracy due to limited data and examples, it is recognized that the international community, through the deployment of more than 14 naval forces from various countries, played a crucial role in curbing piracy threats off the Somali coast in the past. However, with piracy resurfacing in certain coastal areas of Puntland, the continued support of the international community remains pivotal in responding to these threats.

Several international naval forces have already responded to the recent pirate attacks, demonstrating increased cooperation with Somalia's maritime authorities. The table below summarizes responses of respondents on the international naval responses to the pirate attacks:



**Table 3 International Naval Responses to Recent Pirate Attack**

Date	Incident Description	Responding Naval forces	Outcome
26 November 2023	US Navy arrested five suspected Somali pirates and transferred them to Somali authorities	US Navy	Suspects handed over to Somali authorities for legal proceedings
27 January 2024	Seychelles Coast Guard rescued a Sri Lankan fishing vessel hijacked by Somali pirates	Seychelles Coast Guard	Three suspects apprehended and transferred to Seychelles
16 March 2024	Indian Navy intercepted and freed the Maltese-flagged bulk carrier MV Ruen from Somali pirates	Indian Navy	Vessel freed and 35 suspects apprehended and transferred to India
10 May 2024	EUNAVOR responded to suspicious activity involving the Marshall Islands-flagged merchant vessel CHRYSTAL ARCTIC	EUNAVOR Operation ATLANTA	6 suspects seized and transferred to Seychelles for legal proceedings

Source: Authors.

Despite the critical role being played by the international community in curbing piracy acts, respondents highlighted various challenges and concerns regarding the international response to piracy in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. Key points include:

- Reactive Approach to Maritime Security:** Some respondents criticized the international response as being predominantly reactive, emphasizing military interventions instead of addressing the underlying socio-economic causes of piracy.

- Financial Burden:** Respondents from the Puntland government expressed concern over the high cost of combating piracy at sea by international naval forces. Additionally, there is a perceived international fatigue towards this approach.

- Inadequate Legal Framework:** International maritime law experts interviewed for the study noted that the absence of an effective international framework to combat piracy represents a significant obstacle. They pointed out that the current legal definition of piracy does not cover acts driven by political or ideological motives, which could allow armed Islamist groups in Somalia to use piracy as a tactic.
- Ambiguities in Legal Systems:** Some international maritime experts interviewed for the study voiced concern over the Interpretative uncertainties around the criminalization of activities related to piracy, beyond the act itself, have been significant in legal systems across various countries. Ambiguities such as the lack of clear penalization for preparatory actions linked to piracy and the "catch and release" policy of international naval forces contribute to the persistence of piracy.
- Impact on Local Fishermen:** Concerns were raised about the involvement of international navies in counter-piracy operations, leading to wrongful suspicions and lengthy legal proceedings for many innocent fishermen. A former minister of federal government emphasized the collateral damage inflicted on fishermen by international naval forces, which has led to unjust arrests and prosecutions abroad. These fishermen face lengthy legal proceedings in foreign countries,

making it difficult for their families to see their loved ones due to the distant and inaccessible justice system they face, which is not the only option for prosecuting alleged pirates. In this regard, the minister emphasized noted that: *“Investing in local Somali maritime law enforcement could provide a more effective and culturally appropriate solution to the piracy problem, ensuring that justice is served more efficiently and fairly.”*

## 6.2 Response of the Somali Authorities

In response to the resurgence of piracy, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Puntland State have initiated collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing maritime security. Some respondents from the federal government indicated a notable step taken in this direction by implementing the Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing (IORIS) platform to improve coordination among maritime government institutions. This platform provides both federal and state maritime security agencies access to Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) and facilitates regular information sharing. According to a federal government official, the European Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) and the Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) support this initiative as part of a comprehensive strategy to enhance operational efficiency and interagency coordination. This collaboration aims to address and mitigate maritime threats effectively.

To further enhance its maritime security strategy, the FGS is actively working towards establishing an effective National Maritime Security Committee. This initiative aligns with the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) strategy, which advocates for a whole-government approach to maritime security. It aims to integrate various government agencies into a cohesive unit to protect maritime interests and enforce maritime law effectively.

In addition to these operational enhancements, the FGS is also in the process of drafting a new anti-piracy law to strengthen national anti-piracy legal frameworks. Several maritime experts interviewed for the study emphasized the urgent need to enact these frameworks to provide clear legal definitions, introduce stricter penalties, expand jurisdictional authority, align with international maritime laws for better collaboration, and enhance resources for maritime security.

Respondents from the office of the Federal Attorney General in Mogadishu reported that in November 2023, the US Naval Force apprehended six individuals suspected of piracy and subsequently transferred them to Mogadishu in December of the same year. The first hearing of this case has already been conducted by the Banadir Regional Court, with the prosecution being led by the Maritime Crime Unit of the Federal Government of Somalia's Attorney General's office.

Concurrently, the Banadir Appeal Court has dealt with another maritime case involving illegal fishing. Thirty-six Iranian nationals, who were convicted of illegally fishing in Somali territorial waters, have been fined and released after fulfilling the court's financial penalties in May 2024.

Alongside governmental efforts, several respondents from the Federal Government and maritime security experts expressed their optimism towards the new Somali-Türkiye pact, which is expected to facilitate the development of a robust national navy and coastal guard. This development is seen as a strategic and sustainable solution to the ongoing issue of piracy along the Somali coast. By building capable maritime forces, Somalia aims to enhance its defensive and preventive capabilities, thereby providing a long-term resolution to the challenges posed by maritime piracy.

In Puntland, the state government has implemented awareness-raising initiatives in coastal communities identified as hotspots for new piracy activities, including Eyl, Bander Bayla, and Gara'ad towns.

These efforts aim to educate and mobilize local populations against the resurgence of piracy. The government has also intensified its security measures by deploying additional forces, including the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF), to critical coastal areas identified as piracy hotspots. Notably, in the Gardafur region, police operations have successfully resulted in the seizure of weapons and the arrest of several suspects, some of whom are former pirates. Similarly, in Eyl, PMPF units have intercepted weapons and detained individuals suspected of planning piracy attacks. However, Puntland authorities have yet to bring arrested piracy suspects to trial, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the Puntland judiciary system in prosecuting these cases. Some respondents emphasized the importance of trying pirates within Somalia rather than extraditing them abroad. They argued that for legal actions to be effective and respected, it is crucial to conduct trials within the country. This would necessitate amending local laws and establishing international agreements to transfer legal proceedings to Somalia, including Puntland State.

Respondents indicated several obstacles that could compromise the effectiveness of the effective response of Somali authorities, both Federal and State levels, security measures, emphasizing areas crucial for enhancing governance and security outcomes:

- a) Institutional Fragmentation: Fragmentation within government institutions leads to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in enforcing and implementing policies, which undermines coordinated efforts to address security threats.
- b) Resource Limitations: The lack of adequate funding, equipment, advanced maritime surveillance, and modern vessels, and sufficient training for security personnel presents significant resource constraints that hinder effective security responses by Somali authorities.
- c) Inter-Governmental Strains: The strained relationship between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Puntland contributes to fragmented strategies against national threats, weakening the overall response due to a lack of a cohesive strategy.
- d) Focused Prioritization on Al-Shabaab: The Federal Government's focus on combating Al-Shabaab diverts attention and resources from other critical security issues, such as piracy.
- e) Dependency on PMPF: Puntland's dependence on the PMPF to fight Al-Shabaab and ISIS, especially in the mountainous areas of Bari and Sanag, poses a risk of overextending its security forces, which could affect their capacity to manage various security challenges effectively.

### 6.3 The Response of the Communities

Respondents from Eyl and Gara'ad towns reported some community-driven initiatives aimed at mitigating pirate activities and preventing their operations on land. In Eyl town, grassroots-led by elders and religious leaders successfully exerted pressure on local fishermen to release dozens of hijacked Iranian fishing vessels last year. This action not only prevented more attacks on foreign fishing vessels but also demonstrated the potential of local governance structures in maintaining security and order in piracy prone areas. Furthermore, district religious and traditional elders in Eyl have been proactive in organizing educational and awareness meetings. These sessions focused on informing community members about the dangers of piracy and to promote a collective resistance against such illegal activities. Meanwhile, in Gara'ad, the community's response has been shaped by both economic and security concerns. The residents have shown strong resistance to pirate activities, which they blame for undermining the operations of their newly established port. This port is crucial for the local economy, and its effective operation is seen as vital for the community's economic development. To bolster this effort, port security forces have actively conducted patrols within the town and its suburbs. Their primary aim is to deter pirates from docking hijacked ships in the area and to prevent pirate operations from establishing bases in the town or its adjacent coastal zones.

Early responses from some coastal communities emphasize the importance of incorporating local insights and leadership into broader security and economic strategies. According to several respondents, communities' initiatives not only enhance the effectiveness of anti-piracy measures but also ensure that they are sustainable and culturally congruent with the needs and values of the local populations.

While the respondents emphasized the significance of the above community-based initiatives in combating piracy, they expressed concerns about the sustainability of these efforts if underlying issues are not addressed. Key problems identified include foreign overfishing, hostile encounters between foreign fishers and local fishermen, and the resultant damage to fishing gear. Additionally, the ongoing depletion of marine resources, such as fish and lobsters, exacerbates the situation. These factors critically undermine local livelihoods, increasing the likelihood that marginalized communities may support or tolerate piracy as a survival strategy. Thus, for community-based anti-piracy measures to be effective and enduring, it is imperative that they also tackle these root causes to reduce the economic incentives for communities to engage in or endorse piracy.



Based on the feedback of the respondents, the following table outlines the strengths and limitations of the community response-based initiatives.

**Table 4 Strengths and limitations of the community response-based initiatives**

Aspect	Strength	Limitation
Community Engagement	Utilizes local knowledge and insights to understand motivations behind piracy and develop culturally apt solutions.	Partial Buy-In: Divided community views on the legitimacy of piracy complicate universal condemnation and eradication efforts.
Economic Focus	Focuses on improving local economies and providing alternative livelihoods to reduce the allure of piracy	Sustainability Issues: Economic benefits from piracy are unsustainable and lead to further socio-economic problems
Moral and Religious Influence	Leverages moral and religious frameworks, utilizing influential leaders to reshape perceptions and discourage piracy.	Inadequate Targeting: Fails to specifically address actual perpetrators or illegal activities driving piracy, leading to generalized resentment.

## VII. CONCLUSION REMARKS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### 7.1 Conclusion

This study has delved into the reemergence of piracy off the coast of Somalia, particularly in the Puntland region, identifying the complex interplay of economic despair and overfishing as significant contributors. By employing a qualitative research design and gathering data through key informant interviews and a comprehensive desk review of existing literature, the study offers a nuanced understanding of the underlying factors and impacts of Somali piracy.

The findings reveal that contemporary Somali piracy is characterized by sophisticated organizational structures, enhanced technological capabilities, and strategic adaptations in tactics. These changes reflect a deeper and more systemic issue rooted in the socio-economic fabric of Somalia, exacerbated by state collapse, illegal foreign fishing, and severe economic deprivation.

Despite the reduction in piracy incidents due to international naval interventions, the study highlights the persistent socio-economic drivers of piracy.

These drivers include the collapse of the Somali state, which has left maritime borders unguarded and local marine resources vulnerable to exploitation. The economic consequences of piracy, both locally and globally, underscore the need for sustainable and long-term solutions.

The study also underscores the limitations of military interventions alone in addressing the piracy problem. While international naval forces have been successful in reducing piracy incidents, these efforts have not tackled the root causes of piracy. The socio-economic conditions that drive individuals to piracy remain largely unaddressed, perpetuating the cycle of maritime crime.

The study advocates for a multifaceted approach to combating piracy that transcends military interventions. Key recommendations include protecting maritime resources, providing alternative livelihoods for coastal communities, and strengthening local governance structures. Additionally, fostering international cooperation to combat illegal fishing and enhance maritime security frameworks is essential.

## 7.2 Policy Considerations

a) **Promote Sustainable Fishing Practices:** Enforce stricter regulations on fishing activities within Somali waters to curb overfishing by foreign vessels. Establish territorial waters exclusively for local fishers and create exclusive economic zones where only local fishermen are permitted to operate. This strategy aims to conserve marine resources and diminish the economic impetus for piracy.

Additionally, provide local fishermen with access to modern, eco-friendly fishing technologies and equipment, such as sustainable nets, long-lining, and trolling, to minimize ecological impact.

b) **Strengthen Law Enforcement:** Enhance the capability of Somalia's maritime structures to effectively manage and protect their territorial waters. This includes expanding the operational capacity of the marine forces to conduct surveillance and enforce maritime law comprehensively. Invest in specialized training programs and provide necessary equipment to local police forces, ensuring they are well-prepared to address and suppress piracy at its source. Additionally, integrate technological advancements such as maritime drones and satellite surveillance to bolster detection and response capabilities

c) **Improve Governance and Judicial Processes:** Strengthen the legal framework for prosecuting piracy cases within Somalia to ensure pirates face justice in Somalia, which can enhance the legitimacy of the legal process. This includes developing transparent governance structures that can address corruption and improve the efficiency of public services, reinforcing the rule of law.

d) **Develop Infrastructure:** Improve existing port infrastructure and build new facilities to support increased fishing activity. This includes docks, fish processing plants, and cold storage units to preserve catches and maintain quality. Add to improving road and transportation networks to facilitate the efficient movement of fish products from coastal areas to markets inland and for export.

e) **Expand Market Access and Promote Exports:** Promote and support the development of local markets as well as the access to international markets for Somali fish products and implement quality control measures and obtain international certifications to meet export standards, enhancing the global competitiveness of Somali fish products.

f) **Enhance Community Engagement and Support:** Increase community involvement in anti-piracy measures by promoting awareness campaigns that educate on the legal and social repercussions of piracy. Support community initiatives aimed at protecting local waters from illegal fishing and pollution.

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