Piracy in Somalia is a symptom of state collapse in Somalia and a comprehensive solution needs to focus on roots causes. This will require significant political will within Somalia and a careful approach from without. Somalia currently provides a conducive environment for violent crime such as like piracy. Piracy clearly affects ship-owners who pay millions of dollars in ransom costs, while seafarers can be held captive for months awaiting ransom payment. It is also of international strategic importance because of the importance of the sea lanes off the Somali coast (roughly 30% of European energy needs, and manufactured goods from China and Asia pass through the Gulf of Aden).

But there is a deeper and more pernicious impact from the crime on Somalia itself, piracy undermines government in Somalia and makes resolving the chronic humanitarian and security problems of the country harder. Over 3 million people in Somalia are reliant on food aid, most of which is delivered by sea. At times piracy has forced deliveries to stop, putting those lives at risk, and the foreign navies see their primary mission as ensuring that food aid can reach Somalia.¹ So the effect on individual Somali citizens is even more malevolent and long term than that on the international community, the knock on consequences of a relatively small enterprise (in terms of people

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Piracy may well have become one of the largest foreign currency generators for Somalia; earning up to $100 million in 2009\(^2\) and this gives pirates bosses huge influence on the politics of north east and north central Somalia. Local community leaders in Somalia have voiced their fears about the corrupting moral influence of piracy and pirate money.\(^3\) Meanwhile some Somali politicians seem to have decided that blaming all their ills on piracy will encourage the international community to hand over large sums of money to fight the problem, and some politicians have been accused by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia of running election campaigns with pirate money.\(^4\)

Piracy should not be seen in isolation. It is a problem arising from Somalia’s internal crisis. Far more lives are ruined and lost by the weapons trade\(^5\) across the Gulf of Aden and people smuggling between Somalia and Yemen than by piracy. These deserve far more attention than they currently receive. At times it seems Somalia is either completely ignored by the rest of the world or made to bear the burden of ill-considered intervention.

Somalia’s problems are usually ignored by the international community. The Failed interventions by the United Nations and United States in the 1990’s and international acceptance of the hugely unpopular Ethiopian intervention in 2008 are unusual. This has led many Somalis to take a sceptical view of the motivations of the rest of the international community and any attempts from outside to address piracy, or any other problems, in Somalia need to be

\(^2\) Author’s own estimation.

\(^3\) See for example ‘Postcard from Somali pirate capital’
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8103585.stm


\(^5\) UN Sanctions monitors on Somalia have been raising the issue of gun smuggling for many years see