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’s. 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 ships.

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 Atalanta**

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**

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). 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)**

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).
Task forces in figures

**EU NAVFOR Atalanta**

*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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threats</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<td>59</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>166</td>
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<td>174</td>
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<td>Of which pirated</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disruptions</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
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**NATO Operation Ocean Shield**

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

### Somali Basin

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<tr>
<th>Hijacks</th>
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<tr>
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### Gulf of Aden

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<th>2012</th>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disruptions</td>
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### Arabian Sea

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<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hijacks</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
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A success story

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.

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


ii. 2013 China had already sent 16 Task Forces to the Gulf of Aden, each composed of no less than three ships


v. The declarations is not publicly available but forms a legal basis of the operation together with the relevant UNSC resolutions


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.


Further reading

- Axe, David, "Somalia Redux: A more hands off approach", Cato Institute, 2009
- "How Somalia's Fishermen Became Pirates", http://content.time.com/content/world/article/0,8599,1892376,00.html, Time, April 2009

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