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Contrary to common perception, the swift and coordinated international response to piracy off Somalia's coast has been less of a success than reports make it out to be. In fact, it masks deeper problems of unfairness in international economic order and local governance. Somalia's pirates are a motley crew: some are fishermen defending their turf, while others are guns for hire. And the international response to these pirates has been, not surprisingly, military. But more is needed, including action that addresses the deeper issue in Somalia: a lack of economic growth and good governance. Yet, UN Secretary General Moon's appeal to 50 countries for broader assistance received almost no response. Of the countries that contributed naval vessels to the anti-piracy operation, half are nations engaged in fishing in the Indian Ocean with a vested interest in deterring piracy. Broader lessons from Somalia's piracy problem are three. Lack of sufficient governance not only breeds criminals, it also encourages the exploitation of a country's resources by stronger powers. War's combatants are no longer simply nation states, and war's resolution no longer relies on vanquishing the enemy in battle, but requires political solution. Finally, despite idealist talk of protecting human security by comprehensive means, the response to security issues remains decidedly military. Such conclusions leave the question of whether the global commons can really be protected. – YaleGlobal

Somalia's Piracy Offers Lessons in Global Governance

Protecting the global commons requires more than a military response

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NEWPORT: International anti-piracy operations off Somalia have attracted multinational media attention and have largely been heralded as a noble effort to protect the global commons. The unanimous passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1851, in December 2008 authorizing members to take all necessary actions against Somali piracy has been cited as a rare instance of the Council's decisiveness and unity. A closer consideration of the issues involved, on the contrary, reveals it to be pyrrhic victory that masks long-term failure in local and international governance that would ensure continued insecurity.

The wave of piracy off Somalia began in 1991 following the collapse of the Barre regime. Dumping of toxic and hazardous wastes by international companies (possibly with organized crime involvement) increased. Unlicensed foreign fishing vessels eagerly targeted Somalia's fish-rich waters. Local fishermen claimed that foreign boats use intimidation tactics such as ramming and hiring local militants to harass them.



Challenge and response: Escalating piracy off the coast of Somalia has deeper roots and requires more than military response. (Photo: Debbie Campoli, YaleGlobal; (inset) US Navy, Kenneth Anderson) [Enlarge image](#)

In response disaffected fishermen then began attacking foreign vessels in the early 1990s, ultimately leading to full-scale piracy and hostage-taking. In 2005 a UN agency estimated that 700 foreign fishing vessels were operating in Somali waters, many employing illegal and destructive fishing methods.

In 2006 the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of Islamist courts (that had sprung up to provide local law and order after 1991) seeking to create an Islamist state seized power in most of southern Somalia. They reasserted some control over Somali waters: foreign incursions and piracy declined. Ethiopia (supported by the US and the West) invaded Somalia in order to oust the ICU. After the ICU's ouster the chaos off Somali's increased. Fishermen fruitlessly complained to the UN about renewed poaching and dumping.

What began as a defensive movement by local fishermen has evolved into a complex amalgamation of banditry and insurgency.

Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, UN Special Envoy for Somalia, in July 2008 called the situation "...a disaster off the Somali coast, a disaster [for] the Somali environment, [and] the Somali population." The situation that developed has been described by Peter Lehr, of St. Andrew's University, as "a resource swap" with Somalis taking \$100 million annually in ransoms while Europeans and Asian poach \$300 million in fish.

What began as a defensive movement by local fishermen has evolved into a complex amalgamation of banditry, organized crime, freebooting, and insurgency targeting all types of vessels from fishing trawlers to oil tankers. Somali waters emerged as the hotbed of piracy, accounting for close to 32% of attacks reported globally between January and September 2008. Some fishermen independently attack foreign vessels, others join well-organized pirate groups consisting of criminal gangs, warlords, and clan militias who in turn attack foreign vessels, local fishermen, and each other. Organized groups commit most attacks and are well armed, equipped with fast-boats, satellite navigation, radios, and employ large “mother-ships” to launch long-distance operations.

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The failed governance of the country also comes into play. Officials from Somalia’s semi-autonomous region of Puntland issue “licenses” to foreign vessels that then employ pirates as security. With local and diaspora businessmen and clan leaders providing logistics and capital to pirates Puntland’s coastal cities are experiencing a piracy fueled economic boom. Pirates masquerade as Robin Hood-like defenders of Somalia, supposedly protecting the country from exploitation.

The surge in piracy warrants immediate security measures, but ultimately calls for a comprehensive approach that mixes hard and soft measures, similar to that advocated by counterinsurgency experts. In this case such an approach should have a long-term focus on restoring seeking a political solution to Somali’s turmoil, effective governance and promoting economic development. Intermediate efforts would focus on assisting Puntland which is the epicenter of piracy and has as a somewhat dysfunctional government.

In his briefing on Resolution 1851, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon did emphasize, “Anti-piracy efforts, therefore, must be placed in a comprehensive approach that fostered an inclusive peace process in Somalia and assisted the parties to rebuild security, governance capacity, addressed human rights issues, and harnessed economic opportunities throughout the country.” The then US Secretary State Condoleezza Rice and representatives of the African Union and League of Arab States similarly argued for wider approaches during the deliberations.

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The Secretary-General also noted that he appealed to 50 countries to commit resources for a broader multinational force for Somalia, yet he could find no state willing to take the lead. The international response has been almost entirely naval. At least 20 countries have committed or promised ships for what, on the surface, looks like a 19th century punitive expedition where the strong collude to protect their economic interests while protecting “civilizing” efforts (in this case delivery of food aid). While over half the nations contributing ships are major global or Indian Ocean fishing nations; none have offered significant resources to help address the deeper roots of piracy.

This military-centric approach erodes the legitimacy of international operations and instead creates anti-imperialist responses that help fuel extremism and discontent. Al-Jazeera, for instance, has taken up the Robin Hood theme reporting that “...pirates were victims of a U.S.-EU run system that still uses the developing world as a dumping ground for toxic waste.” One commentary posted on June 12, 2008 alleged “the dumping continues to this day, even though we

have been assured that we're living in a 'post racial era' following the election of Barack Obama...that rule doesn't apply to the many black and brown people who still find themselves in the imperial crosshairs."

The fact remains that UN has failed to include in its resolution 1851 the enforcement of Somalia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or the relevant convention that bars dumping of toxic waste.

What insights can be gleaned from this situation? A cynical view suggests that the powerful still prefer military approaches to problems rather than measures requiring broader, multifaceted solutions. A more charitable assessment would suggest that, intent and rhetoric to the contrary, the capacity and will to tackle every problem comprehensively does not yet exist. Reality undoubtedly lies somewhere in the middle. Three points stand-out.

Weakly governed and failed states are often themselves victimized by foreigners.

First, it is now assumed axiomatic that un- or under-governed spaces have become breeding grounds for rogue groups threatening the international community and global economic system. However, this assumption is incomplete. Weakly governed and failed states are often themselves victimized by foreigners.

Second, the nature of warfare has changed is another accepted truth. War is no longer characterized primarily by conventional clashes between states, but fought "amongst the people" by combatants including not only states but hybrid networks of, criminal gangs, insurgents and international terrorists. In this situation military force alone is not sufficient to combat such threats; it should be employed to support political solutions and human security. This, however, requires non-military capabilities, resources, patience, and political and public will that are often lacking.

Third, despite the prevalence of rhetoric about preventing threats through human security states often resort to application of force—in pursuit of short-term, self-interests. Ultimately, the will and capacity to pursue comprehensive strategies that protect both the "winners" and "losers" of globalization appear insufficient. This begs the question of whether the global commons really can be secured for the common good. Yet such a question must be answered soon as global inequalities, economic recession, degradation of and competition over natural resources, climate change, and demographic pressures threaten not just the weak but all humanity.

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