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Somali Piracy and the Enchanting Water Circus
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If you ever felt this whole saga of these invincible maritime desperadoes getting away with the most fantastic piracy operations along the Somali coast is so incredibly bizarre, you are not alone.

Regardless of what many media groups have sensationally been reporting, there is not enough information available to adequately explain the nature of this high sea drama or to pinpoint all those who are involved. However, there are some, state and non - state actors, who are openly positioning themselves to be the beneficiaries.

That said, let there be no mistake, the pirates are real. And, like chemical waste dumping, illegal fishing, weapon smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal oil exploration, illegal human trafficking, and a host of other criminal activities, piracy is a thriving business in Somalia. These lucrative enterprises have steadily soared in the past two decades while Somalia was rapidly descending into a deadly spiral of anarchy.

During that period, Somalia experienced only six months of relative peace and order in 2006 before the Washington-backed Ethiopian invasion abruptly ended the Islamic Courts Union rule and caused Somalia to sink into its worst political and economic conditions. Today, with over a million IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) and a total of over three million people being on the verge of starvation, Somalia is the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Yet, with its 1,880 mile coastline and its vicinity to the Middle East and Bab Al-Mandab - one of the world's most critical trade arteries - Somalia still remains the most coveted strategic space.

Washington's influence in The Horn (of Africa) has been on a steady decline since

pulling its troops out of Somalia in 1994, following that infamous episode known as "Black Hawk Down." But, now that a whole new geopolitical dynamic is rapidly developing in the Middle East and The Horn, for example, the increased volatility of the Middle East as Israeli-Iranian tensions increase, and China's multi-billion dollar oil deals with various African nations, Washington is compelled into a Cold War-like maneuvering for influence.

Ensuring dominance throughout the region in terms of land, water, and air is the name of the game - a game that historically shattered the region's aspirations for peace, co-existence and development.

The National Intelligence Council's report, *Global Trends 2025*, projects that the U.S. will have competitions in its role as the world's most influential nation.

According to the report, as a result of their rapid economic growth, new influential players such as Russia, China, India, and Brazil are not only going to have "a seat at the international high table, (but) will bring new stakes and rules of the game." The NIC report also makes a daunting projection that in the coming decade or two, powerful nations will be competing for access to resources essential to survival: food, water, and energy.

Going back to the pirates: if they did not exist, they would have been invented! Their almost daily criminal activities have dwarfed all other less covered criminal enterprises. This unintended consequence of their actions is paving a way for the architects of chaos, the so-called independent security contractors (ISC) - clandestine military forces immune from all laws and accountabilities.

Already, the American and European ISCs are actively out-maneuvering each other to position themselves for hefty contracts to escort ships through the troubled waters of Somalia and to fight piracy. But, if history is a reliable mechanism to forecast political outcomes, this all too familiar approach has only one plausible result, disaster.

Pirates in Somalia are said to have high-jacked over 90 ships and vessels since January. Currently, there are over a dozen ships parked along the coastal area of the north eastern region of Somalia, waiting to be bailed out with hefty ransoms. These high-jacked ships include a weapon smuggling Ukrainian cargo ship carrying 33 Soviet-made T-72 tanks, rifles and heavy weapons destined to Southern Sudan; also, a super tanker bigger than three football fields carrying 2 million barrels of crude oil worth 100 million dollars to the U.S. The latter was high-jacked near Mombasa, Kenya in broad daylight.

Here you may want to restrain your inquisitive urges: How could these village-dwelling thugs who wear *macawis* (cultural skirts) for camouflage gear and *dacas* (flip-flops) for combat boots pull such a sophisticated operations? How do they execute with such precision and successfully high-jack a new ship virtually every other day? How could they stealthily dodge all the sophisticated land, sea, and air counterterrorism surveillances stationed in and around the Indian Ocean?

By no means are these high sea hooligans innocent. While they are, on one hand, being used as a gambit or a pretext to geopolitical positioning, they are partnering with international organized crime and any other devils willing to make a deal.

Interestingly, for decades the Straits of Malacca (between Malaysia and Sumatra of Indonesia) have been the leading area for piracy. And, according to IMB (International Maritime Bureau) - an agency that, among other things, monitors maritime crimes - the piracy enterprise costs the shipping industry over 10 billion dollars per year. Most shipping companies do not report ransoms they pay or goods robbed for fear of having to pay high insurance premiums.

Meanwhile, there are widespread anecdotal accounts of "wealthy businessmen" from the U.S., Australia, and Western Europe being sighted in remote areas of the piracy-infested region. And the mightiest nations of the world continue to send their war ships to "the world's most dangerous waters".

Piracy in Somalia cannot be solved militarily. Solving this problem will require objective focus on the root cause - the political quandary that broke down law and order and made Somalia a free-zone for crime, exploitation, and human suffering. A starting point for the soon-to-take-office new U.S. Administration is to put this issue on top of its foreign policy priority list and to develop a sound policy toward Somalia.

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