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# General Assembly 1

Tackling the issue of maritime piracy in the Gulf  
of Aden





**Forum:** General Assembly 1

**Issue:** Tackling the issue of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden

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## Introduction

Situated on a crucial choke point for world trade, the Gulf of Aden sees more than 21,000 ships crossing it on an annual basis. The Gulf of Aden, as seen in *appendix item 1*, is a vessel in the greater Red Sea trade route, connecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal. The Gulf of Aden, only ~25 kilometers in width at its narrowest point (the Bab-el-Mandeb strait), is hence vital for the route as a whole to function, otherwise cargo ships would need to reroute across the entire continent of Africa to deliver goods and resources. The Gulf of Aden has been subject to maritime piracy for years, both by Somali groups and more recently by Houthi rebels operating from Yemen. Attacks on cargo ships crossing the gulf put all crew members in danger, and pressure traders to navigate via the reroute through the Atlantic Ocean, baring extensive delays on global trade, and economic implications to our interconnected world.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Cargo

The delivery of traded goods aboard ships or airplanes from one place to another. This can be in the form of delivered products or the transport of resources such as crude oil.

### Sea vessel

Any transportation vehicle travelling through the seas. The most common sea vessel within the context of this issue are cargo ships.

### Maritime Piracy

The act of forcefully, and oftentimes violently, entering a sea vessel for purposes of theft or the committing of other crimes. Maritime piracy regards members of one ship attacking the crew of another sea vessel travelling through the same waters.



## **Hijacking**

The act of forcefully, and oftentimes violently, taking over a vehicle, and unlawfully seizing control of it, often redirecting its route and/or threatening the crew. In the context of maritime piracy, hijacking refers to the seizing of sea vessels, and can be part of the piracy attack.

## **Houthi rebel movement**

Established in the 1990's, this group is the major opposition to the Yemeni government, which has been operating a maritime piracy campaign in the past year. Will be referred to as "Houthis", "Houthi rebels" or "the rebel movement" throughout this document.

## **Somali piracy**

Refers to the incidents of maritime piracy perpetrated by Somali fishermen off the coast of the nation, and into the surrounding seas, primarily in the Gulf of Aden. Somali pirates have been infamous for hijacking sea vessels, holding crews hostage, and demanding ransom.

## **Ransom**

A payment demanded in return for the release of hostages, often of high amounts of money. Somali pirates have focused maritime piracy on demanding millions for the release of hostages from hijacked sea vessels.

## **Suez Canal**

Opened in 1869, the Suez Canal is a vital route connecting the Red Sea (and therein the Indian ocean via the Gulf of Aden) to the Mediterranean sea. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden depends greatly on the number of ships that cross it, which is in turn dependent on the functionality of the Suez Canal.

## **NATO**

An abbreviation for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, an alliance of 32 nations across Europe and North America.

## **Operation Open Shield**

NATO's joint operation to tackle Somali piracy between 2009-2016, in the attempt to sustain a peaceful trade of goods and oil through the Gulf of Aden.

## **Perpetrator**

A person or group in charge of committing a crime, or any other violent, unlawful action. In the context of the issue of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the term "perpetrators" will be used to refer to the Houthis and groups of Somali pirates.



## General Overview

For the past months, the Gulf of Aden has been terrorised by maritime pirates, Somali and Houthi, creating a crisis for global trade, as cargo ships are no longer able to safely navigate the region on the path to cross the Suez Canal. It is important to note that maritime piracy in the region has been manifested for separate purposes by the two separate perpetrator groups. Nonetheless, the actions of any maritime pirates in the region can have devastating consequences on world trade, and with regards to that the two groups are indifferent.

### Somali piracy — Economic piracy

Somali piracy is not new, rooted in the exploitation of regional waters for external use. This has come in the form of resource extraction, use of the waters for cargo routes, and displacement of toxic and/or poisonous waste from cargo ships, which have collectively compromised Somali fishermen. In addition, in the 1990's, Somalia was under civil war, and the lack of a stable government to support the fishermen led to small groups conducting maritime piracy as a form of retaliation and an alternative source of income. This provides the origin of Somali piracy. However, in the 21st century, particularly from 2008-2016, piracy had reached new peaks, with hijacking and ransom demand perpetuated repeatedly, and turning into dangerous crime rather than moral retaliation. Nevertheless, a hierarchy whereby fishermen conduct piracy working for local clan leaders had also formed over the years, turning the operation into a series of organised crime. Somali piracy is hence not completely individualised, but there is no central organisation managing it contrary to the Houthis. Somali piracy is also therefore dependent on local instability, which is why it is returning now after years of quiet. International groups such as NATO & Interpol have previously tackled Somali piracy in the past with local enforcements and the NATO led Operation Ocean See *appendix item 2* for further information on Somali piracy.

### Houthi piracy — Political piracy

The Houthis are an armed group operating from Yemen that has been strengthening progressively since being founded in 1992. The organisation became prominent in 2015, in which it led a coup against the Yemeni government, initiating a civil war that is still ongoing, with nations like Saudi Arabia in a coalition supporting the government. As a result, the Houthi movement possesses control of the capital Sana'a, and the coastal regions of Yemen alongside the Gulf of Aden. Unlike Somali pirates, the Houthis do not pirate for income, and are instead funded by the state of Iran. Rather, Houthi piracy is a war tactic against the state of Israel and the USA, as an effort to combat the nation as a response to the war in Gaza. Sea vessels en route to Israel are pirated by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden, but the rebel movement has attacked other cargo ships as well, meaning all ships are threatened and ultimately prevented from passing the gulf. As such, the United States alongside Britain have already launched aerial attacks on Houthi bases.



## Major Parties Involved

### Somalia

The Somali pirates operating from the coasts of the nation are responsible for threatening international trade, and Somalia hence plays a crucial role in the issue. It is the employment of law enforcement systems in Somalia itself that could preemptively prevent the pirates from even setting off, and such systems must be strengthened.

### Yemen

The Houthi rebels which initiate the majority of contemporary attacks operate within Yemenese soil. The Yemeni government is still facing a power struggle with the group since 2015, and could use newfound sovereignty to combat the rebel movement on water as well.

### Houthi Rebel Movement

The Houthis constitute one of the two key perpetrator groups of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Since the Israel-Hamas war had begun in October 2023, the Houthis have been hijacking and pirating cargo ships in the Gulf of Aden, presumably only attacking sea vessels routed to Israel. However, with over 100 attacks the attacks are threatening global trade as a whole.

### Somali Piracy Groups

Are the second key perpetrator group of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Somali piracy had originally started as a way to make a living for fishermen living in coastal Somalia, and with turmoil initiated by recent Houthi piracy, Somali groups are reintroducing maritime piracy attacks. Note that unlike the Houthis, this is not a single group (see *General Overview*).

### Djibouti

Having immediate access to the Gulf of Aden, and being home to several foreign military bases, Djibouti is both directly affected by the reduction of cargo activity, and has the possibility to support potential solutions to the issue. It has ratified previous UN conventions against piracy, and constitutes a key partner in combating Somali and Houthi piracy in the region today.

### Israel

The attacks of Houthi rebels have been declared to be an anti-Israel measure, as a sign of solidarity for Palestinians as part of the war in Gaza. Since then, there have been exchanges of fire between the two nations. Therefore, Israel is both a nation involved in the fight against the Houthi piracy, as well as a nation whose actions are said to have started it in the first place.



## The United States of America

The USA has attacked Houthi bases as interventions for the consequences the attacks have had on global trade, alongside the United Kingdom. It is committed to restoring a peaceful trading process through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

### Timeline of Key Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
November 17th 1869	Commercial opening of the Suez Canal
1967-1975	The Suez Canal closed as a result of war, the Gulf of Aden mostly inactive subsequently
December 10th 1982	Publication of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), defining maritime piracy as an illegal, criminal activity
1994	Somali fishermen disguised as local coast guard occasionally conduct minor piracy attacks
December 26th 2004	Tsunami in the Indian Ocean destabilises the region, leading to Somali piracy worsening.
2005	Early instances of organised Somali piracy
2008	NATO declares its involvement to combat Somali attacks
August 17th 2009	Start of Operation Ocean Shield by NATO
2011	Peak of Somali piracy — 237 reported attacks
2015	Start of the civil war in Yemen, Houthi rebel movement taking over
December 15th 2016	End of Operation Ocean Shield by NATO. Somali piracy largely combatted and reduced
October 2023	The Houthi movement declares solidarity for Palestinians following the start of war in Gaza.
November 2023	With emerging instability in the region, instances of Somali piracy reappear.
November 19th 2023	Houthi movement hijacks a ship in the Red Sea for the first time.
January 23rd 2024	USA and Britain attack strikes on Houthi bases as a response to increasing maritime piracy affecting global trade.



## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

*The UN has been effective in unpacking Somali Piracy under general law of the sea matters, however has not reciprocated that for Houthi piracy. Feel free to explore via appendix item 3 the comprehensive list of resolutions by the various bodies of the UN.*

Hyperlinks on the *date* of each resolution or treaty below are to the *published document itself*.

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), [December 10th 1982](#)  
Illegalised maritime piracy everywhere.
- Security Council resolution 1814, [May 15th 2008](#)  
Recognised Somali piracy as an issue, and mandated that no group shall disrupt or block peaceful cargo and trade via the Gulf of Aden, nor the efforts to sustain it.
- Security Council Resolution 2316, [9th of November 2016](#)  
Called upon Somali authorities to support the efforts against maritime piracy, and recognised that the issue is still ongoing.
- General Assembly Resolution 72/73, [5th of December 2017](#)  
Discussed the successes in reducing the extent of Somali maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden. The contents of this resolution can be looked at as a methodology of short term solutions for Somali piracy, which indeed saw a decrease during this time.
- General Assembly Resolution 78/69, [5th of December 2023](#)  
Discussed the efforts to tackle maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden which has started to reappear contemporarily to this resolution. Resolution 78/69 is the most recent attempt at solving the issue at the time of writing this document.

## Possible Solutions

### Presence of armed forces of peace enforcement in the region

#### *On water*

The cargo ships ultimately under attack are generally unarmed, and are hence unable to defend themselves upon being pirated and/or hijacked. The presence of separate peace enforcement forces on water could be able to intervene with maritime piracy perpetrators, supporting pirated sea vessels and their crews. Additionally, the presence of armed peace enforcement forces could serve as a preemptive threat to any potential perpetrators of maritime piracy, and potentially prevent attacks. This could be enabled via allyship with neighboring nations in the region, such as Djibouti.



### *On land*

All pirating vessels depart from and return to the coast at one point or another. Similarly to the previous point, this could constitute a preemptive threat to piracy groups, both on the coasts of Somalia and the coasts of Yemen. On the other hand, it is a more intricate solution to enforce as it will require direct contact on the lands of potentially hostile nations to the peace force groups present.

### **Strengthening national governments in Yemen & Somalia**

Neither the Houthis nor Somali pirates are UN member states, and both operate from the lands of a UN member state regardless. Strengthening the local authorities, and the sovereignty of local governments, could limit the ability of piracy groups to operate. However, this solution is more complex to implement, and one must consider whether this is within the mandate of the UN.

### **Declaring maritime piracy as an illegitimate war tactic**

Ultimately, the Houthi attacks originate as a response to the Israel-Hamas war. This type of war tactic, orchestrating an offensive against a nation which disrupts global trade, must be de-legitimised by the United Nations. The UN cannot allow regional disputes to manifest into threats on international economies and communities.

### **Striving to resolve the root causes**

As seen in the *General Overview*, Somali piracy is caused by economic instabilities for fishermen in the region, while Houthi piracy is caused by political turmoil in the region. In addition to solving the issue of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden via measures against perpetrators, the United Nations General Assembly can also attack the issue at its root.

### **Understanding the subtleties between Somali and Houthi piracy groups**

The two perpetrators are quite different. The former is an unorganised collection of groups pirating for economic purposes, that has already been neutralised in the past by the efforts of NATO and its allies. The latter is an organised military group, new on the scene of maritime piracy, with widespread political influence over its nation, and further military power aside from the pirating sea vessels. For instance, the USA & Britain launched a joint attack on Houthi bases as an attempt to solve the issue, but an airstrike solution would not apply to Somali piracy. Moreover, given Somali piracy has been eliminated before, previous methods can be applied now as well, but this does not necessarily apply to the Houthis. Hence, it is necessary for UN General Assembly resolutions to take both groups into account, and perhaps offer some separate measures for each, as well as comprehensive measures that apply to both.





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## Appendices

### 1. Map of the region for reference

Below is a map of the Gulf of Aden. The strait of Bab-el-Mandeb is its narrowest part, where maritime piracy is prevalent. Note the regional presence of Djibouti and Somalia on one side, and Yemen and Saudi Arabia on the other.



### 2. Recommended short documentary for Somali piracy up until 2016

Also cited by this document, the following YouTube video documentary by Johnny Harris explains Somali piracy extensively and informatively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6QYERfIO-Y&t=1639s>

### 3. A comprehensive list of further UN resolutions

The following link, and the resolutions it redirects to are recommended to study the measures taken by the various UN bodies over the years.

[https://www.un.org/depts/los/piracy/piracy\\_documents.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/piracy/piracy_documents.htm)