Community Mobilization and Criminal Organizations: Eyl, Somalia

**Executive Summary:**
Somali Pirates are organized criminal actors, who operate in a similar fashion to armed groups. In the town of Eyl, Somalia, a multi-stakeholder program - involving Clan elders, religious leaders, local businessmen, and the population, - used a strategy of community mobilization to create a hostile environment toward piracy. The program leveraged social structure and devout religious sentiment to deter defection* by individual actors within the program, in order to present a united front against the pirate gangs. This resulted in the successful displacement of pirates.

**Defectors** in this context are members of the business community that engage in commerce with pirates, despite the mandate of the elders and clerics.

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**Background:**
Eyl, Somalia is a remote seaside town in the semi-autonomous Puntland state, that became known on the international stage as Somalia’s Pirate Capital. The population of the region hail primarily from the Majerteen sub-clan of the Darood, and were primarily fishermen. At its height between 2009 and 2010, the town would explode into activity whenever the pirate gangs set up shop offshore. The local economy benefitted from the restaurants and hotels that supported pirates and support personnel. Despite these touted benefits, anti-pirate sentiment was high due to the corruption, violence and immoral behavior associated with pirates. In 2011/2012, with support from the Puntland government, the civilian population was able to pressure the pirate gangs to leave Eyl.

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**Negative Local Effects of Piracy:**

**Deviant Behavior:**
- Prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse,
- Recruitment of children promising a changed life and glamorous future.

**Beyond corruption and deviancy:**
- 49 civilians dead and more injured in 3 month period in 2011
- Engaged in inter-clan violence
- Drunken shootouts
- Pirate gang disputes

**Economic drain:**
- Destroyed local fishing economy
- “No prey no pay” as hijackings dropped, so did revenue
- Default on credit lines, businesses lose out
- Destroys towns’ reputations

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**The Plan to Oust the Pirates:**
Local elders joined forces with religious leaders to initiate the program. The clerics taught the population that piracy is *haram* (forbidden/unclean) under Islam, and that any money of pirate origin is *haram* as well. The elders and clerics used this message to convince local businessmen and women to refuse to accept pirate money from the pirates and their dependents. The mobilization of the business folk and townspeople was designed to put pressure on the pirates, and to make the town inhospitable to their presence by denying them access to the recruits, goods, and services they required. The multi-stakeholder effort combined traditional authority structures, familial influence, and religious piety to discourage defection and create a united front.
Relationship to Government and Populace:
At its height 300 pirate action groups of 2,500 pirates operated off of Somalia. These gangs experience an extremely high turnover rate, requiring that pirates maintain ready access to a pool of potential recruits. Additionally, the pirate gangs require supplies and other services in order to conduct operations and hold hostages. Pirates gangs, as criminal organizations, are not interested in participating in governance activities in a warlord like capacity. Instead, the pirate model operates in the space provided by a lack of government capacity, apathy, and corruption. The criminal strategy of piracy, and the business model that drives it, require that pirate gangs manage the relationship between government and population to maintain operational space.

Theory:
- Pirate violence is largely opportunistic and undisciplined, not selective. (Weinstein, 2006) Pirates operate under a “Blue Ocean” criminal strategy, taking advantage of an untapped market resulting from gaps in governance. (Cockayne, 2013)
- Pirates are pseudo-dependent on the population for access to recruits, goods, and services. The goodwill of the population is maintained by offering alternative livelihood opportunities, payment for goods and services and a “coastguard” narrative. (Cockayne, 2013)
- Counter piracy initiatives that are locally designed, community specific, recognize identity structures, and involve a relationship with the government are more successful. (WOLA, 2008)
- Traditional societies are often more successful in preventing “defection” due to the importance of local leaders, such as Elders and Clerics. (Kaplan, 2013)

Three Pronged Pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Structures</th>
<th>Puntland Government</th>
<th>Economic Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clan Elders:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Puntland Government:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Economic Factors:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Xeer law, the traditional clan law is the primary form of governance in the absence of state structure</td>
<td>• Puntland President Farole from Eyl</td>
<td>• Piracy is a “no prey, no pay” business</td>
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<td>• Collective concept based on Diya-paying groups</td>
<td>• Piracy a potential political liability</td>
<td>• Pirates often made purchases on credit</td>
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<td>• Promotes strong social cohesion</td>
<td>• Official statements indicate involvement</td>
<td>• Intl Navies, BMP4, &amp; PCASP teams reduce the number of hijackings</td>
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<td>• Elders highly respected</td>
<td>• After pirates left, a Puntland Maritime Police Force base established in Eyl</td>
<td>• Pirates begin to default of credit</td>
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<td><strong>Clerics:</strong></td>
<td>• Excessive violence by pirates could force the government to act decisively</td>
<td>• Businesses less willing to accept pirates as clients</td>
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<td>• Pious Muslim population</td>
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<td>• Speak with authority</td>
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<td>• Able to use Sharia concepts to proclaim pirates and their money haram</td>
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Conclusion:
As the level of violence and deviant behavior became unbearable, population mobilization was able to create a united front against the pirates. The risk to local children recruited into piracy was too high and the payoff too low. Elders and Clerics were able to convince the population to refuse the pirates’ access to the local economy. Simultaneously, benefits of defection from the strategy, by doing business with the pirates, were low. Lack of access to a recruitment base and local goods and services created an untenable situation for the pirate gangs, pressuring them to displace.