



# Network Science Center at West Point

## Networks of Somali Pirate Capitalism in the Indian Ocean

Project Year 2012-2013

Principal Investigator: PROF Charles Thomas

### Background:

Somali Piracy has remained a concern in the increasingly vital waterways of the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. However, the threat that is faced today is no longer the same threat faced in 2005. In the past six years, the world has seen the methods of both capture and negotiation the pirates employ change. The pirates' operational range has increased several times over. These changes would not be possible without an increasingly complex infrastructure underpinning the pirates' activities. Current operational patterns point to connections with locations as diverse as Oman, Qatar, Yemen, and India. These locales serve as way-stations for information, and exert influence upon the networks of pirates. In addition, domestic communities of "pirate capitalists," those funding the expeditions, continue to grow and become more legitimate as these figures become patrons of local economies and politics within their regions of practice.

### Objectives:

This project is designed to locate and trace these networks of capital that continue to fund piracy. While there is a significant amount of information in existence about individual attacks or even about isolated connections amongst pirate groups, the creation of a comprehensive model identifying and explaining the international network of maritime crimes has not taken place. Where are the primary flows of capital and information that sustain the networks of piracy? What traditional and new power structures are guiding the practice of piracy in Somalia? What international figures or organizations are involved with the proliferation of piracy? These questions are central to the successful resolution of the issue of piracy in this critical region. This project proposes to create a large scale network model of one or more piracy capitalist networks in the Indian Ocean to analyze the structure and behavior of "piracy capitalism" to allow for the effective answering of the critical questions involved with stopping the illegal activities.

### Approach:

The West Point Somali "piracy capitalism" project will: (1) collect and organize the open-source information available through the United Nations, the International Maritime Bureau, the International Studies Association, the Somali Report, and other sources; (2) data-mine this information to identify locations, individuals, and institutions involved with the proliferation and sustenance of East African piracy; (3) chart out the network of these individuals, location, and institutions both geographically and socially using the principles of network science; (4) identify



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those individuals and institutions central to the continued practice of “pirate capitalism” in terms of influence, capability, and location within the network; (5) recommend options based on projections of the influence that can be brought to bear on these groups and the effect such influence will have on the network; and (6) discuss the applicability of this model in terms of other networks of piracy, including the Gulf of Guinea, Malacca, and other locales.

### **Impact:**

The SPC offers an innovative and useful way to approach and analyze the behaviors of the “pirate capitalists” of the Indian Ocean and the infrastructures supporting them. In addition, the conclusions drawn from the project may offer insights into other developing areas of maritime security, such as the Bight of Biafra and the Gulf of Guinea. In the future, this work might be coordinated between service academies, drawing upon the resources and expertise of the Naval and Coast Guard Academies. Further, the project offers an opportunity to more closely align the academic research of USMA West Point faculty and cadets with the interests and practices of AFRICOM and US Army Africa.