

Counter-Piracy in the Gulf of Aden

Fact Sheet

Maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia on a large and uncontrollable scale emerged in 2000. Reinforced by state failure, piracy in the Horn of Africa can be attributed to two underlying factors. The United Nations initially reported that Somali piracy was caused mainly by foreign vessels illegally fishing and dumping toxic waste off the coast of Somalia, making it hard for local fishermen to earn their living, who formed armed groups in retaliation. They subsequently started hijacking commercial vessels as an alternative source of income. The other root cause of piracy was the absence of an effective national coast guard and army, allowing Somali fishermen to form organised groups for self-protection then, for financial gain.

Maritime piracy has over time become one of the gravest security threats in Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. It has led to maritime and human insecurity and interrupted delivery of shipments, increasing shipping expenses. Food aid deliveries have also been disrupted. To help the Somali government and the African Union, several international maritime missions currently patrol the waters off the coast of Somalia.

The presence of international naval patrols in the Gulf of Aden and their efforts to disrupt and deter pirate activity have greatly contributed to reducing piracy. The EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, NATO's Operation Ocean Shield and the Combined Task Force 151 are at the forefront of such activities. They have taken the lead in increasing collaboration and information sharing between stakeholders.

In addition, a number of countries have chosen to deploy independent maritime missions or task forces in the region, among them Saudi Arabia, Russia, Korea, China, India and Japan. India's total trade value passing through the Gulf of Aden amounts to \$110 billion and its seafaring community counts for 6% of the world'sⁱ. In order to protect Indian ships and Indians employed at sea, the Indian Navy began anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden as early as 2008. By December 2013, the Chinese government had sent 16 task forces to the Gulf of Aden, each composed of no less than three shipsⁱⁱ.

The three counter-piracy forces communicate and coordinate their operations on a daily basis to ensure maximum effectiveness in the deterrence, disruption and repression of piracy in the areas where they operate. Cross-deck meetings are organised regularly in addition to electronic communications.

The Force Commanders of the three international counter-piracy forces regularly come together in what is informally known as "the big three" meeting. They exchange experience and coordinate next steps, as well as discuss the strategic and tactical situation and the broader evolution of the piracy phenomena.

This factsheet briefly presents facts and figures of the on-going maritime operations, example of their cooperation and some of the challenges ahead in 2014 as the mandates expire.



Task forces in facts

European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia – Operation Atalantaⁱⁱⁱ

The EU launched EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta in December 2008 within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The operation is deployed in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions (1816, 1838, 1846, 1851), and International Law, in response to the rising levels of piracy and armed robbery off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean.

On 23 March 2012 the Council of the EU extended the mandate of Operation Atalanta until December 2014. At the same time, the Council also extended the Area of Operation to include Somali coastal territory and internal waters.

The mission mandate is to:

- Protect World Food Programme (WFP) vessels delivering aid to displaced persons in Somalia and the protection of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) shipping;
- deter, prevent and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Somali coast;
- protect vulnerable shipping off the Somali coast on a case by case basis;
- in addition, EU NAVFOR also contribute to the monitoring of fishing activities off the coast of Somalia.

NATO Operation Ocean Shield^{iv}

NATO Operation Ocean Shield is in full accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions (1816, 1838, 1846, 1851) relating to Somali-based piracy. The operation was launched in 2008. The operation was approved on 17 August 2009 by NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC)^v. In March 2012, the NAC extended the mandate of the mission until the end of 2014.

The mission mandate is to:

- Deter and disrupt pirate attacks, while protecting vessels and helping to increase the general level of security in the region;
- increase cooperation with other counter-piracy operations in the area in order to optimise efforts and tackle the evolving pirate trends and tactics;
- use the necessary means to repress acts of piracy and armed robbery within the territorial waters of Somalia.

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)^{vi}

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) are a multinational naval partnership of 30 nations to promote security, stability and prosperity across approximately 2.5 million square miles of international waters.

CMF's main focus areas are defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment.

Combined Task Force 151 (CTF -151) is one of three task forces operated by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).

The mission^{vii} mandate is to:

- Disrupt piracy and armed robbery at sea;
- engage with regional and other partners to build capacity and improve relevant capabilities to protect global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation.



Task forces in figures^{viii}

EU NAVFOR Atalanta^{ix}

Currently held by pirates: Vessels – 1, Hostages – 50

Since 2009:

- 266 World Food Programme (WFP) vessels protected
- 127 African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) vessels protected
- 886,7023 tonnes of food/aid delivered by World Food Programme (WFP)
- Pirates transferred to competent authorities with a view to their prosecution:
Total 149, Remanded 28, Convicted 121

Threats	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Suspicious events	8	59	99	166	73	20	1
Total attacks	24	163	174	176	35	7	2
Of which pirated	14	46	47	25	5	0	0
Disruptions	0	14	65	28	16	5	1

NATO Operation Ocean Shield^x

In January 2013 there were no attacks, approaches or disruptions in the area.

Somali Basin	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Hijacks	8	26	26	4	2
Attacks	11	58	68	52	7
Disruptions	N/A	15	88	52	19
Gulf of Aden					
Hijacks	33	18	12	1	1
Attacks	42	67	33	29	6
Disruptions	N/A	47	56	21	6
Arabian Sea					
Hijacks	N/A	1	7	19	5
Attacks	N/A	5	31	48	10
Disruptions	N/A	N/A	3	23	15



A success story^{xi}

20 January 2014

The French EU NAVFOR Somalia Operation Atalanta flagship FS Siroco in cooperation with Japanese assets released the crew of a dhow ship that was suspected to have been used as pirate mother-ship. The flagship apprehended 5 suspected pirates believed to be responsible for an attack on an oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden a day earlier.

The oil tanker issued a distress call to the UK Maritime Trade Operation (UKMTO) on the evening of Friday, 17 January, reporting to be under attack. According to the reports, the attack was repelled by a private armed security team embarked on board of the oil tanker. The skiff then headed to a dhow which lingered nearby.

The EU Naval Force, in cooperation with other Counter Piracy Forces, reacted quickly to this incident. A Japanese Maritime Patrol Aircraft and a helicopter from the Japanese vessel JS Samidare, with the support of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF/CTF 151), initially located the dhow. The EU NAVFOR flagship FS Siroco was then able to come close to the dhow and launch their helicopter and boarding team.

Once the Siroco's team boarded the dhow, 5 suspected Somali pirates surrendered and were separated from the dhow's crew and transferred to FS Siroco for further investigation. As always, the EU Naval Force seeks, if possible, the prosecution of the suspected pirates.

Conclusion

Almost 6 years of fighting piracy in the Gulf of Aden, operations have resulted in almost complete success. At the time of writing, piracy off the coast of Somalia is almost non-existent and cooperation among the various international maritime operations in the area is viewed as an example to follow. With the mandates of both Operation Atalanta and Ocean Shield coming to an end later this year, it is urgent to identify the lessons to be learned and determine whether these can be applied to other areas of maritime insecurity, and their implications for international cooperation at large. Could operations in the Gulf of Aden pave the way for renewed cooperation with countries such as China?

End notes

- i. <http://voiceof.india.com/in-focus/indian-navys-anti-piracy-operations/538> Articles_09/Jan/
- ii. 2013 China had already sent 16 Task Forces to the Gulf of Aden, each composed of no less than three ships
- iii. Mission, <http://eunavfor.eu/mission>, EU NAVFOR Somalia, 16.04.2014
- iv. Mission, legal mandate, <http://www.mc.nato.int/about/Pages/Operation%20Ocean%20Shield.aspx>, NATO website, 16.04.2014
- v. The declarations is not publicly available but forms a legal basis of the operation together with the relevant UNSC resolutions
- vi. CTF-151: Counter-piracy, <http://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>, Combined Maritime Forces website, 16.04.2014 About CMF, <http://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/>, Combined Maritime Forces website, 16.04.2014
- vii. In accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1816, 1838, 1846 and 1851, and in cooperation with non-member forces
- viii. Figures of the achievements of the Combined Maritime Forces CTF – 151 are not publicly available.
- ix. Key facts and figures, EU naval force Somalia – Operation Atalanta <http://eunavfor.eu/key-facts-and-figures/>, EU NAVFOR Somalia, 16.04.2014
- x. Deterrence and disruption, <http://www.mc.nato.int/about/Pages/Operation%20Ocean%20Shield.aspx>, NATO website, 16.04.2014
- xi. First pirate attack in 2014 in the Gulf of Aden resulted in apprehension of suspects by EU naval force, <http://eunavfor.eu/first-pirate-attack-in-2014-in-the-gulf-of-aden-resulted-in-apprehension-of-suspects-by-eu-naval-force/>, EU NAVFOR Somalia website, 16.04.2014



Further reading

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- "Toxic Waste Behind Somali Pirates", <http://www.projectcensored.org/3-toxic-waste-behind-somali-pirates/>, Project Censored, 2010

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