

2011

Somalia, the New Barbary? Piracy and Islam in the Horn of Africa,

Charles N. Dragonette

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Dragonette, Charles N. (2011) "Somalia, the New Barbary? Piracy and Islam in the Horn of Africa," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 64 : No. 3 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss3/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

sustainable development and the rising role of women in human security. They link civic and economic security to environmental security, pointing out how climate change will have implications for access to clean water and food, as well as for stable health conditions and ecosystem stability. The authors believe that climate change will weaken already feeble states and contribute to regional and global insecurity in ways not seen heretofore.

They offer a new focus on maritime security because new challenges and threats could manifest themselves on and below the world's oceans. Fisheries depletion and pollution could threaten a vital food source for a growing world population, while piracy and competing claims for sea routes and seabed hydrocarbons could contribute to forms of conflict not seen previously. Reveron and Mahoney-Norris also highlight two other areas often neglected by traditional security studies: health security and cyber security. They illustrate how in a more interconnected world infectious diseases carried inadvertently by modern air and sea travel could have deleterious effects on human security. Cyber security receives attention because both state and nonstate actors possess growing capabilities to disrupt the global population's increasing interconnectedness and mounting dependence on the virtual world.

This highly accessible book offers a novel approach to security studies, including insightful inserts ("Think Again") to stimulate readers' thinking about security issues for a new century. *Human Security in a Borderless World* should prove invaluable to a wide audience ranging from civilian and military

students to policy makers and those who advise them.

CHARLES E. COSTANZO
Air Command and Staff College



Murphy, Martin N. *Somalia, the New Barbary? Piracy and Islam in the Horn of Africa*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2011. 176pp. \$26.50

Within the sea services, allusion to the Barbary pirates and the "shores of Tripoli" continues to resonate. Readers of Martin Murphy's detailed and thoughtful book *Somalia* may come away wishing that a solution to the situation our mariners and fleet forces now face in those inhospitable waters were as straightforward as storming the beaches.

Murphy's previous works include *Small Boats*, *Weak States*, *Dirty Money: Piracy and Maritime Terrorism in the Modern World* (2009). He introduces the current volume with this caution: "The purpose of this book is to examine whether or not state failure is a useful and accurate explanation of Somali piracy. . . . It will ask if there are links between Somali pirates and international or regional terrorist groups. Even if these links are tenuous, it will ask why and how the terrorist groups that operate within Somalia might exploit the maritime dimension in the future. Finally, it will review whether or not naval action, in the absence of political engagement with entities within Somalia, will provide solutions to either problem, and if, perversely, achieving the political stability that may reduce or eliminate piracy might provide violent Islamist groups with the secure sanctuary within Somalia they are seeking." In

posing these questions Murphy takes the story forward from that told in *Small Boats*, which looked at maritime crime worldwide. Although this work, like his earlier book, finds no direct link between terrorism and crime, despite circumstances conducive to both, the question remains how long the international maritime community can tolerate the effects of such an expensive absence of the rule of law.

The current volume treats Somali piracy as it should be treated, *sui generis*. Piracy as experienced today off Somalia, and emanating from that nonstate, cannot be compared to contemporary experiences in the Gulf of Guinea or those in the Strait of Malacca or among the islands of the Indonesian archipelago. As dangerous as those waters are, the crimes they record are mostly of the “smash and grab” variety, perpetrated against ships in port, maneuvering slowly in restricted waters, or at anchor. Virtually all these crimes have occurred in territorial waters and thus within local or national law-enforcement jurisdictions, rather than on the high seas, a point that is critical to the legally actionable definition of the internationally recognized crime of piracy.

Many archipelagic and littoral states lack the will or effective capacity to exercise their maritime sovereignty and to combat crime uniformly throughout their maritime territories. However, only Somalia among today’s community of nations so lacks a sense of unitary statehood that pirate bands may function as if they governed a minstate within its borders. Yet these pirate “strongholds” are virtual only, without the centers of gravity that even a minstate would possess. In that sense, they are not in reality the New Barbary but

something more ephemeral and even more difficult to call to account.

How difficult is amply demonstrated in Murphy’s detailed history of modern Somalia and the forces that continue to conspire to keep it ungoverned and, so far, ungovernable. *Somalia, the New Barbary?* not only takes us through the history of Somalia’s failure to gel into stable statehood but illustrates at each turn how these continuing failures contributed to the ongoing pirate dramas playing out in the waters off the Horn of Africa.

There are few heroes in this story, and the international community, insisting on support for the minimally effective Transitional Federal Government as its sole interlocutor in combating piracy and explaining away the lack of progress despite huge sums spent on counter-piracy patrols and escort duties, bears a large part of the burden. As Murphy demonstrates, a large part of this inability on the part of the international community lies in the legitimate fear of creating an even more intractable problem should the extremists, currently characterized by the Islamist al-Shabaab, form a governmental shield behind which piracy could both thrive and marry itself to extremism. However, as Murphy pointed out in *Small Boats* and now refines in *Somalia*, these fears have no basis in evidence. In fact, there is ample evidence that the money-driven pirates continue to hold political influences of all stripes at arm’s length, fearing restriction on their operations and heavy taxation of their ill-gotten gains.

Where the above has caused many observers to throw up their hands, resignedly calling down a plague on all their houses, Murphy carefully outlines how

Puntland, which is largely self-governing and (by Somali standards) governed, but which also hosts the vast majority of pirate operations, could be a key either to combating piracy or to being held accountable for not doing so. However, either way, the international community needs to extend tacit recognition to Puntland's *capabilities*, if not its sovereignty, in order to harness any sense of responsibility to that international community.

The bigger challenge to the United States and to its navy may come from the appearance of a power vacuum that continued Somali pirate success offers. Many nations have joined the counter-piracy coalition off the Horn of Africa, but as Murphy points out, not all forces are equally effective, except perhaps in demonstrating their nations' right to be there. As long ago as 1809 the Royal Navy, operating with armed ships of the Honourable East India Company, engaged pirates who were operating in the Strait of Hormuz with the benign neglect of local rulers along the littoral. After protracted combat, culminating in the battle of Ras al-Khaimah, that left the waters relatively safe, the Royal Navy remained as the international guarantor of the safety of trade, and Britain enjoyed a century of military, political, and economic preeminence. Britain would not be the last to seek to do so.

Somalia, the New Barbary? thus takes the reader beyond the breakers, which may be all of Somalia that most analysts of the current maritime scene have examined, and returns us to essential questions on the water. It is an experience every reader with an interest in matters that impel naval operations ought to embrace.

CHARLES N. DRAGONETTE

Senior Commercial Maritime Operations Analyst
Nimitz Operational Intelligence Center

(The views expressed here are purely the author's and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Navy or of the Office of Naval Intelligence.)



Moore, John Norton, and Robert F. Turner, eds.
Legal Issues in the Struggle against Terror. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic, 2010. 565pp. \$70

For the better part of the last ten years, the word "terrorism," in some shape or form, has become an integral part of the world's vocabulary. Whether in regard to military operations, air or sea transportation, law enforcement, cyber communications, or even the environment, responses to perceived or actual threats almost always include some form of counterterrorist activity. With each response, various legal rights, and regimes that society and individuals rely upon and often take for granted, are time and again directly impacted. Whether such impacts are experienced as good or bad depends in great part on one's ability to understand clearly the issues, which is where *Legal Issues in the Struggle against Terror* comes in.

This book of essays is essential reading for anyone looking to understand the many significant and complex issues regarding responses to terrorism since 9/11. The essays, written by legal experts and scholars, put into context, using words that are easy to read and understand, some of the most hotly contested international and domestic legal issues. The editors state in the preface that this work is an important collection of essays that cover topics considered integral to the "struggle against al Qaeda and its terrorist allies."