

Review - Somali Piracy and Terrorism

Written by Karl Sörenson

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Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa

By Christopher L. Daniels

Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012

The last decade has seen an abundance of books about the state of Somalia, Somali terrorism and the Somali piracy. While some have provided important contributions of our collective knowledge with regards to Somalia, piracy and terrorism, others take a more popular approach providing anecdotes but little new in terms of fact or theoretical advances. Professor Christopher Daniels has in his book *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa* tried to deal with three of the more frequent Somali topics: Piracy, terrorism and the Somali state. As far as intellectual challenges for the social scientists goes this should qualify as one of the greatest. It requires a good orientation of the state of Somalia and state building as well as awareness of theories of interstate war, a good command of the quantum leap research on international terrorism and international operations has taken the last decade, pared with a kinship to research on maritime security and naval operations. Diverse fields and needless to say, a gigantic task to set oneself and one can only commend Professor Daniels for trying to connect the dots between various areas of research which often is quite particular about its own scopes and limits. Reviewing such a book is also challenging as the field of “unknown unknowns” is ever present.

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The result of Professor Daniels attempt is a curious read since one is faced with several types of writing; historical overview is contrasted with unprocessed statistics on arms-sales and piracy numbers, reprinted UN-resolutions figure next to policy advice and a dictionary type of terms and acronyms appear alongside an overview of the Somali clans. In fact, less than half of the book (99 pages out of 215) is dedicated to the three topics Professor Daniels attempts to understand. The majority of the book, i.e. the last chapter and the following six appendixes concern conclusions and policy advice, suggested further reading, timeline, an overview of the Somali clan system, key people and institutions in Somalia, UN-resolutions and international agreements relating to Somalia and in the very end, a definitions of terms and acronyms – as if the author tries to provide as many keys to those interested in the complex Somali society, the terrorism and the piracy as possible.

So for whom is the book intended? For the scholar there is little new, especially since the author does not attempt to relate the historical background and description of the Somali civil war to actual research. The work of scientists such as Ken Menkhous and other well-known Somali researchers are footnoted, but there is never any attempt to criticize, reconstruct or even describe any of these findings. On the contrary, the author seems to have the ambition to set the stage for the two other topics: piracy and terrorism. With regards to the piracy, this chapter is almost research free, as most of the references are to online articles. This is problematic since some of recent years of research like that of Stig Jarle-Hansen, questions some popular notions, e.g. that the Somali piracy grew out of disgruntled fishermen. Maritime security, shipping and the naval operations seems also not to concern the author. The chapter on terrorism is more detailed, but does not connect to any new data or theories regarding al-Shabaab.

For the civil servant or policy advisor there is also not much in the book in terms of novelties. The policy advice provided are often on such a high level that it becomes lofty and non-applicable. For example, to advice against ransom payments of hijacked ships makes little sense today. First, the Somali piracy is on decline partly as a result of the IMO and EU attempt to coordinate merchant vessels and ship-owners work with the EU, NATO and CMF naval operations (organizations and operations which are barely mentioned), which make it more difficult for the pirates to succeed. Secondly, this sort of advice was discussed in 2007, but since ship-owners would stand to lose much more by refusing payment, the incentives are too powerful for denying an owner to make the payment and get ship and crew back – in spite of the long term effects it might have. The last point is important since the connection between ransom payments and al-Shabaab has been an issue. Here Professor Daniels could have connected the two dots, but since the evidence provided by the book is anecdotal – just as all other open source material on the piracy-terrorism connection – it does not further our knowledge. However, for the layman *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa* may prove interesting since it takes a bird's view of a conflict and its spillover effects that have eluded the world for decades.

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