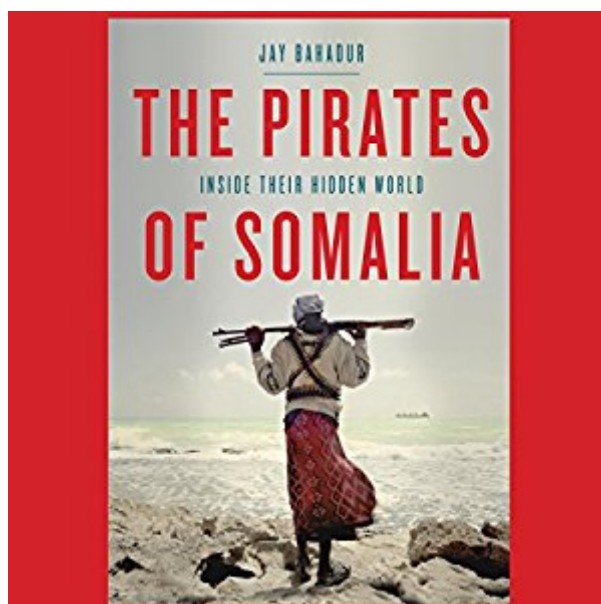


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The Pirates Of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World



Synopsis

Somalia, on the tip of the Horn of Africa, has been inhabited as far back as 9,000 B.C. Its history is as rich as the country is old. Caught up in a decades-long civil war, Somalia, along with Iraq and Afghanistan, has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Getting there is a forty-five-hour, five-flight voyage through Frankfurt, Dubai, Djibouti, Bosaso (on the Gulf of Aden), and, finally, Galkacyo. Somalia is a place where a government has been built out of anarchy. For centuries, stories of pirates have captured imaginations around the world. The recent bands of daring, ragtag pirates off the coast of Somalia, hijacking multimillion dollar tankers owned by international shipping conglomerates, have brought the scourge of piracy into the modern era. The capture of the American-crewed cargo ship Maersk Alabama in April 2009, the first United States ship to be hijacked in almost two centuries, catapulted the Somali pirates onto primetime news. Then, with the horrific killing by Somali pirates of four Americans, two of whom had built their dream yacht and were sailing around the world ("And now on to: Angkor Wat! And Burma!" they had written to friends), the United States Navy, Special Operation Forces, FBI, Justice Department, and the world's military forces were put on notice . . . The Somali seas were now the most perilous in the world. Jay Bahadur, a journalist who dared to make his way into the remote pirate havens of Africa's easternmost country and spend months infiltrating their lives, gives us the first close-up look at the hidden world of the pirates of war-ravaged Somalia.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 34 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: July 19, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B005DCA26C

Best Sellers Rank: #100 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Africa #664 in Books >

Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events > Freedom & Security #770 in Books > Audible

Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Travel

Customer Reviews

Article first published as Book Review: The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World by Jay Bahadur on Blogcritics. Far from being a romanticized history, The Pirates of Somalia by Jay Bahadur is a new (July, 2011) and important book about the pirates themselves, giving readers a full-color view of their origin, their clannish culture, and their motives. Bahadur explains through his bold interviews with financiers and respected leaders that the piracy we currently see in Somalia is a result of an evolutionary process. Early on, in the mid 1990's, in absence of a coast guard, Somali fishermen vigilantes, determined to protect their livelihood, began seizing the assets of small commercial fishing boats, in essence levying on them a tax of sorts for the offender's intrusion into their national waters. By the mid-2000's, as Bahadur explains, these same operations became big businesses. No longer a defensive measure alone pirating became profitable and drew attention from other sectors of Somali culture. In the "third wave" opportunism matured, attracting among others "disaffected youth from the large inland nomad population." This group, while echoing the "worn-out mantra" of the legacy they inherited, has lost the "brooding introspection" possessed by the older fishermen vigilantes who chose the route of piracy as a means of forcing justice in absence of a government authority. It is this third wave that has extended their reach into the high seas targeting large commercial trade ships for multi-million dollar ransoms. In the conclusion of his book, Bahadur proposes actions which the international community might take to offer a "pragmatic mitigation" of piracy, a term he uses instead of "elimination."

Few places are more uninviting than Somalia, a lawless 'failed state' gripped by the worst drought in 60 years. Jay Bahadur, a young Canadian, quit his job writing market-research reports and flew to the center of piracy in northeastern Somalia to pursue his dream of being a journalist. Wisely he had previously arranged for a local sponsor (Mahamad Farole, son of the new president of Puntland, a Somali state) to both provide safeguarding and introductions to local pirates - otherwise his story, at best, would have simply been one of being kidnapped and held for ransom. Bahadur further ingratiated himself to the locals by adopting some of their customs - most notably the chewing of 'khat,' a mild cocaine-like leaf grown in Africa and selling for about \$20/kilo, roughly a day's supply. Khat produces mild euphoria, and a belief that one is invincible and superhuman. Downsides include tooth decay, decreased liver function, and depression after withdrawal. The leaves' ability to create a narcotic effect is time limited - thus fresh supplies are flown in daily from Kenya and Ethiopia. Local pirates told Bahadur that their forays started in the mid-1990s when Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean fishing trawlers began using steel-pronged drag fishing nets to wipe out their lobsters and their breeding grounds. The first piracy raids were retaliatory - capturing foreign

fishing vessels, keeping the catch, and ransoming the crew. However, by 1997 the foreign fishing fleets began obtaining protection contracts with local warlords who provided armed guards and anti-aircraft guns. So the early pirates then began pursuing commercial cargo ships, identifiable by the cranes on their decks and much slower speeds (supertankers ran at about 10 mph) vs. tourist ships.

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