

**Reconstituting the Somali Marine Forces and Enhancing their Land-based
Capabilities
A Maritime Strategy for Somalia**

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The Dubai Conference on maritime security, capacity building and public-private partnerships is a timely opportunity to consider the utility of a maritime strategy for Somalia. This paper offers a reflection on the nature, scope and objectives of such a strategy. The statement made by President Hassan Sheikh at the Fourteenth Plenary of the Contact Group on Piracy in New York on May 1st, 2013, suggests that the Somali government considers the maritime domain and its economic opportunities as crucial for the economic development of Somalia and that maritime security is vital to Somalia's overall national security and stability. It is good that the Somali government has recognized the importance of the opportunities the maritime domain represents. The next step is to develop and endorse a national maritime strategy, agree to a plan for the development of the maritime sector, and declare it a national priority.

The issue is that the Somali government is unable to develop such a national maritime strategy at leisure, nor can remain divided over details or deadlocked in disagreement for months if not years. Somalia needs a maritime strategy and it needs it now. The reason for this urgency is simple: Somalia enjoys momentarily - in terms of international attention and in the proverbial way – its ‘place in the sun’. It is worldwide one of the focal points of international attention. Donors, resources and political energy have been mobilized and stand *en masse* ready to support. This is a historic time – and a historic opportunity – in the development of Somalia. The means are there, the political will is there and the impetus is there. But Somalia will not remain forever a focal point of international attention. It may be over sooner rather than later when the international community will turn its attention to other pressing crises and developments. Somali decision makers would be well advised to develop an appropriate sense of urgency and I would add that even a flawed maritime strategy is better than no maritime strategy at all.

Seeking a Solution

The problem for Somalia is that the magnitude of the challenges is daunting and that ‘everything’ is a priority and needs to be done now. However, some things stand out in terms of importance and in terms of potential for cascading or spilling-over into other policy domains as essential preconditions for success. Out of everything that needs to be done, it appears that Somali decision makers are confronted with a set of three strategic priorities that require immediate action and sustained attention:

- eradicating Somali piracy;
- developing the Somali maritime infrastructure; and
- the development of capable maritime law enforcement forces.

Let us examine these issues in order to develop some understanding by what is meant by this and why these issues should be declared national priorities.

Winning the End Game in Somali Piracy

Winning the end game in Somali piracy is of huge symbolic value. Being able to declare the Indian Ocean ‘pirate free’ would be a historic milestone. It begins with a continued focus and renewed energy and attention to liberate the remaining ships and seafarers still held hostage by Somali pirates. This moment of zero ships and zero captive seafarers does not signal that the fight is over, however ‘after care’ and strategic presence and oversight by international naval forces will be required, perhaps for several years. But the symbolic value ‘zero/zero’ is easily translated into economic opportunity as it will contribute to the required confidence of private sector investors to jump at the opportunity to come to Somalia and invest in the strategic maritime infrastructure such as ports and coastal infrastructure and commence economic activities.

To win the end game in Somali piracy, the Somali government needs to retain its focus on the issue. It is almost there, but we - the Somali government and the international community - need to hold on, not give up, and bring the game to its necessary conclusion. Experts agree that with the increasing number of (maritime) capacity building projects underway, development projects beginning and emerging private sector involvement, Somali piracy can be eradicated within a

number of years - there is no better alternative for piracy and maritime crime than jobs and economic development.

Developing the Strategic Maritime Infrastructure

As with all fragile and war torn states, the generation of revenues through a fair and equitable system of taxation is a challenge that often proves too complex to be realized in the short term. Somalia will embark on a process that will eventually lead to the creation of such a system of taxation but that may take decades to achieve. Its only alternative is to develop its strategic infrastructure to such an extent that it can be used to generate important revenues for the state. For the purpose, this paper will concentrate on the development of the Somali strategic maritime infrastructure.

Developing strategic maritime infrastructure requires the development of (deep water) ports, but also the corresponding development of adequate lines of communication inland (to Nairobi, Djibouti, Addis Ababa and Kampala, in particular) and the development of coastal infrastructure. These infrastructure projects would be best suited for competent and sufficiently large private partners operating through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Private sector investors, seeking out sustainable new business bring in the necessary skills and expertise to build and leverage strategic infrastructure. Through PPPs the Somali government can share the risks, while also reaping the economic rewards of a modern and robust infrastructure. Given the stakes of the international community and the level of investments in Somalia, the importance of these PPPs for the overall success of stability and economic recovery of Somalia cannot be overstated.

Creating Maritime Law Enforcement Structures

Security remains a primary concern and priority for any government. The Somali government needs to create as a matter of priority a maritime law enforcement force that enables the Somali government to take control of its maritime domain, guard its marine resources and provide security for the economic operators present in Somalia. This is the focus of the huge number of maritime capacity building projects and programs the EU, amongst others, has made available to Somalia. Providing and displaying maritime security is a key precondition to attracting the private sector to Somalia.

The development of a maritime law enforcement force touches upon many sensitive issues, not least the relation and division of responsibilities between the central government and the regions. This issue is also addressed in the new Constitution. This is not something that can be accomplished overnight. The Netherlands, which recently celebrated the 525th anniversary of its navy, constantly works on optimizing the structures and internal processes of its navy. It is impossible to get it right in one go; these structures must be developed and constantly optimized, a process that can take decades. But it is crucial to take those first steps.

Concurrent Activity

In an ideal world, these strategic objectives would be pursued in a systematic, sequential manner. However, Somalia does not have the luxury of time. The Somali government would lose a historic opportunity if it does not succeed in utilizing the international support presently on offer to the best possible effect. With such international support in place, these three strategic maritime objectives could be achieved. If Somalia were on its own, it would be an entirely different matter altogether. It may not be impossible but it would certainly take many more years to achieve. The government may thus be forced to pursue these three maritime strategic objectives in a concurrent manner: i.e. to pursue them on parallel tracks. This is, from a perspective of overall coordination, not an easy route to follow. Nevertheless, it can be done, precisely because the Somali government enjoys and can call upon unprecedented levels of international support.

Ambition into Action

The government of Somalia is ambitious and rightly so. The international community stands ready to support and work shoulder to shoulder with the Somali government and the Somali people. But the Somali government needs to translate its ambition into action, and it needs to do that now. Internal divisions and blockages detract, delay and should be avoided. A sense of urgency and national opportunity should be the overarching sentiment of all politicians and decision makers, both in central government and in the regions. The international community has repeatedly expressed its deep support and willingness to commit itself to the long term in supporting Somalia. But the time for action is now, not tomorrow, not next year.

This article was commissioned by the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA) on behalf of the third United Arab Emirates Counter Piracy Conference, **‘Countering Maritime Piracy: Continued Efforts for Regional Capacity Building’**, organized by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with global ports operator DP World and Abu Dhabi Ports Company, held in Dubai on September 11-12, 2013. The opinions expressed in this paper are the views of the author only, and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the conference organizers. Content may have been edited for formatting purposes.

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