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Don't Call Us Pirates, We Are Protectors

In an economy where there are no guarantees, why not invest in cargo-ship hijacking? In a recent interview with Scott Carney from Wired, a Somali pirate discloses information about the recent ship hijackings around the horn of Africa and the motivation behind the pirate attacks.

When asked what his job was before ship-hijacking or what forced him into a life of crime on the high seas, the pirate defended his actions noting that Somalians once earned a living through fishing, but that that was no longer feasible. Instead, he claimed, "We became watchmen of our coasts and took up our duty to protect the country. Don't call us pirates. We are protectors."



The "protector" interviewed by Wired admitted that they attack ships everyday but pointed out that only some are profitable. He went on to say that ships from third-world countries are rarely profitable and the jackpot is with the western ships carrying oil, weapons, and other valuable cargo.

Describing common tactics employed by hijackers, the pirate said when a ship with valuable cargo is captured, the next step is to demand a highly inflated ransom. The process also involves contacting the media to start putting pressure on shipping companies to negotiate the release of their ships and crew.

One thing made clear in the interview is that hijackings are not simple operations carried out by only a few people on a simple rubber raft. According to the source interviewed by Carney, pirate crew members need to be rotated out three times per week and each operation requires a large crew for the operation to be successful and profitable. He says the average hijacking will cost an investor \$30,000, and it can take up to four hijackings for that investor to hit a "jackpot."

Each hijacking typically involves six men on a boat, another six in reserve, and a whole crew of people on land that range from finance people to cooks and logistics personnel.

Still, piracy on the high seas is a risky proposition, but the payoff, apparently, is worth it. "The key to our success is that we are willing to die, and the crews are not," the pirate told Wired.

When asked how dangerous it was to be a pirate, he responded "very dangerous," pointing out: "you could easily drown while boarding a ship or die if they [the crew] fight back."

At least for now the economics of piracy favor the criminals. "Hostages — especially Westerners — are our only assets," the pirate told Wired, "so we try our best to avoid killing them."



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