Maritime piracy has been on an exponential rise over the last five years (Samatar, Lindberg & Mahayni, 2011; Chalk, 2010; Bento, 2009; Pham, 2010). The International Maritime Bureau reports that there were 445 ships (a record number) attacked by pirates in 2010. Somali pirates have carried out more than 49% or 219 of those attacks in the waters off the Horn of Africa (IMB, 2011; Middleton, 2011). Although pirates’ success in hijacking ships decreases significantly, these attacks continue to this day.

The increased piracy attacks in Somalia have had negative economic, security and humanitarian impacts across the globe and certainly on the Middle East and East Africa regions (Fu, Ng, Lau, 2010; Keyuan, 2009; Kraska, 2010; Anderson, 2011).

With the assistance of the Qatar National Research Fund grant, Dr. W. Andy Knight (University of Alberta), Dr. Afyare A. Elmi (Qatar University) and their research team will conduct a longitudinal research on the piracy phenomenon. The research team hopes to unearth the causes of modern day piracy, the consequences that result from this criminal activity, and the policy responses of governments, international organizations and industry to piracy in the Horn of Africa waters.

This study will be significant in that it will contribute to two of the three priorities of Qatar. Qatar and other states in the Gulf region export oil and gas to Europe, North America, Japan, India, China and many other states in the world. As Kaplan notes 70% of petroleum-related products are exported to their destinations via the Indian Ocean. Qatar and other Gulf states obviously depend on and benefit from secure commercial sea routes.

Besides library research and document analysis, the research team will interview about 100 officials from five groups: International organizations, industry, governments, victims of piracy crime and former pirates that are in custody.