

GMUNC XIII



Specialized Committee

**Contact Group on the
Reemergence of Piracy off the
Coast of Somalia**

Contact Group on the Reemergence of Piracy off the Coast of Somalia

I. About the committee

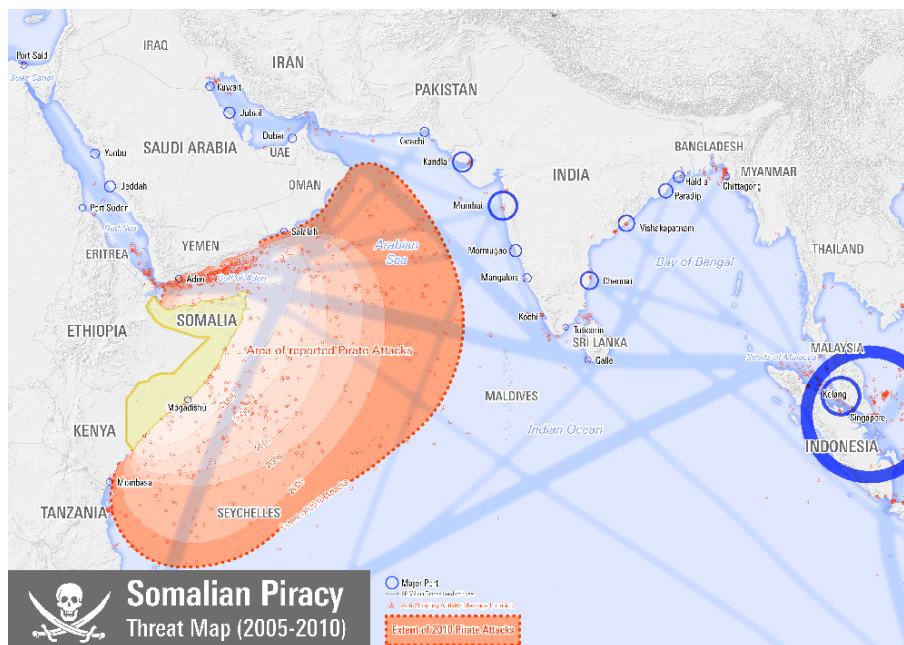
UN Security Council Resolution 1851 created the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, usually shortened to CGPCS, in 2008. It was created so that naval powers, the states most affected by piracy, and the shipping industry would have one channel to coordinate with each other instead of needing Security Council resolutions every time a new country or company wanted to join or contribute to the group. In practice, CGPCS worked through several standing working groups, one focused on naval and military coordination, one on legal questions like where captured pirates should actually be prosecuted, and one focused around the shipping industry. It also ran a coordination channel for warships, called the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE), that let navies from countries with very little else in common, including the United States and China, collaborate without going through typical diplomatic channels (CIMSEC). As piracy declined through the 2010s, CGPCS's relevance also declined with it. Participation continued to thin out year after year until, in 2022, the group formally rebranded itself as the broader Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activity. It shifted its attention toward smuggling, trafficking, and illegal fishing instead of piracy specifically (CIMSEC) (Maritime Executive, "UN's Contact Group").

Given everything that has happened over the last three years, this committee reconvenes CGPCS with its original, narrower focus on piracy restored. Along with this, we will incorporate one structural change from how the real body actually worked. The real Contact Group kept only states as its formal members, with navies and the shipping industry associated through SHADE and the industry working group described above rather than sitting as full members with a vote of their own. This committee removes that distinction and national delegations, naval officers, and shipping industry executives all hold seats with equal standing here. This is because the decisions this committee actually has to make affect all three groups at once, and forcing them to

negotiate face to face in the same room is more emblematic of a true Model UN experience. Going into this committee, don't assume everyone in the room wants the same outcome just because everyone in the room is opposed to piracy. A shipowner, a navy, and a state government will typically expect vastly different resolutions and more control than the other parties, and part of your job in this committee will be to find common ground and where these goals will overlap. To submit your position papers or if you have any questions regarding the committee please email us at gmuncxiiipirates@gmail.com.

II. Introduction

On January 1, 2023, six shipping industry bodies, BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO, IMCA, and OCIMF, removed the Indian Ocean's "High Risk Area" designation for piracy, a label carried since 2010, when a merchant ship was attacked roughly every other day (Insurance Journal). Their released statement referred to fifteen years without a single successful hijacking off Somalia. The effort to reach this state had pulled in dozens of navies that otherwise cooperated on almost nothing, thousands of merchant crews sailing with razor wire and armed guards, and governments paying for warships, prosecutions, and patrols for well over a decade (gCaptain). For this industry, taking off this designation was about as close as it gets to declaring victory.



Documented Somali pirate attacks on shipping, 2005-2010, the buildup that led to the High Risk Area designation later removed in 2023. Map by Arun Ganesh (Planemad), National Institute of Design, Bangalore, licensed CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Three years since then, that declaration seems

rash in hindsight. Since late 2023, pirate groups based mostly in Puntland have hijacked or attempted to hijack more than a dozen vessels, and by mid-2026 the UK Maritime Trade Operations office (UKMTO) had raised its threat rating for the Somali coast to "severe," the category assigned during the worst years of the original crisis (CNN, "Somali Piracy on the Rise") (Al Jazeera, "Why Is Piracy Rising"). Even though, as of early June 2026, pirates hold at

least three commercial vessels and crews for ransom, the High Risk Area designation has not been restored in the area (BIMCO, "Somali Piracy Structures"). Ultimately, this committee exists to work out why the threat came back even though little about Somalia's coastline, politics, or fishing changed, how we can learn from the initial piracy crisis and what makes this different, especially considering a war involving Iran and the Strait of Hormuz.

III. Historical background: 2000 to 2018

Somalia had no effective national government for most of the two decades after 1991, when Siad Barre's government collapsed into civil war. Through that period, it also lacked coast guard capacity which would eventually lead to the rise in piracy seen in the country (VOA News). Since 1981, foreign fishing off Somalia rose more than twenty-fold and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimates Somalia loses more than \$300 million a year to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (Hurlburt et al.). Fishing communities also reported foreign vessels dumping toxic waste off the coast, and the UN Environment Programme later confirmed radioactive and chemical waste washed ashore after a 2004 tsunami. As a response, local fishermen organized into armed groups using these facts to justify their attacks (Al Jazeera, "Tsunami Exposés"). They drove off the trawlers, charged "fishing licenses" or protection fees, and called themselves badaadinta badah, or "saviors of the sea" (NPR). They notably originated as an improvised, partly popular response to a real grievance rather than the organized crime observed at later points.

As these badaadinta badah kept collecting fees from passing trawlers they gradually began holding entire ships and their crews for ransom in search of greater payouts. Eventually from roughly 2006 to 2009 these pirate groups moved from small-scale extortion of fishing boats to hijacking large commercial vessels. Investors would typically give cash for fuel and weapons in exchange for a cut of 30 to 50 percent of the ransom per a later World Bank, UNODC, and INTERPOL study (World Bank et al.). By late 2008, pirates had attacked more than 90 vessels and hijacked more than 36, bringing in at least \$30 million that year. During this process, towns like Eyl grew into local hubs for the ransom economy (NBC News). During this period, one of the most notable hijackings took place, drawing significant attention to the crisis: the 2009 seizure of the Maersk Alabama and the subsequent rescue of Captain Phillips. Though this particular incident ended in armed conflict, it was the exception as most hostages were released unharmed after a ransom was paid, rather than through a violent standoff (World Bank). Piracy peaked in 2011, when the International Maritime Bureau recorded 237 incidents and over 3,800 mariners attacked that year (CNN) (NPR). The World Bank estimated ransoms paid between 2005 and 2012 totaled \$339 to \$413 million, with the broader economic cost reaching as high as \$18 billion a year at the crisis's height (Al Jazeera) (World Bank).

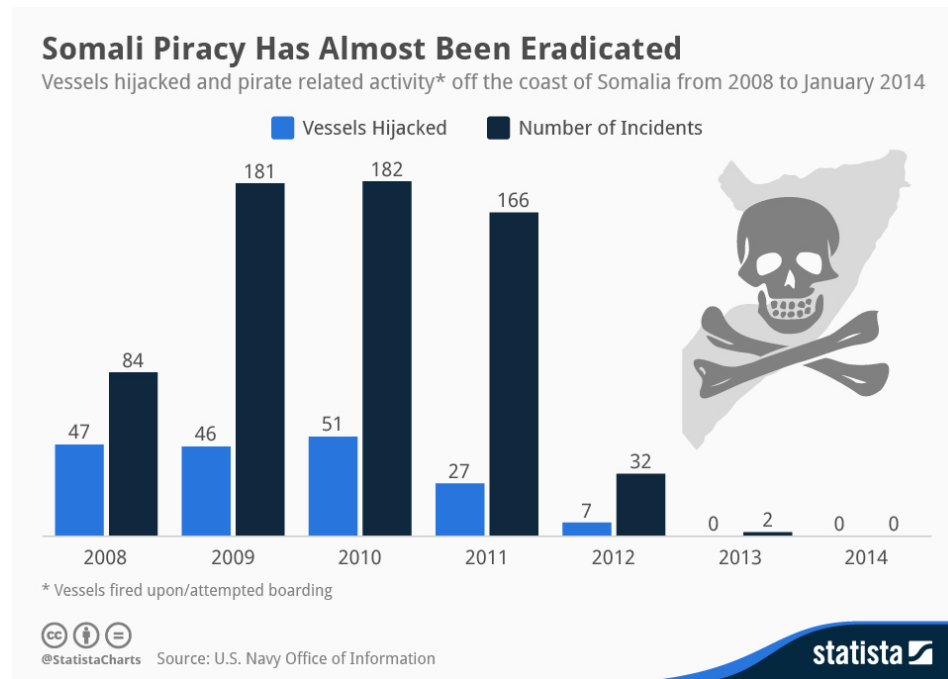


The lifeboat carrying Captain Richard Phillips and his captors, photographed from a Navy Scan Eagle drone during the 2009 Maersk Alabama hijacking. U.S. Navy photo, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The turnaround for pirate activity came from several sources coinciding together. Firstly, shipowners adopted "Best Management Practices" published by BIMCO, including razor wire on deck; a reinforced "citadel" room; and round-the-clock lookouts; and began hiring private armed guards despite resistance from the vessels' flag-states (BIMCO et al.). However in 2013, the State Department told Congress that not a single ship carrying an armed security team had been pirated, helping normalize the practice (Shapiro). Additionally, a large multinational naval coalition arrived in the region too. This included the EU's Operation Atalanta (2008), the United States' Combined Task Force 151, and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield, which ran from 2009 until NATO shut it down in 2016, citing no successful hijacking anywhere since 2012 (NATO). China, India, Russia, Japan, and others sent warships as well, coordinating through SHADE. Onshore, the semi-autonomous state, Puntland passed Somalia's first anti-piracy law in 2010 and established the Puntland Maritime Police Force, funded by the United Arab Emirates. This cut into the onshore safe haven pirate networks depended on (Small Wars Journal).

Unfortunately, naval forces that caught pirates often had nowhere to send them, and suspects sometimes went free because no country would try them. To help resolve this, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ran a counter-piracy program with a budget of roughly \$55 million, helping Kenya, Seychelles, and Mauritius build up courts and prisons. With the aid of this program, Seychelles alone prosecuted 31 suspects and convicted 22 by 2010 (UNODC). The results of these programs were dramatic. The very next year after these regulatory, military, and prosecutorial programs started, attacks fell from 237 in 2011 to about 75, hijackings dropped

from 28 to 14, and by 2013 the US Office of Naval Intelligence counted only nine vessels attacked and none hijacked by Somali pirates. Officials attribute this decline primarily to Best Management Practices, armed guards, naval presence, and onshore security (Shapiro). The High Risk Area designation was reduced in 2021 and removed entirely in January 2023.



Vessels hijacked and pirate-related incidents off Somalia, 2008 to January 2014. Chart by Niall McCarthy, Statista, Jan. 6, 2014, sourced from ICC International Maritime Bureau data.

IV. Past international action

Since long before this crisis began, piracy has been considered a crime of universal jurisdiction under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This means that any state can capture and prosecute pirates regardless of their flag or location. Getting states to use that authority, and deciding what to do with suspects once caught, took far longer than the actual question of whether they could, and remained a bottleneck well into the crisis's worst years. To help resolve this, the Security Council built the rest of the legal scaffolding starting in 2008: Resolution 1816 was passed to authorize foreign naval vessels to enter Somalia's territorial waters to fight piracy, Resolution 1838 called on states to actually use force against pirates rather than simply monitor them, and Resolution 1851 established the Contact Group described in Section II. The Council then renewed the territorial-waters authorization yearly for well over a decade (Security Council Report).



Sailors assigned to USS Farragut, part of Combined Task Force 151, signal a Somali skiff with suspected pirates aboard to raise their hands before boarding, February 2010. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Elizabeth Allen, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The burned hull of a suspected pirate skiff drifts near USS Ashland after an exchange of fire in the Gulf of Aden, April 2010, an example of the naval force Resolution 1838 called on states to use. U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Jason R. Zalasky, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

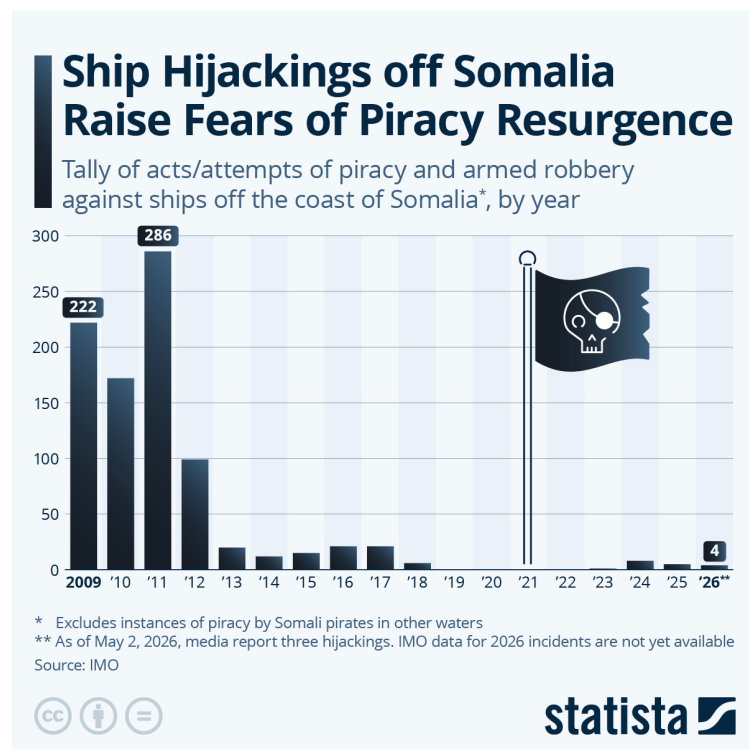


The renewal of Resolution 1816 ended in March 2022, when Somalia's government asked the Security Council not to extend the authorization again. It argued that its maritime security capacity had improved enough that it no longer needed foreign navies allowed in its territorial waters indiscriminately. This action attracted little attention at the time because piracy incidents were already near zero, and it looked like a reasonable consequence of progress in the region (Maritime Executive, "U.N. Security Council Explores"). Regardless of this, international patrols continued, though on a much more questionable legal basis. Maritime security researcher Christian Bueger has since pointed to this lapse as one of the gaps that left room for piracy's return, alongside declining participation in the Contact Group and the diversion of naval attention toward the Red Sea beginning in late 2023 (Bueger).

Additionally, the IMO-backed Djibouti Code of Conduct, adopted in 2009, built a framework allowing Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden states, where Somalia is located, to coordinate directly with each other, separate from the naval coalitions built around Western military powers. Furthermore, in January 2017, signatories adopted the Jeddah Amendment, broadening the Code's scope beyond piracy to also cover arms trafficking, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and toxic waste dumping, the same root causes identified in Section IV. Somalia became the Code's 14th signatory not long after (Maritime Executive, "Somalia Signs Jeddah Amendment"). The Code's current chair, held by South Africa, has publicly stated that Somali piracy remains "suppressed, but not eradicated," and has expressed "grave concern" over the vessels currently held for ransom off the Somali coast (Marinelink).

V. Current situation: 2023 to 2026

2023-2024. The reemergence of Somali piracy happened gradually, starting back up in 2023. This was when Yemen's Houthi movement began attacking shipping in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait in November 2023. During this time, Somali piracy stirred back to life in the same waters. Analysts linked the resurgence to the Red Sea crisis because naval assets that would have watched the Somali basin had shifted north to the Houthis. This opened a gap Somali networks were quick to exploit (Bueger). The USS Mason thwarted a suspected pirate attack that month, and on December 14 the bulk carrier MV Ruen was hijacked, the first successful hijacking off Somalia in six years. On top of that, in March 2024, the Bangladesh-flagged MV Abdullah, carrying coal toward the UAE, was seized by 15 to 20 armed men east of Mogadishu (CNN, "Hijacked Bangladesh-Flagged Ship"). Indian commandos recaptured MV Ruen on March 17, detaining 35 pirates for prosecution in Mumbai, while MV Abdullah's owners paid a reported \$5 million ransom before the ship and crew were released April 14 (Al Jazeera, "Indian Navy Captures") (CNN, "Hijacked Bangladesh-Flagged Ship").



Acts and attempts of piracy and armed robbery against ships off Somalia, by year. Chart by Anna Fleck, Statista, May 7, 2026, sourced from IMO data.

2025. The IMB's January 2026 annual report found only a small number of incidents off Somalia for 2025, but flagged two long-range attacks in November. They credited the small number to

sustained naval presence and Best Management Practices (ICC-CCS). However, in the same month, BIMCO warned that "emboldened Somali pirates pose a growing threat" (BIMCO, "Emboldened Somali Pirates"). Helping to further the reemergence, a September crackdown on illegal fishing by Puntland drew pirate backlash. This happened while Puntland's own forces were stretched by an offensive against Islamic State's — commonly known as ISIS — Somalia branch and by tension with the federal government and Somaliland (Small Wars Journal) (Security Council Report). A UN report also found evidence of direct contact between al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organization based in Somalia and frequent collaborators of known pirates, and the Houthis in February 2025, though how much real cooperation exists between the two groups remains contested and unconfirmed (UN Security Council) (Africa Center for Strategic Studies).

2026 and the Iran war. The turning point for this crisis came on February 28 when the US and Israel mounted an attack against Iran. The two countries killed Iran's Supreme Leader and set off a war that ultimately drew in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran closed the strait in early March, and the US blockaded it from mid-April to late May, before the countries reached a ceasefire and a peace memorandum in June (Britannica). Roughly a fifth of the world's oil and gas moves through Hormuz, so carriers were forced to reroute around Africa. That added about \$1 million per ship to each cargo load, driven by the extra days at sea and higher fuel costs, while also pushing traffic into the Somali basin. At the same time, warships, including much of India's navy, were reassigned to monitor the situation in Hormuz (CNN, "Somali Piracy on the Rise") (Bahadur). One retired Indian naval officer confirmed this, also arguing that US unilateralism against Iran pushed India to prioritize energy security over sustained anti-piracy patrols. India still disrupted an attempted attack on May 27 (Bahadur).

Rising oil prices made things worse as naval coverage decreased in the Somali region. Brent crude oil rose more than 50 percent after the war began to above \$110 a barrel, making tankers more attractive targets for pirates. An unusually calm and storm-free first half of the year, tied to a delayed monsoon, likely helped worsen the situation too, since rough seas usually deter small-boat piracy (Al Jazeera, "Why Is Piracy Rising") (Bahadur). Pirates moved quickly to exploit the situation, seizing and releasing the fishing vessel Alkhary 2 within two days in late

April, hijacking the tanker Honour 25 near Puntland with 17 crew aboard, and hijacking the tanker Eureka off Yemen on May 2 with 12 crew aboard and a reported \$10 million ransom demand (Marinelink) (Bahadur). Furthermore, unverified intelligence from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime suggests possible contact between the Eureka hijackers and Houthi-linked officials in Yemen, though the organization says these claims could not yet be confirmed (Bahadur). By June, BIMCO counted seven hijackings for the year, three still held for ransom, and UKMTO's threat rating had been raised in stages from "substantial" to "severe" (BIMCO, "Somali Piracy Structures") (CNN, "Somali Piracy on the Rise").

The matter is still unsolved as of this writing. While acknowledging that at least three pirate action groups are still active in northern Somalia, the European Union insists that its Atalanta assets are untouched by the broader conflict (CNN, "Somali Piracy on the Rise"). Additionally, although BIMCO and the other groups that eliminated the label in 2023 have reissued security guidelines and are advocating for revised Best Management Practices, no shipping industry body has reestablished the formal High Risk Area designation (BIMCO, "Somali Piracy Structures"). Finally, private security businesses report demand rising swiftly, with the cost of a three-day armed guard team up nearly 50 percent this year, to between \$4,000 and \$15,000 depending on route. It's unclear if this wave will subside after the Iran War ends or if it represents a long-term change in the security environment in the area.

VI. Committee objectives

- Decide whether to rebuild the coordinated naval presence that suppressed piracy the first time, and who should lead it, since the countries that led it before aren't all equally willing or able now.
- Take a position on whether the shipping industry's High Risk Area designation should return, and who has standing to make that call, since the associations that removed it in 2023 bear the financial cost of getting it wrong.
- Address the vessels and crews currently held for ransom, and be clear about what this committee expects from Somalia's federal government and Puntland in securing their release.
- Weigh Somalia's and Puntland's sovereignty concerns against the international community's interest in a fast, coordinated response, since the 2022 decision to let naval authorization lapse was itself an assertion of that sovereignty.
- Close, or account for, the legal and institutional gaps left by the 2022 lapse in Security Council authorization and the fading of coordination mechanisms like CGPCS and SHADE.
- Write resolutions and directives that hold up for states, navies, and shipping industry members alike, since a text that only works for one of them will not survive contact with the other two.

VII. Questions to consider

1. Should the Security Council revisit the counter-piracy authorization Somalia itself let lapse in 2022? Should a decision this consequential for Puntland's waters rest with the federal government alone, given how much of the actual coastline sits under Puntland's control?
2. Should the shipping industry restore the High Risk Area designation it removed in January 2023? Who actually has standing to make that call, the same associations that removed it, the International Maritime Organization, or individual flag states?
3. How should naval forces balance aggressive patrolling against the risk of misidentifying a civilian fishing boat as a pirate skiff? Should rules of engagement be standardized across navies, and who is accountable if a mistake happens on this committee's watch?
4. Who should bear the financial cost of this renewed crisis, shipowners, insurers, flag states, or the international community? Does your answer change once a ransom actually gets paid, rewarding the exact behavior this room is trying to prevent?
5. Should private maritime security contractors face tighter international rules now that the industry has expanded again? Whose law should apply when the guard, ship, owner, and territorial waters involved are all flagged to different countries?
6. Is this wave of piracy mainly a side effect of the Iran war that fades once it resolves, or does it reflect deeper governance and fishing disputes that need a lasting answer regardless? Your committee's recommendations should look different depending on which reading you find more convincing.

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Committee Members

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|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Australia | 13. Japan | 25. South Korea |
| 2. China | 14. Kenya | 26. Tanzania |
| 3. Denmark | 15. The Netherlands | 27. Türkiye |
| 4. Djibouti | 16. New Zealand | 28. United Kingdom |
| 5. Egypt | 17. Norway | 29. United States of |
| 6. Eritrea | 18. Puntland | America |
| 7. Ethiopia | 19. Russia | 30. Yemen |
| 8. France | 20. Seychelles | |
| 9. Germany | 21. Singapore | |
| 10. Greece | 22. Somalia | |
| 11. India | 23. Somaliland | |
| 12. Italy | 24. South Africa | |