

Rolling Back Somali Piracy: Views from EUNAVFOR on Operations Since 2012

Rear Admiral Bob Tarrant, Operational Commander, EUNAVFOR

The last 12 months have seen a remarkable decline in the fortunes of the Somali pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. As of writing, (July 2013) it has now been over a year since a ship was successfully attacked at sea. From a high of 47 vessels pirated in 2010, the number of ships in the hands of pirates has now been reduced to only one. In parallel, the number of hostages still held captive has decreased. However, encouraging though this may be, these figures do not mean that our mission is accomplished. The pirates have been very successfully contained, but they remain active and could be resurgent should the international community relax its guard, with hostages remaining captive in appalling conditions, and in some cases having been held for several years. The counter-piracy effort, therefore, is paramount until pirate activities are no longer viable and the hostages are all safely returned to their loved ones.

It is a combination of measures that have seen the reduction in piracy, most notably:

- Increased use of self-protective measures and vigilance by commercial shipping;
- The introduction of new legal measures to deal with piracy, and an increased willingness by states to prosecute these pirates;
- Pressure exerted by naval power, deployed in force to the region in order to protect shipping, and deter and disrupt acts of piracy.

These counter-piracy activities have resulted in over 1,000 Somali pirates being prosecuted in 21 states, and many more pirate attacks being disrupted before they could even be undertaken.

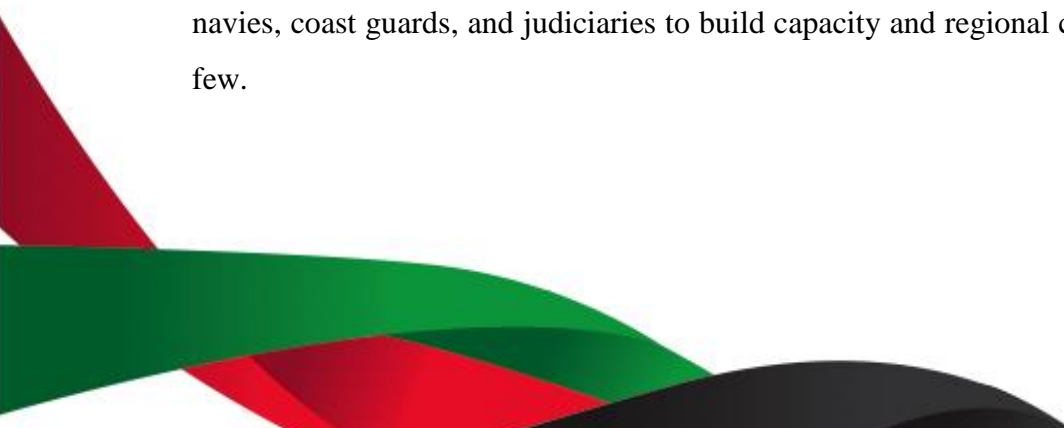
Since it was established in August 2012, the Somali Federal Government has worked to change the perceptions within Somali communities, emphasizing that pirates launching their

boats from Somali beaches are committing a criminal offence. Coupled with increased pressure from naval forces, such as the disruption of pirate logistics dumps on the shoreline, this has forced a change in pirate behaviour. The pirates can no longer brazenly prepare to operate in plain sight; increasingly they have to conceal their activities out of fear of detection and disruption before even putting to sea. In addition, they have increasingly moved away from the methodology, widely seen in earlier years, of using larger vessels as mother-ships supporting several smaller skiffs, to the use of a single small boat which can more easily be concealed, both ashore and once at sea. In short, Somali pirates are being forced to disguise their activities and are more contained and constrained by counter-piracy efforts.

Yet despite this significant pressure put on them, Somali pirates continue to put to sea. They have tried to innovate and have attempted to adapt their tactics in response to the efforts of the international community with little success. In the last six months, 21 suspect pirates have been apprehended by EUNAVFOR in the wake of unsuccessful attacks on vessels at sea.

The focus on prosecuting suspected pirates has been bolstered by a growing number of legal avenues. This has included the first transfer of suspected pirates to Mauritius, in January 2013 for prosecution. Furthermore, March saw the first post-trial transfer of convicted pirates from the Seychelles to prisons in Somalia, indicating a welcome advance in the ability of the Somali authorities to operate a prison to international standards.

The international response to Somali piracy has demonstrated that the oceans are a unique space for collaboration and cooperation in order to solve common problems. This has involved both public and private sector bodies, with national, international, commercial and non-governmental organizations representing the many different elements – military, industry, legal, judicial – involved in the response to piracy in the region, and working together to tackle a common problem. EUNAVFOR has seen many examples of this: the cooperation and co-ordination between naval forces, deployed as part of coalitions or as independent operators; and international organizations working with regional governments, navies, coast guards, and judiciaries to build capacity and regional cooperation to name but a few.



Yet the successes seen in the past year are reversible. Piracy still remains an attractive option for young Somali men, despite the risk of capture and prosecution, or death in stormy seas, because the alternative options are few. Moreover, pirate leaders have made significant cash gains from their criminal activities over the last few years. None of these leaders have yet to be brought to justice, enjoying a degree of immunity within isolated coastal communities that still see them as modern-day ‘Robin Hood’ figures. The conditions and the motivation therefore remain in place for a resurgence in pirate attacks should the international community not maintain counter-piracy efforts at sea. This fact presents a challenge for the international community. Undoubtedly, the costs of piracy in terms of additional protective measures, routing and speed have been a painful additional burden for the merchant fleets, at a time of global economic hardship. Similarly, despite the budgetary pressure placed on many states, the analysis is accepted that reducing the international presence too soon would jeopardize the fragile progress made recently, before efforts to address the root causes have made headway.

The gains made by international counter-piracy efforts can only be secured in the long-term when Somalia is able to control its 3,300 kilometer coastline, and has sufficient maritime forces to secure and protect its waters. It is the setting up of effective maritime capacity and robust legal processes fully endorsed by a developing Somalia that must now be the focus if the causes of piracy are to be removed. This long task also plays a vital role in setting the conditions that facilitate viable new maritime livelihoods to help those young Somali men find a source of income other than crime.

The importance of this activity is well appreciated by the Somali authorities and, on May 1, 2013, President Hassan Sheikh declared the need for a maritime strategy, highlighting that the sea offers potential common narrative, and the resources that can be used to cement the country back together. This approach offers Somalia a new chapter in its economic development, as the seas off Somalia offer resources barely exploited by the peoples to whom they belong. Key to this strategy will be a properly constructed maritime security apparatus. Many within the international community are already intimately involved in providing support to the Somalis, assisting them to develop their maritime security apparatus; such efforts are to be applauded. It is hoped yet more donors will come forward in the coming months. This can only add to Somalia increasingly able to manage its own maritime affairs.

It is important that this support does not solely focus on Somalia. The removal of piracy from the seas off East Africa is achievable only through a regional approach, complementary to the international efforts to suppress piracy at sea, that facilitates all countries in the region developing the capabilities themselves required to deal with piracy – ashore and at sea.

Within the EU, we are strongly committed to helping the Somali people achieve their ambition to make best use of their maritime resources, and to ensure Somali ownership of any process aimed at developing them. The EU already funds a number of maritime security projects in the region, and has recently launched the regional maritime security mission EUCAP NESTOR. EUCAP NESTOR works to strengthen the rule of law and to build maritime capacity. In Somalia itself, the mission will work to assist the Somali Federal Government with the development of coastal security forces and judiciary, recognizing national responsibilities as well as regional specificities.

The crimes that have been inflicted on the merchant community since the Somali piracy phenomenon started are appalling. Pirates are common criminals. However, the causes of Somali piracy can be found in the lack of alternative maritime and economic opportunities, together with the absence of state institutions capable of dealing with this crime at cause. While continuing to fight the symptoms at sea, now is the time to address the causes of piracy ashore. Properly managed, these new areas of support will create the conditions where the international response – so crucial for the suppression of successful piracy – can be drawn down while maintaining security.

To that end, while maintaining its strong presence, deterring and disrupting acts of piracy at sea, and protecting shipping, the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) will seek to increasingly support the work of other European instruments in the future. The positive developments which have been observed over the past months provide encouraging evidence that the international community should continue to support our Somali partners in developing their maritime strategy to put an end to the curse of piracy.



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.

For more information, visit the conference website at www.counterpiracy.ae.

