

SOMALI PIRACY AND THE INTRODUCTION OF SOMALIA  
TO THE WESTERN WORLD

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the origins of the modern phenomenon of Somali piracy within a deeper historical context. More specifically, this analysis concentrates on the development of piracy in the north of the country. It is here contended that Somali piracy is, in fact, the product of the confluence of three historical currents. The first of these currents is the progressive degeneration of traditional Somali institutions due to exposure to the colonial and global markets. The second is the increasing reliance of northern Somalis on maritime resources due to over exploitation of the land and the fishing initiatives of the Barre regime. The final current is the intrusion of foreign fishing vessels into Somali territorial waters, beginning in the early 1990s, for the purposes of illegal fishing and the dumping of toxic waste.

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## INTRODUCTION

On any given day, as many as fifty vessels pass through the Gulf of Aden hauling, amongst other cargo, 3.3 million barrels of oil daily. This represents four percent of the world's daily production and twelve percent of all oil transported by sea in a given day. In all, an average of 33,000 vessels traverse the Gulf of Aden each year, making it one of the most vital trading corridors on Earth. This corridor, however, has faced a new threat over the last twenty years – the threat of Somali piracy. Against the backdrop of a war torn and lawless Somalia, armed gangs have been venturing out to sea seizing vessels many times the size of their own and negotiating for ransoms reaching into the millions of dollars. This thesis explores the genesis of Somali piracy as well as its nature and impact on the modern world.<sup>1</sup>

This work is intended to demonstrate that Somali piracy has a deeper historical context than is commonly portrayed in the media and in literature. In fact, Somali piracy is the result of the intersection of three phenomena. The first is the adulteration of traditional institutions, in particular the Somali clan system, through the introduction of western influence in the forms of colonialism and globalization. The second is an increased reliance by Somalis on coastal resources due to the overexploitation of land for the livestock trade and the efforts of the military regime of Siad Barre to educate nomadic herders as fishermen. Finally, the third is the entry, in the early 1990s of foreign vessels into unprotected Somali waters for the purposes of illegally fishing those waters and dumping toxic waste.

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1. *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting our Ships, Crews and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security of the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation*, 111<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, S. HRG. 111-427, 18, 31.

## **A Few Points**

Before embarking upon an analysis of a subject matter such as this, a few points must first be addressed. The first is that of the idealization of traditional societies. It can be tempting for the modern observer to imagine that traditional societies exist in a “purer” time or are more “connected” to the natural world within which they operate. Such assumptions, however, are generally projections of the views of the observer onto the societies being observed. As such, they have no value, and, at worst, begin to resemble the prejudiced image of the “noble savage” so popular in the nineteenth century. This work will discuss traditional Somali society’s adaptations to the climate within which it developed as well as the distortion of these adaptations. However, traditional Somali society, as any other, has more than its fair share of shortcomings. This work does not, in any way, seek to suggest otherwise.

The second point which begs attention before embarking upon this analysis is the issue of cultural determinism. It is the opinion of the author that no individual’s actions are entirely prescribed by his or her culture. Individuals from every society act in ways which cannot be predicted purely on the basis of cultural background. To discount the free will of actors in history is to again run the risk of holding a prejudiced outlook, particularly when examining traditional societies. This work is written from the standpoint that cultures represent tendencies within a society, a mean curve away from which individuals stray nearer or farther. As such, culture and institutions can serve as useful tools in interpreting the past, but never as predictors of the future.

The last point which must be addressed before embarking on this analysis is the question of morality. Given the fact that Somali piracy continues to this day, any discussion of the phenomenon runs the risk of eliciting very strong opinion or even emotional response regarding

the moral grounds underlying piracy and the situation of the Somali coast. While the moral ramifications of Somali piracy make for intriguing subject matter for debate, it is not within the scope of this work to engage in that debate. A philosophical essay would be better suited to that end. This work, rather, is simply intended to examine the forces behind the emergence of Somali piracy.

### **Historiography**

Before delving directly into the issue at hand, an examination of works relevant to the topic is appropriate. Though one is hard-pressed to find a book-length investigation into Somali piracy that seeks to place the phenomenon into an historical context, there are a number of works which are very relevant to the topic. A brief look at some of those works follows.

David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, in their collaboration *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, provide such insight. In their work, they stress the importance of overseas trade to the entire history of the region. As early as the twilight of the seventeenth century, they argue that the disruption of Indian Ocean trade due to Portuguese depredations contributed to the decline of the coastal Somali city-states as well as the inland kingdom of Ujuuraan, ruled by the powerful Gareen clan of the lower Shabeelle River basin. According to Laitin and Samatar, the Somali role in this trade took them beyond the shores of their homeland: “Somalis not only traded goods on the coast; many also joined the crews of the ships that traveled throughout the Middle and Far East. That Somalia has traditionally been a crossroads of world trade has meant that the Somali people have long been aware of important events taking place elsewhere in the world. Traders and seamen, approaching old age, would often return to the nomadic life and bring the nomadic

hamlets information about world events.”<sup>2</sup> They further stress that the livestock trade from the northern port city of Berbera to the ever-hungry coaling station at Aden was the primary impetus for British occupation of the region. This trade, widening over time to encompass the entire region of the Arab Gulf states, expanded to account for seventy-six percent of all Somali exports – roughly 101.6 million dollars in livestock by their reckoning.<sup>3</sup>

Laitin and Samatar also highlight the growing potential of off-shore fishing along the Somali coast, contending that at the time of the release of their work, 90,000 Somalis already depended upon fishing for their livelihood, and, “... the sector has almost unbounded capacity to absorb any new influx of families if matched by corresponding public investments and market demand for their catches.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to making a strong case for the influence of maritime activity on Somali society, Laitin and Samatar also draw attention to the *franco valuta*, a combination of currency fraud and smuggling which they contend represents a full-scale underground trading system. Laitin’s and Samatar’s work offers a useful perspective on the issue at hand.<sup>5</sup>

Another work of particular interest to the proposed topic of research is Abdi Ismail Samatar’s 1989 work *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884-1986*. In this work, Samatar holds that pre-colonial household-clan based pastoralism was undermined by increasing colonial and global demand for livestock exports. It is Samatar’s contention that prior to the imposition of colonial rule, Somali herders focused their efforts on use-value production, participating in the overseas trade only as a supplemental activity. However, as demand for meat

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2. David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 102.

3. *Ibid.*, 17-19, 95-113.

4. *Ibid.*, 113.

5. *Ibid.*, 17-19, 95-113.

rose in colonial Aden, so too did livestock prices. The result of this, according to Samatar, was a transition to market-oriented production – the commoditization of livestock. This transition, in Samatar’s view, had several repercussions. First, it resulted in a hands-off approach to colonial rule on the part of the British. Contented with the northern pastoralist’s willingness to participate in the livestock trade, British authorities made little effort to exert direct control over the Somali hinterland, and when they did, they did so through the mechanisms of clan authority.<sup>6</sup>

The consequences of this approach would be the preservation of the centrality of clan affiliation up to the present day. Another repercussion, according to Samatar, was that the transition to market-oriented production eroded pre-colonial methods of mitigating natural disasters such as pestilence and drought by encouraging the increase of livestock herds to unsustainable levels. He contends that by the 1930s, changes in the consumption habits of Somali nomads combined with an ever-increasing dependency on the profits derived from livestock sale led to the demise of the option to withdraw from the colonial-world economy. As herders found themselves increasingly entangled in the world market, Samatar argues that they also found themselves at the mercy of a new class in Somali society: the mercantile and bureaucratic class. This class, tracing its origins to the most successful traders and later to the successors to the colonial administration, monopolized the profits of the livestock trade without reinvesting in the productivity of Somali pastoralism. Thus, production rose without the benefit of greater efficiency, to the detriment of the environment of northern Somalia.<sup>7</sup>

Though not a book-length work, Ben Wisner’s “Living with the Somali Land, and Living Well,” originally composed in 1992 for a Geneva conference on the Somali crisis, addresses the

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6. Abdi Ismail Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia: 1884-1986* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 16-21, 41, 57, 80, 146-158.

7. *Ibid.*, 16-21, 41, 57, 80, 146-158.



influence of maritime activity on Somali society from a primarily ecological standpoint. Like A. I. Samatar, Wisner laments the impact of the commoditization of livestock citing overgrazing as well as an overreliance on cattle. In his words, “Commercial pressures have resulted in a change in the composition of herds. A comparison of 1944-1951 with 1973 shows that the ratio of camels to cattle decreased from 5.4:1 in the North and 1.4:1 in the South to only 1.8:1 in the North and 0.5:1 in the South. This change increased the risk of drought because it reduced the effectiveness of time-tested coping strategies such as mobility. Cattle are not only less resilient than camels and more dependent on a constant water supply, they are also less mobile.”<sup>8</sup> Also, like David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, he stresses the enormous potential of Somali coastal fisheries. However, he highlights the threat posed to this abundant maritime resource by illegal fishing operations. He cautions, “During 1992, there were alarming reports that in the vacuum created by the fall of the Barre regime – which meant the absence of a central government to enforce rights over territorial waters – fishing ships from as many as two dozen countries were plundering the maritime catch offshore.”<sup>9</sup>

Wisner draws attention to a further deleterious effect of foreign shipping on Somali society in contending that given that the Gulf of Aden sits astride the busiest tanker traffic on earth, oil pollution regularly degrades Somalia’s ecosystem – to the particular detriment of Somalia’s most vulnerable inhabitants. Lastly, Wisner argues that Somalia’s integration into the world economy, originating with the livestock trade, has led many Somali herdsmen to travel abroad in search of wage labor. In Wisner’s opinion, this loss of skilled pastoralists has resulted

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8. Ben Wisner, “Living With the Somali Land, and Living Well,” in *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*, ed. Ahmed I. Samatar (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1994), 46.

9. *Ibid.*, 52, 44-55.

in a further erosion of sustainable, traditional practices. This loss, according to Wisner, is hardly ameliorated by the remittances sent home by emigrant laborers.<sup>10</sup>

*The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship, and Death in Somalia*, written by Alice Bettis Hashim in 1997, makes use of Joel Migdal's model of "strong" and "weak" institutions in exploring the decline of Somalia's fortunes. Hashim argues that the link between Somali pastoral society and the urban maritime trade was well established before the onset of colonialism. She contends that in response to drought, Somali herders regularly engaged in the livestock trade in order to alleviate pressure upon the resources available to them. As she puts it, "... there is a close relationship between pastoralism and town life where nomads find sustenance during the dry season and drought."<sup>11</sup> This system, developed outside of the authority of any centralized power, has the potential to operate illicitly, as Hashim notes that, "Having for hundreds of years developed survival mechanisms independently of outside assistance, the Somali resist the pressures placed by centralized authority."<sup>12</sup>

Also, Hashim concurs with A. I. Samatar and Ben Wisner in arguing that the introduction, through colonialism, of Somali pastoral society to the global market led inexorably to the erosion of traditional institutions. As she words it, "In the process of transition from a largely pastoral society to a more settled agricultural and industrialized one, economic, social, and political problem-solving traditions have been emasculated but not replaced with viable alternatives."<sup>13</sup> This emasculation, according to Hashim, became apparent as Somalia embarked upon its post-colonial path. Specifically, Hashim argues that Somalis, faced with economic

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10. Ibid., 44-55.

11. Alice Bettis Hashim, *The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship, and Death in Somalia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 43.

12. Ibid., 44, xvi-xv, 43-53, 62-72.

13. Ibid., xvi.

stress and environmental insecurity, turned away from central government, which they perceived as a “weak” institution, and turned to what they perceived as “strong” – the clan system – to provide for their needs. This, she claims, resulted in the fractious, clan-based political “praetorianism” which doomed both the First and Second Republics. Thus, Hashim’s assessment suggests that centrifugal forces in Somali politics might be substantially linked to the vagueries of maritime commerce.<sup>14</sup>

Peter D. Little, in his 2003 work *Somalia: Economy Without State*, recognizes the role of maritime activity in Somali society. In addition, Little pays considerable attention to illicit activities and their role in securing the economic well-being of many Somalis. Though his examination generally does not extend back beyond the 1990s, Little’s work raises intriguing points. Central to his analysis is his argument that, “For some individuals the lack of government has provided opportunities to accumulate wealth, but for the majority it has been a matter of survival. With inconsistent and minimal international assistance, there were few options but to develop a ‘second economy’ based on cross-border trade and smuggling, informal finances, and a global system of remittances that has allowed the territory to maintain a level of economic welfare comparable to some of its neighbors.”<sup>15</sup>

Little traces this ‘second economy’ back beyond the collapse of the Barre regime, contending that, “Even prior to its collapse, Somalia on the domestic front operated more as an unofficial or ‘unconventional’ economy rather than an economy of wage earners, formal institutions, and legal contracts.”<sup>16</sup> State collapse, though certainly not benefiting all, has

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14. *Ibid.*, xvi-xv, 43-52, 62-72.

15. Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), xv, 7-14, 90-115.

16. *Ibid.*, 7.

provided considerable economic opportunities for some in Little's opinion. Little holds that one group, the purchasing agents of large overseas traders – sometimes referred to as *wakil* – has enjoyed such opportunities. He claims that as the fortunes of their large-scale maritime trading associates – called *ganacsato* in some areas – flagged, the *wakil* found themselves in an advantageous position. Combining access to considerable amounts of capital and direct relationships with Somali cattle raisers, these purchasing agents were able to consolidate their control over the Somali livestock market through informal channels. This consolidation, according to Little, was achieved at the expense of foreign shipping interests.<sup>17</sup>

Little further contends that economic collapse has not only shifted economic power amongst players in the 'second economy' but has also markedly increased the value of that economy. He cites across-the-board increases in cattle prices in the foreign markets of the region as evidence of this phenomenon. He goes further, citing the stifling effect which the Somali government had once had on the economy, "The Somali state controlled the only bank in the country in the 1980s, the Somali Commerce Bank, and imposed border controls and duty agents that did restrict some unofficial imports and exports. The government created an environment where formal commercial transactions were difficult even when they were pursued."<sup>18</sup> In fact, Little suggests that state collapse may have improved merchants' access to investment capital and financial services claiming, "The entrepreneur still has access to formal financial institutions, as was the case when a government existed. However, small traders can now utilize one of the

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17. *Ibid.*, 7-14, 90-115.

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

numerous informal facilities that recently have opened and, therefore, their access to banking services actually may have improved during the past decade.”<sup>19</sup>

Little does not, however, suggest that state collapse has led to complete economic deregulation. In fact, it is his contention that regulation has fallen into the hands of extralegal entities. He argues, “For the economic agent port fees to import and transport goods safely must still be paid, but instead of going to representatives of a central state the revenue is going to warlords, clan militias, or local administrations.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Little contends that in the absence of a Somali state, illicit economic activity has provided, at least to a limited extent, for Somalia’s economic needs. That the Somali shilling is still accepted throughout Somalia Little sees as a testament to the Somalis’ faith in this ‘second economy.’<sup>21</sup>

For the most part, the scholarship reviewed above touches upon the issue of the historical context of Somali piracy in a tertiary manner. While the scholarship is not entirely silent on the issue of the genesis of Somali piracy, there is a noticeable paucity of book-length research efforts on the topic. Full-length works thoroughly addressing Somali piracy and illicit maritime activity, like Martin N. Murphy’s *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World* or the *Somali Piracy Yearbook for 2008: A compendium of Seaborne Attacks, Rescues, and Analysis* from the editors of *The Mid-East Business Digest*, tend to do so from a current-events-oriented perspective. Thus, these works seek to address the strategic and economic interests of non-Somali actors, rather than the ramifications of the issue for Somali history and society.

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19. *Ibid.*, 9, 7-14, 90-115.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 7-14, 90-115.

This thesis represents an attempt to address this deficiency. While this work is of limited length, as is appropriate for a thesis, it is the author's belief that it contributes, in some small part, to a new and potentially fertile line of Somali scholarship. This it achieves through an investigation of the phenomenon of Somali piracy in the context of events dating back to the eighteenth century. Examining Somali piracy from a standpoint emphasizing historical depth and the relationship between cultural and economic change and contemporary phenomena in northern Somalia, this thesis is able to place Somali piracy within the context of the wider narrative of Somali maritime history. In doing so, it endeavors not only to foster a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, but also to help to begin the process of empowering policy makers to better address the issue of Somali piracy through that deeper understanding.

### **Outline of Chapters**

This work is divided into three chapters. The first of these addresses the pre-colonial and colonial periods. This chapter begins with an examination of the traditional relationship between inland herders, coastal fishing villages, and Red Sea and Indian Ocean merchants. This relationship revolved around a system of exchange which varied with the vagaries of the difficult northern Somali climate. Within this system, herders and fishing peoples regulated the distribution of labor within the region as well as the influx of foodstuffs and luxury goods into and the flow of livestock out of northern Somalia. Meanwhile, Red Sea and Indian Ocean merchants adapted their cargoes to meet the requirements of their Somali clientele. These interactions took place within the framework of the Somali clan system, a surprisingly robust and adaptable form of social organization which allowed for the flexibility critical to the nomad-fisherman-ocean merchant relationship.

Chapter one then proceeds to address the introduction of Western influence into northern Somalia – initially through the wrecking of European ships along the Somali coast. These wrecks, and the spoils they offered, provided ambitious Somali leaders with the wealth to attract and reward followers, a phenomenon which over time would lead to the emergence of a new social order. This social order was based upon patron-client relationships rather than on the interaction of various, security-oriented local interests.

With the establishment of Aden as a British coaling station across the Red Sea from northern Somalia, those who had established themselves as patrons over northern Somali society would begin to use their new-found wealth and influence to seize control of the livestock trade. No longer directly exposed to the threats of starvation and ruin, this nascent merchant class would compel their pastoral dependents to increase both livestock production and export. This expansion and “commoditization” of livestock production in northern Somalia undermined traditional safeguards against ecological disasters, increased the divide between rich and poor in the region, and led to increased violence as overgrazing led to conflicts over pasturage. Chapter one continues with an examination of the experience of the Majeerteen of northeastern Somalia, an experience illustrative of the phenomena described above.

Finally, Chapter one looks to the introduction of colonial rule into northern Somalia. During this period, the processes inaugurated by the introduction of a Western presence on the Red Sea were accelerated. This acceleration was primarily the result of three mechanisms. The first was the introduction of veterinary services and modern technologies, which allowed northern Somali herders to scale up their production to meet an ever increasing world demand. The second mechanism was the introduction of increased urbanization in the early twentieth century. This development expanded the segment of the population involved in government and

exchange rather than production with the effect that inland herders found their bargaining power further circumscribed. Additionally, those same herders were burdened with the support of this nonproductive class through taxes and rents. The third of these mechanisms was the exploitation, by colonial administrators, of clan politics in order to reduce the expense of governing Somalia. Dedicated to a cost-saving program of indirect rule, the colonizing powers favored some lineages with local authority and preferential treatment, inspiring jealousy and resentment in lineages not so favored – a situation which would lead to violent inter-clan rivalry.

Chapter two explores the period of the independent Somali state, 1960 to 1991. During this period, the Somali Republic, having inherited the economy and governmental structure of the old colonial regime, was obliged to continue the process of livestock overproduction for export, placing an ever increasing strain on the northern Somali ecosystem. As northern herds continued to expand and southern herds were driven across the North to access the more profitable northern ports, the land was pressed to capacity. The result was horrendous loss of life when famine struck in the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

Chapter two then moves on to address why the Republic was bound to the policies of the colonial past. The reasons were two-fold. First, the taxation system inherited from the colonial past was based largely upon indirect taxation, and therefore exports had to be encouraged in order to increase government revenues. Second, the powerful large-scale livestock trading class benefited from the old system and had firm control over the livestock trade – and by extension, much of the government's revenue stream. In fact, rather than reform, a system of informal exchange which took advantage of exchange rates and access to importing and exporting capabilities emerged. Referred to as the *franco valuta*, this system enriched government officials and big livestock traders at the expense of northern Somali pastoralists.



The analysis then turns to the role of the Somali clan system in the independence period. During the democratic period, 1960 to 1969, clan became a means of gathering support for a rapidly increasing number of candidates, each with his or her own clan- or sub-clan party. The result was political stagnation as politicians expended their efforts in endless squabbles for position and government largesse. As these squabbles proliferated, political stagnation exacerbated economic stagnation. Clan rivalry and government corruption culminated in the debacle that was the competition for the presidency following the assassination of newly appointed president Abdirashid Ali Shermaarke by a disaffected soldier from a rival sub-clan of the Majeerteen.

So disgusted was the Somali populace with the state of national politics, that calls for change became commonplace across Somalia. One *Somali News* correspondent even lamented the need for a “benevolent deity” to guide Somalia out of its morass of political clan rivalry. When the army and police intervened, seizing power in a bloodless coup on October 21, 1969, many believed that they had found their “benevolent deity” in the person of Mohamed Siad Barre. The highest ranking military officer in Somalia at the time, General Barre assumed leadership over the Supreme Revolutionary Council, the coordinating body for the coup forces. Appealing to popular sympathies through references to the poetry of Sayyid Mohamed, Barre accused politicians of “*musuq maasuq*,” or “going in different directions at the same time,” and launched a campaign of *hisaabi hil male* – an “accounting [of theft by government officials] without shame.” Barre’s populist orientation and pan-clannist message appealed to a broad stratum of Somali society, securing substantial initial support for his dictatorial regime.<sup>22</sup>

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22. Laitin and Samatar, 77.

During the dictatorship of Siad Barre, spanning from 1969 to 1991, an alliance of the Darood, Ogadeni, and Majeerteen clans served as the power base for autocratic rule. Despite his claims that he sought to eradicate the divisiveness of clan sympathies, Barre relied ever more heavily on clan support to prop up his regime – eventually narrowing his favor to his own lineage, the Marehan.

The failure in the late 1970s to take the Ogaden from Ethiopia proved a devastating blow for the Barre regime. As the clans, one by one, grew hostile to the military regime, they armed themselves with weapons that had flooded the black market due to the war. Soon, Barre was toppled and clan rivalry exploded into the most widespread bloodshed Somalia had ever seen.

Chapter two ends with a look at new developments during the independence period. One such development was the refugee problem. Following Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden, close to one million refugees fled across the border from vengeful Ethiopian authorities. The resultant humanitarian crisis put even more population pressure on northern Somalia. Another development, which resulted from the refugee crisis, was the encouragement by the Barre regime of coastal fishing enterprises as a safeguard against famine. Though the regime failed to convert pastoralists into full time fishermen, northern Somalis retained the fisherman's equipment and skill set and resorted to them in times of scarcity – such as the chaos that followed 1991.

Chapter three begins with an examination of much of the northern Somali population's dependency on maritime resources for survival following the collapse of the Barre regime. It moves on to explore the threat posed to those resources by the illegal activities of foreign vessels in Somali waters. Taking advantage of the lawlessness that predominated in Somalia, foreign

ships looted Somalia's fisheries and used Somali waters as a cheap dumping ground for toxic chemicals, including radioactive waste.

In response, coastal Somalis armed themselves and began to launch retaliatory attacks against foreign vessels, "taxing" the crews for their illegal activities. As time went on, however, these Somalis realized the potential profitability of ransoming vessels and crews. The now familiar phenomenon of Somali piracy was born.

Chapter three continues, examining the evolution of pirate tactics from small skiff raids not extending more than fifty nautical miles from shore to high seas operations involving the use of hijacked "mother ships." These tactical changes resulted in a substantial increase in the range and frequency of pirate attacks. The international response to these tactics has been largely ineffective in containing Somali piracy.

Chapter three then explores the nature of Somali piracy. It is argued that Somali piracy is, in fact, organized around the Somali clan system in its more violent, contemporary form. Lineage groups, some already organized and experienced as militias, serve almost as ready-made piracy cells, awaiting only recruitment by an influential kinsman.

Chapter three concludes with a look at the impact of piracy. It is held that piracy presents considerable costs to the world's navies, to international shipping, and to regional maritime interests. In northern Somalia, piracy has meant some recovery for Somalia's fisheries as foreign trawlers have been chased off as well as the emergence of pirate boomtowns and never before available amenities. On the other hand, piracy has also caused inflation which has been devastating to those not involved in piracy and has also left many Somali fishermen afraid to venture out to sea lest they be mistaken for pirates. Furthermore, many Somalis condemn piracy

as immoral and blame it for the introduction of drugs, alcohol, and prostitution into many communities.

### **A Word on Source Material**

Before embarking upon this historical analysis of piracy in northern Somalia, a few words on the source material employed in this thesis are appropriate. Two points, in particular, merit special attention. The first of these is the heavy reliance upon secondary source material evident in the first and second chapters. This reflects a conscious decision on the part of the author, as an analysis of Somali cultural and economic history extending back to the late eighteenth century would exceed the limitations of a thesis-length work. Such an analysis, however, is necessary to any effort to place Somali piracy into an historical context. Therefore, this paper relies upon the work of prominent scholars in the field of Somali studies to supplement its examination of Somali history prior to 1991, particularly in reference to the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

The second point which merits consideration is the nature of the primary source material employed in this work. Unfortunately, given the nature of the current conflict in Somalia, it is exceptionally difficult to gather evidence from within Somalia itself. As a result, little of the primary source material utilized in this thesis originates with Somalis themselves. Instead, the primary sources utilized in this work tend to include materials gathered from journalistic and information-gathering organizations based outside of Somalia. As this threatens to exclude the voices of northern Somalis from the examination, the author has made an effort to reconstruct that voice, where possible, through journalists' recordings of Somalis' statements as well as through the consideration of the motives and viewpoints of various outside sources. Such an approach carries with it certain unavoidable limitations, but despite these, it is the author's belief

that this analysis nonetheless provides a considered and reasonably balanced look at piracy in northern Somalia.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Somalis and the Sea before the advent of European Influence**

Prior to the increase in Western influence which accompanied the rise of European shipping in the Red Sea and the eventual seizure of Aden by a British expeditionary force in 1839, the people of northern Somalia had a relationship with the sea which had evolved over centuries of Somali presence. This relationship, having been forged over generations by the residents of the northwestern Horn of Africa, was adapted to address the vagaries of the region's climate and terrain. Arid, largely barren, and subject to perennial drought, northern Somalia presents a considerable challenge to any would-be inhabitants. To address this challenge, Somalis adopted a system of production and exchange which linked inland herders, coastal Somalis, and foreign maritime traders and enhanced the resilience of all three groups in the face of recurring ecological hardship.<sup>23</sup>

In times of relatively plentiful rainfall, the nomadic inhabitants of the interior traded surplus livestock from their swollen herds to the Somalis of the coastal towns. The townspeople, in turn, traded these livestock to Red Sea merchants – largely Indian and Arab – primarily for consumption on the Arabian Peninsula. In exchange for the cattle, camels, sheep, and goats of the interior, the coastal dwellers supplied salt and other oceanic products as well as locally produced dates and palm matting. More significantly, the coastal peoples also imported various

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23. Hashim, 42-43; Wayne K. Durrill, "Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884," *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 289.

luxury goods – such as coffee, tobacco, cloth, and sugar – which the herders of the interior were eager to obtain.<sup>24</sup>

Sufficient rainfall was not the norm in northern Somalia, however. The region which would constitute British Somaliland is arguably the most forbidding in Somalia. As Alice Bettis Hashim points out in her work *The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship and Death in Somalia*, “Even in the riverine areas of the South rainfall insufficiency causes crop failure two years out of five.”<sup>25</sup> Many regions of the North receive an annual precipitation of less than four inches per year, and only a few particularly blessed areas of the highlands receive significantly more.<sup>26</sup>

In these more challenging times, the trading relationship between Somali herders, coastal Somalis, and Indian Ocean merchants adjusted to meet the needs of each group. Faced with shortages of water and suitable pasture, inland nomads traveled ever more widely to sustain their herds, regularly ranging as far as the Ogadeen in modern western Ethiopia. Under all but the direst of circumstances, Somali nomads sought to preserve their herds during drought, and thus refused to trade their animals towards the coast. Charles Cruttenden, a British official at Aden in charge of the Somali trade, illustrated this phenomenon in the dry year of 1843 when he complained that in September, which is late in the hot season, he was obliged to send men on a three-day journey into the interior to locate willing sellers of cattle. Instead, Somali herders took advantage of the increased mobility which came with their expanded search for pasture by collecting alternative trade goods which could be gathered across the region. Foremost among

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24. Hashim, 43; Durrill, 291.

25. Hashim, 43.

26. I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961; reprint, Oxford: James Curry Publishers, 1999), 31.

these were ghee, skins, gum arabic, incense, ostrich feathers, and ivory. In order to further alleviate the trade imbalance resulting from the decrease in livestock sale, hard-pressed Somali herders also reduced their consumption of luxury goods. For example, Cruttenden reported in 1843 that inland Somalis significantly reduced their consumption of coffee. He quotes them as arguing, “If we drink coffee once, we shall want it again, and where are we to get it from?”<sup>27</sup>

The Somalis of the coastal towns, in their turn, modified their economic activities to suit climatic conditions as well. Due to the brackish nature of much of the water supply along the Somali coast, long portages from higher ground were often necessary to meet the water needs of the townspeople, resulting in a constant demand for labor. Periods of drought exacerbated this demand, as the distance traveled to obtain potable water could be dramatically increased. Thus during dry periods, Coastal dwellers would employ Somalis from the hinterland in water portage and other fields. This not only served to meet the demand for labor amongst the coastal communities, but it also allowed Somali herdsman to deposit weaker or less travel-worthy members of their extended families at the coast, reducing the strain on their herds and permitting the herders to range further in search of pasture and trade goods than would otherwise have been possible. Additionally, in response to the decreased demand for luxury goods in the interior, coastal Somalis would shift their trading emphasis towards foodstuffs such as dates, rice, and sorghum. These would be obtained from Indian and Arab merchants who had altered their cargoes in response to conditions on the Somali coast.<sup>28</sup>

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27. Charles Cruttenden, “Report on the Mijjertheyn,” quoted in Wayne K. Durrill, “Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 292; Samatar, 27; Hashim, 43; Durrill, 291-292.

28. Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Restructuring the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 60-64; Hashim, 43; Durrill, 289-292.

## The Somali Clans

This delicately balanced relationship between Somalis, their environment, and the sea was regulated primarily through a complex web of relationships between lineage groups derived theoretically from agnatic descent – the Somali clan system. At the top of this system lay the mythical ancestors from which all Somalis were said to descend, Sab and Samaale, and deriving from these founders were the great Somali clan families: Digil, Dir, Rahanweyn, Daarood, Hawiye, and Isaaq. These were further divided into sub-clans. Those of northern Somalia consisted of the Issa and the Gadabursi, (sub-clans of the Dir); the Iidagale, the Habar Yoonis, the Habar Awal, the Habar Tol Jaalo, and the Habar Jaalo, (sub-clans of the Isaaq); and the Warsangeli, the Dulbahante, and the Majeerteen, (subclans of the Daarood). These groups were further subdivided down to the level of the *jibil*, the extended family group responsible for the payment of *dia*, or “blood debt,” in the event of disputes or feuds with other groups. The *jibil*, tracing shared lineage back four to six generations, represented the basic unit of production in traditional Somali society.<sup>29</sup>

In the absence of any central government authority, the Somali clan system represented the central idiom within which all Somali political and social interactions played out. So much was this the case that the famed anthropologist I. M. Lewis noted of the northern Somalis over 100 years after the introduction of European influence, “By reference to his ancestors, a man’s relations with others are defined, and his position in Somali society as a whole determined. Thus an understanding of the political relations between groups requires a knowledge of their genealogical relationships. As Somalis themselves put it, what a person’s address is in Europe, his genealogy is in Somaliland. By virtue of his genealogy of birth, each individual has an exact

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29. Laitin and Samatar, 33; Abdalla Omar Mansur, “The Nature of the Somali Clan System,” in *The Invention of Somalia*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 117; Samatar, 24-29.



place in society and within a very wide range of agnatic kinship it is possible for each person to trace his precise connection with everyone else.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, clan affiliation provided a ready-made framework which allowed nomadic and coastal Somalis to navigate their relationships with each other as well as their environment with relative ease and without recourse to central authority. As Lewis puts it, “Few societies can so conspicuously lack the judicial, administrative, and political procedures which lie at the heart of the western conception of government. The traditional northern Somali political system has no chiefs to run it and no formal judiciary to control it. Men are divided amongst political units without any administrative hierarchy of officials and with no instituted positions of leadership to direct their affairs. Yet, although they thus lack to a remarkable degree all the machinery of centralized government, they are not without government or political institutions.”<sup>31</sup> Genealogy provided northern Somalis with the benefits of these institutions.

In addition to regulating interactions between Somalis, the clan system also provided a basic element of stability and security in the *jibil*. Though agnatic descent offered a guiding principle in Somali interactions, it was a very flexible principle even in the best of times. As Cassanelli points out, “The effective unit of social and political cooperation in precolonial Somalia varied according to circumstances. A man might identify with his entire clan when its wells or grazing land were threatened by another clan but act on behalf of his own lineage or di-paying group in a feud within the clan over access to dry season grazing reserves.”<sup>32</sup> Faced with the vagaries of climate and clan politics, the northern Somali could always rely on the *jibil* for economic support and security – particularly amongst the majority nomadic population. For the

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30. Lewis, 2.

31. Lewis, 1.

32. Cassanelli, 21.

Somali herder, the nuclear family simply could not meet the labor requirements necessary for survival on the harsh terrain of the northeastern Horn of Africa. Thus, herders traveled and lived amongst their *jibil*. These closely related nuclear families usually cohabitated in a communal kraal called a *reer* in Somali. This multifamily political, social, and economic arrangement allowed herders to take advantage of an expanded labor pool in addressing needs which could not be met by individual families, such as well digging and the defense and movement of herds. Likewise, in the more sedentary coastal areas, the *jibil* provided Somalis with added security as well as an enhanced ability to raise capital for trade. Indeed, the *dia*-paying group constituted the basic social, political, and economic unit in northern Somali society, and by encouraging a cooperative approach to subsistence and trade, fostered a “safety-first outlook” which insured relative stability in times of hardship or drought.<sup>33</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar states the case well in his 1989 work, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884-1986*, arguing that, “... the *dia*-paying group was the anchor in a sea of continuously shifting political loyalties.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, mutual assistance at the *jibil* level was a cardinal principle in northern Somali society and proved sufficient to mediate petty conflict, manage the exploitation of nature, and mitigate personal and natural disaster in most cases.<sup>35</sup>

The Somali clan system had been in place for several centuries before the arrival of Western observers. It is first attested in Zeila’ Shibaab ad-Din’s *Futuuh al-Habasha*, or “History of the Conquest of Abyssinia,” written at some point between 1540 and 1560. The *Futuuh* offers

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33. Samatar, 24.

34. Samatar, 29.

35. Samatar, 16-29; Hashim, 38.

a vivid account of the behavior of Somali warriors on campaign against the Kingdom of Ethiopia and thus a tantalizing first glimpse into Somali clan interaction.<sup>36</sup>

It is the nature of this interaction which allowed nomads, coastal dwellers, and high-seas merchants to interact effectively in adapting to the climate of northern Somalia. More specifically, within the Somali clan system were instruments allowing Somalis to reap benefits beyond the simple security provided by membership in a particular lineage group. Three major institutions stand out amongst these. The first of these institutions is *heer*. *Heer* was a contractual agreement between two parties which solidified kinship bonds, established new bonds beyond kinship, or established new political or economic relationships. *Heer*, roughly translating to agreement, contract, or treaty, was entered into freely by Somali parties, regardless of genealogical affiliation. The terms of *heer* were binding on each group involved and were generally inherited by the descendants of the signatory groups. However, the terms of this social contract could be modified or rescinded to suit the changing needs of the groups involved. Though most often used as a means of ensuring cooperation in defense, *heer* was capable of regulating a variety of social and economic interactions. Thus, the inhabitants of northern Somalia were equipped with a flexible means of providing themselves with standards of inter-group justice and compensation, collective defense, trading contacts, and security in the transport of goods to and from the coastal ports. It is not without reason that Alice Bettis Hashim, in her work *The Fallen State*, refers to *heer*, along with *tol*, (the solidarity derived from membership in a lineage group), as the cement which binds the clan system and provides social cohesion to northern Somalia. Indeed, Lewis contends, “Contract [meaning *heer*] is by extension the basis of

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36. Lewis, 15-16.

customary practice in general, and Somali political and legal relationships represent a marriage of lineage status and contract.<sup>37</sup>

The second of these institutions is *sheegad*. Deriving from the verb ‘to say’ or ‘to tell,’ *shegaad* effectively represents a patron-client relationship between two lineage groups. Though client status was generally sought only as a last resort, *sheegad* could often serve to enhance the wealth and survivability of both groups. Most commonly, client status was sought by hard-pressed groups seeking to contract for the use of water or grazing lands controlled by more powerful lineages during drought or the dry season. *Sheegad* could, however, have more significant and lasting implications for the groups involved, as it forged lasting connections between otherwise unrelated groups. These connections often led to new or enhanced trading relationships and even, at times, led to the incorporation of one group into another. Thus, particularly in times of difficulty, *sheegad* increased contacts amongst potential trading partners and mitigated the competition for limited resources.<sup>38</sup>

The third major institution which facilitated the interaction of inland Somalis, those of the coast, and foreign merchants was the contracting of *abaans*. An *abaaan* was a guide, generally hailing from the coastal lineages, who escorted caravans from the interior in exchange for a commission on the value of the merchandise transported. Though the territory through which the caravan passed was not usually under the control of the lineage group of the *abaaan*, the lineage group of the *abaaan* guaranteed the safety of the caravan through the threat of retaliatory action against would-be attackers. *Abaans* further served as brokers for inland caravans upon their

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37. Lewis, 299; Hashim, 35.

38. Bernard Helander, “The Hubeer in the Land of Plenty: Land, Labor, and Vulnerability Among a Southern Somali Clan,” in *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*, ed. Catherine Besteman and Lee V. Cassanelli (London: HAAN Publishing, 1996), 50; Hashim, 43.

arrival in the coastal towns, capitalizing on their often exclusive access to their clan's *suuq*, or market. The use of *abaans* proved vital in maintaining trade links in an acephalous and often turbulent society such as that of pre-colonial northern Somalia. In fact, the use of *abaans* allowed Somalis to effectively conduct the inland trade without any significant intervention from outside interests – so much so that Sir Richard Burton, during his travels in the region during the 1850s, made no mention of foreign merchants in the interior and specifically indicated that Somalis transported their own goods to the coast.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to these three institutions, the lineage system itself incorporated a degree of flexibility which allowed for cross-regional exchange and adaptation to ecological challenges. In “The Nature of the Somali Clan System,” Abdalla Omar Mansur explores the genealogical claims of the Somali clans. As a result of this exploration, Mansur not only rejects the validity of the more mythical Somali ancestry, but he also calls into question the reality of more immediate blood ties amongst kinsmen. Mansur argues that, “... what emerges from such analysis is that Somali clan structure typically is not based on blood relationship, but rather it is a fruit of nomadic pastoral life. The necessity of defense and the movement to new territory necessitated by a constant search for pasture and water have resulted over time in the formation of new alliances and, later, new clan identities.”<sup>40</sup> Thus Somalis, in their struggles for survival and ascendancy, have long tolerated and even welcomed the fission and fusion of lineage-groups as well as the incorporation of outsiders to Somali society into the clan system. In this light, lineage appears as more a social construct than a genetic reality in Somali culture – a construct adapted to the social and climatic conditions faced by pre-colonial Somalis. In fact, though lineage was ubiquitous in Somali society, its impact on social relations could vary depending on

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39. Hashim, 43-44; Samatar, 27-28.

40. Mansur, “The Nature of the Somali Clan System,” 122.

the level of economic stress or environmental insecurity faced by Somalis. In short, lineage served as a tool, not a constraint, in the effort to survive and prosper in northern Somalia.<sup>41</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to portray the society of pre-colonial northern Somalia in a utopian light. To do so would be to cater to the stereotype of the “noble savage” which is all too often applied to traditional societies. Northern Somali society had its shortcomings before the arrival of western influence. Foremost among these was a considerable propensity towards violence. In fact, northern Somali males were divided into only two classes: *wadaad*, or men of religion, and *waranleh*, literally “spear-bearers.” Indeed, Mansur, citing the poetry of the Somali nomads, notes, “Looting other people’s camels is not an illegal act for the Somali pastoralist. On the contrary, he regards the seizing of another’s camel(s) as a source of honor and pride (although it is forbidden by Islam).”<sup>42</sup> Despite even the institution of the *shir*, an assembly of adult males convened to mitigate disputes, the resort to violence remained endemic to northern Somalia, so much so that even in the 1960s, long after the imposition of centralized government, I. M. Lewis could not recount how many internecine conflicts he had been witness to during his twenty month stay in the region. Traditional Somali society simply could not escape the fact that all obligations between individuals or groups, be they genealogically or contractually derived, were guaranteed by the threat of force alone. As Lewis contends, “Political ascendancy is not conferred by or symbolized in mystical ties to the earth but derives from superior fighting potential. In Somali lineage politics the assumption that might is right has overwhelming authority and personal rights, rights in livestock, and rights of access to grazing and water, even if they are not always obtained by force, can only be defended against usurpation by force-of-

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41. Hashim, 72.

42. Abdalla Omar Mansur, “Contrary to a Nation: The Cancer of the Somali State,” in *The Invention of Somalia*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 109.

arms.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, in a society where martial enterprise was considered the proper pursuit of men, social, political, and economic status rested ultimately upon a group’s military capability. Under such circumstances, violence remained an unavoidable component of day-to-day life in northern Somalia.<sup>44</sup>

Despite their limitations, the traditional institutions which mediated the interaction between Somalis and the sea served their purpose well. These well established relationships between inland pastoralists, coastal townspeople, and Red Sea merchants profited all parties while avoiding the dangerous overexploitation of the delicate environment of northern Somalia and limiting conflict to sustainable levels. As European, and particularly British, interests began to penetrate into the region, this situation would be altered dramatically.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Introduction of European Influence and Its Consequences**

The European entry into the political and economic life of northern Somalia began in the eighteenth century and increased steadily from that point onward. As the trade with India became increasingly important to European, most notably British, mercantile interests, western shipping through the Red Sea increased dramatically. As these vessels plied the treacherous waters off the coast of northern Somalia, many were wrecked upon the rocky coastline. By 1878 Georges Révoil, a visitor to Bandar Qassim – modern Bosaso – could report that no less than six ships had foundered off the coast of that region in the previous season alone. Somalis of the

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43. Lewis, 3.

44. Mansur, “Contrary to a Nation,” 111; Hashim, 35-36; Lewis, 3, 28-29.

45. Samatar, 16.

region thus entered into a violent competition for the spoils of these distressed vessels. To the victors in this struggle went not merely wealth, but also the ability to reward supporters.<sup>46</sup>

Over time, these victors established a new order in northern Somalia based upon patron-client relationships rather than the traditional system of free exchange between decidedly local interests. The new ruling elite which sat at the top of this hierarchical structure were decidedly mercantile in outlook, and therefore cared little for maintaining the “safety-first” outlook which had previously safeguarded the subsistence of Somalis as they had engaged in trade toward the coast. As the frequency of these wrecks increased, their impact on the carefully balanced relationship between coastal and inland Somalis and foreign merchants became ever more apparent – ultimately resulting in the establishment of two centralized sultanates, the privatization of much of the natural wealth of northern Somalia, the reduction of the majority of the region’s population to the status of clients and debtors, and a dramatic increase in violence amongst competing nomadic groups in search of pasture for their ever increasing herds.<sup>47</sup>

In 1839, British involvement in the Red Sea market increased dramatically. In a move to secure a faster and more secure route from the Mediterranean to India and also in the interests of establishing a monitoring station to check the ambitions of Mohammad Ali of Egypt, the government at Bombay dispatched a detachment of royal marines to South Arabia to seize the port of Aden from the Sultan of Lahej. Situated at the halfway point between Suez and India, Aden was ideally situated to replenish steamers which could not possibly carry enough coal for the lengthy journey. Soon, Aden was host to over 3,000 vessels annually, carrying more than

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46. Lidwien Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, “From Slaves to Coolies: Two Documents from the Nineteenth-Century Somali Coast,” *Sudanic Africa* 3 (1992), 2-3; Durrill, 289-306.

47. Kapteijns and Spaulding, 2-3; Durrill, 289-306; Samatar, 24.



£4,000,000 in trade goods. Aden rapidly became indispensable to the security of not only British India, but also Britain's more far flung possessions such as Australia and the East Indies.<sup>48</sup>

Ensuring a reliable food supply for the growing population of Aden proved to be a challenge for the British administration. The hinterland of Aden was host to constant tribal conflict as well as fierce rivalry between Turkish and Arab interests. Thus, the authorities had to look elsewhere for stable suppliers. Most British officials rejected long distance shipping schemes based upon refrigeration as uneconomical and impractical. Instead, under the leadership of Major-General T. F. Hobday, Commissioner-in-Chief of the Indian Army, the British pursued a policy of livestock importation from northern Somalia.<sup>49</sup>

The northern Somalis had been exporting livestock to Arabia long before the arrival of the British. Indeed, the northern ports of Zeila, Berbera, Bulhar, and Tajura had a long history of trade with Aden. The rise of demand associated with the British occupation, however, expanded this trade to unprecedented levels. As this vital strategic outpost was completely reliant upon Somali beef and mutton for its survival, the British eagerly sought to secure and expand commercial ties to the Somali coast. As northern Somalia was now dominated by a merchant elite with firm control over production through a system of patronage, these British efforts were richly rewarded. During the 1875-1876 trading season, Berbera alone exported some 65,000 sheep and 1,000 cattle.<sup>50</sup>

This tremendous increase in exports, however, had serious implications for northern Somalia. As large-scale Somali traders seized control of the livestock trade, pastoralists were

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48. Patwardhan, Dileep, "Imperialism by Proxy: Aden and Somaliland Under British Indian Rule, 1839-98," *Indica* (1981), 105-108.

49. *Ibid.*, 109, 117-119.

50. Samatar, 27; Patwardhan, 110.

driven further and further into clientage and debt. In this way, wealth became accumulated in ever fewer hands. Somali producers, deprived of their traditional protections and bargaining power, became hopelessly dependent upon the export market for their livelihood. In short, they had lost the ability to “opt out” of the coastal trade when environmental circumstances so dictated. Because this dependency was coupled with the imposition of undervalued prices by the dominant merchant class, northern Somali herders were driven to increase their herds substantially in order to make a living. The result was a severe overpopulation of livestock in the region. This overpopulation led a rise in violence between herding groups as nomads vied for access to limited resources in water and pasturage. Worst of all, the depletion of northern Somalia’s scarce natural resources by the pastoralists’ swollen herds led to horrendous outbreaks of famine – particularly in the dry second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

Effectively, the introduction of European influence into the northern Somali coastal trading system resulted in a massive socio-economic transformation. As Somalis were inexorably drawn into the global market, traditional safeguards against overexploitation of the environment were undermined and class divisions began to overshadow distinctions of lineage amongst Somalis. In sum, the institutions which had governed the relationship between northern Somalia and the sea were thoroughly emasculated. In their place arose a system more suited to serving the interests of the British and the new Somali elite than to providing for the subsistence and security of the majority of Somalis.<sup>52</sup>

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51. Durrill, 301; Samatar, 17, 81; Hashim, xvi, 7.

52. Samatar, 17; Hashim, xvi, 30.

## **The Case of the Majeerteen**

The experience of the Majeerteen of northwestern Somalia, as presented by Wayne K. Durrill in his article “Atrocious Misery: The African Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” is particularly illustrative of not only the effectiveness of the native Somali relationship with the sea in ensuring stability, but also of the deleterious effects of western influence upon this relationship.

The Majeerteen, numbering between twenty and thirty thousand members, consisted of three major lineages: the ‘Ise Mahamuud, the ‘Umar Mahamuud, and the ‘Ismaan Mahamuud. In addition to these, two more distantly related lineages, the ‘Ali Suleymaan and the Siwakron, also lived amongst the Majeerteen. While the three primary lineages of the Majeerteen occupied a 150 by 400 mile inland strip of rocky, arid terrain, the ‘Ali Suleymaan and the Siwakron were situated along the northwest coast near Cape Guardafui. Majeerteen territory could be divided into three distinct ecological zones. The interior-most of these was the Haud, a dry upland region of hills and plains for the most part suitable only for camel and goat pastoralism. In this region, drinking water was largely unavailable and ground moisture was sufficient only to grow grass in crescent-shaped patches. Parallel to the coastline lay a zone of marble cliffs and hills. Rock crevices in this region provided a particularly amenable environment for valuable acacia trees, from which Majeerteen nomads extracted high-quality frankincense and gum arabic for trade during the dry season. The third ecological zone consisted of the coastal region, which provided its inhabitants with fish and oceanic products, palm leaves for matting, dates, and a fruit stone useful for the production of coarse bread. In addition to these resources, the coastal zone was blessed with grassy uplands which provided fodder for herds as well as opportunities for wild game hunting. The coastal Majeerteen generally resided on coastal islands surrounded by

salt marshes. While these islands offered the advantages of safe harbors for fishing vessels and enhanced defensive capabilities, the salty water table necessitated the acquisition of drinking water from higher ground, often requiring a portage of several miles.<sup>53</sup>

In order to negotiate the challenges presented by this arid and unforgiving region, Majeerteen herders and fishermen formed a relationship which took advantage of the unique characteristics and capabilities of each group. During the shorter hot season of *hagaa*, which lasted from June or July until November, Majeerteen herders dispersed their livestock over the Haud, traveling from one clan-controlled well to the next in order to avoid overtaxing pasture and water supplies. As the northeast monsoons ushered in the sporadic *dayr* rains in September or October, the herders descended into the lower plains, where they fattened their herds on the regenerated grasses. The Majeerteen herders subsisted primarily upon milk during these times, but as the main dry season, the *jiilaal*, set in the herders' livestock ceased to produce milk. Thus, the inland Majeerteen moved towards the coastal region where they harvested frankincense and gum from the hills and pasture and watered their herders on the comparatively well-watered coastal uplands. The coastal Majeerteen, meanwhile, imported foodstuffs, particularly Indian rice, as well as luxury goods in order to exchange for the herders' incense and gum which they exported, in turn, to Indian Ocean merchants. Additionally, the coastal fishermen exchanged the use of their herds and acacia trees for nomadic labor, which helped to offset the dearth of labor created by increased water-portage distances caused by the dry season. Finally, the coastal dwellers provided *abaans* for Indian Ocean merchants and Majeerteen herders alike.<sup>54</sup>

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53. Durrill, 290-292.

54. Lewis, 37; Durrill, 289-292.

In plentiful years, Majeerteen pastoralists additionally sold surplus livestock to coastal dwellers for consumption in Arabia in exchange for imported luxury goods. In harder times, however, pastoralists and coastal dwellers alike reduced their consumption of luxury items, and the herders withheld their livestock from the market, instead dispersing their herds over wider areas in an attempt to minimize their losses and establish a firm foundation for recovery. So effective was this system of exchange in securing the livelihoods of the Majeerteen that when between 1840 and 1843 drought conditions were so severe as to permit only a single appreciable crop of gum, British official Charles Crittenden, on the ground at the time, reported no evidence of starvation. On the contrary, Crittenden described seeing “fat” sheep in immense flocks and “large droves of horned cattle.”<sup>55</sup> Further, Crittenden observed that the Majeerteen frequently supplemented their diets with fresh meat – the spoils of antelope hunts. Thus, the adaptations of Majeerteen society served not only to preserve their herds, but also to safeguard the productivity of their environment.<sup>56</sup>

Majeerteen economy and society were presided over by decidedly local interests. Leaders generally did not wield power at any level significantly higher than that of the *jibil*. Though higher agnatic affiliations did exist amongst the Majeerteen, as amongst all Somalis, significant coordination at the level of sub-clan, clan, or clan confederation – the Majeerteen were amongst the members of the Harti clan confederation – was extremely rare. Thus, the Majeerteen interacted with their environment with a particular focus on local economies and

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55. Charles Cruttenden, “Report on the Mijjertheyn,” quoted in Wayne K. Durrill, “Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 293.

56. Durrill, 292-293.

sustainable subsistence. This situation would be drastically altered by the arrival of western influence in the region.<sup>57</sup>

On June 7, 1801 the British East India Company frigate *Weisshelm* ran too close to the Majeerteen coast en route from India to Egypt. The vessel ran afoul of two boulders, spitting in two and wedging between them. The crew, left stranded on shore near the promontory of Ras Haafuun, was quickly set upon by ‘Ismaan Mahamuud warriors. Though bloodied, most of the crew managed to escape to a passing friendly vessel. The *Weisshelm*, however, was plundered by the Majeerteen warriors – its cargo to be distributed amongst the ‘Ismaan and their supporters.<sup>58</sup>

This was not the first European vessel to run aground on the Majeerteen coast, nor would it by any means be the last. In fact, the Majeerteen were uniquely situated to receive shipwrecks along their coast. Durrill explains this phenomenon as follows, “These wrecks were caused by strong currents that swept northward in July and August at seven to eight knots off the Somali coast. The currents flowed northeast to Ras Haafuun where they turned directly east, forming on the current’s backside an enormous whirlpool rotating counterclockwise toward the shore. Ships caught in the whirlpool were carried westward to the rocky coast between Ras Hafuun and ‘Alula on the point of the Horn.”<sup>59</sup> In an era when the calculation of longitude was difficult and in some cases impossible, this hazard placed shipping passing through the Red Sea at considerable risk. Thus, in a curious parallel to more recent events, the Majeerteen – and Somalis

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57. *Ibid.*, 290-291.

58. *Ibid.*, 287.

59. *Ibid.*, 287-288.

in general – became infamous amongst Africans for systematically preying upon vessels in distress.<sup>60</sup>

The windfall which came from the exploitation of European wrecks began to affect Majeerteen society from the very beginning of significant European shipping on the Red Sea in the eighteenth century. As treacherous currents drew vessels into the rocky coast, Majeerteen bands competed to plunder their cargoes. Those “chiefs” who proved successful then supervised the sale of the captured goods, usually to Arab merchants, and then distributed a portion of the proceeds to their kinsmen in exchange for claims to labor, water, and pasturage. In this way, certain Majeerteen strongmen rose above the normally egalitarian social structure of northern Somalia, forging a new, hierarchical political organization based upon relationships of patronage. By 1800, two to three wrecks per season were expected along the Majeerteen coast, an amount fully adequate to cement the position of the new Majeerteen ruling class. By the early 1840s, the ‘Ismaan Mahamuud emerged as the victors in the scramble for control of the plunder of European vessels. Employing their exclusive access to this extremely profitable resource, the ‘Ismaan imposed their authority over the other lineages, uniting the Majeerteen under the rule of Sultan Nur-bin-‘Ismaan. Thus was formed the only sultanate in northern Somalia.<sup>61</sup>

As the ‘Ismaan Sultanate extended its authority over the Majeerteen country, the ruling elite placed an ever greater emphasis on the acquisition of the European wealth which could be won from the sea. This emphasis was accompanied by a dramatic increase in European shipping on the Red Sea, as the British occupied Aden and assured that sea lane’s role as the primary artery of British trade with India. From 1839 on, British shipping – and thus shipwrecks –

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60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 289-290.

increased dramatically off the Majeerteen coast. Such was the frequency of Majeerteen predation of distressed British vessels that, in exchange for the protection of *abaans* for shipwreck survivors, officials at Aden were willing to provide the ‘Ismaan Sultan with an annual annuity of 360 Maria Theresa thalers, salvage rights to ships’ cargoes, and exclusive trading rights in livestock for the Sultan’s merchants. Indeed, the Sultanate had become so fixated upon the acquisition of European salvage that in 1878 Charles Graves, an American visitor to the region, wrote, “A priest is stationed in the mountains near Cape Guardafui who prays day and night that God will drive Christian vessels ashore that they may plunder them! This was told me by the Chief of Hunda who regarded it as a very prudent, proper, and pious precaution – he thinking I was a Moslem.”<sup>62</sup>

The increasing centralization of Majeerteen society combined with an unequal but increasing general prosperity brought on by the influx of foreign wealth from European wrecks to provide the ‘Ismaan Sultans with both the means and popular support to vigorously pursue commerce with Aden. This they did with considerably alacrity. Along the coast, Nur-Bin-‘Ismaan and his successors actively challenged Indian and Arab merchants for control of the trade to Arabia. To this end, the Majeerteen took advantage of new competition brought to the region by British, French, and American shipping, utilizing their control of the coastal trading towns as leverage. As early as 1843, wealthy ‘Ismaan elites operated twelve trading vessels on the Red Sea – eleven of which sailed exclusively to Aden. This represented the first significant Somali foray into direct involvement in maritime shipping.<sup>63</sup>

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62. Charles Graves, *Graves Papers*, quoted in Wayne K. Durrill, “Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 289; Kapteijns and Spaulding, 2-3; Durrill 295-296.

63. Durrill, 290, 295-297.



With respects to the hinterland, ‘Ismaan merchants also went to considerable lengths to enhance their trading interests with Aden. Accumulating capital through trade and salvage, these merchants invested heavily in livestock, amassing enormous herds which they parceled out to wives and clansmen in groups of fifty to eighty. In this way, kinsmen were transformed into clients, enhancing the control of powerful coastal merchants over inland production. In a further bid to enhance their influence over the interior, Majeerteen traders sought to monopolize usage rights to the acacia-bearing marble hills paralleling the coast. Previously, this region was held in common by the Sultan who allowed the inland nomads free use of its valuable acacias. However, after 1843, the Sultanate bowed to the pressure of the rising merchant class and the allure of immediate profits, selling off the rights to the marble hills. Snatching up these rights, Majeerteen coastal merchants, in turn, rented out acacia plots to pastoralists in exchange for a portion of the gum arabic yield. Finally, ‘Ismaan caravans from the port of Bandar Qassim, modern Boosaaso, penetrated deeper into the interior than ever before. Carrying goods purchased from Indian and Arab traders, they made certain to intercept the inland herders before they could reach the coast in September. Eager to avoid the risks entailed by the long journey to the coast, the nomads sold their goods to the coastal caravans at significantly discounted rates. In this way, Majeerteen merchants were able to cut out Indian and Arab competitors and eliminate the bargaining power of the inland Majeerteen.<sup>64</sup>

As independent pastoralists and townspeople were transformed into tenants and clients, the efforts of the Majeerteen elite were rewarded with results. Production and trade rose to unprecedented levels. Cruttenden reported in 1843 that elites controlled herds of, “upwards of a

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64. Ibid., 296-297.

thousand she camels,” and even greater numbers of sheep and goats.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the Majeerteen livestock trade to Aden, which in 1839 had been unimpressive, saw the export of 15,000 animals in 1844. Effects on the gum trade were equally impressive. Exports of that commodity rose from 750 tons in 1843 to as much as double that in 1856. The consequences of this transformation of the Majeerteen economy would not, however, be without consequence.<sup>66</sup>

Increased warfare was one of two major unintended consequences of the new Majeerteen political and economic environment. Under pressure to increase production, inland Majeerteen were obliged to increase the size of their herds. Given that at the height of the trade with Aden upwards of 15,000 animals were being exported, Majeerteen pastoralists found it necessary to range farther than ever before to sustain production levels so far beyond subsistence. Thus, Majeerteen herders began to pour southward into the Nugaal Valley and further on into the grassy plains inhabited by the Marehan. Under the conditions dramatically increased raiding and skirmishing became unavoidable.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, as increased trade, salvage, and production concentrated wealth in fewer and fewer hands, Majeerteen politics came to be dominated by a small class of merchant-patrons who could draw upon vast resources, both military and capital. Thus, warfare amongst the Majeerteen, which had previously been an affair of skirmish and raid between small competing groups, was increased considerably in scale. Thus, to the raids of Majeerteen herders and traders

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65. Charles Cruttenden, “Report on the Mijjertheyn,” quoted in Wayne K. Durrill, “Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 297.

66. Durrill, 296, 299.

67. *Ibid.*, 296-299.

into the territories of other clans were added full-scale military incursions, organized by the Sultan to punish neighbors and expand Majeerteen interests.<sup>68</sup>

Within the Majeerteen country, the concentration of wealth led to outright civil war. In 1878, the ‘Ali Suleymaan, under the leadership of the wealthy and powerful Yuusuf ‘Ali, refused to honor Sultan ‘Ismaan’s request that they construct a new royal palace at ‘Alula. The ‘Ali Suleymaan elite, jealous of their newly acquired wealth and status, saw the Sultan’s command as an attempt to depose Yuusuf ‘Ali and impose direct rule. The situation came to a head when two steamers, the *Mei-Kong* and the *Vortigern*, ran afoul of Cape Guardafui. In defiance of the Sultan, the ‘Ali Suleymaan descended upon the wrecks, seizing the cargoes for themselves. Yuusuf immediately arranged for the direct sale of the plunder to Arab interests at Aden. When the British protested, recognizing the ‘Ismaan Sultanate’s exclusive rights to the salvage of British shipping on the northern Somali coast, Yuusuf ‘Ali was defiant, declaring, “It is our custom, when any vessel is wrecked on our coast, we take for ourselves all the vessel contains and do not wait for an answer from Aden. I have sold the shipwreck ...”<sup>69</sup> This proved more than the ‘Ismaan Mahamuud were willing to tolerate and several years of devastating civil war followed. At last, the ‘Ali Suleymaan faced defeat, despite being fortified by weapons taken from the hold of the *Vortigern* as well as by wealth derived from trade and the sale of plunder. Their defeat did not, however, translate into an end to the bloodshed, as the beaten rebels descended upon the territory of the Hawiye clan to the immediate south, spreading the brutality of war down the Somali coast.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Ibid., 299.

69. Yuusuf ‘Ali, India Office R/20/A 512 (14.2.79), quoted in Lidwien Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, “From Slaves to Coolies: Two Documents from the Nineteenth-Century Somali Coast,” *Sudanic Africa* 3 (1992), 3.

70. Kapteijns and Spaulding, 2-4; Durrill, 303.

The other major consequence of the new order amongst the Majeerteen was severe famine. As in all of northern Somalia, climatic vagaries were hardly unknown in Majeerteen country. However, with the reorientation of Majeerteen society towards the service of foreign markets came outbreaks of starvation on a scale not previously recorded in the region. Transformed from relatively independent, locally-oriented participants in the regional market into a class of clients and debtors, the inland Majeerteen found themselves bound by their various obligations to neglect the security of their subsistence in order to service the new export economy. Thus, they increased their herds regardless of rainfall levels and began to exploit marginal lands. In doing so, the herders destroyed vast tracts of pasture. As pasturage ran out and herds collapsed, the herders turned to gum production in order to trade for food. However, because the nomads now received badly underinflated prices for their goods and had to provide portions of their harvests as rent, they were driven to overexploit, and thus exhaust, that resource as well. Under these conditions, the traditional survival tactics of the Somali herder proved impossible to implement. In consequence, when drought conditions predominated, mass starvation and ruin ensued.<sup>71</sup>

Such was the case from 1866 to 1880 when shortages of water and pasture cost hundreds of Majeerteen lives. In 1872, S. B. Miles, a British officer from Aden reported extensive devastation in the Dharor Valley, the home range of the 'Ismaan herders. Traveling up a dry riverbed from the village of Hunda, Miles described a barren landscape with scarce game and little more than wild palms for vegetation. Miles reported, "The universal drought in this country had visited this place; they had hardly any rain for a year, and the river was dry in consequence. All human habitations had now ceased, and I was told that none were to be met

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71. Durrill, 301.

with for a long distance in front.”<sup>72</sup> Those few he did encounter shared tales of even great herders being reduced to grinding poverty. Georges Révoil, another visitor to the northern Somali coast, described the desperate straits to which the once prosperous port of Bandar Qassim had been reduced. By 1880, Révoil stated, the herders had turned on each other in a desperate competition for the remaining livestock. Thus, the previously abundant market at Bandar Qassim was now stocked primarily with camels and goats raided from the Dulbahante to the south.<sup>73</sup>

The experience of the Majeerteen in the face of European influence is telling of the bitter results of the destruction of the traditional regulatory apparatus of northern Somalia. By the time direct British rule came to northern Somalia, the clan system which had served to balance trade and limit conflict had been entirely undermined. Clan, superseded by patronage, now served as little more than a means of justifying violence against rival factions. The traditional institution which had once bound Somali society together now had a divisive influence over the population.

### **The Effects of the Colonial Period**

In the midst of the European “Scramble for Africa,” Britain began to take a keener interest in the northern Somali coast. Faced with the threat of rival European claims in the region, British officials began in 1884 to penetrate the region, securing treaties with local rulers and elites in order to secure the livestock supply to Aden. In 1888, the British used these treaties to support their declaration of a protectorate over the area they now designated as Somaliland. Vice-Consuls were duly dispatched to the ports of Zeila, Berbera, and Bulhar to secure British

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72. S. B. Miles, “On the Neighbourhood of Bunder Marayah,” quoted in Wayne K. Durrill, “Atrocious Misery: The Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia, 1839-1884,” *The American Historical Review* 92, 2 (April 1986), 301.

73. Durrill., 301,304; Kapteijns and Spaulding, 2.

trade interests. In October of 1898, the Foreign Office would assume control of the protectorate from the India government in the wake of a joint French-Ethiopian-Mahdist threat to the territory, firmly establishing British Somaliland as a province of the Empire. Northern Somalis would continue to live under British rule until 1960.<sup>74</sup>

The colonial period saw an acceleration of the erosion of traditional Somali institutions. This acceleration manifested itself in three primary ways. The first of these was the continued growth of the livestock trade throughout the period. In fact, a twenty-year war of resistance inaugurated by Sayyid Mohamed in 1899, the so-called “Dervish Revolt,” served only to slow this growth. Likewise, two World Wars were insufficient to stem the growth of the livestock trade. Even the Italian occupation of Somaliland during 1940-1941 could not stem the tide, as livestock traders simply went underground and reemerged with their stock ready for market upon the return of British authority. By 1941, more than 44,000 head were being exported annually. According to the Glover Report, commissioned by the colonial administration, twenty percent of all livestock in Somaliland were being slaughtered or exported to meet the demands of the global market. The greatest leap, however, came in the 1950s, as the discovery of oil in Arabia brought a massive influx of laborers to the region. By 1959, annual exports had skyrocketed to over 500,000 per year. Indeed according to annual trade reports for the Somaliland Protectorate, throughout the 1950s, the livestock trade was valued between £700,000 and £1,000,000 each year.<sup>75</sup>

Though estimates vary widely, what is clear is that this continued expansion of the livestock trade led to further increases in the size of northern Somali herds, thus increasing

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74. Patwardhan, 111, 120; Samatar, 79.

75. Samatar, 38-40, 59, 60-64.

pressure on the land even further. The situation was exacerbated by the introduction of new technologies which greatly improved the ability of herders to expand their holdings. In order to secure their sizeable interests, elites constructed water storage tanks and began to employ trucks to transport grasses and water from far afield to their herds. Additionally, in response to American concerns over anthrax infection in Somali sheepskins, (used in glove making), the British administration established veterinary services in the Protectorate in 1924.<sup>76</sup>

The result of this situation conformed to pre-colonial patterns. When faced with drought, northern Somalis were no longer able to fall back upon traditional institutions, as these had been overshadowed by new economic relationships. The result was famine. In 1927-1928, eighty percent of the stock in northern Somalia was lost. When a similar disaster struck in 1942-1943, British authorities tried to limit overgrazing. At this point, however, it was too late. Tasked with governing at a minimal cost, the administration was obliged to rely on clan leaders to enforce any limitations on grazing practices. These leaders, however, no longer had the power to regulate pastoral practices. Due to the thorough commoditization of livestock in Somaliland, real authority lay with the big livestock merchants, who were more concerned with profit margins than the preservation of marginal lands.<sup>77</sup>

The second way in which the erosion of traditional Somali institutions was manifest during the colonial period was through the process of urbanization. Urban populations had been gradually rising since the introduction of European influence began to transform the coastal trade, but significant urban increase did not begin until the late 1920s and early 1930s. Beginning at this time, the influence of global trade encouraged growing numbers of northern

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76. *Ibid.*, 60-61, 80-81.

77. *Ibid.*, 61-63.

Somalis to congregate in cities and towns. Specifically, as trade increased, temporary seasonal markets became increasingly permanent. Over time some of these markets grew into towns. As inland markets became permanent fixtures upon the landscape, the role of the *abaans* came to be superseded by the *dilaal-sawaaqui* system. Under this new arrangement, livestock brokers, or *dilaal*, congregated at permanent markets situated at major wells near new administrative centers such as Hargeisa and Burao. After purchasing stock from inland herders, these brokers then passed the animals on to drovers, or *sawaaqui*, who transported them to the coast and sold them to largely Indian and British trading firms. This system bolstered the populations of both inland administrative centers and coastal settlements.<sup>78</sup>

Urbanization took its toll on Somali society. The new urban population was mostly involved in exchange and was, thus, not productive. Therefore, the already overextended pastoral economy now had to contend with the claims of urban beurocrats and merchants to a share in the produce of the herds – a share exacted in taxes and rents. Further, Somali nomads who entered the urban environment were well out of their element. Thus, for support they looked to their traditional lineage affiliations. This offered some aid to urban immigrants, but it also served to reinforce societal divisions along clan lines. In consequence, the Somali lineage system would be converted, over time, into an almost purely divisive element in northern Somali society – a development which would have serious implications for the future.<sup>79</sup>

The final major way in which the colonial experience eroded traditional Somali institutions was through the British practice of introducing clan rivalry into colonial politics. Under British rule, district boundaries were draw up along the borders of the supposed

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78. Hashim, 32; Samatar, 53-54, 80-81.

79. Hashim, 30, 45-46; Samatar, 53-54, 80-81.



“territories” of the various lineages. Furthermore, unlike elsewhere in the British Empire, no serious effort was launched to train a native administrative class to supplement British officials. Instead, officials referred to clan elders regarding local affairs. The result of this was to encourage rivalry amongst clans for representation in the colonial government. The tendency of the British administration to show favor to certain clans over others, as in the case of the generally favored Isaaq clan, served to intensify this rivalry to violent proportions. At times the government itself could be drawn into the violence. “In districts where several rival clans or lineage-groups are present, Somali constantly complain of unjust representation in all spheres in which the Administration exercises authority,” reports I. M. Lewis.<sup>80</sup> According to Lewis, when a clan or lineage-group planned an attack on another, information regarding this attack would sometimes be leaked to the authorities. The attack would then be launched a few days in advance, the result being that, “The forces of law and order then tend to arrive after the assailant has struck and just as the outraged group is preparing its reprisal.”<sup>81</sup>

The worst evidence of the distorting effect which the British administration had on the clan system, however, was the *Xaarama Cunkee*, or “Time of Filth Eating.” Dedicated to the idea of a strictly coastal protectorate but faced with Sayyid Mohamed’s inland revolt against Christian overlordship, the British armed the clans against the rebels and withdrew to the coastal towns. The various clans, however, took the opportunity to address old grievances with each other. In the warfare and resultant famine that followed, fully one-third of the population of British Somaliland perished.<sup>82</sup>

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80. Lewis, 29.

81. Lewis, 29; Hashim, 48; Samatar, 48, 57.

82. Samatar, 39.

As the colonial period drew to a close, it was clear that northern Somali society had undergone a profound transformation – and certainly not one for the better. Though the traditional social and economic arrangements of northern Somalia were by no means without their shortcomings, they did include mechanisms to address the unique challenges of life along the edge of the Horn of Africa. The new orientation of Somali society, however, was adapted only to maximize exports for a hungry global market. Vestiges of the old system, particularly the institution of clan, could no longer serve to protect northern Somalis from ecological crises. Instead, these institutions persisted in a distorted form – One which proved most adept at provoking violence and division.

## **CHAPTER 2**

On July 1, 1960, after seventy-two years of division and colonial domination, the territories of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia united to form the independent Republic of Somalia. The Somali Youth League, which had been central to the struggle for independence throughout the Somali homelands, managed to garner enough support to form the first government of the nascent republic, despite spirited competition. Publicly espousing a platform founded upon rising above clan divisions and spreading modernity across all segments of Somali society, the SYL government seemed to offer the hope of a new beginning for the Somali people after a century and a half of rising economic uncertainty and inter-clan strife.<sup>83</sup>

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83. Laitin and Samatar, 67; Patwardhan, 111.

## **Continuing Trends**

Sadly, this would not be the case. Far from opening a new chapter in Somali history, the thirty years of independent Somali statehood would in many ways echo the trends of the colonial and late pre-colonial eras. In fact, in two areas, the period of Somali statehood would serve to accelerate processes already underway during the previous 150 years. The first of these two areas was the livestock economy, where events of the independence period would lead to a further acceleration of the commoditization of livestock, and thus the overgrazing of northern Somalia's fragile pastures and the consolidation of the wealthy livestock trading class. The second area in which the independence period was to add momentum to pre-independence trends was in the continued devolution of the Somali clan system. It would be during this period that clan contention and, ultimately, violence would reach new heights in Somalia.

At independence, the Somali government fully inherited the economic system established during the colonial period. As has been previously established, central to this system was the commoditization of livestock in order to increase exports and thus garner both profits for the wealthy livestock trading-class and revenue for the administration. After 1960, this pattern showed no signs of abating. In 1957, livestock accounted for 33.8% of the total exports of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. Just two years after the founding of the Republic, that percentage had risen to 44.6%. In the North, livestock constituted fully 80% of all exports. Fueled by demand from oil-rich Saudi Arabia, livestock exports continued to rise throughout the independence period. According to United Nations statistics, in 1961, livestock exports were valued at approximately \$6.78 million. By 1964, this figure had risen to \$13.75 million, rivaling export revenues derived from the banana plantations of the South. Within nine years, exports

had more than quadrupled, reaching \$60.69 million by 1975. By 1981, this already impressive figure had more than doubled, reaching \$136.39 million.<sup>84</sup>

When one considers that a large portion of Somali livestock was retained within the country, the scale of Somali livestock production during the period of independent statehood becomes much clearer. According to estimates by the Planning and Coordinating Commission for Economic and Social Development, the body charged with the execution of the Republic's five-year development plans during the 1960s, roughly fifty percent of saleable livestock were retained by Somali pastoralists. Still clinging to some of their traditional practices in an environment of rapidly accelerating capitalist exchange, Somali herdsmen sought to maintain large herds for the payment of dowry as well as for the accumulation of prestige.<sup>85</sup>

Given that only two percent of the Somali landscape has continuous access to fresh water and only forty-six percent is suitable for any level of pastoral exploitation, all of this increased livestock production necessarily placed considerable strain on an already marginal landscape. To meet the ever growing demand for fresh stock, northern Somalis continued to increase their herds, now aided by the veterinary services of Somalia's Livestock Development Agency. Through its irrigation efforts, the agency also opened up new pastures to exploitation, increasing the maximum volume of stock which could be supported. Throughout the period of independent

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84. Samatar, 93, 101; Hashim, 85; United Nations, *Yearbook of International Trade Statistics: 1962* (New York: United Nations, 1964), 597-599; United Nations, *Yearbook of International Trade Statistics: 1964* (New York: United Nations, 1966), 657-660; United Nations, *Yearbook of International Trade Statistics: 1979* (New York: United Nations, 1981), 864-867; United Nations, *International Trade Statistics Yearbook: 1988* (New York: United Nations, 1990), 804-807; United Nations, *International Trade Statistics Yearbook: 1989* (New York: United Nations, 1991), 804-808.

85. Samatar, 101-102.

statehood, the Somali government continued to encourage the increase of herds in order to increase exports.<sup>86</sup>

This expansion of exploited land was compounded in the North by the passage of southern herds to market. Because the northern ports such as Berbera and Boosaaso were situated so as to have immediate access to the Arabian market, herds could fetch premium prices in the northern markets. Indeed, in 1967 camels fetched roughly forty-two dollars per head at the Mogadishu market, while at Hargeisa, the same camel could net a herder as much as seventy dollars. Similarly, cattle fetched twice as much on the northern market as in the South, and the mark-up for sheep and goats was even higher. The result of this pricing disparity was a seasonal invasion of northern Somalia by southern herdsmen seeking better rates for their stock. This seasonal upsurge in grazing pressure placed even greater strain upon a terrain which was already heavily exploited. In fact, though earnings from livestock export continued to increase, livestock production seems to have peaked in 1972 at 1.63 million head. Though higher returns would be seen in later years, the volume of animals exported would never again reach this level – the land had reached its capacity.<sup>87</sup>

The consequences of this, as in previous periods, were severe. Drought, in Somalia, is an inevitability. From 1970 to 1974 the rains failed, leading to a punishing drought during 1973 and 1974. Dubbed *Dabadheer*, literally “The one with the long tail,” by President Siad Barre, this drought led the government to declare a state of emergency in November of 1974. Students previously tasked with spreading literacy in the countryside were quickly diverted to famine relief duties, and substantial foreign aid was necessary to contain the disaster. So serious was the

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86. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook: 1995* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1995), 386; Samatar, 102-103, 121.

87. Samatar, 103, 124.

threat that Barre was driven to declare, "... nothing at the disposal of the Somali government and people would be spared; we must be prepared even to divert the salary funds to this emergency, if it comes to that in order to save the lives of the drought victims."<sup>88</sup>

Though the effects of *Dabadheer* were terrible, another drought, which swept across the Horn of Africa during the mid-1980s, was even more devastating in its effects. The death toll due to this drought exceeded one million people, many of whom were Somalis. This despite the fact that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization alone provided \$23.5 million in emergency aid.<sup>89</sup>

That the central government did not act to encourage more sustainable practices in the livestock industry was in large part symptomatic of the dependence of the Somali state on the wealthy livestock trading class. As has been previously stated, at independence, Somalia inherited the economy of the colonial period. In addition, the basic governmental structures of the colonial territories persisted as well. Included in these was the taxation scheme. Disinterested in establishing direct rule over the heavily nomadic Somali populace, the British, as well as the Italians, preferred to interfere with the herders' day-to-day activities as little as possible. Thus, in order to generate revenues from their colonies, the colonial governments levied indirect taxes – chiefly customs duties – in order to finance their operations. During the years immediately preceding independence, seventy-three percent of colonial revenues for Italian Somalia derived from indirect taxation. For British Somaliland, the figure was eighty percent. This meant that the independent Somali government, which inherited this taxation scheme, was

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88. Hashim, 88; Samatar, 106.

89. "State of the Union Message." In *Historic Documents of 1981*, 57-104. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1982, available from <http://library.cqpress.com/historicdocuments/hfdc81-0000110868>, accessed May 2010; U.N. Aid for Drought Area, *The New York Times*, December 4, 1987; "U. N. Sees New Famine in Africa," *New York Times*, 20 July 1991, 5.

largely dependent upon export revenues in order to generate funding. Therefore, there existed a considerable incentive to encourage increased livestock exports regardless of ecological concerns.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, the government lacked the power to alter this configuration, dependent as they were upon the revenue generated by the big livestock traders – twenty-two of whom dominated the livestock market by the 1980s. That this was the case was readily apparent when, in 1981, the regime attempted to impose a twenty-five percent *ad valorem* tax on cattle. In response, the Livestock Traders Association went on strike, refusing to assemble stock for export. Its desperately needed revenue threatened, the government backed down. Even in the midst of Siad Barre’s program of “scientific socialism” the livestock industry remained unchallenged. It was one of the few industries to escape nationalization, and the Livestock Development Agency was designed specifically not to compete with the traditional merchant class.<sup>91</sup>

Instead, a special relationship developed between the central government and the large-scale *dilaals*. A sort of “informal economy” referred to as the *franco valuta*. This scheme, which profited both government and big livestock trader at the expense of Somali pastoralists is well described in Abdi Ismail Samatar’s influential work *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884-1986*. Here, Samatar describes a typical *franco valuta* transaction:<sup>92</sup>

A pastoralist sells a sheep to a trader and usually gets no more than 50 percent of the price paid at the livestock market in Jedda (Saudi Arabia). The trader must remit a portion of the foreign exchange (usually 70%) back to Somalia through the national bank at the official rate of exchange. Through taxes, the government gets about 10-15 percent of the total value.

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90. Samatar, 86, 95

91. *Ibid.*, 95, 123; Hashim, 85.

92. Hashim, 85.

The trader then invests the unremitted foreign exchange, 20-25 percent, in merchandise such as rice and sugar, which are imported at undervalued prices to Somalia and then sold at exorbitant prices in the “open” market. The pastoralist, who is a consumer of these commodities, must pay these prices. In fact he or she may pay an extra penalty, as it is usually the case that pastoralists are not paid for their animals until the final sale is made in Jedda, despite the fact that the trader takes full possession of the animals in Somalia. During 1983-84, it was not uncommon for the prices of consumer commodities to rise significantly (up to 10%) within a month.<sup>93</sup>

This practice, by substantially reducing the profit to be earned by a Somali nomad from his stock added yet more incentive to increase the size of his herds.

While changes begun in the late pre-colonial era continued to act on the livestock industry, the Somali clan system also continued its transformation during the period of the independent Somali state. This transformation, as in previous eras, would have deleterious effects. During the independence period, however, clan rivalry would reach new levels of violence and intractability – ultimately playing a leading role in the demise of the state.

From the start, clan rivalry had planted itself at the heart of Somali politics. During elections for a provisional government for Italian Somalia prior to its unification with British Somaliland, twenty-one clan-based parties competed for a place in government. Even at the time of unification, when only two parties – the Somali Youth League and the Somali National League – held considerable influence, clan remained at center stage. Though both officially espoused pan-clannism and appealed often to Somali unity, their memberships told a different story. In truth, the Somali Youth League was primarily Darood in constituency, and the Somali National League was an Isaaq organization.<sup>94</sup>

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93. Samatar, 126.

94. Hashim, 61; Samatar, 107.



The Republic's subsequent two elections saw even more clan rivalry. In 1964, twenty-four clan-based parties fielded 793 candidates to compete for 123 seats. During the 1969 elections, the number of parties had swollen to sixty-two, fielding 1,002 candidates. The reason for this incredible proliferation of parties lay in the election laws of the Republic. Under the Somali system, one did not vote for an individual, but rather for a party. The parties themselves assembled a ranked list of candidates. The number of the candidates on the list that would take office was based on the number of votes won by the party. As a result, candidates who did not make the cut off would often seek an alternate path to election. That path lay in exploiting kinship connections in order to gather the signatures necessary to start one's own party, (which was only 500 at the time). In this way, a myriad of competing clan-parties emerged, complicating the business of government and rendering consensus impossible. This competition was rendered all the more fierce by the fact that in poverty stricken Somalia, political influence was one of only a few means of securing economic benefits for one's self and one's kinsmen. At the least, it might gain one a share in the lucrative *franco valuta* trade.<sup>95</sup>

Seven months after the debacle of the 1969 elections, newly appointed president Abdirashid Ali Shermaarke was assassinated by a soldier while reviewing troops. The soldier, a member of the Majeerteen sub-clan, committed the act as repayment for the mistreatment of his kinsmen during violence leading up to the election. As Parliament considered Shermaarke's successor, selfish clan rivalry dominated the tenor of the debate. The result was widespread disaffection with a government which was too preoccupied with internal squabbling to achieve any real improvements, despite the sweeping promises of two five-year development plans.<sup>96</sup>

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95. Ibid.

96. Laitin and Samatar, 78.

Riding this wave of discontent, Siad Barre, the nation's highest ranking military officer, seized power. Barre promised a new beginning and condemned the old clannism, which he referred to as "tribalism." In a speech entitled "Unity is Strength" Barre declared, "I believe that tribalism was the stumbling block to Somalia's progress. It was a cancerous virus that had been slowly rotting away every fibres [sic] of society. It was our number one enemy."<sup>97</sup> In the same speech, he even goes so far as to proclaim, "... tribalism is a crime tantamount to murder."<sup>98</sup>

Contrary to his bold statements, however, Barre did not become a champion of Somali unity. In fact, Barre established his power-based through an alliance of the Darood clan, (of which his lineage group, the Marehan, was a sub-clan), with the Majeerteen and the Ogadeni. Upon these three clans and their leaders, Barre showered gifts – often through proceeds of the *franco valuta* and to the general neglect of the other lineages. At the local level, as well, Barre employed clan in governance. Recruiting clan elders as *nabaddoon*, or "peace seekers," he trained them at district orientation centers and then deployed them across the country to administer over their kinsmen. This practice echoed the British colonial practice of indirect rule which once prevailed in northern Somalia.<sup>99</sup>

In 1977, Ethiopia was recovering from the revolution which had brought Colonel Mengistu Haile Mirriam to power while simultaneously fighting a grizzly civil war to retain separatist Eritrea. In this situation Siad Barre saw an opportunity to achieve the long desired Somali ambition of uniting the Ogaden with greater Somalia. Lying to the immediate west of Somalia, the Ogaden had been granted to Ethiopia by the British in June of 1897 in order to

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97. Siad Barre, *My Country and My People* (Mogadishu: State Printing Agency, 1974), 6; quoted in Alice Bettis Hashim, *The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship and Death in Somalia* (New York: University Press of America, 1997).

98. Ibid.

99. Hashim, 85-87, 91-92; "Siad Barre on Somalia's Home, Foreign Policies," *Xinhua General News Service*, 22 January 1982.

diffuse the threat of Ethiopian incursions into the southwest of the Somaliland Protectorate. From that time on, the restoration of the plains of the Ogaden remained a central goal of the Somali people. Indeed, it became a matter of national honor. When independence grew imminent, Somali leaders pressed for a unified “Greater Somalia,” one which would include the Ogaden. Despite the fact that between 300,000 and one million Somali herders spent half of each year in the area, neither the British nor the Ethiopians entertained notions of restoring the lands lost to Somalis during the “Scramble for Africa.” Somalis had sought the restoration of the Ogaden since its initial annexation. The initial objective of the Dervish Revolt was to resist Ethiopian incursion. Resistance continued into the republican era with the Somali government organizing and arming the unsuccessful Western Somali Liberation Front against Ethiopian authorities. Now, General Barre sought to fulfill the long-held dream of reunification through a full-scale military assault.<sup>100</sup>

Barre’s invasion was ill-fated, however. As the Soviets had entered into alliance with Ethiopia, Barre had cast off the 1974 treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in order to seek American aid. That aid was not forthcoming. Barre would later refer to this political miscalculation as his “biggest blunder.”<sup>101</sup> Further, upon appealing to the African Union, he found that its members were more committed to the sacro-sanctity of African borders than the self-determination of Africa’s peoples. Isolated, Somalia’s military was unable to cope with Soviet-backed Ethiopia. Eight months later, the Somali invasion had been soundly defeated.<sup>102</sup>

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100. "State Department Report on Human Rights." In *Historic Documents of 1982*, 107-20. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1983 available from <http://library.cqpress.com/historicdocuments/hfdc82-0000111947>, accessed May 2010; Hashim, 98-101; Patwardhan, 119; Laitin and Samatar, 53, 135-136.

101. Hashim, 101.

102. "Brezhnev at 26th Party Congress." In *Historic Documents of 1981*, 225-40. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1982, available from <http://library.cqpress.com/historicdocuments/hfdc81-0000110857>, accessed May 2010; Hashim, 98-101; "Barred; President Siad Barre's Ejection of the Russian from Somalia Gives the West its Cue

In the wake of this military debacle, Barre found himself increasingly isolated. Those outside of his clan alliance grumbled against the oppression of his regime, a flagging economy, and a lost patriotic war. Meanwhile, fissures formed within the alliance itself. The Majeerteen, who feared a majority of the Ogadeni clan if the war were successful, had begun to distance themselves from the dictator at the outset of hostilities. The Ogadeni, on the other hand, defected from the alliance when Barre finally admitted defeat in the Ogadeni campaign and signed a treaty with Ethiopia.<sup>103</sup>

Barre responded by relying ever more heavily on his own Marehan clan for support. Soon most all important posts in the Barre government were filled by Marehan kinsmen, often times regardless of qualifications. In a fit of anger, Barre once lashed out at a group of his subordinates, exclaiming, “What were you before I came to power? You were nothing. You, you, you ... you were a clerk in an office; you were a driver, now you are a millionaire. I will take you back to the positions I picked you from. Today, you are something because of me.”<sup>104</sup> As time went on and his health began to decline, Barre relied increasingly on his Marehan subordinates as well as family members in his administration. This clan-cronyism had reach such levels that former U. S. ambassador Chester Crocker referred to Siad Barre as an, “old style, feudal, tribal chieftain.”<sup>105</sup>

Finally, the deepening cracks in Somali society split open along clan lines. As firearms had become commonplace on the black market since the Ogaden War, clan-based underground opposition parties had been transformed into full-scale guerrilla movements. The Isaaq, angered

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to Try to Bring Peace to the Horn of Africa,” *The Economist*, 19 November 1977; Abstracts, *New York Times*, August 4, 1979.

103. “Siad Barre on Somalia’s Home, Foreign Policies”; Hashim, 103.

104. Hashim, 105.

105. Bruce W. Nelan, “A Very Private War,” *Time*, 14 January 1991, 25.

by years of abuse and neglect, struck the first blow. Organized through the Somali National Movement, they began protests in 1983 which escalated into full scale warfare after the December 1986 assassination of the national security chief for the northern region. Barre armed Ogadeni refugees against them, but soon found these arrayed against him under the leadership of the Somali Patriotic Movement. The estranged Majeerteen also joined the fray under the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, and after a bloody crack-down on protesters in Mogadishu, the Hawiye United Somali Congress threw its hat in the ring as well. The result of all of this was the flight from Mogadishu and eventual defeat of Siad Barre, the collapse of the central government, and the inauguration of a brutal civil war which continues to this day – one in which warlords employ clan relationships in assembling armed militias.<sup>106</sup>

## **New Developments**

In addition to the continuation and acceleration of previous trends in Somali history, the independence period would also bring about new developments: the overpopulation of the North due to a refugee crisis and an increased reliance on fishing to supplement the ever more precarious livelihoods of northern Somalis. These phenomena would be instrumental in setting the stage for the rise of piracy following the collapse of the central government.

Following the military disaster in the Ogaden, a humanitarian crisis of massive proportions erupted. Faced with the prospect of Ethiopian retaliation for Ogadeni collaboration in the Somali invasion close to one million Ogadeni fled across the Somali border. Faced with

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106. Nelan, 25; Hashim, 103-105, 113-115; "Siad Barre on Somalia's Home, Foreign Policies"; "Somalia Rebels Say Barre is Set to Flee," *The Times*, 1 January 1991; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: 1988* (London: Amnesty International, 1988), 69-71; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: 1989* (London: Amnesty International, 1989), 83; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: 1990* (London: Amnesty International, 1990), 210-211; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: 1991* (London: Amnesty International, 1991), 202; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report: 1992* (London: Amnesty International, 1992), 232.

this massive influx of population, President Barre feared that competition for land could result in conflict. Thus, he diverted roughly 500,000 of the refugees north into Isaaq territory. The Isaaq being outsiders under the Barre regime, the dictator had no qualms with granting the refugees squatting rights on Isaaq land. To their credit, the Isaaq accepted the newcomers peacefully, but this additional increase in people and livestock could hardly be supported by the land. Indeed, by this time, Somalia as a whole had increased food imports by almost 300% since 1961, and by 1981 food imports would almost triple once more. So serious was the crisis that pledges of aid from the United States and other nations were by no means sufficient to address the issue. This overpopulation of refugees would plague northern Somalia until the end of the Barre regime and beyond, as though civil war sent as many as 400,000 Somalis fleeing into Ethiopia, famine and civil war in that country during the early 1990s sent them fleeing back.<sup>107</sup>

Faced with heavy overgrazing and an enormous refugee problem in the North, Siad Barre took a novel approach to feeding northern Somalia – he endeavored to transform nomads into fishermen. He began this venture in the wake of the *Dabadheer*, establishing eighteen fishing cooperatives along the northern and eastern coasts of the country which he equipped with 600 Soviet-bought artisanal fishing boats. Barre's project went well beyond traditional fishing vessels, however. In 1974, Somalia negotiated a joint venture with the Soviet Union to deploy ten freezer trawlers in Somali waters, but the diplomatic fallout erupting from the U. S. S. R.'s alignment with Ethiopia put an end to that venture. In 1979, however, nine reinforced polyester boats were constructed at Greben yard in Yugoslavia for a \$5.5 million Somali contract. By 1980, Somalia had established a joint fishing company with Egypt. In 1981, a joint Somali-

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107.Hashim, 101; United Nations, *Yearbook of International Trade Statistics and International Trade Statistics Yearbook*, see note 2; "State of the Union Message." In *Historic Documents of 1981*, 57-104. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1982, available from <http://library.cqpress.com/historicdocuments/hfdc81-0000110868>, accessed May 2010; "State Department Report on Human Rights."

Italian company deployed a vessel to Somali waters capable of harvesting thirty-five tons of fish per day, and Romania, in order to strengthen ties of friendship with Somalia, agreed to deploy six vessels to Somali waters for a one-year trial period. Perhaps the Barre regime's most effective encouragement of coastal fishing was the 1982 decision to permit private fishing companies to operate, which encouraged many Somalis to pick up the trade.<sup>108</sup>

The government's attempts at establishing nomads as fishermen along the coast had mixed results. The value of annual fish exports from Somalia had never exceeded \$500,000, but in 1975, fish exports jumped to \$1.84 million. However, by 1980, fish exports had dropped down to \$443,000. This drop was followed by the export of a \$2.53 million catch in 1981. These figures, erratic though they seem, actually portray the flexibility of northern Somali herders. Having received training and equipment from the Barre regime, many nomads did take up fishing to escape the deprivations of the *Dabadheer*. When the rains returned, however, they returned to their traditional practice – only to return again when times became difficult once more. They became difficult during the drought of the early 1980s, and they would become far more difficult still in the early 1990s.

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108. "U. S. Exporters and Investors Have an Opportunity to Help Somalia Develop Its Fisheries Industry," *Business America*, 25 September 1989, 16-19; "Fishing Boats Built for Somalia at Vela Luka," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 31 May 1979; "Somalia, Egypt Establish Joint Fishing Company," *Xinhua General News Service*, 25 April 1980; "Somalia: New Fishing Boat," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 15 September 1981; "Romanian Fishing Boats on Loan to Somalia," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, September 14, 1983.

## CHAPTER 3

### An Embattled Coast

In the wake of the collapse of central government in Somalia, northern Somalis found themselves in a very precarious position. The fall of the government, and thus the central bank, had sealed the fate of the national economy. Inflation accelerated at an incalculable rate as businesses began to print their own currencies, and civil war ravaged town and countryside claiming the lives and property of thousands of victims. Across Somalia, conditions deteriorated. Currently, the per capita gross domestic product is roughly \$600 and the estimated life expectancy for residents of Somalia is under fifty years. Indeed, Somalia has reached such desperate straits that today one in six Somali children is malnourished – the highest rate of acute malnourishment on Earth, amounting to 240,000 underfed children.<sup>109</sup>

Northerners found themselves particularly hard-pressed to procure their subsistence. The North was, and continues to be, an arid land of sparse pastures capable of supporting little more than goat and camel pastoralism. Despite this fact, the majority of Somalia's population resided in the northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland. As of 1995, over sixty percent of this northern population maintained the traditional pastoral livelihood practiced by the majority of Somalis in the North. Faced with the pressures of an unforgiving climate, overpopulation, and perennial warfare, many northern Somalis looked to the sea in order to secure a living.<sup>110</sup>

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109. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2010, available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html>, accessed May 2010; World Food Programme, *Somalia*, 2010, available from <http://www.wfp.org/node/3584>, accessed February 2011.

110. Martin N. Murphy, "Solving Somalia," *U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 136, 7 (2010), 30-35; Abdalla Omar Mansur, "Contrary to a Nation: The Cancer of the Somali State," in *The Invention of Somalia*, ed. Ali Jamale Ahmed (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 108.



Already under the regime of socialist dictator Siad Barre, many Somalis had been driven to the coast and a dependence upon its fisheries by bouts of severe drought as well as by the brutal Ogadeen War of 1977-1978 which drove a deluge of refugees towards the Somali littoral. According to the World Resources Institute, roughly fifty-five percent of the Somali population now lives within 100 kilometers of the sea, compare to the world average of thirty-nine percent. In the growing chaos of stateless northern Somalia, fishing grew ever more important to the diet and livelihood of the northern Somali population.<sup>111</sup>

As the dependence of northern Somalis on coastal resources increased, competition for those resources escalated accordingly. This process was exacerbated by the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Coming into force in 1994, the UNCLOS clearly delineated the zone over which coastal nations had exclusive rights to natural resource wealth. In the Somali case, this had the effect of reducing the range over which Somali fishermen could operate, effectively limiting their operations to within Somali national waters. Predictably, the result was a further strain on aquatic resources as increased competition led to stock depletion.<sup>112</sup>

Unfortunately, Somalis were not the only contenders for control over northern Somalia's littoral resources. Article 220 of the U. N. Convention on the Law of the Sea guarantees the right of Somalia to extend its legal jurisdiction over its territorial waters as well as its right to take necessary measures to enforce Somali law within that jurisdiction. However, the UNCLOS

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111. Ben Wisner, "Living with the Somali Land, and Living Well," in *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*, ed. Ahmed I. Samatar (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1994), 28-34; "Coastal and Marine Ecosystems: Somalia," *World Resources Institute: EarthTrends Environmental Information* (EarthTrends, 2003), 2, available from [http://earthtrends.wri.org/pdf\\_library/country\\_profiles/coa\\_cou\\_706.pdf](http://earthtrends.wri.org/pdf_library/country_profiles/coa_cou_706.pdf), accessed May 2010.

112. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, United Nations Treaty Series vol. 1833, 10 December 1982, art. 55-58; Sean Kane, "Fishing for the Motives that Lie Behind Piracy; Attacks on Vessels Can Often Be Attributed to Social Deprivation in Coastal Regions," *Lloyd's List*, 5 March 2008, 19.

assumes that coastal states have the ability to enforce their laws at sea. During the Barre regime, the state maintained a small coast guard which was more or less capable of achieving this goal. After the final collapse of central authority in 1991, the situation changed dramatically. The absence of strong government meant the absence of the funding and organization necessary to launch an effective coast guard fleet. The Somali-Canadian (SomCan) coast guard, the Puntland state's meager attempt at fielding such a fleet, has at no point exceeded 400 men and is heavily reliant on funding from abroad.<sup>113</sup>

Drawn by the allure of Somalia's tuna-rich fisheries, foreign trawlers – primarily from Europe and Asia – began to operate illegally in Somali national waters. These massive factory-ships easily outstripped Somali fishermen, rapidly depleting northern Somalia's fisheries. In 2005, the United Nations estimated that roughly 700 foreign trawlers were looting Somalia's territorial waters each year. In fact, that same year the High Seas Task Force, an organization established in 2003 by fisheries ministers from several nations in concert with a number of NGOs, claimed that fully 800 foreign fishing vessels had been operating illegally off the Somali coast. Estimates have placed the value of the fish looted from Somali waters at anywhere from \$150 million to \$450 million per annum. A 2009 study places the average annual illegal catch in the western Indian Ocean during the period from 2000 to 2003 at between 229,285 and 559,942 tons per year – translating to losses valued at \$206 to \$504 million dollars annually across the region. Such massive losses are difficult even for Africa's third richest fisheries to sustain. In

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113. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, art. 220; United Nations Department of Information, "Somalia: UNOSOM I" (Geneva: United Nations Department of Information, 1997); United Nations Department of Information, "Somalia: UNOSOM II" (Geneva: United Nations Department of Information, 1997); Gatehouse, Jonathan, "This Cabbie Hunts Pirates," *MacLeans* 122, 1 (19 January 2008), 38-41.

the words of Mohamed Waldo, a long-time force in Somali politics now based in Nairobi, “They fish with impunity. It is the mother of all piracies in Somalia.”<sup>114</sup>

Unfortunately, foreign vessels have routinely violated Somali waters for another reason since 1991. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has estimated that it costs roughly eight dollars to illegally dump one ton of toxic waste in Somali waters compared to the approximately \$100 required to bury it in Europe or the United States. As a result, the seas off northern Somalia have become a favorite location for illegal waste disposal operations. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, passing tankers have routinely expelled oily ballast into Somali waters, as evidenced by tar balls which regularly wash ashore along the coast. In addition to this waste, at one point estimated at 33,000 tons per year, vessels have also discharged sewage and solid waste. In 2003, one vessel, the Dutch-owned *MV Cormo Express*, went so far as to attempt to land 52,000 Australian sheep infected with “scabby mouth” on northern Somalia’s shores after they had been rejected by Saudi authorities. Repelling the *Cormo Express* and its cargo, dubbed the “Sheep of Fools,” was one of the few appreciable victories achieved by the SomCan coast guard.<sup>115</sup>

Most troubling of all, however, is the dumping of heavy metals and even radioactive waste in Somali territorial waters. Nick Nuttall, spokesman for the United Nations Environment Programme, claims, “Somalia has been used as a waste ground for hazardous waste since the early 1990s. There is radioactive uranium waste – the main garbage – and heavy metals like

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114. Gatehouse, 2, 1-3; Kane, 19; Nayan Chanda, “No safe harbor for illegal fishing,” *Policy Innovations*, 15 September 2009; John Hari, “Toxic waste behind Somali pirates,” *London-Gedo-News*, 15 April 2010; Agnew, David J. et al, “Estimating the World Wide Extent of Illegal Fishing,” *PLoS One* (San Diego: Agnew et al, 2009), 2; For information on the High Seas Task Force, see <http://www.illegal-fishing.info/uploads/HSTFFINALweb.pdf>.

115. Abdi Ismail Samatar, Mark Lindberg and Basil Mahayni, “The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia: The Rich versus the Poor,” *Third World Quarterly* 31, 8 (2010), 1384; Gatehouse, 1.

cadmium and mercury. There is also industrial waste, hospital waste, chemical waste and whatever you want.”<sup>116</sup> Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, U. N. envoy to Somalia, echoes this sentiment: “Somebody is dumping nuclear material here. There is also lead, and heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury – you name it.”<sup>117</sup> Ominous evidence of this particularly dangerous illegal dumping was exposed by the 2004 tsunami that so devastated the Indian Ocean basin. As giant waves assailed the coast of Puntland, toxic waste containers were washed ashore. Locals reportedly began to show symptoms of radiation sickness – symptoms which cost the lives of over 300 Somalis.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to illness and death resulting directly from illegal dumping, foreign exploitation of northern Somali waters had a disastrous effect on an already hard-pressed population. Given that the average Somali survives on less than two dollars a day, northern fishermen could hardly afford significant reductions in their catch. Unfortunately, they operated at a distinct disadvantage in competing with foreign factory-ships. Whereas massive foreign ships could deploy extensive trawling nets capable of denuding vast swaths of Somali waters of fish and crustaceans, local fishermen relied primarily upon hand-cast nets flung over the sides of dhows, motorized skiffs, and even wooden canoes. That northern Somalis were badly outmatched is evidenced by changes in the reported catch for the region. In 1995, the reported capture off the Somali coast amounted to 30,000 metric tons. By 2000, however, this figure had fallen to 20,000 metric tons. Even more strikingly, the reported trade in seafood from the Somali coast plummeted from \$14,000,000 in 1990 to \$2,000,000 in 2000.<sup>119</sup>

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116. Valerie Noury, “Do Somali Pirates Have Legitimate Grievances?” *New African* 496 (June 2010), 30.

117. *Ibid.*, 30.

118. *Ibid.*, 31.

119. CIA, World Factbook, “Coastal and Marine Ecosystems: Somalia,” 2; “Piracy,” *Eighth Report of Session 2005–06*, United Kingdom House of Commons Transport Committee, 6 July 2006, p. 3: HC 1026.

## The Emergence of Somali Piracy

The inhabitants of the northern Somali coast did not respond passively to these threats to their subsistence. Indeed many northern Somalis, blaming illegal foreign vessels for the social and economic decline of their communities, armed themselves and retaliated. As Rear Admiral Ted Branch, Director of Information, Plans, and Security for the Office of the Chief of U. S. Naval Operations, stated in a hearing of the House of Representatives subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport, “The primary industry and livelihood of coastal Somalia has always been fishing, and Somalis are capable mariners.”<sup>120</sup> In defense of their livelihoods, many northern Somali coastal dwellers indeed demonstrated their maritime capabilities. Equipped with automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenades and utilizing the small fiberglass skiffs so common amongst the fishing communities of the region, northern Somali men, some former members of the now-defunct Barre-era coast guard, began boarding foreign vessels, sometimes confiscating cargo, and demanding “taxes” in compensation for lost income. These men soon realized that the greatest windfall was to be gained through the ransoming of crews and vessels, and the now familiar form of Somali piracy began to take shape.<sup>121</sup>

Initially, pirates generally operated well within fifty nautical miles of the coastline due to the limitations in fuel capacity of their skiffs. They identified targets visually, favoring ships

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120. *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure*, 111<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, H. R. HRG. 111-6, 7.

121. Kane, 19; Jeffrey Gettleman, “Pirates Tell Their Side: They Only Want Money,” *New York Times*, 1 October 2008; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas in *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure*, 111<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, H. R. HRG. 111-6, xii; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, S. HRG. 111-421, 24; Gary E. Weir, “Fish, Family, and Profit,” *Naval War College Review* 62, 3 (2009), 20; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual Report, 1 January – 31 December 2010* (London: ICC International Maritime Bureau, 2011), 20.

traveling at under fifteen nautical miles per hour with a freeboard, (distance of the deck from the waterline), of less than six meters, as these were far easier to board if necessary. In a typical attack, the target vessel was engaged from multiple directions at once by small skiffs loaded with armed men. The pirates would typically fire upon the vessel in an attempt to intimidate it into stopping. If they were not successful in halting their quarry, the pirates would then proceed to engage their prey from port and starboard with boarding ladders in order to get a portion of their number aboard. If they achieved this end, the small vanguard on deck would then secure the crew's surrender. The first man aboard in such operations enjoyed a special prestige amongst his peers. Such attacks usually came without warning, as pirate skiffs blended in easily with the fishing craft common to the region, and rarely lasted more than twenty minutes, making it extremely difficult for targeted vessels to summon aid.<sup>122</sup>

Once taken, the pirates' quarry was then taken to port to be held for ransom. Though almost certainly traumatized, hostages were generally treated well – pirates even offering meals, such as roasted meat, grilled fish, and spaghetti, designed to appeal to western palates. This treatment derived less from any particular desire to be merciful than from an understanding that violent or otherwise unprofessional behavior could impede ransom negotiations. In fact in 2010, a record-breaking year for hostage-taking off Somalia, 1016 mariners were taken, but only eight were killed and thirteen injured.<sup>123</sup>

Faced with a rising tide of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the world's merchant fleets and navies began to introduce countermeasures. Vessels began to maintain speeds over fifteen

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122. *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 20-21; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xii-xiii; Weir, 20; Mohamed Olad Hassan and Elizabeth Kennedy, "Pirates' Ransom Helping Somalian Towns Boom," *Seattle Times*, 20 November 2008.

123. Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xii; Hassan and Kennedy; Weir, 20; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 19; Colin Freeman, "Why Somali Piracy is Booming – By Former Hostage Victim," *The Daily Telegraph* (UK), 11 April 2009.

nautical miles per hour and improve their surveillance techniques. In 2004, the International Maritime Bureau, monitoring from Kuala Lumpur where they had established the Piracy Reporting Center in response to predation in the Strait of Malacca, issued a warning to merchant vessels to remain at least fifty nautical miles from the Somali coast. Finally, Combined Task Force 150, a multinational fleet assembled for the War on Terror after September 11<sup>th</sup>, was deployed to the Gulf of Aden to suppress piracy.<sup>124</sup>

Somali pirates were quick to adapt to the new situation, however. Starting in 2005, they began to target low-value merchant and fishing vessels for use as “mother ships” from which they could launch their skiff-based attacks. A typical example of this is the assault on the bulk carrier *MV Safina Al Bisarat* in January of 2006. Informed of the attack by the Piracy Reporting Center, U. S. Central Command deployed the guided missile destroyer *USS Winston Churchill* to the scene. Locating the dhow from which the pirates had launched their assault, U. S. naval personnel boarded the vessel, detaining ten Somalis and sixteen Indian citizens. The Indians claimed that they had been taken prisoner six days before and been forced to use their vessel to ambush commercial shipping.<sup>125</sup>

This new tactic carried with it three main advantages. First, it allowed pirates to pursue target vessels at higher speeds, thus defying the effective fifteen-nautical-mile-per-hour ceiling on their operational capabilities. Second, it provided further cover for Somali pirates, particularly when operating further out to sea, as the hijacked “mother ship” vessels blended in with the flow of merchant traffic through the Indian Ocean. Most significantly, the adoption of “mother ships” vastly increased the area over which Somali pirates could range. Limited only by

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124. Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xvii; “Somalia’s Dangerous Waters,” *BBC News*, 26 September 2005; Weir, 22.

125. “U. S. Navy Seizes Pirate Ship off Somalia,” *Associated Press*, 23 January 2006.

the “mother ship’s” fuel capacity, pirate crews extended their attacks well out to sea. According to Rear Admiral Brian M. Salerno, Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security, and Stewardship for the U. S. Coast Guard, Somali pirates now patrol a range of roughly 2.5 million square miles – more than twice the area enclosed by the borders of the United States. Meanwhile, the International Maritime Bureau has reported attacks in the Persian Gulf and off Yemen, Oman, Kenya, Tanzania, the Seychelles, Mozambique, Madagascar, western India, and the Maldives. High seas attacks across the broader expanse of the Indian Ocean have also been reported.<sup>126</sup>

This new tactic led to high profile attacks, such as that on the cruise ship *Seabourne Spirit*, which drew considerable international attention. Faced with a newly enhanced piracy threat, the United States Department of Transportation advised passing vessels to remain a minimum of 200 nautical miles from the Somali coastline. In the same vein, the International Maritime Bureau advised commercial vessels to travel in convoys with other vessels of similar speed class and to strictly adhere to corridors patrolled by Combined Task Force 150.<sup>127</sup>

These enhanced precautions could do little, however, to stem the rising tide of piracy based in northern Somalia. The tactics employed by Somali pirates, emphasizing rapid operations and the use of regional shipping for concealment, have proven extraordinarily difficult to counteract. As Theresa Whelan, U. S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, lamented, “When they are not actively engaged in piracy, pirate vessels easily blend in with ordinary shipping. When they return to land, pirates become still more difficult to

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126. Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xiii; Weir, 22; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 19, 23; *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation*, 24.

127. *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 20-21; Weir, 21; *MARAD Advisory*, United States Department of Transportation, 28 October 2005, 05-03.



locate.”<sup>128</sup> Rear Admiral Ted Branch echoed this sentiment, stating, “The lack of governance, poor economic conditions, vast coastline and numerous vessels along the coast created a situation allowing pirates to mix with fishermen, evade coalition navies, and take merchant vessels hostage with little or no consequences.”<sup>129</sup> Abdirahman Mohamed Farole, president of the autonomous Puntland state, expressed similar frustration, “Our coast guards are just two small ships belonging to a private company, a small unit of 30 people. We don't have an effective coast-guard unit. We can't afford to finance them.”<sup>130</sup>

As piracy escalated, the inability of local Somali or international authorities to control the situation became glaringly visible. From 1992 to 2005, 3,583 attempted acts of piracy were reported worldwide with 650 mariners being taken hostage as a result. While the portion of these attempts represented by piracy off Indonesia and the Strait of Malacca declined, the portion resulting from piracy off the Horn of Africa increased steadily. In the period from 1995 to 1999, fifty-one attempted hijackings were reported off Somalia. In the period from 2000 to 2004, this figure more than tripled, reaching 182 attempts. The re-tasking of Combined Task Force 150 in 2005 did little to arrest the growth of Somali piracy. An estimated 1,845 attempted hijackings took place between 2003 and 2008. Again, during this period, the Somali share continued to grow. Though dipping from twenty-one reported incidents in 2003 to twelve in 2006, Somali attacks on merchant shipping rapidly rebounded, reaching twenty-three reported incidents in 2007, ninety-two in 2008, and a shocking 141 in 2009. Meanwhile, due to multilateral efforts amongst nations in the South East Pacific, piracy attempts in the Strait of Malacca and off Indonesia fell from 121 attempts in 2003 to twenty-eight in 2008. Based on data from the

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128. *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security*, 29.

129. *Ibid*, 7.

130. Steve Bloomfield, “A Politician on Pirate Turf,” *Newsweek* 153, 18 (2009): 1-2.

International Maritime Bureau, from 2006 to 2009, the portion of annual attempted piracies being perpetrated by Somali pirates rose from approximately eight percent to thirty-four percent. Other estimates range as high as forty-six percent. These figures are made all the more impressive by the assertion of Peter Chalk, Senior Political Analyst for the RAND Corporation, that up to fifty percent of attempted piracies go unreported by shipping firms fearing increases in their insurance premiums. Worldwide rates of hostage taking have also increased dramatically since 2005, as this is the preferred method of profit extraction for the Somali pirate. While an estimated 650 hostages were taken at sea for the whole period from 1992 to 2005, according to the International Maritime Bureau 188 hostages were taken in 2006 alone. 2007 saw this number increase to 292, while in 2008 it skyrocketed to 889. From there hostage taking increased further still, hitting 1050 taken in 2009 and an unprecedented 1181 taken in 2010, (for which Somali mariners were responsible for 1016). Pirate leader Sugule Ali, interviewed from on board the captured *MV Faina* summarized the matter succinctly: “We hijack ships every opportunity we get.”<sup>131</sup> As of 2010, an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 northern Somalis had taken to maritime predation.<sup>132</sup>

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131. Nordland, Rod, “I Know It is Evil, but It is a Solution,” *Newsweek* 153 (12 January 2009), 12.

132. Peter Chalk, “Piracy Off the Horn of Africa: Scope, Dimensions, Causes and Responses,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16, 2 (2010), 90, 93; United States National Geospatial, Maritime Safety Information, 2010, available from <http://www.nga.mil/NGAPortal/MSI.portal>, accessed August 2010; “2009 Worldwide Piracy Figures Surpass 400,” *International Chamber of Commerce Commercial Crime Services*, 14 January 2010; “IMB Reports Unprecedented Rise in Maritime Hijackings,” *International Chamber of Commerce Commercial Crime Services*, 16 January 2009; Anderson, Elliot, “It’s a Pirate’s Life for Some: The Development of an Illegal Industry in response to an unjust global Power Dynamic,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, 2 (2010), 323, 332; *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation*, 24, 81; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security*, 18, 24; “Piracy,” *Eighth Report of Session 2005–06*, United Kingdom House of Commons Transport Committee, 3; Jeni Bone, “Piracy Costs Maritime Industry \$16bn+,” *Marine Business-World.com*, 23 August 2008; “Pirate Warning for Somalia’s Coastline,” *Somaliland Times*, 3 February 2003; International Maritime Organization, Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships 2003-2010, 2010, available from <http://www.imo.org/Pages/home.aspx>, accessed August 2010; Fu, Xiaowen, Ng K. Y. Adolf, and Yui-Yip Lau, “The Impacts of Maritime Piracy on Global Economic Development: The Case of Somalia,”

Already by 2002, the Somali coastline was considered the most dangerous waterway on Earth. Further, in that same year, the International Maritime Bureau increased its risk-of-attack rating for the waters off the Horn of Africa from “possibility” to “certainty.” As the volume of Somali piracies increased, so too did the capabilities and confidence of the pirates. With each passing year, reports of weapons discharges associated with piracy attempts increased, suggesting that Somali pirates were both increasingly well armed and increasingly willing to employ those arms. In fact according to the International Maritime Bureau, reported weapons discharges during hijacking attempts spiked from forty-six to 120 between 2008 and 2009. So bold had Somali pirates become that when the American *MV Liberty Sun* evaded capture in April of 2009, her assailants followed the vessel to port in Kenya where they waited offshore for their quarry to reemerge – this despite the fact that the *Liberty Sun* had been escorted to port by the *USS Brainbridge*, a Navy destroyer. The *Liberty Sun* was obliged to spend three weeks in port before the pirates finally abandoned their siege.<sup>133</sup>

This boldness amongst armed Somali mariners has led to a number of high profile attacks. In 2005, seven attacks were reported in Iraqi waters, including two off the Basra Oil Terminal, raising concerns that Somali pirates could disrupt U. S. war efforts. In November of that same year the *Seabourne Spirit*, a luxury liner, was assailed off East Africa leaving one crew member injured by shrapnel. In September of 2008, the *MV Faina*, a Ukrainian cargo vessel carrying arms and munitions including thirty-three T-72 battle tanks, was seized by Somalis. Two months later, Somali pirates boarded the *Sirius Star* 450 miles off the Kenyan coastline. An oil supertanker bearing a cargo valued at an estimated \$100,000,000, the *Sirius Star* fetched an

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Maritime Policy and Management 37, 7 (2010), 681; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 7, 10-13; “No Stopping Them,” *The Economist*, 5 February 2011, 69-71.

133. Bone; “Pirate Warning for Somalia’s Coastline”; *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships*, 13; Nicholas Graham, “Liberty Sun, U. S. Ship, Attacked by Pirates,” *Huffington Post*, 15 April 2009.

impressive \$3,000,000 in ransom – though the pirates drowned trying to escape with the money. January 2009 saw the capture of the German liquefied petroleum gas carrier *Longchamp* despite the fact that the *Longchamp* was traveling with a naval escort. Finally three months later, Somali pirates launched their much publicized attack on the *Maersk Alabama*, capturing the attention of the United States Government as well as the American people.<sup>134</sup>

Considerable efforts on the part of merchant crews, shipping companies, and the world's navies have done little to stem the rising tide of piracy off Somalia. In fact, only the brief ascendancy of the Council of Islamic Courts in the south of the Somalia in 2006 offered any real prospects for the reduction of maritime predation. Dedicated to Islamic principles which condemn theft and piracy, the Council of Islamic courts proved increasingly capable of extending its influence on the ground in coastal Somalia, thus applying pressure on pirate havens. The port of Mogadishu was even briefly reopened to commercial traffic without the interference of pirates. The similarities between the ideology of the CIC and that of other militant Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda, however, were seen as a threat by the West as well as by neighboring Ethiopia. Thus, Ethiopian troops entered Somalia in 2006, toppling the CIC and restoring the anarchic status quo in the region.<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, 2011 seems poised to be a record-breaking year for Somali piracy. Four attacks were reported on New Year's Day alone, and as of February, the rate of attacks is over one per

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134.Scott Benjamin, "Pirates Attack Cruise Ship," *CBSNews*, 5 November 2005; Andrea Stone and Tom Vanden Brook, "Maersk Alabama Crew Recalls Pirate Attack," *USA Today*, 17 April 2009; Nordland, 12; "Pirates on the Sirius Star Drown with \$3 Million Ransom," *Herald Sun*, 11 January 2009; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xiii.

135.CIA, *World Factbook*; Weir, 22-23; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xi.

day. With the end of the monsoon and calmer seas on the way, this rate is expected to further increase.<sup>136</sup>

That Somali pirates continue to expand their enterprise despite increasing risks should come as no surprise considering the enormous gains to be made. As Peter Chalks points out, “Whereas settlements in the late 1990s and early 2000s were in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, sums today are in the millions.”<sup>137</sup> This is no exaggeration. According to various estimates, in 2008 pirates took in anywhere from \$30 million to \$150 million. The National Security Council placed the average ransom for a hijacked vessel at \$500,000 to \$2 million. In 2009, that average increased to \$1.5 million to \$3.5 million – and the trend shows no signs of abating. Indeed, some truly spectacular ransoms have been obtained. The Greek tanker *Maran Centaurus* is reported to have yielded between \$5.5 and \$7 million dollars. More impressive still, the South Korean tanker *Samho Dream* fetched a record-breaking \$9.5 million dollars.<sup>138</sup>

Despite the astounding opportunities for profit which piracy has generated, the initial motivation for northern Somalis to engage passing vessels was not ransom, but the defense of their desperately needed maritime resources. Pirate Shamun Indhabur spoke to this end in a satellite phone interview from aboard the *MV Faina*, “In Somalia all the young men are desperate. There is wide unemployment in the country. One of the only sources of income is fishing, and the superpowers and Asian countries sidelined us in our own sea. So at first we

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136. “No Stopping Them,” 69-71.

137. Chalk, 93.

138. Chalk, 93; Brian J. Hesse, “Where Somalia Works,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, 3 (2010), 358; AllAfrica.com, Somalia: Puntland Cabinet Passes 2009 Budget, Parliament Votes Next, 2 May 2009, available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200905040544.html>, accessed August 2010; *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation*, 82, xii; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security*, 18; “No Stopping Them,” 69-71; “Pirates Gained \$150m This Year,” *BBC News*, 21 November 2008

started out just to counter the illegal fishing, but international forces started to protect them.”<sup>139</sup> When asked about the threats of his compatriots aboard the *Sirius Star* to spill its cargo of oil if ransom is not received, he responded, “...we know the risk of spilling the oil shipment. But when evil is the only solution, you do evil. That is why we are doing piracy. I know it is evil, but it is a solution.”<sup>140</sup> Current president of Puntland Abdirahman Mohamed Farole, when asked about the origins of piracy in northern Somalia, responded, “Piracy in Puntland is not something new. The escalation has reached its peak these days, but it is something that started in 1991 with the collapse of the central government. Foreign trawlers started to steal our marine resources. Some fishermen turned against them. They were paid ransom, and that ransom has encouraged that escalation.”<sup>141</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed by Abdulrahman Adan Ibrahim Ibbi, Somalia’s deputy prime minister: “If the international community wants to limit acts of piracy, it has to help Somalis keep illegal foreign fishing and toxic waste dumping away from their coasts.”<sup>142</sup>

The fact that northern Somali pirates initially acted in order to defend their livelihoods rather than seek out extraordinary wealth can be deduced from the nature of a number of early pirate attacks. Indeed, early attacks were often directed against illegal fishing vessels rather than other high-value traffic in the region. This was the case of the *MV Bonsella*, a fishing vessel taken in September of 1994. The captured *Bonsella* was subsequently used to pursue other fishing vessels off northern Somalia.<sup>143</sup>

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139. Nordland, 12.

140. Ibid.

141. Bloomfield, 1-2.

142. Noury, 30.

143. Maritime Safety Information.

As recently as 2009, some pirates in Puntland have reportedly expressed a willingness to return to legitimate occupations if provided with protection against illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping. Unfortunately, northern Somalis generally see the world's naval presence in the region as aimed at protecting the illegal vessels that prey upon their waters.<sup>144</sup>

### **House Built on a Troubled Foundation: The Framework within Which Somali Piracy Operates**

In testimony before the U. S. House Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Rear Admiral William D. Baumgartner, Judge Advocate General for the Coast Guard, stressed that, “There is a friendly supporting coastline there [in Somalia] that supports these operations, and that is what is the real enabler for piracy off the Horn of Africa.”<sup>145</sup> This supporting coastline is manifest in pirate-friendly towns such as Garoowe, Harardhere, Eyl, and Boosaaso. In each, as well as in numerous smaller pirate-harboring villages, northern Somali pirates receive the support that they need to operate effectively – so much so that one pirate remarked, “When you capture a ship people welcome you like a president.”<sup>146</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the organizational framework in place on the ground in northern Somalia is far more responsible for the success of piracy attempts than any particular tactic at sea.<sup>147</sup>

At the heart of this framework lay the traditional Somali institution of clan relationships. After decades of economic imbalance and inept and oppressive rule by colonial administrators, infighting politicians, and a brutal dictator, the Somali clan system – which had once served to

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144. Jeffrey Gettleman, “For Somali Pirates, Worst Enemy May Be on Shore,” *New York Times*, 9 May 2009; Gatehouse, 38-41.

145. *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure*, 111<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, H. R. HRG. 111-6, 22.

146. Chalk, 92.

147. Gettleman, “For Somali Pirates, the Worst Enemy May Be on Shore.”

strengthen relationships central to survival on the harsh Somali landscape – had deteriorated into a tool of warlords for rallying support. Indeed, when Siad Barre finally fell in 1991, Somalia fractured along clan and sub-clan lines, resulting in an epidemic of warfare and atrocity. So endemic was this brutality across Somalia that, when threatened by illegal fishing and dumping, northerners had no difficulty in procuring arms with which to strike back.<sup>148</sup> That at its earliest stages Somali piracy was largely an enterprise of the Hawiye clan speaks to the pivotal role which this more violent clan system has played in the development of piracy in Somalia.<sup>149</sup>

Pirate bands vary in size from small one-skiff subsistence operations to large scale organizations employing as many as 100 armed men, though typical groups count from twelve to thirty-five armed members. Groups are usually assembled by an experienced leader with strong connections within his clan – guaranteeing him vital support in the local community. This leader will typically hire the majority of his men from within his own clan in order to ensure their loyalty. This is essential as during operations the pirate gang is normally divided into a maritime team, which conducts the actual hijacking, and a ground team, which secures supplies and guards hostages, stolen goods and vessels. Clan is also significant in the recruitment of pirates as many are, in fact, former members of clan-based militias – and thus experienced with small arms fighting. In many cases, whole local clan militias have turned to piracy in a bid to control both land and sea in their areas of influence. The largest pirate agglomerations are centered around Harardhere in Majeerteen country, and further north at Eyl, amongst the Darood.<sup>150</sup>

Of course, these operations require funding. According to Peter Chalk, to launch a small scale attack would cost potential hijackers \$1,500 to \$2,500 for basic supplies and a small skiff.

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148. Weir, 18.

149. "No Stopping Them," 69-71.

150. Chalk, 91-92; Weir, 19; Anderson, 336-337; Hesse, 359.



Added to this expense would be the burden of maintaining the captured vessel and its crew as negotiations proceed. As such negotiations regularly stretch across weeks and months, operating costs can total several thousands of dollars. Since the onset of civil war, northern Somalia has hardly been replete with investment capital, so Somalis have had to employ the clan system in order to obtain financing for their piratical ventures. At first, much of this money had to be obtained from abroad. Using clan connections amongst the Somali Diaspora, would-be pirates would make contact with potential investors – primarily Somali criminal networks in Dubai, Nairobi, and Lebanon, but also individuals and even business organizations. As piracy schemes grew more profitable, however, pirates became increasingly able to fund their expeditions locally. In fact, local researchers have identified fifty-one piracy sponsors in Puntland alone, largely mid-level businessmen affiliated with the pirate groups by clan.<sup>151</sup>

Once sponsorship has been obtained and the quarry detained, Somali pirates again have recourse to clan connections – this time in procuring the services of a third party negotiator in order to ensure security and overcome potential impediments to negotiation due to language barrier. Once the ransom has been secured, pirate groups then distribute the spoils in roughly the following manner: ten percent going to the ground team, ten percent to the maritime team, ten percent going to the community to reinforce clan loyalties, ten percent to the contact through which a sponsor was located, and thirty percent to the sponsor. As operations grew more successful, advanced money-counting machines were introduced to ease this process. When questioned about these devices, one pirate remarked, “Getting this equipment is easy for us, we

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151.Chalk, 91-92; “No Stopping Them,” 69-71; Hesse, 359.

have business connections with people in Dubai, Nairobi, Djibouti and other areas, so we send them money and they send us what we want.”<sup>152</sup>

In order to transfer the money to initiate a pirate expedition or distribute and launder the proceeds upon its successful completion, northern Somali pirates once more turned to the clan system – this time in combination with the *hawala* system of money transfer which has been in use in the Indian Ocean basin since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Brian J. Hesse, in his article “Where Somalia Works,” explains this arrangement well:

In a basic, traditional Somali hawala arrangement, a person wishing to send a remittance from, say, Toronto, Canada to Mogadishu, Somalia approaches a hawala agent in Toronto and gives the agent a lump sum of cash. After accepting the cash and taking a commission (typically around 5%), the agent then deposits the balance in a local bank account. At this point the agent contacts an associate on the ground in Somalia informing him of the deposit amount, who it is for, and any other important details, such as whether the money is to be delivered or collected; in the past such information was conveyed via fax or phone, but today is usually done by e-mail or instant messaging. Alas, when a person in Mogadishu tries to collect the money, he or she must prove his or her identity; for example, the would-be recipient might face detailed inquiries about his or her kinship relations or clan lineage. Only after the individual has answered all questions to the satisfaction of the Mogadishu hawala agent is the money then handed over. It should be stressed that in the hawala transaction described above no money is physically moved between or amongst agents. This allows for a relatively quick turnaround from when a transaction is started to when it is completed. Sometimes the whole process might take only a matter of hours, but more likely a day. What makes the system work is the running tally hawala agents keep detailing how much one agent owes another, with debts to be settled at a later date. Trust is paramount.<sup>153</sup>

Of course, this entire clan-based arrangement could never exist if the political climate of northern Somalia were hostile to it. This, however, is most certainly not the case. Northern

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152. Hassan and Kennedy; Chalk, 93; Hesse, 359.

153. Hesse, 345-346.

Somalia has been awash in clan rivalry since well before 1991, with clan leaders and clan-based warlords functioning as the real power on the ground. The very fact that pirate ground teams can operate openly in northern Somalia's coastal towns and villages suggests that local clan leaders approve. Theresa Whelan sums up the situation well in stating, "... there is no effective and reliable central governing authority or capacity in Somalia. Consequently, pirates can operate with impunity from coastal fishing villages as long as they have support of the local Somali clan leadership."<sup>154</sup> Clan authorities have even been known to trade in "fishing licenses" with vessels interested in harvesting waters within their sphere of influence.<sup>155</sup>

Formal government also does not present a serious barrier to Somali piracy. With an upper house of parliament composed of clan elders enshrined in the constitutions of both Somaliland and Puntland, clan interests permeate to the highest levels of government. Not surprisingly, both states have dabbled in the sale of "fishing licenses." In the case of Puntland, even the motives behind the deployment of the SomCan Coast Guard can be called into question. Abdiweli Ali Taar, who commands the small unit, was an ally of Puntland's founding president, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, during the civil war as well as a fellow Majeerteen clan member. The contract to command the SomCan coast guard, along with a share of the proceeds from the sale of "fishing licenses," has allegedly enriched the Taar family considerably.<sup>156</sup>

Signs of collusion between pirates and the Puntland government seem to be almost universally recognized by foreign observers. In March of 2009, the office of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon released a report accusing Puntland officials of being involved

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154. *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security*, 29.

155. CIA, *World Factbook*; Murphy; Anderson, 336-337; Weir, 19.

156. Hesse, 355; Weir, 19; Lunsford, 28-33; Gatehouse;

with piracy rings. The following year, the U. N. Monitoring Group reported the firing of a number of government officials for complicity with piracy and further recounted that the mayor of Eyl had accused both police officials and government ministers of the same activities. At one point, the nephew of President Yusuf Ahmed was detained by Somaliland officials while in possession of \$22,000 in U. S. currency.<sup>157</sup>

### **The Case of the “Somali Marines”**

The Hobyo-Harardhere cartel represents one of the earliest as well as one of the most extensive piracy rings to have operated out of Somalia since the collapse of the government in 1991. Its story, beginning not long before 1994, is illustrative of the role of the nexus of three forces – the heavy reliance of Somalis on coastal resources for food, the illegal penetration by foreign firms into Somali territorial waters, and the persistence of the Somali clan system in its new, more conflict-prone form – in the genesis of Somali piracy.

At times referred to as the “Somali Coast Guard” or the “Somali Marines,” the cartel was founded at Harardhere by Mohammad Abdi Hassan Afweyne in order to defend against the ravages of foreign trawlers. Harardhere is located in the Mudug, a harsh and arid region of Somalia, where the land is for the most part suited only for the herding of camels, sheep and goats. Due to the precarious nature of subsistence in this region, the many of the inhabitants of the Mudug were particularly reliant upon maritime resources in order to supplement their diets. As a result, when foreign trawlers began to loot the coastal fisheries, the Somalis of the Mudug were especially hard hit.<sup>158</sup>

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157.Hesse, 358; Anderson, 331.

158.ReliefWeb , Country Profile: Somalia, 2011, available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/bkg.nsf/doc200?OpenForm&rc=1&cc=som&mode=cp>, accessed May 2010; Chalk, 92.

Given the poverty of the region, it generally escaped the notice of the largest political and military players in Somalia. As a result local leaders with strong influence over their fellow clan members enjoyed more or less free reign. As one such leader, Mohammad Abdi Hassan Afweyne was able to attract a growing number of disaffected young fishermen from among his Haber Gedir subclan of the Hawiye clan family. Empowered by his growing following, Afweyne began to launch increasingly bold retaliations against foreign vessels, claiming that fees, cargoes, and ransoms taken were legitimate compensation for losses incurred by coastal Somalis. By 2004, the Harardhere ring had consolidated its working strategy for engaging foreign ships. The cartel, like other Somali pirate groups, launched its attacks in multiple groups from fiberglass skiffs which could be outfitted for up to two weeks of continuous patrolling at sea. Blending in with local fishermen the “Somali Marines” would identify their targets visually and then strike, taking full advantage of the element of surprise.<sup>159</sup>

In response to increased pressure from Combined Task Force 150, the Harardhere ring, like other Somali pirate groups, began to increase the sophistication of its tactics. Harardhere cartel pirates began to capture mother ships which they used to harry vessels further out to sea. This tactic was employed in the case of the bulk carrier *MV Safina Al Basarat*, which was assailed well beyond the two-hundred-nautical-mile danger zone off the Somali coastline. When the *USS Winston S. Churchill* intervened, boarding the dhow from which the pirates had launched their assault, they detained sixteen Indian nationals in addition to ten Somalis. The

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159. Andrew McGregor, “The Leading Factions behind the Somali Insurgency,” *Jamestown Foundation* (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2011); Country Profile: Somalia; Weir, 19-20; Barbara Starr, “U.S. Destroyer Pursuing Hijacked Ship in Somali Waters, Military Says,” *CNN.com*, 29 October 2007; “Pirates Attack UAE Ship off Somalia,” *Al Jazeera English*, 25 January 2006.

Indians reported that their dhow had been taken six days earlier and that they had been compelled to conduct it in pursuit of other potential victims.<sup>160</sup>

By 2004, Afweyne's Harardere ring was recognized as a major threat to commercial interests off the Horn of Africa. The following year, through the use of mother ships, the "Somali Marines" scored some impressive victories. Among these were the capture of the compressed-gas transport *MV Feisty Gas* and the seizure of the tea- and oil-laden *MV Torgelow*. Harardhere pirates were also responsible for the much-publicized 2005 assault on the cruise liner *Seabourne Spirit*. By 2006, the Harardhere ring had swollen to include a militia of seventy-five to 100 armed seafarers. It had also inspired smaller groups of imitators to take up arms all along the coast, with new pirate havens springing up at Garard, Ras Asir, Kismaayo, Alula Cape, Boosaaso, and Eyl. So entrenched had piracy become in the northern half of Somalia that, when the Council of Islamic Courts managed briefly to suppress Hawiye piracy operations during 2006, pirate groups of the Darood clan, launching from the Puntland coast to the north, eagerly took up the slack.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Impact of Somali Piracy**

Somali piracy has had an impact far beyond the interactions of pirates and merchant marines. In reality, the wake of Somali skiffs has been felt as far away as Tokyo and Washington, D. C. To reach any useful understanding of the phenomenon of Somali piracy, one must both recognize and understand this impact. In analyzing this impact, both within Somalia and without, one comes to a greater understanding not only of the current state of northern

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160. "U. S. Navy Seizes Pirate Ship off Somalia";

161. McGregor; Weir 19-22; Chalk, 92; "Kenya Probes Somalia Ship Attack," *BBC News*, 12 October 2005; "No Stopping Them," 69-71.

Somalia, but also of the inherent fragility of the Indian Ocean trade network upon which so many rely.

According to Deputy Assistant Secretary Theresa Whelan, only about 0.5 percent of the 33,000 vessels that transit the Gulf of Aden annually are subject to pirate attack, and of these, only one in three is taken. Despite the relatively small portion of Red Sea traffic that is unfortunate enough to be exposed to maritime predation, pirate expeditions launched from the north of Somalia have taken a tremendous financial toll. Though ransom payments, in all likelihood, have never exceeded \$150 million in any given year, collateral expenses amount to a far greater sum.<sup>162</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious expense associated with Somali piracy, aside from ransom payments, is the expense of conducting antipiracy patrols in the Indian Ocean. For the European Union alone, the cost has been estimated to be in excess of \$450 million per year. When action becomes necessary, expenses rise even further. The U. S. Department of Defense recorded a total combined cost of \$3.114 million dollars for the Navy's responses to the attacks on the *Maersk Alabama* and the *Liberty Sun*. This sum includes \$1.191 million in fuel costs, \$1.6 million in aircraft flight time, \$300,000 in unmanned aerial vehicle costs, \$6,000 for translator services, and \$17,000 spent on communication and coordination with allies in the region.<sup>163</sup>

The costs to the maritime industry have proven even greater. Most directly, the fishing industry has taken damage due to Somali piracy. This \$6 billion per year industry has been rocked by a severe drop in the Indian Ocean catch. In 2008 alone, the Southwest Indian Ocean

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162. *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security*, 29.

163. Catherine Holahan, "The Real Cost of Piracy," *MSN Money*, 14 April 2009; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure*, 61.

tuna catch dropped by a devastating thirty percent. Such losses naturally raise questions of sustainability.<sup>164</sup>

Increased insurance rates have also taken their toll against the maritime industry. The cost of a temporary insurance contract, or “binder,” for a vessel traveling through the Gulf of Aden was roughly \$500 in 2007, not including coverage for injury, liability, or ransom. By November 2008, the price had risen to around \$12,000. By 2010, the cost of a “binder” for a Gulf of Aden voyage climbed to \$20,000 – a forty-fold increase in the span of three years. This cost, of course, was passed on to consumers in the form of higher shipping costs. In January of 2009, CMA CGM, the third largest container shipping company in the world, announced the introduction of an “Aden Gulf Surcharge” of twenty-three dollars per twenty-foot equivalency unit. The next month, the United Arab Shipping Company followed suit with a twenty-two dollar surcharge. By December, the CMA CGM surcharge had risen as high as forty-one dollars per TEU.<sup>165</sup>

As piracy increased, some carriers decided to abandon the Gulf of Aden route altogether. Instead, they chose to round the Cape of Good Hope, traversing a considerably longer, but far safer, trading lane. According to Lloyd’s List, the Cape of Good Hope Transit adds an additional seven to ten days travel time, as well as approximately \$250,000 in added fuel costs. The Oil Companies International Marine Forum places added transit time at ten to fifteen days and fears that the trend toward shunning the Gulf of Aden route could lead to an eight percent increase in

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164. Richard Lough, “Somali Pirates Threaten Indian Ocean Tuna Industry,” *Reuters*, 22 January 2009.

165. *Economic Impact of Piracy in the Gulf of Aden on Global Trade*, United States Department of Transportation, 2008, 1-2; “Potential Hikes in Shipping Rates Involving Gulf of Aden Transits,” *Gerson Lehrman Group*, 29 September 2008; “Shipping Lines Raise Levy to Offset Piracy Losses,” *Business Daily Africa*, 3 December 2009; Miles Costello, “Shipping Insurances Cost Soars With Piracy Surge Off Somalia,” *Times*, 11 September 2008; Hardev Kaur, “Pillaging Pirates Pile Gloom on World Trade,” *World Trade Review*, 16-31 December 2008.



demand for tankers. By the calculations of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, circumnavigating Africa bears with it a thirty-three percent increase in total costs. According to a study for the journal *Maritime Policy and Management*, were piracy to go unchecked, a reduction of 30.25% in total traffic along the shipping route between Europe and the Far East would result. Furthermore, 18.14% of remaining traffic would then be diverted around the Cape of Good Hope. In total, the study predicts that unchecked piracy would have an overall cost of \$30 billion to parties dependent upon Europe-Far East shipping.<sup>166</sup>

Amongst these parties are included regional interests in Africa. Kenya, which lies directly to the south of Somalia, is heavily reliant upon the export of its agricultural products through the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa. Already under considerable strain, Kenya's economy can scarcely afford a decline in maritime exchange. Indeed, an estimated twelve percent of Kenya's gross domestic product, derived from the transport sector, could be seriously diminished. The Kenyan government, preoccupied with illegal arms control and immigration, lacks the resources to meaningfully intervene in Somali pirate activities off its coastline.<sup>167</sup>

Another regional interest threatened by Somali piracy is the Suez Canal. As piracy concerns have limited shipping along the Gulf of Aden sea lane, the canal has seen very real declines in income. In March 2008, 1,699 vessels passed through the canal, earning \$416 million in revenues. In March of 2009, however, traffic had declined to 1,439 vessels, resulting

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166. Statement of the Oil Companies International Marine Forum in *International Piracy on the High Seas – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure*, 111<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 2009, H. R. HRG. 111-6, 89; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure*, 24; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Review of Maritime Transport 2009*, (Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2009), 25-26; Fu, et. Al., 678-690.

167. "Kenya Business Forecast Report, Q2 2009," Business Monitor International, 1 April 2009; "Somali Situation Threatens Regional Economies," *Daily Nation*, 22 November 2008.

in a decline in revenue of \$89 million. That this decline is linked to the dramatic increase in Somali piracy which was underway between 2008 and 2009 is made more apparent by the correlation between a period of limited success of Combined Task Force 150 in protecting the Gulf of Aden corridor during the first quarter of 2009 and an increase in canal revenues of \$26.1 million from February to March 2009.<sup>168</sup>

One particularly chilling potential cost of Somali piracy has yet to be realized – the threat of a catastrophic spill from a tanker due to pirate attack. When the oil tanker *MV Sirius Star* was hijacked en route to the United States from Saudi Arabia via the Cape of Good Hope, her pirate captors threatened to spill her cargo, roughly \$100 million in oil, into the sea. Though it is not clear whether they would have carried out their threats, the incident certainly highlights the risk. An even greater threat is posed by the potential of rocket-propelled grenade fire – routinely employed in boarding attempts – to spill or set alight hazardous cargoes. Such a disaster could have devastating results across the Indian Ocean littoral.<sup>169</sup>

In northern Somalia itself, piracy has also, of course, had an enormous impact. Unlike the case for the wider global community, the impact of Somali piracy in the pirates' homeland has not always been negative. After successful operations, pirates return to their communities considerably enriched. In a region where life expectancy hovers around forty-six years and fully one quarter of all children perish before their fifth year, the influx of between \$30 million and \$150 million in to the local economy has had considerable effects. Indeed in 2008, the United

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168. "Downturn, Rates and Pirates All Play a Role in the Suez Canal's Revenue Decline," *Business Monitor Online*, 15 April 2009.

169. Nordland, 12; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xviii.

Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia projected the entire budget of the Puntland government to be only twenty percent of piracy revenue entering the region.<sup>170</sup>

Indeed, Somali pirate dollars have funded the construction of white stone houses in towns where corrugated iron sheeting once predominated as the building material of choice. Even luxury cars and generators – allowing for unprecedented twenty-four-hour electricity – have been introduced in pirate havens. Entire restaurants featuring western-style cuisine to cater to the needs of hostages have even been rumored. According to Eyl clothing store owner Sugule Dahir, "There are more shops and business is booming because of the piracy. Internet cafes and telephone shops have opened, and people are just happier than before."<sup>171</sup> Shamso Moalim, a mother of five in Harardhere, echoed this sentiment, declaring, "Regardless of how the money is coming in, legally or illegally, I can say it has started a life in our town. Our children are not worrying about food now, and they go to Islamic schools in the morning and play soccer in the afternoon. They are happy."<sup>172</sup> Local businessmen in the pirate havens set up kiosks to supply the pirate crews, who regularly come ashore for provisions, with cigarettes, soda, and various other goods. As Abdulqadir Omar, an Eyl merchant reported, conducting trade with the pirates could yield impressive profit margins: "I can buy a packet of cigarettes for about \$1 but I will charge the pirate \$1.30"<sup>173</sup> So profitable is this trade that pirates are even extended credit against their future earnings by local merchants. As recounted by Sahra Sheik Dahir, a Harardhere shop owner, "They always take things without paying and we put them into the book of debts. Later, when they get the ransom money, they pay us a lot."<sup>174</sup>

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170.Hassan and Kennedy; Anderson, 331.

171.Ibid.

172.Ibid.

173.Ibid.

174.Hassan and Kennedy; De Rugy, Veronique, "Paying the Pirate's Price," *Reason* 41, 3 (2009): 17-19.

The economic boon offered by piracy has led many in northern Somalia to view pirates in a very positive light. In November 2008, when the tanker *Sirius Star* came into view at Harardhere, it was cause for mass celebration. Puntland president Abdirahman Mohamed Farole recounted that, “There is a joke that if you ask a young woman who you want to marry, she will say, “In the north I will marry a pirate, in the south I will marry a Shabab [Islamic jihadist] boy.”<sup>175</sup> As Sahra Sheik Dahir put it, “The pirates depend on us, and we benefit from them.”<sup>176</sup> This statement rings particularly true amid predictions that piracy may soon overtake agriculture as Somalia’s single largest generator of revenue.<sup>177</sup>

It could even be suggested that northern Somali piracy has succeeded in its original objective of safeguarding marine resources for Somali fishermen. As piracy has escalated, many foreign fishing interests operating illegally in the region have abandoned these troubled waters. The result has been the replenishment of northern Somali fisheries to the extent that, in 2009, fishermen reported catches valued at up to £200 per day. Similarly, Kenyan fishermen have reported bumper catches of shellfish and shark following the withdrawal of European and Asian trawlers. More skeptical observers, however, point out that many coastal Somalis have already been crowded out of the fishing industry or are afraid to go out to sea where they could be mistaken for pirates, themselves.<sup>178</sup>

It would be misleading to suggest that the impact of piracy on northern Somalia has been entirely positive, however. Piracy is seen by many northern Somalis as leading to general immorality. According to President Abdirahman Mohamed Farole, “They spend the money in a

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175. Bloomfield, 1-2.

176. Hassan and Kennedy.

177. David Axe, “No Quick Solutions to Pirate Crisis,” *World Politics Review*, 6 October 2008.

178. “The “Benefit” of Somalia’s Pirates,” *Channel 4 News*, 25 October 2009; Samatar, et. Al., 1389.

very wasteful manner by corrupting young people, using drugs, alcohol. They exploit the culture of the communities by introducing things that did not exist in the past.”<sup>179</sup> The clerical community, which holds piracy to be un-Islamic, also represents a locus of discontent – so much so that Abshir Boyah, a veteran pirate who had taken more than twenty-five vessels, complained in 2009, “Man, these Islamic guys want to cut my hands off.”<sup>180</sup> Indeed, such Islamic-based political movements as Al-Shabaab and the Union of Islamic Courts have openly denounced piracy, and in areas where they have held sway, have effectively suppressed piracy.<sup>181</sup>

Piracy also has its economic downside for northern Somalia. Individuals enriched by the pirate industry generally apply their earnings to dowries, livestock acquisition, housing purchases, and the purchase of cars and other consumer goods. The result of this spending glut has been a crippling acceleration of already burdensome inflation rates. Combined with a loss of jobs due to reductions in legitimate shipping, this inflation placed incredible stresses upon those who were not somehow associated with the piracy industry. The result has been the rise of affluent new communities, like “New Boosaaso,” amidst a sea of grinding poverty.<sup>182</sup>

Perhaps most damaging of all is the disruption caused by piracy to the flow of aid into Somalia. In 2008, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported a total of \$686 million committed, contributed, or pledged as aid to Somalia. In 2009, \$662.5 million was similarly disposed. This aid provided the necessities of life for between 2.5 and 3.2 million Somalis who were dependent upon aid for their survival. Unfortunately, aid vessels present an appealing target for Somali pirates. From June 2005 to November 2009, fully

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179. Bloomfield, 1-2.

180. Gettleman, “For Somali Pirates, Worst Enemy May Be on Shore.”

181. Gettleman, “For Somali Pirates, Worst Enemy May Be on Shore.”; Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transport Staff Summary on International Piracy on the High Seas, xviii.

182. Hesse, 359; Anderson, 331; Jeffrey Gettleman, “Somalia’s Pirates Flourish in a Lawless Nation,” *New York Times*, 31 October 2008.

ten aid vessels were targeted off Somalia. One of these vessels was the *Liberty Sun*. In her hold, she carried 47,000 tons of food – enough to feed 250,000 people for a full year. As a result of these predations, aid organizations have had to rethink shipping to Somalia. As early as 2004, the World Food Programme closed its supply lines to the region due to piracy. The result was that the cost of delivering aid rose dramatically while aid stock reached an all-time low.<sup>183</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This work has examined the role of the introduction of western influence in the development of piracy off the coasts of northern Somalia. Through a chronological assessment spanning from the earliest years of Somali interaction with the West to the emergence of Somali piracy in the aftermath of the collapse of the Barre regime, this thesis has contended that Somali piracy is, in fact, the product of the collision of three historical phenomena. These are the transformation and emasculation of traditional Somali institutions due to foreign economic influences, an increased dependency amongst northern Somalis on coastal resources stemming from overexploitation of the land and the efforts of the Barre regime to promote the fishing industry, and the introduction in the 1990s of illegal fishing and dumping by foreign vessels in Somali waters.

Prior to the advent of western influence, northern Somalis conducted their economic activities within the frame work of a system which had evolved in response to the vagaries of the northern Somali climate and landscape. Within this system, inland herders provided cattle for

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183. ReliefWeb, Financial Tracking Service, 2011, available from <http://fts.unocha.org>, accessed January, 2011; Anderson, 333; "Somalia Pirates Complicate Food Aid Provision," *Afrol News*, 5 December 2004; Chalk, 95; *Piracy on the High Seas: Protecting Our Ships, Crews, and Passengers – Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure*, 3.

export with an eye to maintaining the security of their subsistence. Thus, they tended to adjust the volume of their livestock exports to the coast, as well as their demand for imported goods, based upon the climatic conditions that they faced. Furthermore, they also avoided overgrazing in order to avoid destroying vital pasturage. Meanwhile, the fishing communities of the northern Somali coast adjusted their practices to meet environmental demands as well. In times of plenty, they imported luxury goods for the nomads in exchange for their stock, and during drought they switched emphasis towards food importation while absorbing excess nomadic labor. Finally, Arab and Indian merchants trading with the coast tailored their cargoes to the demands of the coast. This entire system of exchange was regulated by the institution of clan affiliation. Through clan, the residents of northern Somalia obtained the organizational tools necessary not only to solidify relationships from the level of the diya-paying group up to that of the clan family, but also to forge flexible working relationships across clan lines. Thus, through the agency of the traditional clan system, northern Somalis were able to dictate the terms of production and exchange in their region in order to ensure the long term sustainability of their society.

The earliest origins of western influence in northern Somalia lay in the wrecking of European, and especially British, vessels on northern Somali shores. As western shipping through the Red Sea increased, increasing numbers of European vessels ran afoul of the dangerous currents active off the tip of the Horn of Africa. The windfall acquired through the looting of these vessels and the sale of their cargoes to Arabia led to a profound change in the northern Somali social order. Newly enriched, military leaders were now able to gather large followings through the distribution of rewards. Thus, a powerful new patron class rapidly monopolized political and economic authority in the region, while the bulk of the population was

reduced to dependency. In this way, the old social arrangement, locally focused and emphasizing the insurance of long term security and sustainability, was undermined in favor of a patron-client system oriented towards the continuous accumulation of wealth by a highly competitive upper class.

With the British establishment of a coaling station at Aden, the social and economic polarization of northern Somali society accelerated. The demand for meat to feed the garrison at Aden offered an opportunity to generate unprecedented profits through the livestock trade. No longer exposed to the immediate threat of starvation, the patron class leapt upon this opportunity. Exploiting the authority they derived through their control of the distribution of resources and wealth, they compelled their dependents to swell their herds in order to increase exports, usurping traditional practices designed to safeguard against overgrazing and ecological disaster. This “commoditization” of livestock resulted in the further polarization of society, disastrous famines, and increased violence amongst growing factions competing over a constantly diminishing range. As violence and desperation increased, lineage increasingly became a focus of violent contention as leaders sought to cement their support through agnatic affiliations. Though violent competition between lineage groups had been the norm in northern Somalia since before written history, this competition now took place on a far grander scale – and with more devastating results.

Colonial rule furthered these trends. The introduction of modern technologies and veterinary services by the colonial administration led to increased livestock production to meet growing world demand – straining the land still further. Additionally, the onset of increased urbanization in the early twentieth century increased the portion of the population not directly involved in rural production. This group, involved primarily in trade and government drew



support from the Somali countryside through taxes and rents and further undermined the economic agency of northern Somali pastoralists through the establishment of permanent inland markets which denied herders direct access to coastal buyers. Finally, in a bid to reduce expenditures, the colonial government relied on a strategy of indirect rule, referring to clan authorities regarding local matters and often favoring certain lineages over others. The result was a further fomentation of inter-clan rivalry and violence.

The advent of independence, which seemed to promise a new chapter in Somali history, in fact continued the patterns of the colonial and immediate pre-colonial periods. The republican government, bound by an indirect-taxation-based revenue system inherited from the colonial period as well as by a dependence upon the immensely powerful livestock trading class, continued to foster livestock overproduction. This behavior, combined with the passage of southern herds through northern lands due to higher livestock prices at northern ports, resulted in further strain on the northern Somali ecosystem – resulting in multiple, catastrophic famines.

Also, the lineage system grew more divisive during the tenure of the short-lived republican government. As the constitution provided for party-based rather than candidate-based voting in national elections, aspiring politicians who did not receive a nod from their party turned to their lineage groups for support in founding their own political organizations. The result was a myriad of political parties, all divided along agnatic lines and all competing bitterly for a share of government largess and the lucrative “second economy” of the *franco valuta*.

The ascent of Siad Barre to power further increased clan contention. Despite repeated denunciations of clannism, Barre relied on an alliance of the Darood, Ogadeni, and Majeerteen to secure his rule. Following his disastrous defeat in the Ogaden War, the clan rivalry which Barre

had exploited to ensure his authority began to work against him. As his allies broke away, he fell back on the support of his own Marehan lineage. Meanwhile, the other clans, armed by a glut of black market arms which followed the war, crystallized into full-fledged resistance movements. These clan militias would eventually topple Barre and then turn on each other, hurling Somalia into brutal anarchy.

In addition to the increase of pasture overexploitation and the progressive militarization of the Somali clan system, a further development attended the latter portion of Siad Barre's reign. Following the disaster in the Ogaden, close to one million Ethiopian-Somali refugees fled into Somalia to escape government reprisals for their perceived role in Barre's invasion. Feeling no compunctions about encroaching upon Isaaq land, the dictator settled these Somalis in the North. This influx of population combined with severe drought to cause severe food shortages and outright famine. The Barre regime sought to combat this development through the encouragement of the fishing industry. Though he did not succeed in transforming nomads into permanently settled fishermen, Barre did provide the skills and equipment needed for herders to turn to marine resources during times of scarcity. The advent of civil war and its attendant collapse of central authority would prove to be one of those times.

As northern Somalis looked to the sea to assuage the worst extremities of the chaos of post-Barre Somalia, foreign interests took advantage of that chaos to plunder Somalia's maritime resources. In the absence of any significant Somali naval presence, foreign fishing trawlers began to penetrate Somali territorial waters, overwhelming local fishermen in the competition to exploit the region's rich fisheries. In addition to this, the Somali littoral rapidly became a preferred site for the illegal dumping of toxic waste, including poisonous heavy metals, biological waste, and even radioactive materials.

In response to this challenge to their subsistence, Somalis fell back upon their now heavily militarized clan system as well as the maritime skills and equipment which had been enhanced by the Barre regime's efforts to settle nomads as fishermen. Organized in small, well-armed, and largely lineage-based bands, northern Somalis utilized small skiffs to overtake and board fishing vessels – ostensibly to seek reparation for lost economic opportunities. As these pirate bands began to enjoy increasing success, their tactics improved and their organization grew in scale through the exploitation of wider agnatic affiliations. The result was the emergence of the piratical phenomenon which is widely recognized today.

Though Somali piracy is the product of the intersection of trends in modern Somali history, it is not the inevitable result of those trends. To assume such would be to ignore the agency of the inhabitants of northern Somalia. From the initiation of contacts with the West, Somalis have made conscious decisions regarding how to react to that contact – Somali piracy being the cumulative result of these decisions as much of any historical trends. When European ships first wrecked on Somali shores in significant numbers, Somalis could have pursued more equitable methods of distributing the spoils, thus preventing the rise of an export-interested patron class. Similarly, the powerful merchant-patron class made a deliberate decision to step away from time-honored modes of exchange – which had mitigated the effects of ecological calamity for centuries – when it pursued the profits to be gained through export-oriented livestock production. Further, Somali political leaders missed two unparalleled moments of pan-Somali solidarity – at the foundation of the Republic and at the accession of Siad Barre – which could have been used to ameliorate the worst symptoms of violent clan rivalry. Even following the collapse of the central government in 1991, a number of voices continued to call for the end of piracy off northern Somalia – particularly amongst the governing elements in Puntland,

Somaliland, and at Mogadishu, amongst the nation's still-vibrant Islamic community, and amongst the many Somalis who have been displaced due to the social and economic consequences of maritime predation. Even some pirates, including veteran marauder Abshir Boyah, have begun to denounce the practice. Though the distortion of traditional institutions, an increased reliance on maritime resources, and the inauguration of illegal fishing and dumping in Somali territorial waters set the stage for the emergence of Somali piracy, the play could not commence without the participation of the actors, the Somalis themselves.<sup>184</sup>

Whether one considers the actions of Somali pirates to be justified as self-defense or condemns their piracy as a series of violent – and sometimes deadly – criminal acts, Somali pirates have made an impact in today's world well beyond the expectations normally reserved for impoverished coastal fishermen. That impact, the product of more than two hundred years of Somali interaction with the West, is a reminder of the interconnectivity of World Civilization. Northern Somalia, rough and arid though much of it is, has played an important role in world history since before the writing of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. It should come as no surprise that, for better or worse, it continues to do so now.

It is the author's sincere hope that Somalia should receive increased scholarly attention, positioned as it is astride a crossroads of world commerce and cultural exchange. But, more importantly still, it is the author's wish that a brighter day should come for Somalia, so that more Somalis might have the opportunity to enjoy and participate in that scholarship.

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184. Gettleman, "For Somali Pirates, Worst Enemy May Be on Shore."

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