



## OBP Issue Paper:

### Will Illegal Fishing Ignite a *Preventable* Resurgence of Somali Piracy?

**Incident:** Two Iranian-owned fishing vessels, with 48 Iranian sailors on board, were seized and detained on March 21<sup>st</sup> near Hobyo, a former pirate haven in Somalia

**Issue:** Current conditions off Somalia echo those which led to the recent piracy crisis. However, the under-reporting of small-scale attacks may be masking alarming trends.

#### Background:

- The rise of Somali piracy between 2005-2008 is often attributed to three factors:
  - Governance vacuum created “safe havens” necessary for piracy
  - Foreign fishing vessels visibly exploited coastal fishing areas, fostering resentment in coastal communities
  - Hijacking of fishing vessels by quasi-official parties enjoyed popular support
  - As ransoms increased, piracy attracted hardened criminals and led to exponential growth: (13 attacks in 2004, 121 in 2008, and 277 in 2011)
- Current conditions are similar to start of piracy epidemic in the early 2000’s:
  - Governance systems in Somalia remain weak
  - Foreign fishing vessels have returned to coastal areas
  - Popular support is increasing for local groups to detain foreign fishing boats
  - Recent reports indicate investment in piracy is growing

#### Discussion:

- Over the last two years, the perceived threat of piracy to foreign fishing vessels has dropped, leading to an upsurge in coastal fishing
- International navies do not have a mandate to address illegal fishing (only to monitor), resulting in resentment by coastal communities
- The potential for a rapid resurgence of piracy remains:
  - Piracy business model is not broken (original investment networks remain)
  - Hostility towards foreign fishing vessels is growing in coastal communities
  - Very few alternatives to piracy can compete with piracy in coastal areas
- Current reporting systems for piracy largely ignore acts of piracy against fishing vessels and regional mariners:
  - Ignoring incidents involving dhows and fishing vessels could be concealing a dangerous upward trend in criminal activity

#### Considerations:

- Current focus on suppressing attacks against merchant vessels may be missing key indicators of a piracy resurgence:
  - The desire to “put piracy in the rearview mirror” could fuel over-confidence
  - Alarming trends have received negligible attention
- The next outbreak of Somali piracy is preventable:
  - Efforts must shift to prevention and support for long-term solutions onshore
  - International forces must make a stand on foreign fishing in Somali waters
  - Small investments in Somalia’s future could save billions of dollars and ensure that thousands of seafarers will not be forced to relive the nightmare of piracy



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