

A Modern Day Pirate's Tale

anon.

2009

from the *Guardian* (London)

I am 42 years old and have nine children. I am a boss with boats operating in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

I finished high school and wanted to go to university but there was no money. So, I became a fisherman in Eyl in Puntland like my father, even though I still dreamed of working for a company. That never happened as the Somali government was destroyed [in 1991] and the country became unstable.

At sea, foreign fishing vessels often confronted us. Some had no license; others had permission from the Puntland authorities, but did not want us there to compete. They would destroy our boats and force us to flee for our lives.

I started to hijack these fishing boats in 1998. I did not have any special training but was not afraid. For our first captured ship we got \$300,000. With the money we bought AK-47s and small speedboats. I don't know exactly how many ships I have captured since then but I think it is about 60.

We give priority to ships from Europe because we get bigger ransoms. We make friends with the hostages, telling them that we only want money, not to kill them. Sometimes we even eat rice, fish, pasta with them. When the money is delivered to our ship we count the dollars and let the hostages go.

Then, our friends come to welcome us back in Eyl and we go to Garowe in Land Cruisers. We split the money.

Our community thinks we are pirates getting illegal money. But we consider ourselves heroes running away from poverty. We don't see the hijacking as a criminal act but as a road tax because we have no central government to control our sea. With foreign warships now on patrol we have difficulties.

But we are getting new boats and weapons. We will not stop until we have a central government that can control our sea.

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