

Assessment of Frequency of Pirates Operation off the Coast of Somalia from 2008 to 2024 (17 Years): Its Impacts on Social, Economic, Environmental and Moral factors

¹ Akeem Morounkeji Lawal, ² Sule Ademola Salawu-Adeitan

¹ Senior Lecturer, School of Nautical Studies and Head of Department of Quality Control Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Akwalbom State Nigeria

² Doctoral Researcher Birmingham City University Birmingham United Kingdom

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2025.1408000056>

Received: 29 July 2025; Accepted: 06 Aug 2025; Published: 05 September

Abstract: Piracy was presented in the past as an international challenge, but thanks to military interventions and naval patrols mainly in the recent time, which has ameliorated the impact of pirates operations. The paper depicts the frequency of piracy and the rates of which the operations of pirates were disrupted by assessing the impact of piracy off the Coast of Somalia through social, economic, environmental and moral factors. Both primary and secondary methods of data collection were applied. The primary method entails information generated by the researcher through semi structured interviews. The secondary data were obtained from establishment such as European Union (EU) Naval Force Somalia Operation Atlanta and others from 2008 to 2024. The available data were further analysed and subjected to statistical method using spearman rank order correlation methods, since the available data were non parametric type (without unit of measurement). The results of finding shows that there is a very strong positive relationship between frequency of piracy and the rates of which activities of pirates were disrupted with ($r = 0.95$). This implies that the frequency of piracy and the rates of which operations of pirates were disrupted contributed maximally to the reduction of maritime security threats from year 2012 to 2024 in particular, but the reverse is the case in year 2011 in particular. Therefore, information sharing should be invigorated among the security experts on time, but not just focusing on intelligence gathering alone. Similarly, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) presence should be felt at all Africa nations and off the Coast of Somalia in particular. For example, CIA operation centre should introduced to Somalia environment. Finally, capacity building should be encouraged continually in order to enhance the performance of security personnel during military operations but prevention is better than the cure. Then, to prevent pirates operations to a larger extent, international actors should apply more resources to support study/research of this nature.

Key words: Piracy, Security, Disruption, Social, Economic, Environmental and Moral

I. Introduction

‘Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU) and the subsequent loss of livelihood for local fishermen were some of the earliest narratives presented by proponents of piracy to justify pirates’ operations among the Somali. Latterly, opportunistic businessmen, criminals and modern-day buccaneers took over and turned piracy into a highly coordinated and lucrative business’ (Tatu, 2017 p. 10)

It has been widely argued that there is no consensus on definition of maritime security (Bueger, 2015), and as such it remains a nebulous concept (Feldt et al, 2013). Although, in 2004 the United State launched national Maritime Security Policy; in 2011, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) added Maritime Security as part of its objectives in handling maritime security threats. In 2014, the United Kingdom (UK), European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) established a robust maritime security strategy.

The rationale for the development of maritime security strategies in Africa was as a result of increase in the rate of piracy off the Coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea but this paper focuses more on the former (Coast of Somalia), as issues related to the latter (Gulf of Guinea) will be unfolded in our future publications. Though about 40 percent of all maritime incidents reported globally in 2018 alone occurred within the off coast of Somalia and Gulf of Guinea (GMSA, 2019). Consequently, affecting the economy of the continent negatively, in which trades, employment and international cooperation have been hindered extensively. In a more pragmatic manner, Bueger (2015) and Feldt et al (2013) have enumerated threats that are associated to Africa domain and these are: maritime inter-state dispute, maritime terrorism, piracy, illegal fishing, environmental crimes and trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods.

To an extent, this paper intends to concur with some portion of the three basic maritime security frameworks as proposed by Bueger (2015). The first is the semiotic framework, which anticipates depicting different meanings, by exploring the relationships between maritime security and other concepts such as resilience, marine safety, and blue economy and so on. The second is the securitization framework, which provides the means to understand how different threats are included in maritime security. The third is security practice theory, which aims at understanding what actions are undertaken in the name of maritime security. For the purpose of simplicity and accuracy, this paper applies in the one hand securitization framework and security practice theory, on the other.

Consequently, the securitization framework is applied in this paper by identifying event of piracy common to the continent and further assesses its impact through social, economic, environmental and moral factors. The security practice theory is applied in this paper by exploring ways by which improvement can be achieved; this is what has been described as policy enhancement (Lawal, 2012 and Lawal and Bouzarovski, 2011) through an effective recommendation. If the recommendations are well managed, this will give researcher(s) opportunity to view maritime security in a positive term by considering it economy growth and blue growth mainly. For example, even though Gulf of Guinea and the off coast of Somalia have earlier been identified with several threats, but still remains very relevant economically, politically, culturally (morally), and military wise (GMSC, 2019). Hence, actions to be taken in achieving sound and effective maritime security strategies in the continent became necessary. We present our method of data collection, description of study area and positionality of the researchers through the next section.

II. Methods of Data Collection, Description of the Study Area and Positionality

The aim of this paper is to assess the impact of piracy through social, economic, environmental and moral factors within the Africa continent context and off the Coast of Somalia in particular. This will enable us to identify where improvements are required. Thus, depicting or highlighting the frequency the rates at which operations of pirates were disrupted will not become a mirage.

Both secondary and primary data were used in this paper. The secondary data were not generated by the researcher(s) directly rather they were properties of an establishment such as EU Naval Force Somalia Operation Atalanta. The available secondary data highlighted frequency of piracy off the Coast of Somalia (Figure 1) from 2008 to 2024 (17 years) by focusing on two variables the frequency of piracy and rates of which the operations of pirates were disrupted. The available secondary data were further analysed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation method. This is because the available data were non parametric type (data without unit of measurement) (Lawal, 2003).

Meanwhile, the available primary data used in this paper were generated by the researchers directly. The researchers engaged 12 participants using the semi structured interviews. The semi structured interviews appear to be one of the most appropriate form of qualitative methods, as it encourages what has been described as 'conversation with a purpose' (Lawal et al, 2013; Lawal and Salawu-Adeitan, 2025). The participants responded to the questions on impact of piracy on national developments and Africa continent in particular. Furthermore, data generated via primary method were analysed using narrative method, in order to showcase the experiences of the participants as maritime security experts. The starting point of this method is to transcribe the available data first and later code all the data by using two letters for each respondent, so as to guarantee confidentiality by protecting the identity of the participants or respondents.

The Somalia's coastline consists of the Gulf of Aden to the north, the Guardafui Channel to the northeast, and the Somali Sea to the east. The Coast of Somalia has different conditions throughout its length and it is also the second longest in Africa. It is easternmost coast of continental Africa, north-western coast of Indian Ocean and nearest coast to Socotra Islands (Yemen). Northern coast extends from Djibouti to east, and eastern coast extends from north-east to south-west, reaching to Kenya.



Figure 1: Coastal line of Somalia

Source: Baniela and Rios (2012 p. 694); en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coastline_of_Somalia accessed on 17/9/2019

Therefore, the positionality of the researchers remain an important integral of a sound and empirical research; this is because such entails researchers' reflections, observations and impression, which can form part of data. It is on this note Flick (2002) and Lawal (2012) maintain that researchers' reflections on their actions and observation in the field, their impression, irritation, feelings and

so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation, and are documented in research diaries or context protocol. Interestingly, the two authors of this paper are renowned academics and experts for more than a decade. The next section depicts the frequency of piracy off the coast of Somalia by focusing on two variables; the attacks and the frequency of disruption.

Depicting the Frequencies of Piracy Attacks within off the Coast of Somalia

The Somali pirates have attacked hundreds of vessels in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean region, though most attacks do not result in a successful hijacking but associated with enormous impact and evidences are numerous. This is the focal-point of the next section. This section identifies the frequency of piracy and the rates of which pirates' operations were disrupted. This is shown in a tabular form (See Table 1) and later interpreted allegorically by subjecting it to statistical equation using spearman correlation method and finally, interrogated through original interviews obtained from the respondents and supported the findings with the views of previous researchers in the field of study.

Table 1: The Frequency of Piracy and the rates of which Operations of Pirates were disrupted off the Coast of Somalia from 2008 to 2024

Years	Attacks	Disruption
2008	24	0
2009	163	14
2010	174	65
2011	176	28
2012	34	16
2013	17	10
2014	2	1
2015	0	0
2016	1	0
2017	7	2
2018	2	0
2019	1	1
2020	0	0
2021	0	0
2022	0	0
2023	1	0
2024	7	0

Source: <http://eunavfor.eu> accessed on 18/9/2019 and <https://www.ukpandi.com/fileadmin/uploads/ukpandi/Documents/uk-p-i-club/articles/2025/2024-Jan-Dec-IMB-Piracy-and-Armed-Robbery-Report-2> accessed on 4/8/2025

Allegorically, the above data have been subjected a statistical method through spearman correlation method mainly to examine the relationship between frequency of piracy and the rates of which operations of pirates were disrupted. The results of finding shows that there is a very strong relationship between frequency of piracy and the rates of which activities of pirates were disrupted with result ($r = 0.95$). This implies that the frequency of piracy and the rates of which operations of pirates were disrupted contributed maximally to the reduction of piracy from year 2012 to 2024, but the reverse is the case in year 2011 in particular. This finding is in line with previous researchers' assertion. For example, Tatu, (2017) has established that piracy has been a recurring problem off the coast of Somalia for quite long time with the peak in 2011 with several ships attacked and 28 ships hijacked at a total economic cost of over \$7 billion.

Paradoxically, the highest piracy was carried out in the year 2011 (see Table 1), with the frequency of attacks at about 176 times, though pirates' operations in the same year were disrupted only in 28 times. This does not fully support the correlation results of 0.95, which signifies that there is a very strong positive relationship between the frequency of attacks and the rates of which pirates' operations were disrupted. The situation in 2011 is similar to 2009 and 2010. One of the reasons why there was large variation between frequency of attacks and rates of which the activities of pirates were not disrupted is seen in the original interviews with one of the respondents.

‘.....when and where a profound intelligent information were not available.....what do you expect?.... and there is no way operations of pirates can be disrupted.....’ (Interviews with AO Maritime Security Expert on 9/9/2019).

Interestingly, from year 2012 to 2024, reverse is the case. Apart from the fact that low piracy was recorded from 2012 to 2024, the rates of which pirates’ operations were disrupted are commendable. This shows that there is a very strong positive relationship between frequency of attacks and rates of which operations of pirates were disrupted. The reasons for the notable improvements and strong relationship in particular are treated subsequently through original interviews.

‘.....let me tell you what I know as a seafarer between year 2012 till date, there have been a strong collaboration among the nation states and support from the developed nations to assist the Africa continent.....though implementation of international law remain another problem....’. (Interviews with OE the Seafarer on 9/9/2019).

The lack of legislation criminalizing offences such as piracy and armed robbery at sea, this is a major problem in the effort to combat crimes’ (GMSA, 2019). Nevertheless, Mukundan (2018) noted that piracy within the study area has reduced compared with the previous years. Similarly, Tatu (2017) establishes in his publication titled independent qualitative research on Somali Piracy that pirates’ operations have drastically reduced and in year 2015 in particular. We would maintain that whether piracy attacks have reduced or not, one of the knotty questions that required urgent attention is what are the reasons for the piracy? This question in our own view will enable the reader to appreciate the impact of piracy in the subsequent section and position this paper in the same perspectives with other previous empirical research papers. From the original interviews, part of the reasons for the piracy in the study area is as follows:

‘In regards to Somalia, I think the aftermath of the Somalia’s Civil war in the 1980’s resulted to piracy (Interview with OW Naval Officer, on 10/9/19).

We would argue that neglects are capable of disorganising populace and it can give birth to other problems depending on the nature of the neglects in question. Several social scientists have viewed neglects from different perspectives but the most common is lack of social amenities and provision basic welfare for the unemployed (Lawal 2012, NDRDMP, 2006, Illori, 2002, Oyeranti, 2002 and Ajakaye, 2002). Though, none of our respondent concurs to the fact that unemployment can result to piracy; as it all depends on individual choice and state of mind.

We would further argue that unemployment can encourage youth in particular joining the pirates especially where welfare package is not available for such vulnerable group. We should not forget in hurry the popular say that an idle hand is a devil workshop. There is no doubt that part of implication of neglects is what the continent is experiencing now, the chronic threats on security, which are pronounced in the maritime sector. We strongly maintain that there is no responsible government that will neglect the youth in particular and when such happen it is seen as an institution failure (Lawal, 2012). In the same vein, Tatu (2017) views that unemployment, poor governance, foreign interference, corrupt leaders and destructive politics are the main reasons for piracy off the Coast of Somalia. The pictorial evidences of vessels that have previously been attacked are shown in figure 2 and 3 respectively. The next section assesses the impact of piracy off the Coast of Somalia through social, economic, and moral factors.



Figure 2: Somali Piracy

Source: [geogle.com/search?q=piracy+attacks+pictures+in+off+the+coast+of+Somalia](https://www.google.com/search?q=piracy+attacks+pictures+in+off+the+coast+of+Somalia) accessed on 17/9/2019



Figure 3: Piracy Attacks off Somalia Coast

Source: Source: [google.com/search?q=piracy+attacks+pictures+in+off+the+coast+of+Somalia](https://www.google.com/search?q=piracy+attacks+pictures+in+off+the+coast+of+Somalia) accessed on 17/9/2019

Impact of Maritime Security Threats common to the Africa Continent

Piracy has remained a big challenge to the international fishing vessels, international shipping and international cooperation. In fact, the scenario has threatened the Africa Continent and off the Coast of Somalia mainly through social, economic, environmental and moral factors.

Social Factor

Socially, the continent is affected in two ways, as the criminals (attackers) and ship operators suffered immensely, if the criminals are not killed, the ship operators will be killed and examples abound. On 28th May 2007, a Chinese sailor was killed by the pirates because ransom demanded was not paid on time by the ship owner. On 8th April 2009, four Somali pirates seized MV Maersk Alabama; fortunately, the United State Navy disrupted them and they were over powered where 3 were killed out of 4 pirates. The continent should value life and ship operators should be protected accordingly through intelligent gathering not fighting anyhow. It is saddening to hear from the desk of International Maritime Bureau that all the 35 seafarers held hostage by the Somali pirates died in 2011. This clearly supports our argument in section 3 that activities of pirates were not actively disrupted from 2008 to 2011. It can be resolved that piracy has affected the safety and security of crewmen who sail in the study area (Baniela and Rios, 2012).

Economic Factor

Economically, the continent is affected in several ways and the study area mainly. For example, on 23rd April 2009, the international donors pledged over 250 million Dollars for Somalia alone, this was outside 134 million Dollars to support African Union Peace-Keeping Mission and in the same vein additional 34 million Dollars was allocated to the Somalia Security Force. The painful part of this was that ransom of 3 million Dollars was paid to Somali pirates on 2nd May 2009 by the owner of MV Ariana. This will surely hinder the affected company economically and in turn resulting to unemployment when the company closed down. Over 500, 000 thousand Pounds was paid before the British couple were released. In our own view, this amount could have been channelled into a more developmental project or charity. In 2008 alone pirates gained about 80 million Dollars through ransom payments. Somali pirates are believed to have accumulated ransoms of approximately USD \$350 million between 2005 and 2012 according to a 2013 World Bank report (also see Tatu, 2017). The cost of Somali piracy in 2010 was US\$7 to US\$12 billion (World Bank Report, 2013, p. 27). Piracy has destabilised the world economy in general (Baniela and Rios, 2012).

Environmental Factor

‘One of the main reasons for piracy off the Coast of Somalia is illegal fishing and neglects.....no support per se from the Government and as such youth in particular search for an alternative.....in turn pirates’ operations became popular in the region’ (Interview with BO Oil and Gas Operation Expert on 9/9/2019).

It appears that there are connections between environmental problem and other associated problems treated in this paper. This is because environmental challenges arising from piracy attacks might have resulted in a wide variety of political, economic and social problems (Lawal, 2012). For example, concerns about illegal fishing resulting in toxic waste being dumped along the Somali coast were viewed as one of the ways by which the study area has been affected environmentally (Tatu, 2017). According to World Bank Report (2013) Somali piracy has indeed had a significant negative impact on the fishing industry in the region where by the tuna

catch alone has dropped by 26.8 % annually. 'Fishing vessels are of particular interest to pirates because they can be used as mother-ships, floating bases from which to launch further attacks' (World Bank Report, 2013 p. 58). According to IMO (2009) illegal fishing refers to activities: (i) conducted by national or foreign vessels in waters under the jurisdiction of a State, without the permission of that State, or in contravention of its laws and regulations; (ii) conducted by vessels flying the flag of States that are parties to a relevant regional fisheries management organization but operate in contravention of the conservation and management measures adopted by that organization and by which the States are bound, or relevant provisions of international laws; (iii) in violation of national laws or international obligations, including those undertaken by cooperating States to a relevant regional fisheries management organization.

Moral Factor

Morally, the Somali government has not gone after pirates because pirate leaders currently have more power than the government, which is wrong morally. No wonder, Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon told delegates at a donors' conference sponsored by the UN that Piracy is a symptom of anarchy and insecurity. We should not forget in hurry how the British couple (The Chandlers) were kidnaped and molested by the pirates. The Chandlers were released after 388 days of captivity on 14 November 2010. This is a clear immoral act and the attitude demonstrated by the pirates is against human right though they were not killed. Thanks to the commitment of four Island Nations: Seychelles, Mauritius, Kenya, and Tanzania for partnering with the United Nation office on Drugs and Crime's (UNDOC's) Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) in combating piracy since 2009 (Tatu, 2017). Tatu (2017) further maintain that the group has handled 13 cases, and tried 152 suspected pirates but only 15 Somali's pirates serving sentences ranging from 12 to 24 years respectively. The researcher(s) would argue that this judgement is not commensurable with the offences; in fact, the whole settings and the way the cases were handled remain questionable and not justifiable morally. In order to avert the occurrence of piracy, the government, ship-owners, security personnel, and maritime experts should be ready to translate into practice all our suggestions, which will be discussed in the next section

Conclusions and Recommendations

Piracy in Somalia is an outcome of the breakdown of Somalia's national institutions and an absence of a functional government (Tatu, 2017), including the outbreak of war in the region in the 80's. The paper depicts the rates at which the operations of pirates were disrupted using spearman correlation methods to analyse the available secondary data. The paper further assesses the impact of piracy off the Coast of Somalia through social, economic, environmental and moral factors.

Parts of the reasons for the piracy in the study area are civil war, neglects and unemployment arising from institutional failure. The paper has established that lack of intelligence gathering might prevent the naval officer from being active in disrupting operations of pirates as it is ought to be. Alternatively, the paper clearly proved that stringent international collaboration and support can go a long way to reduce piracy in the study area though the extent to which international law has be implemented in another discourse. According to IMB publication, the piracy keeps on reducing by each year (See Table 1). There is no doubt that this drop or reduction in piracy is encouraging and it is because of recent improvements around Indonesia and the continued deterrence of Somali pirates off East Africa among other reasons (Gueger, 2015, Feldt et al, 2013 and World Bank, 2013).

We would conclude with the assertion of Tatus that emphases on the 'deployment of naval assets in the form of European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR), European Union Capacity "Nestor" (EUCAP NESTOR), NATO's Operation Ocean Shield and Combined Maritime Forces' CTF-151 strongly contributed to reduction of piracy off the Somali coast.....This response was further supported by assistance from China, Russia, South Korea, India and the Japan, as well as the creation of the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC)....However, the naval patrol mandate does not extend to tackling IUU fishing along Somalia's 3,300KM coastline, meaning the issue remains unresolved.....' (Tatu, 2017 p. 10). In the light of Tatus assertions, we would further suggest a more robust recommendation as highlighted below:

The contributions of Indian and Russian Navy in particular are appreciated but Maritime Security Patrol should cover everywhere; including the land, as prevention of piracy should start from the land (Baniela and Rios, 2012). Therefore, the security experts should be well coordinated and ready to cover both onshore and offshore. For example, Dutch Naval Force, which was part of NATO mission but not part of EU mission lacks legal jurisdiction to prosecute pirates outside its jurisdiction. It was on this note that the President Clinton called for a more coordination among the nations (Gueger, 2015).

Information sharing and intelligence gathering in particular should be invigorated among the security experts on time beyond the context of International Maritime Organisation (IMO) MSC.1/Circular 1334 (See IMO, 2009), as this paper strongly suggests that all parties concern in disrupting piracy should be more proactive.

A sound regulation should be formulated, strengthened and implemented accordingly. As result of weak international law, the pirates that were arrested on May 2010 were not further prosecuted by the Russian Special Force (Gueger, 2015). However, in the past, international law was strengthened through the Security Council (SC) to issue a string of ad hoc Resolution (UNSCRs) to fill some gaps in the UNCLOS by expanding their jurisdictions, though there are still some loopholes emanated from lack of political will (Baniela and Rios, 2012). This paper suggests that a strong political will should be embraced among the nation states.

Capacity building should be encouraged in order to enhance the performance of security personnel during military operations though the World Bank (2013) suggests best practice.

Peace building related organisations should do more in the area of sensitization. Campaigns are essential and it should be handled as such; this is because young men and women at the coast were fooled in the past by the quick money (Tatu, 2017).

Even though, CCTV is to be installed on ships as required by IMO (See IMO 2009), an adequate policing of the areas that are more pronounced to the piracy should be fortified beyond relying on the joint task force operations alone but rather holistic approach should be embraced.

More resolutions should be adopted by the UN Security Council beyond previous resolutions such as that of 1838 calling on nations with vessels to apply military force mainly to suppress the activities of pirates. It is vital to mention that whenever forces are applied without putting into consideration other factors and technical know-how mainly, such can exacerbate the number of casualties. For example, on 19th November 2008, the Indian Navy warship INS Tabar wrongly fired at Thai trawler suspecting they were pirates, they later defended their actions by explaining that they were fired upon first but the error has been committed and the impact cannot be reversed because of lack of intelligence leading to application force. The paper emphasises that IUU fishing should be addressed at policy level, because IUU fishing was one of the primary reasons for piracy in the study area.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) presence should be felt at all Africa nations and off the Coast of Somalia in particular. For example, it appears that CIA operation centre is not in Somalia.

Ship operator should be more vigilant, maintain security routine check and report all piracy as at when due. In the light of the fact that crew members are not allowed to carry fire arms and the use of unarmed security personnel, which is part of International Maritime Organisation (IMO) resolution (IMO, 2009). Importantly, monitoring and tracking fishing vessels at sea should be used to help in identifying IUU fishing, which assists in search and rescue response to casualties. For example, commercial fishing vessels use Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) to allow environmental and fisheries regulatory organizations to track and monitor the activities of participating fishing vessels.

In order to prevent pirates operations to a larger extent, international actors should apply resources to support research work and study of this nature in particular. No amount of money is ever enough for an effective research and training (Effedua, 2019).

Therefore, based on the above, we would maintain that future studies should delve more into policy related matters in particular and attention should also be focused on the following aspects of further studies/researches:

- Examine the extent to which Gulf of Guinea and its environment have been endangered by the operations of pirates.
- Unpack a comprehensive approach to maritime security threats, including examination of relationships between maritime security threats and Geo-politics.
- Finally, methods of preventing the activities of pirates off the Coast of Somalia and Gulf of Guinea will be explored in the future using comparative studies and correlation analysis.

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