

THE MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION SOMALIA-CHINA IN COMBATING PIRACY IN SOMALIA'S WATERS (2008-2024)

KERJA SAMA KEAMANAN MARITIM SOMALIA-CINA DALAM PENANGGULANGAN PEMBAJAKAN DI PERAIRAN SOMALIA (2008-2024)

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Abstract - This research examines the relationship between Somalia's maritime security cooperation with China in combating piracy in Somali waters, particularly the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, from 2008 to 2024. The main objective of this research is to analyze the impact of bilateral cooperation between the two countries on reducing the threat of piracy, maritime security capabilities, and the broader implications for national and regional stability in Somalia. Using a qualitative case study methodology with secondary data obtained from official government documents, United Nations reports, international organization reports, scientific publications, and credible national media. Data analysis was conducted through content analysis of the development of China's naval strategy, the impact of piracy on socio-economics, and the role of multilateral cooperation within the framework of international relations and maritime security theory. The research findings indicate that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has evolved from a mission focused on protection to participating in joint patrols and multilateral exercises, which significantly reduced piracy between 2009 and 2018. This cooperation will impact the improvement of Somalia's maritime security capabilities and post-conflict economic recovery, and help stabilize the regional area. This aligns with China's strategic goals mentioned in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The piracy rate in Somalia from 2019 to 2023 was relatively low due to the implementation of continuous naval patrols, increased coast guard capacity, and the integration of maritime cooperation for broader economic recovery under the Belt and Road Initiative framework. However, in 2024, piracy rates resurfaced, indicating the need for sustained cooperation, adaptive strategies, and the integration of military diplomacy into Somalia's foreign policy.

Keywords: China, foreign policy, maritime security, piracy, Somalia

Abstrak – Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan kerjasama bidang keamanan maritim Somalia dengan Cina dalam memerangi pembajakan yang terjadi di perairan Somalia, khususnya Teluk Aden dan Samudra Hindia dari tahun 2008 hingga 2024. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis dampak kerja sama bilateral ke dua negara terhadap menurunnya ancaman pembajakan, kemampuan keamanan maritim, dan dampak yang lebih luas bagi stabilitas nasional dan regional di Somalia. Menggunakan metodologi studi kasus kualitatif dengan data sekunder yang diperoleh dari dokumen resmi pemerintah, dewan Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa, laporan organisasi internasional, publikasi ilmiah, dan media nasional kredibel. Analisis data dilakukan melalui analisis konten terhadap perkembangan strategi angkatan laut Cina, dampak pembajakan terhadap sosial-ekonomi, serta peran kerja sama multilateral dalam kerangka teori hubungan internasional dan keamanan maritim. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Angkatan Laut Tentara Pembebasan Rakyat Cina (PLAN) mengalami perkembangan, dari misi yang berfokus melindungi, menjadi ikut terlibat dalam patroli bersama dan latihan multilateral, yang secara signifikan mengurangi pembajakan antara tahun 2009 dan 2018. Kerjasama ini berdampak pada peningkatan

kemampuan keamanan maritim Somalia, pemulihan ekonomi pasca-konflik, dan membantu menstabilkan kawasan regional. Ini sejalan dengan tujuan strategis Cina yang disebutkan dalam Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Tingkat pembajakan di Somalia dari tahun 2019 hingga 2023 relatif rendah, dikarenakan terlaksananya patroli angkatan laut yang berkelanjutan, peningkatan kapasitas penjaga pantai, dan integrasi kerja sama maritim untuk pemulihan ekonomi yang lebih luas di bawah kerangka Belt and Road Initiative. Namun, pada tahun 2024, tingkat pembajakan kembali terjadi, hal ini menunjukkan bahwa diperlukannya kerja sama secara berkelanjutan, strategi adaptif, dan integrasi diplomasi militer ke dalam kebijakan luar negeri Somalia.

Kata kunci: Cina, kebijakan luar negeri, keamanan maritim, pembajakan, Somalia

Introduction

Somalia is a country located in the Horn of Africa, occupies a strategic geographical position at the easternmost tip of the African continent. It shares borders with Ethiopia to the west, Kenya to the east, the Gulf of Aden to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the east. Somalia's position gives this country of significant access to key maritime routes and neighboring countries (Rondos, 2016).

With a coastline stretching approximately 3,025 kilometers (Carbone & Accordi, 2000), the longest on mainland Africa, Somalia is positioned along some of the most important maritime trade routes in the world, linking Asia, Africa, and Europe through the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal. This geographical advantage presents significant economic and strategic opportunities but it also exposes Somalia to considerable security challenges.



Figure 1. Map of Somalia
Sources: Google Maps, 2025

As shown in Figure 1. Somalia has experienced prolonged armed conflict and political instability since the collapse of its central government in the early 1990s. This ongoing instability has stifled economic growth and rendered large parts of the country unsafe for business activities. Much of Somalia's economy operates informally, with key sectors such as trade, fishing, and agriculture forming the backbone. Somalia is highly dependent on international aid to meet basic needs and fund development, which, while crucial for economic stabilization, also leaves the country vulnerable to changes in international policy. Despite these challenges, Somalia's strategic location in the Horn of Africa gives it the potential to become a hub

for maritime trade. However, the threat of piracy off the Somali coast has damaged the country's reputation as a safe trade route.

Despite having the longest coastline in Africa, Somalia's maritime and related economic security protection remains underdeveloped. The coastline presents many commercial and strategic opportunities but also associated national security risks, including arms and human trafficking, piracy, and as a channel for terrorists to move arms and personnel from the Middle East to the Horn of Africa (The Ministry of Planning, 2024). From economic and environmental perspectives, the risks include illegal foreign fishing activity, the dumping of toxic waste, and unregulated economic activity. In addition, piracy off the coast of Somalia has raised the costs of shipping, presented grave physical risks, and had damaged Somalia's commercial opportunities to exploit a globally strategic shipping route and rich fish stocks. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has recognized the importance of marine security and has designated the territorial waters of Somalia, the continental shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone, demarcation and matters related to the Red Sea as matters of national security (UN SOM and the World Bank, 2017).

In order to safeguard its national security, both economic and maritime, Somalia has established several forms of

cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral, including with China. This collaboration reflects Somalia's urgent need to protect its waters and strengthen its maritime governance. The rise of piracy in Somalia, however, cannot be separated from the country's internal conditions. The collapse of the Somali government in 1991 caused the disintegration of state institutions and left a vacuum of authority. In the absence of law enforcement, piracy emerged as survival strategy for coastal communities that lacked state protection and basic services. Economic hardship further exacerbated this problem. Widespread poverty and high unemployment particularly among youth, with nearly 67% jobless in order to protect their national security, including economic and maritime, Somalia is having several cooperation both bilateral and multilateral with many countries, which one of them is China. The rise of piracy in Somalia can be attributed to a combination of social and economic factors that have created a conducive environment for such activities. The collapse of the Somali government in 1991 resulted in a disintegration of state functions, leaving a void where law and order no longer existed. This vacuum allowed piracy to emerge as a survival strategy in the absence of a functioning government capable of providing security

or basic services. Contributing further to the problem is the pervasive poverty and high unemployment rate in Somalia, particularly among the youth, with 67% of young people jobless (Karawita, 2019) created fertile ground for piracy. For many young Somali men, hijacking ships became a tempting alternative to secure livelihoods. The redistribution of profits within clans also turned piracy into a socially accepted practice, reinforcing its persistence. At the same time, corruption and organized crime networks contribute greatly in sustaining piracy. These syndicates provided the resources, technology, and financial channels needed to support operations, often through money laundering and other illicit activities. This combination of weak governance, dire economic conditions, and entrenched criminal structures has made piracy a deeply rooted challenge in Somalia.

The dire economic situation makes piracy an appealing alternative for many young Somali men desperate to improve their livelihoods. The lack of legitimate economic opportunities has also led many to see piracy as a viable path to financial success, with the profits often shared within communities, incentivizing participation. Somali social dynamics, which emphasize community support and sharing, further reinforce piracy as an accepted means of income, as wealth generated from these activities is typically redistributed among clan members. Corruption and organized crime also play a significant role in perpetuating piracy, with organized syndicates providing the resources and technology needed to sustain these operations, often through money laundering and other illicit activities.

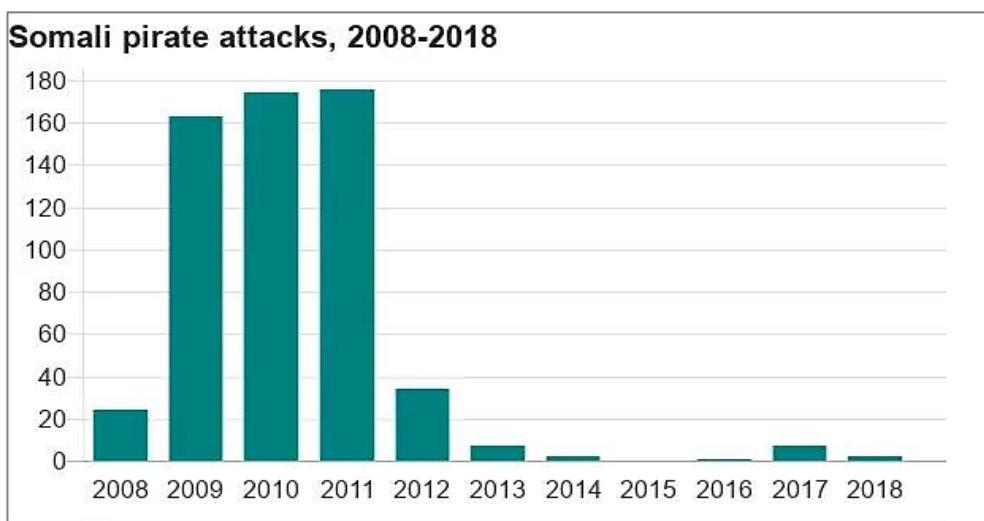


Figure 2. Somali Pirate Attacks
Source: Redrawn from BBC, 2019

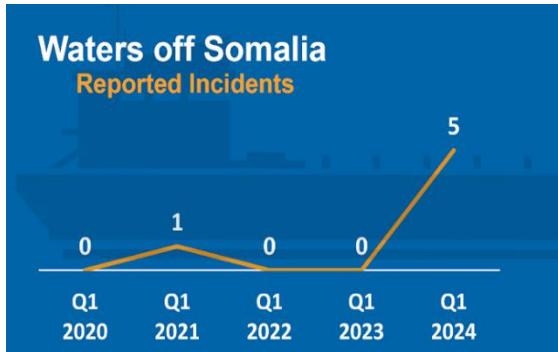


Figure 3. Piracy in Somalia Somali Pirate Q1 Attacks Q1 2020-2024

Source: The international Chamber of Commerce, 2024

Pirate attacks in Somalia started at least in 2008 and peaked in 2011, but have declined to negligible levels in recent years. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, this trend reflects how piracy incidents fell drastically after 2011 and remained relatively low between 2020 and 2023. However, the data also indicate a renewed threat in 2024, when Somali pirates attacked a Bangladeshi vessel in the Indian Ocean.

Pirate attacks in Somalia started at least in 2008 and peaked in 2011, but have declined to negligible levels in recent years. Unfortunately, after several years decrease, in 2024, there was an attack of Somali pirate to Bangladesh's ships in the Indian Ocean (Arbar, 2024). The renewed activity of Somali pirates is concerning, making it more important than ever to protect trade, secure shipping routes, and ensure the safety of the seafarers who keep global commerce running. It is essential to take all necessary steps to maintain the continuous and uninterrupted flow of goods through international supply chains (The International Chamber of Commerce, 2024). Especially now, according to Figure 4. When the Somalia's economic seems to be growing. Somalia's country known has poverty declined from 69% in 2021 to 54.4% in 2022, while youth unemployment remained high at 30.1% in 2022, well above the 21.7% overall unemployment rate.

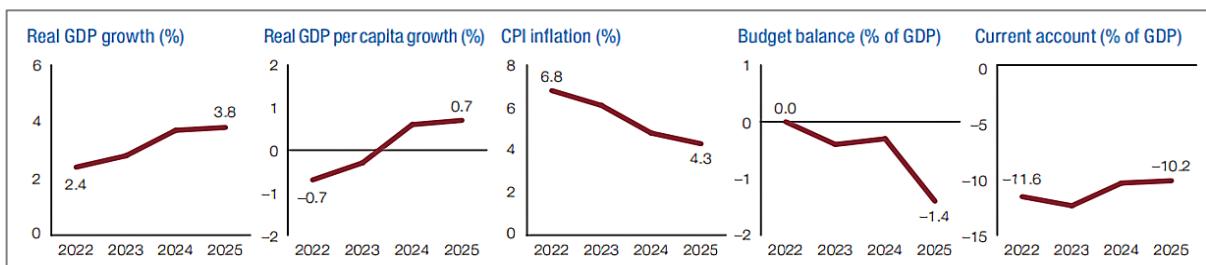


Figure 4. Somalia's Economic Outlook

Source: Adapted from African Development Bank Group, 2024

Therefore, the object of this research is the maritime security cooperation between Somalia and China in combating piracy in Somalia's waters, specifically in the Gulf of

Aden and the Indian Ocean, during the period 2008–2024. This object is chosen because the cooperation reflects a unique intersection of Somalia's urgent need to

safeguard its maritime domain and China's growing role as a global security actor through the deployment of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The partnership offers a valuable case study in how bilateral military cooperation can address non-traditional security threats while also serving broader economic and geopolitical interests.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the implementation of Somalia's foreign policy through its cooperation with China's military in addressing piracy, assess the effectiveness of these efforts in enhancing maritime security, and examine the implications for regional stability and economic recovery. This study also seeks to contribute to the understanding of how military diplomacy operates in the asymmetric maritime threats.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which focuses on understanding social and political phenomena through detailed and descriptive data gathered in natural contexts (Creswell, 2013, p.32). This approach is considered suitable as the study explores the political, economic, and security aspects of maritime security cooperation between Somalia and China, an area that requires contextual and interpretative analysis rather

than quantitative measurement. By employing a qualitative design, the study is able to examine the complexity of foreign policy implementation and assess its implications for efforts to reduce piracy.

The research adopts a case study approach, which (Yin, 2018) defines as an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world setting, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A single-case study is chosen because the Somalia–China maritime security cooperation represents a unique and critical case in maritime cooperation, with clear operational and policy implications.

Defines as an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A single-case study is chosen because the Somalia–China maritime security cooperation represents a unique and critical case in maritime cooperation, with clear operational and policy implications. Within this case study framework, the study employs descriptive analysis as the analytical technique. Descriptive analysis, as explained by (Babbie, 2020) involves systematically describing the characteristics and patterns

of a phenomenon without manipulating variables. This makes it suitable for mapping the evolution of cooperation, identifying strategic patterns, and assessing impacts over time. Involves systematically describing the characteristics and patterns of a phenomenon without manipulating variables, making it suitable for mapping the evolution of cooperation, identifying strategic patterns, and assessing impacts over time.

Data collection focused on secondary sources, including official government documents, United Nations resolutions, and reports from international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the African Development Bank. Credible news agencies and historical records of piracy incidents were also used to provide relevant insights. The reliance on secondary data was necessary due to the limited feasibility of conducting fieldwork in Somalia, given security challenges and restricted access. Moreover, piracy incidents and maritime security cooperation between Somalia and China have been extensively documented by international organizations and research institutions, making secondary sources sufficient and reliable for capturing the dynamics of the case.

Data were collected through document review and analyzed using content analysis. According to (Krippendorff, 2019), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use, which in this study helps to identify recurring themes such as strategic cooperation, operational developments, and piracy trends. To further interpret these findings, the analysis is situated within the framework of International Relations and maritime security theories, which provide the conceptual tools to understand how Somalia's foreign policy and cooperation with China address the challenges of piracy and regional stability.

The analysis is informed by two main theoretical frameworks: The analysis is guided by two theoretical frameworks: International Relations (IR) theory and the concept of Maritime security.

International Relations

In analyzing the maritime security cooperation between Somalia and China, this study draws from key perspectives within International Relations (IR) theory, particularly realism and liberal institutionalism.

From a realist perspective, states are the primary actors in an anarchic international system where no overarching authority exists, and their actions are primarily driven by the pursuit of power, security, and survival. Realism highlights how states act to protect their security and strategic interests, as seen in China's deployment to secure sea lines of communication and Somalia's efforts to safeguard its territorial waters and economic stability (Waltz, 1980). Realism views maritime security cooperation as a strategic tool for protecting national interests, Somalia seeks to safeguard its territorial waters and economic stability, while China aims to secure vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs) for trade and energy supply. In this sense, China's naval deployment to Somalia's waters aligns with realist assumptions that states enhance their military presence abroad to protect strategic assets and increase their influence in critical regions.

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, international cooperation is possible and often necessary, even in an anarchic system, because institutions, norms, and interdependence reduce the likelihood of conflict. Meanwhile, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the role of cooperation and international frameworks

in addressing shared challenges, explaining why both countries engage not only bilaterally but also through multilateral mechanisms such as UN Security Council mandates (Keohane & Nye, 2017). By applying IR theory, this study evaluates how political interests and strategic considerations shape the cooperation. This viewpoint explains how Somalia and China, despite differences in political systems and development levels, engage in cooperative frameworks both bilaterally and through multilateral mechanisms such as United Nations Security Council mandates to address piracy. Liberal institutionalism emphasizes that cooperation can generate mutual benefits, such as improved maritime security, economic development, and strengthened diplomatic relations.

Maritime Security

Maritime security essentially refers to all efforts aimed at safeguarding a nation's safety and interests at sea, including its territorial waters, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and international shipping lanes. Bueger explains that this concept involved three main dimensions (Bueger, 2015). First, the maritime environment, which relates to the geographical, economic, and socio-cultural factors that shape the character of maritime areas. Second, maritime threats,

which include various risks such as piracy, smuggling, marine pollution, and armed conflict. Third, maritime responses, which are the measures taken to address these threats, ranging from maritime security operations and law enforcement to international cooperation.

Within this framework, Somalia and China joint patrols, legal enforcement, and UN-coordinated missions are examined as practical measures to address piracy while also promoting regional stability. Thus, maritime security theory is used to connect the study's objectives with the operational outcomes of the cooperation

In this study, the concept of maritime security helps explain why and how Somalia and China have chosen to cooperate in addressing piracy threats. Joint patrols, law enforcement efforts, and coordination under the mandate of the United Nations are part of both countries' strategies to secure key shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. These efforts are not only intended to suppress piracy but also to maintain regional stability while protecting the economic and political interests of each nation.

Results and Discussion

Somalia and China established diplomatic relations on December 14, 1960

(Shengchao, 2011). After the outbreak of civil conflict in Somalia in the early 1990s, China consistently supported peace efforts and actively promoted political stability in the country. China's role as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) coordinator for Somalia from 2003 to 2007 reflects this commitment. In line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the Chinese government, since December 2008, has begun deploying naval vessels to carry out routine maritime escort and protection operations in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the coast of Somalia. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) task force then worked with various international navies to secure international shipping lanes or sea lines of communication (SLOCs). In more than a decade, PLAN has deployed more than 100 ships, as well as about 26,000 officers and sailors, in 31 escort convoys, each of which consists of three to four ships and provides security protection for a large number of merchant ships (Xinhua, 2023).

The Chinese military's direct involvement in piracy eradication operations in Somali waters began in 2008, when the PLAN was deployed to the Gulf of Aden in response to the growing threat of piracy (Cheng, 2019). This deployment marks the Chinese navy's first operational

mission outside of its claimed waters (Kaufman, 2009a; Kamerling & Van Der Putten, 2011). China's navy collaborates with the U.S., Japan, Russia, and other navies to execute its plans. This cooperation reflects a broader shift in China's foreign and security policy toward more active involvement in military operations other than war (MOOTW), with an initial focus on protecting China's shipping interests from the threat of piracy (Christoffersen, 2009).

The deployment's purpose grew over time, going beyond just escort missions. Anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden contribute to the gradual development of China's blue-water navy through increased power projection capabilities, operational experience in distant waters, and strengthening China's image as a responsible maritime actor at the international level (Henry, 2016). On a strategic level, the deployment is part of China's broader efforts to secure national economic interests, particularly the protection of SLOCs that are critical to trade and energy supplies. China's Maritime Silk Road initiative, which aims to expand economic connectivity and strategic influence in key maritime areas, aligns with these goals (Henry, 2016). The experience gained from the ongoing operations in the Gulf of Aden also supports the

modernization of the PLAN and expands the reach of the Chinese navy towards the Indian Ocean, thereby strengthening its position as a rising maritime power (Henry, 2016). In addition, China's participation in international efforts to eradicate piracy is often considered an indication of its willingness to take on a more prominent military role at the global level, with implications for its relations with other major powers, particularly the United States (Kaufman, 2009b).

From a foreign policy perspective, cooperation between countries generally relies on the principle of mutual benefit or reciprocity, which is the basis of bilateral and multilateral relations. This principle is clear in the way that Somalia and China work together to fight piracy in Somali waters, where their interests meet. For Somalia, the persistent threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean creates an urgent need to improve maritime security. By allowing PLAN operations in its waters, Somalia reaps tangible benefits in the form of improved maritime security, including a significant reduction in piracy incidents. Better maritime security not only makes international shipping safer, but it also helps the region as a whole stay stable, which is an important step toward economic recovery and social development.

Beyond the security dimension, Somalia also benefits from a broader form of Chinese involvement. As a country still grappling with the long-term effects of prolonged conflict, Somalia needs substantial international support. China's involvement is not limited to military cooperation but also includes economic support and infrastructure development, such as investment in ports and road networks that are essential for economic revitalization. In addition, cooperation with China facilitates Somalia's access to technical and humanitarian assistance. Strategically, closer ties with China have also strengthened Somalia's position on the international stage, allowing it to attract broader support from other countries and international organizations for various development and security initiatives. From China's side, military involvement in Somali waters has a strategic function in protecting vital shipping lanes connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa. These routes are the lifeblood of global trade as well as energy supply flows that support China's economic growth. By securing the sea lane from the threat of piracy, China is protecting its economic interests and strengthening its position as a global maritime power. China's use of naval power in important places like the Gulf of Aden lets it project power beyond its

waters. This is an important step in building a deep-sea navy that can do long-range operations regularly. This engagement is also in line with the Maritime Silk Road as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to strengthen global economic and infrastructure connectivity related to China.

Implementation of Somalia–China Maritime Security Cooperation (2008–2024)

Between 2008 and 2024, maritime security cooperation between Somalia and China evolved significantly as both nations sought to address the persistent threat of piracy in Somalia's waters, particularly in the Gulf of Aden. According to data from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), incidents of piracy in the region peaked in 2011 with over 200 reported attacks but declined sharply after the intensification of coordinated naval patrols, capacity-building initiatives, and information-sharing mechanisms (International Maritime Bureau, 2024). The cooperation was rooted in both countries' strategic interests: for Somalia, safeguarding its maritime sovereignty and protecting its coastal communities; while for China, ensuring the safety of vital sea lanes for its trade and energy imports. This dynamic reflects a combination

of Realist which motives from driven by the protection of national security and economic interests, and Liberalist that emphasizing multilateral engagement and the strengthening of institutional frameworks for maritime governance.

On the other hand, from a maritime security theory perspective; the partnership addressed the four core dimensions: military measures (joint patrols and escort missions), law enforcement cooperation (training Somali coast guards and improving legal frameworks for prosecuting pirates), infrastructure development (modernizing Somali port facilities and communication systems), and regional collaboration (aligning with initiatives such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct).



Figure 5. The People's Liberation Army Navy first anti-piracy operation took place in the Gulf of Aden on 6 January 2009
Source: Erickson et al., 2009

PLAN's Evolving Approach to Piracy in the Gulf of Aden

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has significantly evolved its approach to addressing the threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden since its initial involvement in 2009.

Each phase of this evolution reflects how PLAN has adjusted its strategies and tactics to meet the increasingly complex challenges of maintaining maritime security in one of the world's most strategic shipping lanes (Erickson & Mikolay, 2009).

This approach continued through 2011, focusing on ensuring the safety of merchant vessels. In 2012, PLAN adopted more assertive measures, including simulated assaults and warning shots, marking a shift toward a more proactive stance.

From 2013 to 2015, PLAN increased its focus on international cooperation, engaging in joint exercises and information sharing with other navies, thereby strengthening its role in global maritime security. By collaborating with other nations, PLAN not only expanded the scope of its operations but also demonstrated China's commitment to international stability and security (Henry, 2016).

Since 2016 to the present, PLAN has continued to refine its tactics based on the operational experiences it has gained. PLAN has begun employing a combination of intimidation and direct-action during escort missions, reflecting a broader understanding of the complexities of maritime security. This evolution reflects PLAN's deepening

understanding of maritime security complexities and its commitment to a more comprehensive and adaptive strategy in the Gulf of Aden (Henry, 2016).

Domestic or Internal Factors

The domestic factors in Somalia are significant in explaining why the country has become a hub for maritime piracy, particularly in the strategically important waters of the Gulf of Aden. Somalia's geographical location, near one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world, the Gulf of Aden, is a significant factor. This route connects the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, making it a vital corridor for international trade. However, Somalia's extensive coastline, stretching approximately 3,025 kilometers, is extremely difficult for local authorities to monitor and control. This situation gives pirates a tactical advantage, allowing them to operate easily, hide, and escape after launching attacks. Additionally, Somalia borders countries that also face maritime security challenges, such as Yemen, further increasing the region's vulnerability to criminal activities, including piracy (Potgieter, 2008).

The political and security instability that has plagued Somalia since the fall of Siad

Barre's regime in January 1991 exacerbates this situation. The prolonged civil war and clan conflicts have created deep political instability, resulting in the central government's weakened ability to control its own territory. The government's inability to enforce laws and maintain security has created a power vacuum that pirate groups have exploited to thrive. As a result, the lack of effective authority enables pirates to operate relatively freely, without fear of repressive action from the government (Elmi & Barise, 2006).

Furthermore, Somalia's collapsed economy is a major factor driving individuals to engage in criminal activities such as piracy. A significant portion of the Somali population lives in extreme poverty, with little or no access to decent employment opportunities. In a situation where livelihoods are hard to come by, many people, particularly the youth, see piracy as the only means of survival. Corruption within the government exacerbates this situation, as corrupt officials either facilitate or, at the very least, do not hinder illegal activities (Djama, 2011).

The breakdown of social and legal structures in Somalia is also important in the proliferation of piracy. The absence of a functioning legal system means there is no effective law enforcement to prevent or punish acts of piracy. In some cases, traditional clan structures even support

or do not obstruct pirate activities, viewing them as a way to protect or benefit their communities. This creates an environment where the law holds little power, allowing pirates to operate with impunity (Guilfoyle, 2009).

Finally, the exploitation of marine resources by foreign fishermen engaged in illegal fishing in Somali waters further aggravates the situation. This exploitation depletes marine resources, which are the primary livelihood for many coastal communities. As these vital natural resources diminish, anger grows, pushing some groups to retaliate by hijacking foreign ships. This cycle of violence and crime perpetuates itself, deepening the instability in the region (Glaser et al., 2019).

External Factors

External factors are significant in understanding the dynamics of piracy in Somali waters. The international system and regional sub-system are instrumental in shaping global and regional frameworks and responses to this threat. These two systems are interconnected in global and regional efforts to address piracy and ensure ongoing security and stability in these strategic waters.

International System

a. Global Maritime Security

The waters around Somalia, particularly the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean, are among the most vital international trade routes in the world. This route connects the Indian Ocean with the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, serving as a key passage for ships transporting goods between Asia and Europe. Consequently, maritime security in this region is crucial for the smooth flow of global trade (He et al., 2023).

Any disruption in these waters, such as piracy, can have wide-reaching economic impacts, harming many countries. To address this threat, numerous nations, including China, participate in multinational operations such as Combined Task Force 151, as well as NATO and EU NAVFOR operations, all designed to maintain security and suppress piracy in Somali waters. China's involvement in these operations demonstrates its commitment to supporting global stability and protecting international maritime interests (Schwarz, 2012).

b. China's Role on the Global Stage

As an increasingly dominant global power, China has a significant interest in strengthening its position on the international stage, particularly concerning global security issues. China's involvement

in efforts to maintain maritime security off the coast of Somalia is part of a broader strategy to demonstrate its leadership in addressing global security challenges. By actively participating in anti-piracy operations, China not only protects its economic interests linked to maritime trade routes but also increases its image as a responsible nation contributing to global peace and stability (Kamerling & Van Der Putten, 2011).

c. International Cooperation Framework

International efforts to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia are closely tied to the framework of international cooperation facilitated by global organizations. The UN Security Council, for example, has issued several resolutions encouraging member states to collaborate in addressing the piracy problem. As a permanent member of the Security Council, China has both a moral and political obligation to support the implementation of these resolutions. China, along with other nations, works through international platforms such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which plays a key role in promoting maritime safety and security worldwide. This cooperation ensures that efforts to combat piracy are coordinated

and effective, involving various countries and international organizations (Boamah, 2023).

d. Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

Through direct cooperation with Somalia, China can help build Somalia's maritime security capacity, including training and providing equipment for the Somali navy and coast guard. This collaboration is often carried out within the framework of multinational operations such as Combined Task Force 151, NATO, and EU NAVFOR. By enhancing Somalia's ability to protect its own waters, China contributes to a more sustainable solution to piracy and strengthens regional security (Schwarz, 2012).

Regional Sub-System

a. Security in East Africa and the Horn of Africa

Maritime security in Somali waters impacts not only Somalia itself but also the regional stability of East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Countries in this region heavily rely on safe waters for their trade and economic sustainability.

Piracy in Somali waters can disrupt trade activities, raise maritime insurance costs, and threaten the safety of ships and their crews (Potgieter, 2008). This

has the potential to create broader instability in the region. In this case, China, through cooperation with countries in this region, including Somalia, plays a key role in collective efforts to enhance maritime security. This cooperation includes military training, joint patrols, and intelligence sharing aimed at strengthening the capacity of regional countries to face maritime threats. By helping to improve maritime security in this region, China contributes to regional stability and economic well-being (Schwarz, 2012).

b. Regional Economic and Infrastructure Initiatives

Somalia is one of the countries involved in China's global initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This initiative includes various infrastructure projects and investments aimed at enhancing connectivity and economic development in several countries, including those in East Africa and the Horn of Africa (Dianjaya, 2019).

Maritime security is an important factor for the success of this initiative. China understands that stability in Somali waters is essential to ensuring the smooth progress of infrastructure projects under the BRI. Therefore, in

addition to providing military assistance, China is also investing in infrastructure development in Somalia and its neighboring countries. These investments not only help improve local economic conditions but also serve as a preventive measure to reduce the factors that contribute to piracy, such as poverty and economic instability. Thus, China's contributions to economic and infrastructure development in this region are an integral part of broader efforts to enhance regional security and stability (Demissie et al., 2016).

Decision Making Process

a. President to President

In December 2008, a summit was held in Beijing where the President of Somalia and the President of China signed a joint statement reaffirming the commitment of both countries to cooperate in addressing piracy and promoting economic growth. This meeting was updated in December 2022 to reinforce the commitment.

b. Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Foreign Ministers of Somalia and China held a series of meetings in Mogadishu and Beijing to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

on maritime security cooperation and economic investment. This bilateral dialogue continues through regular video conferences and diplomatic visits. Both parties discussed the implementation of anti-piracy operations, economic aid, and infrastructure projects.

c. Ministry of Defense to Ministry of Defense

Ministry of Defense to Ministry of Defense joint task force was established between the Somali Navy and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). This task force began conducting anti-piracy operations in January 2009 in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, including joint patrols and military exercises.

d. Ministry of Economy to the Ministry of Commerce of China

Negotiations and the signing of a trade agreement in 2010 facilitated the export of Somali products to China and the import of high-tech goods and industrial equipment from China to Somalia. China also invested in the development of Mogadishu Port and the improvement of transportation infrastructure in Somalia to support trade and economic growth.

Impact of Maritime Cooperation between Somalia and China

The implementation of maritime cooperation between Somalia and China, particularly through joint patrols and military operations in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters, has been highly effective in reducing piracy incidents. From 2009 to 2018, the number of piracy attacks significantly decreased.

The improvement in maritime security has had a direct and positive impact on Somalia's economy. Several critical factors contributed to a significant reduction in the poverty rate, which dropped from 69% in 2021 to 54.4% in 2022.

Enhanced security in Somali waters not only benefits Somalia but also contributes to the broader stability of East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

Safe maritime trade routes are essential for the global economy. The reduction in piracy incidents ensures that key routes, such as the Gulf of Aden, which connects the Indian Ocean with the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, remain open and secure for commercial shipping.

China's economic assistance, including training and technology transfer, are significant in helping Somalia improve its industrial capacity and promote sustainable development.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations

Despite these achievements, Somalia's continued dependence on external naval partners also raises concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of its maritime security framework. Reliance on foreign naval presence may constrain the development of autonomous maritime governance and limit Somalia's ability to respond to evolving security threats independently. Consequently, sustained cooperation must be complemented by efforts to strengthen domestic institutions, including the Somali Navy, coast guard capabilities, and maritime legal frameworks. Enhancing local ownership of maritime security initiatives is crucial to mitigating structural vulnerabilities that enable piracy to reemerge.

Furthermore, the resurgence of piracy in early 2024 highlights the adaptive nature of maritime crime and the limitations of deterrence-based strategies alone. To be effective, efforts to stop piracy must include naval enforcement, socioeconomic development in coastal communities, legal accountability for those who commit piracy, and ways for different regions to work together. In this context, Somalia–China cooperation remains relevant, but its effectiveness will depend on how well it

aligns external support with Somalia's internal capacity-building priorities and broader regional maritime security arrangements.

Based on these findings, the recommendations highlight the importance of strengthening Somalia's domestic maritime governance capacity while sustaining strategic cooperation with foreign naval forces, including China. This balanced approach is considered necessary to address concerns related to national sovereignty while ensuring operational effectiveness in maritime security efforts. The recommendations further underscore the need to improve intelligence coordination and information-sharing mechanisms, invest in coastal surveillance infrastructure and maritime domain awareness systems, and promote regional cooperation within the frameworks of the African Union and the United Nations Security Council. Collectively, these measures are expected to enhance Somalia's capacity to secure its extensive coastline and contribute to broader maritime security in the region.

In addition, this study does not fully address the long-term sustainability and domestic institutional effects of foreign naval cooperation on Somalia's maritime security governance. Accordingly, the findings should

be interpreted within these analytical boundaries. Future research may extend the analysis through longitudinal designs and wider regional perspectives to examine how international partnerships influence the development of national maritime security capacities over time. Such efforts could also inform more grounded and policy-relevant recommendations for coastal states and international security actors.

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