

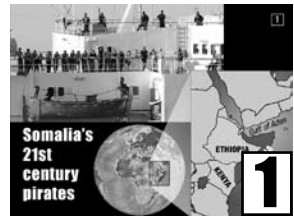
Somalia's 21st century pirates

Recent incidents have turned the world's attention to this desperately poor, unstable country.

BASIC

In the last few weeks, there have been a lot of news stories about Somalia. **Where is Somalia?** (*In eastern Africa.*) For many years, Somali pirates have threatened ships off Somalia's coast. **What is a pirate?** (*Someone who attacks and robs ships at sea.*) Somali pirates are heavily armed with guns and other weapons. Much of the world's oil and other valuable shipments go through the Gulf of Aden near Somalia. So far this year, pirates have captured more than 40 ships. The pirates

approach a ship in small boats with guns, and climb aboard with ropes and ladders. Once they take over the ship, they take the crew as hostages and demand money from the ship's owners. This money, called ransom, is sometimes dropped to the ship from a helicopter. Somalia is very poor, and the money helps some of its people. But the pirates also make Somalia a more violent, unstable country. NEXT



GENERAL

Over the past few weeks, there have been a lot of news stories about events happening off the coast of Somalia. **Where is Somalia?** (*Eastern Africa.*) These stories involve modern-day pirates taking over ships in Somalia's waters. The definition of a pirate is the same now as it was hundreds of years ago. **What do you think a pirate is?** (*Someone who attacks and robs ships at sea.*) For several years, Somali pirates have threatened ships off Somalia's coast. Much of the world's oil and other valuable cargo is shipped through the Gulf of Aden, north of Somalia. So far this year, pirates have captured or tried to capture more than 40 ships. These heavily armed pirates approach ships in small boats, usually at night, and use ropes, ladders, and hooks to climb aboard. They hold the

crew hostage, demanding money from the ship's owner. **Who knows the word for money paid to kidnappers?** (*Ransom.*) Most of the time, the owners pay the ransom, and the money is dropped by helicopter to the pirates. **Why do you think the owners pay the ransom?**

Some of the pirates are former fishermen who say illegal fishing by other countries forced them out of business. But now, piracy is big business in Somalia, an otherwise desperately poor country. Some Somali people see the pirates as heroes. But others say the pirates have made their country more violent, dangerous, and unstable. And the countries whose ships travel near Somalia are trying to figure out what to do about the problem. Let's find out more about Somalia. NEXT

ADVANCED

Over the past several weeks, you may have noticed a lot of headlines about events off the coast of Somalia. Since the start of 2009, Somali pirates have captured or tried to capture more than 40 ships. Last year, there were more than 100 attempted hijackings. Lately, the pirates have expanded their range beyond the Gulf of Aden south into the Indian Ocean. **Where is the Gulf of Aden?** (*Between Somalia and Yemen.*)

About 30 percent of the world's oil is shipped through the Gulf of Aden. The pirates are heavily armed, possessing assault rifles and rocket launchers. Some of them claim that they are not pirates, but part of Somalia's unofficial coast guard. Originally, many of the Somali pirates were fishermen who began arming

themselves to fight tuna poaching by other nations. They began to stop fishing boats and demand a fee for using Somali waters. Then, as they realized that their own government could not stop them, the fishermen escalated their activity. Some pirates also allege that European companies have long been illegally dumping toxic waste on Somalia's shores. Some accuse local warlords of accepting payments from these companies in return for dumping rights.

Piracy has brought new money to parts of this otherwise desperately poor country, and in some quarters the pirates are hailed as folk heroes. Others say the pirates are making Somalia a more violent and unstable nation. **What do you think is the best way for other countries to deal with the piracy problem?** NEXT

Somalia's 21st century pirates (cont'd)

Somalia's government collapsed in 1991.

BASIC

Somalia has not had a real government since 1991, when the government collapsed. Since then, warlords and other groups have ruled the country. A warlord is a private citizen who controls his own private army. These warlords have fought each other, and made life very difficult for many Somalis. The warlords have fought each other all around the country, and especially in Somalia's capital city of Mogadishu. The United Nations sent troops to Mogadishu to try to control the violence. In 1993, two U.S. helicopters, including the one shown here flying over

Somalia, were shot down. The U.N. troops were pulled out, and fighting has continued around Mogadishu ever since. The president of Somalia, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, has been in office since January. He is a former teacher who has spoken out against the warlords. But his government is weak and only controls part of the country. **What do you think he can do to help his country?** NEXT



GENERAL

Somalia has been one of Africa's most troubled nations for nearly 20 years. In 1991, Somalia's government collapsed. Since then, the country has not had a working central government. At first, the country split into many different groups, each controlled by a different warlord. A warlord is someone who commands a private army.

How do you think the warlords were able to gain so much power in Somalia?

The fighting between these warlords in the years after the government collapsed killed hundreds of thousands of people.

In the 1990s, the United Nations sent a peacekeeping force to Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, to try to stop the fighting. During a battle in 1993, two U.S. helicopters, including the one shown here flying

over Somalia, were shot down. Eighteen U.S. troops were killed, along with hundreds of Somali fighters, in what came to be known as the first Battle of Mogadishu. After the battle, U.N. troops pulled out, and fighting has continued on and off to this day.

Somalia is an Islamic country. In recent years, these warlords have been fighting against Islamic leaders. These leaders have taken power in many parts of the country. Somalia's new president is one of these Islamic leaders. He is a former teacher, and he is said to have gotten involved with politics after one of his students was kidnapped by a local warlord. But his government is weak and controls only parts of Somalia. **What do you think he can do to help his country?** NEXT

ADVANCED

The nation of Somalia is one of the most troubled in Africa. It has had no functioning government for more than 15 years. For much of that time, Somalia's capital has been in a state of chaos. **Who can name the capital of Somalia?** (*Mogadishu.*) In 1991, a small group of tribal warlords took over the government. In the following years, rival warlords fought each other for control of various regions.

In the early 1990s, the United Nations tried to help the many starving people in Somalia, but warlords stole much of the food and water that was meant for the poor. In 1993, U.S. forces stormed Mogadishu to eliminate one of these warlords and his militia. But two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters, including the one shown here flying over Somalia, were shot down. Eighteen U.S. troops were killed, along with

hundreds of Somali fighters, in what came to be known as the first Battle of Mogadishu. Americans were horrified at news footage of dead U.S. soldiers being dragged through the streets of the city. President Bill Clinton withdrew U.S. troops from Somalia, and the U.N. withdrew its peacekeeping force soon afterward. **Should the international community have tried harder to get Somalia's warlords out of power? Why or why not?**

Rival warlords soon faced a new threat from Muslim leaders seeking to install strict order to their chaotic nation. Somalia's new president is a former Islamic cleric who reportedly got involved in politics after one of his students was kidnapped by a local gang. His government has U.S. and U.N. backing, but still controls only parts of Somalia. NEXT

Somalia's 21st century pirates (cont'd)

Somali piracy is a symptom of a larger problem.

BASIC

Years of fighting in Somalia has torn the country apart. The fighting also destroyed most of the country's farms. **How do you think this affected Somalia?** Without farms, Somalia was left with no way of growing enough food to feed its people. Somalia has also had bad droughts that have killed what few crops were grown. A drought is a time when there is little to no rainfall. This helped cause a large famine in Somalia. **What do you think a famine is?** (*A time when food is very scarce, and people starve.*) The picture on the left shows two young victims of Somalia's

famine. On the right you see a tent city, made up of people who had to flee their homes because of violence.

Can you imagine living like this? Yet the people of Somalia have managed to survive these terrible conditions. Somali people who have left the country often send money back to their families. **What do you think the United States and other wealthy nations can do to help the people of Somalia?** END



GENERAL

The fighting between Somalia's warlords has killed up to a million people, and forced many more to flee their homes. In the process, Somalia's farms and entire system of agriculture have been nearly destroyed. This, along with years of drought, when there has been little rainfall, has led to terrible famine in Somalia. **What is a famine?** (*A period when food is scarce, and people are in danger of starvation.*) The photo on the left shows two young victims of Somalia's years of famine. The picture on the right shows one of many tent cities in Somalia, made up of people who were forced to flee their homes because of violence. **What do you think it is like to live like this?**

The fighting in Somalia also destroyed its economy, making it one of the

poorest countries in the world. The average yearly income in Somalia is only \$650, compared to about \$30,000 in the United States. Still, the Somali people have managed to create their own system of trade to keep their country running. And Somali people who have left the country often send money to their families to help them survive.

Meanwhile, Somali pirates can get more than \$1 million by capturing a ship. **Can you understand why some Somalis are willing to risk their lives and the lives of their hostages as pirates?** The Somali government has almost no power to stop the pirates from operating off Somalia's coast. **What do you think the United States and the rest of the world's powerful nations can do to help the people of Somalia?** END

ADVANCED

Up to a million people have died in Somalia due to years of fighting and devastating famine. The ongoing violence has not only killed countless people, it has also destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, particularly its agriculture. This, combined with years of drought, led to severe famine and what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The photo on the right shows one of many tent cities that are currently home to Somalia's millions of displaced people. **What do you think the United States and the rest of the world should do to help Somalia?**

Without a functioning economy or central government, Somalia has become one of the poorest countries in the world. Millions of Somalis rely on international food aid of some kind. The average annual income

in Somalia is estimated to be about \$650, although the country's situation is too chaotic to produce accurate statistics. Still, the Somali people have managed to survive by creating an unofficial economy based partly on trade. In the absence of a formal banking system, unofficial banks have been created around the country. Refugees who have fled Somalia also send money home, which has also helped it survive. In the face of such poverty, it isn't surprising that warlords and pirate bosses have no trouble recruiting young men to work as pirates. And Somalia's government has virtually no power to put a stop to the piracy. **Does knowing this information make you think differently about the Somali pirates, many of whom are in their teens? Why or why not? Does it give you a different perspective on how to best deal with the pirate problem?** END