

# JACK SPARROW'S NEMESIS

Maritime Patrol Aircraft play an instrumental role in helping the fight against piracy with assets such as this Seychelles Air Force Dornier Do-228K proving important  
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The term 'piracy', defined by RAND Corporation as "the plundering, hijacking, or detention of a ship in international waters," brings back images of eye-patched, wooden-legged ship captains ordering their unruly crew to storm another vessel.

**Dr. Alix Valenti**

**H**owever, the phenomenon depicted in our childhood movies, and in more recent works such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, has not only persisted through time, it is now a significant threat to the global economy costing an estimated \$7 billion to \$12 billion in the past five years. Away from commerce, piracy also poses a threat to the delivery of precious humanitarian cargo to trouble-spots such as Somalia.

Modern day maritime piracy is therefore a serious threat to ships navigating key commercial corridors in the Gulf of Aden (off the coast of Somalia), the Gulf of Guinea (off the coast of Nigeria), the Strait of Malacca (between Indonesia and Malaysia) and off the Indian subcontinent

(between India and Sri Lanka). A lucrative business at sea, it is actually the symptom of a much wider malaise that encompasses governance, societal and economic conditions in the territories flanking these waters. Somali pirates, for instance, were originally local fishermen who, in the absence of effective central governance, took to defending themselves from illegal trawlers by charging them with fines of a few thousand dollars. As fines became more profitable than fishing or land-based economic activities these part-time fishermen turned into full-time pirates.

Piracy, however, only really made it to the international agenda as a major international challenge in 2008. As the civil war which has raged since 1988 brought devastation and famine across Somalia, large hu-

This year the Netherlands are contributing to EU NAVFOR with the HNLMS *Groningen*. As part of its mission, the HNLMS *Groningen* escorts commercial vessels (seen here) © EU NAVFOR



Turkey is currently commanding CTF-151, as well as contributing to the mission's capabilities with its TCG *Gemlik* seen here to the right of the picture © US DoD

manitarian aid shipments from the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations (UN) body which provides food assistance around the world, were dispatched by sea to Somalia to respond to the crisis. Yet the ships carrying this aid became easy targets for pirates as they sailed unprotected and unprepared for such maritime threats. For example, on 8 April 2009, the MV *Maesk Alabama* container ship was hijacked by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean bound for the Kenyan port of Mombasa where it was to offload WFP supplies. The hijacking, detention of the ship's master, and his subsequent liberation by United States Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) commandos was later made famous by the 2013 movie *Captain Philips*. In response, in 2008 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1851, allowing navies, with the permission of Somalia's Transition Federal Government, to take appropriate action against the pirates. In this international context, a number of

task forces have since been implemented to fight piracy.

#### OPERATION ATALANTA

"Concerned with the safety of the WFP ships carrying humanitarian goods, following Resolution 1851 it only took ten weeks for the European Union (EU) Council (which regularly gathers cabinet members from EU members) to pass the Joint Action 851 initiative setting up Operation ATALANTA," says Commander Jacqueline Sherrif, spokesperson for the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR). Established in December 2008, EU NAVFOR's Operation ATALANTA covers the Southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and part of the Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Mauritius and Comoros). Its main objectives are the protection of vulnerable ships, deterring and disrupting piracy as well as armed robbery at sea, monitoring fishing activities off the Coast

of Somalia and supporting other missions sharing similar objectives.

EU NAVFOR benefits from the contribution of all EU member states as well as other non-EU countries, such as Norway, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine. The type and number of units varies regularly, with a typical rotation including approximately 1200 personnel, four to six surface combatants, and two-to-three Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA). The EU, in cooperation with other ongoing military operations in the area, determines the number of units for each rotation according to a needs assessments, with inter-monsoon seasons typically seeing more units as "seas and waters are easier to navigate at that time, creating more opportunities for pirates," says Commander Dave Benham, chief public affairs Officer for the Allied Maritime Command (AMC).

The AMC, headquartered in London, is a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) body exercising the central command of all NATO naval forces, which also supports anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden/Indian Ocean. "On this basis, countries then decide whether and when to participate according to the ships available in their navy," adds Elbrich Alga, security manager at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Currently four countries are contributing to EU NAVFOR.



The sustainability of EU NAVFOR's success also lies in building the capacity of regional forces. Instrumental to this is cooperation with regional naval and air forces  
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Spain is providing the ESPS *Galicia*, a 'Galicia' class amphibious assault ship equipped with a Thales DA08 naval surveillance radar and Oerlikon (now Rheinmetall) 20mm cannon. It is also contributing the ESPS *Meteoro*, an Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) built by Navantia and commissioned in 2009. The *Deutsche Marine* (German Navy) 'Braunschweig' class corvette FGS *Efurt*, which carries an Airbus TRS-3D naval surveillance radar and Thales Mirador optronic system, plus Saab RBS-15 Anti-Ship Missiles (AShMs) and a 76mm gun, is also supporting efforts. Usefully, it can embark AgustaWestland Mk.41 Sea Lynx or NH Industries NH-90NFH maritime support helicopters.

Italy is currently lending its ITS *Libeccio* 'Maestral' class frigate to EU NAVFOR. Built by Fincantieri and commissioned in 1983 she can embark two AgustaWestland/Bell AB-212ASW/NLA maritime support helicopters and has a sensor fit which includes a Selex RAN-10S naval surveillance radar and OTO Melara 127 54mm gun. Finally, the Netherlands is contributing to the mission with their 'Holland' class OPV, the HNLMS *Groningen*, built by Damen Schelde and commissioned in 2012. She displaces 3180 tonnes

and carries a single NH-90NFH helicopter, a Thales Gatekeeper optronic system, plus the SeaMaster 400 and SeaWatcher 100 naval surveillance radars from the same company: "The Dutch navy has been contributing to EU NAVFOR since the beginning," said Ms Alga, "and this fall, as happens every year, the government will be deciding if, how and what it will contribute next year."

#### OPERATION OCEAN SHIELD

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) stepped up to the anti-piracy challenge at the same time as the EU. In late-2008, it established Operation ALLIED PROVIDER, which included protection as well as deterrence and prevention in the waters where WFP ships transited. Following this operation, Operation ALLIED PROTECTOR commenced in March 2009 and concluded in August the same year with a similar mandate. In August 2009, Operation OCEAN SHIELD (OOS) was established and been operating in the Gulf of Aden, the Western Indian Ocean and the Strait of Hormuz ever since.

OOS works in cooperation with Operation ATALANTA, the US-led Combined Task Force-151 (CTF-151 established by the

US Navy in 2009 to fight piracy in the Gulf of Aden) and with the navies of Japan, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea (RoK), to name just three. Since it holds a similar mandate to that of the other two missions, it was decided in January 2015 that OOS would work on the basis of a focused presence, that is, it would provide ships for protection, prevention and deterrence during the inter-monsoon season when piracy is at its peak. In times where OOS has no maritime presence, it continues to operate through the deployment of maritime patrol aircraft. As these are provided by contributing countries, the type of aircraft varies regularly, but "have included in the past Lockheed Martin P-3 Orion family and Bombardier CL-604 Challenger MPAs, the latter being operated by the *Flyvevåbnet* (Royal Danish Air Force) alongside maritime support helicopters," states Cmdr. Benham.

Much like EU NAVFOR, NATO benefits from the contributions of countries "depending on their national priorities and available capabilities" continues Cmdr. Benham. Rotations are determined together with other task forces on the basis of needs assessments shared during regular



A Royal Netherlands Air Force Airbus Helicopters AS-532U2 Cougar naval support rotorcraft lands on the deck of the EU NAVFOR flagship HNLMS *Johan de Witt* © US DoD



inter-task force meetings. Thus far, NATO has received contributions from a wide variety of countries from the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands, to New Zealand, Canada and the US. The mission is currently benefitting from the *Søværnet* (RDN/Royal Danish Navy's) eponymous 'Absalon' class frigate. Equipped with a BAE Systems Mk.45 Mod.4 127mm gun which provides useful fire support, the ship has a sensor package which includes Thales SMART-S and Terma SCANTER-2100 naval surveillance radar plus the ability to deploy Boeing RGM-84 Harpoon Block-2 AshMs.

#### CTF-151

CTF-151 was established with a specific anti-piracy mandate under the leadership of the US Navy's Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) which works to coordinate coalition naval operations. The mission of CTF-151 is to "engage and build capacity with regional and other partners to improve relevant capabilities in order to protect global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation", indicated Lieutenant Commander Francesca Woodman, CMF deputy public affairs officer.

CTF-151 is composed of thirty nations, and has been commanded by Turkey, the RoK, Singapore, Pakistan, New Zealand, Denmark, Thailand and the United States. Participation to CTF-151, much like for OOS

and Operation ATALANTA (*see above*), is "on a voluntary basis from contributing countries, and the number of ships at sea varies constantly according to the needs," said Lt. Cmdr. Woodman. "For example", she continues, "at the height of piracy in 2011 there were a large number of ships at sea, but now that the number of successful attacks has dramatically decreased, there were none in 2015, the number of units has dropped to eight or ten." At present Turkey is commanding the mission with the TCG *Gemlik*, an 'Oliver Hazard Perry' class frigate originally built by Bath Iron Works (now General Dynamics) for the US Navy. She counts a Raytheon AN/SPS-49 air surveillance radar and Raytheon Phalanx family close-in weapons system among her sensors and armament.

#### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The statistics compiled by NATO's Shipping Centre are a testament to the successes of the coordination between these three task forces in their fight against piracy. In 2009, as the task forces were being established to respond to the piracy threat, a total of 35 pirated boats, 114 attacks, 56 approaches and 40 disruptions were recorded. In 2011, at the height of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, while only 23 ships were successfully pirated, 125 attacks were recorded as well as 61 approaches and 56 disruptions. However,

practice makes perfect, and as of 2012 these numbers started dropping significantly, reaching almost zero on all indicators by 2014 when only one attempted attack and one disruption were recorded. The fact that both Operation ATALANTA and OOS, initially mandated for two or three years, have been regularly extended with both mandates now running through to December 2016, is also an indication of their success.

"One of the key success factors of these three task forces is their coordination and their ability to work together," says Cmdr. Sheriff, a view that was unanimously shared by every person interviewed for this article. "EU NAVFOR, NATO and the CTF coordinate daily," she continues, "to discuss the threats in the area and how to best address them, and weekly, through inter-task force meetings, to examine the best course of action to be taken as well as which navies and capabilities are available to implement these actions." The three task forces also meet quarterly in Bahrain for the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) conference, where states involved in these task forces interact with other navies and industry to share information, ideas and to coordinate their approaches to the latest identified threats. This includes deciding on the future rotations for each task force.

In large part, successful coordination is



CTF-151 supports its partners with their missions' objectives, which include monitoring fishing activities in the Gulf of Aden © US DoD

only as good as the reporting and monitoring of piracy incidents, “and the commercial shipping industry has really stepped up in this respect” comments Cmdr. Benham, another view shared by all interviewees. Booklets on the ‘Best Management Practices’ are regularly published and updated to provide ship operators and captains, transiting through high-risk areas, with planning and operational practices to “avoid, deter or delay piracy attacks.” The guidelines recommend that ships submit a ‘Vessel Movement Registration Form’ to the EU NAVFOR’s Maritime Security Centre Horn Of Africa (MSCHOA) upon entering high-risk areas, and should report daily to the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations (UKMTO) centre, both of which are based in London, with the latter being the first point of contact during an attack.

Assistance is provided by a variety of secured communication systems. The EU NAVFOR has a password-protected internet-protocol enabled chat Satellite Communications (SATCOM) system known as Mercury, mounted on both task force ships and merchant ships. “When a ship logged into Mercury flags a potential or actual threat in one of the high-risk areas, the notification will then show as a red spot in the command centre,” specifies Cmdr. Sheriff. Naval vessels contributing to Operation ATALANTA are also all fitted with the ATALANTA Command Military Network (ACMN), which allows all commanding officers to use SATCOM to communicate

securely with each other and with the operation’s centre about the situation in the waters they are patrolling. “NATO also has its own secure communication system known as NATO Secret Wide Area Network,” points out Cmdr. Benham, “which is used by every mission’s ship to facilitate communication amongst ships and with the mission’s centre.”

As the role of all three task forces is not limited to detection and prevention, but also extends to deterring and stopping pirate attacks, the success of these task forces is underpinned by the ability to use “capabilities that are combat proven,” points out Ben Zion Dabul, Israel Aerospace Industries’ (IAI) specialist for Exclusive Economic Zone solutions. To this end, IAI provides capabilities tailored to customers’ needs that facilitate “the detection, identification, classification and prevention of threats in high-risk waters,” continues Mr Zion Dabul, “and that are more cost-effective as they do not require a constant presence of patrol ships.” For example, IAI’s Maritime Heron Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) can detect threats and send information to the command centre that will dispatch a naval vessel to investigate.

#### **HARD WORK AHEAD**

“It is true that we have seen a drop in piracy in the past years, but we must not forget that the factors that led to piracy becoming a significant problem largely remain today and we must remain vigilant,” says

Cmdr. Benham. Cmdr. Sheriff agrees and adds that the drop in piracy attacks is in large part the result of “having successfully denied pirates the opportunity for an attack.” In order for this to be sustainable, capacity building in the countries surrounding these waters to help them fight piracy needs to be improved.

To this end, EU NAVFOR and NATO both offer capacity-building to other countries concerned by the piracy threat. EU NAVFOR’s German Navy underway replenishment ship FGS *Berlin*, for instance, conducted a capacity-building exercise with the Seychelles Coastguard in August 2014, training them how to act when providing assistance to a ship. NATO provides similar capacity-building exercises in the Horn of Africa. Other organisations that are not directly involved in anti-piracy operations at sea undertake capacity building. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO), for instance, published the Djibouti Code of Conduct signed by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, the Maldives, Seychelles, Somalia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen in 2009 which binds these countries to anti-piracy actions such as investigating, arresting and prosecuting persons accused of acts of piracy. As the conditions in territories around these waters fail to improve for their populations, and as a number of Western countries begin to decrease their military spending, this all-encompassing approach against piracy will remain a crucial aspect of these task forces. ◻