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EU Peacekeeping and Somalia

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Introduction

Since 2008 the EU has led a joint naval operation off the Somali coast to deter and detect piracy attacks on international shipping. Acting under a UN mandate, it also acts in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia by protecting its vessels and also those of the World Food Programme (WFP), a UN agency seeking to feed the desperately poor people of Somalia.

The EU's operation works in co-operation with international efforts to prevent piracy and terrorism in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, notably those of the US-led Combined Maritime Forces and of the NATO-led Operation Ocean Shield. The EU also contributes to capacity-building in Somalia through a military training mission in Uganda. In March 2012 the Council agreed to extend the mandate of the naval force to enable it to carry out operations in Somalia's coastal and inland waters.

The extent of these international efforts reflect not only concern about the plight of the people of the poorest and one of the most violent countries in the world but also widespread concern that Somalia is becoming a base for terrorism that has already spilled over into Uganda and Kenya and could lead to attacks further afield.

This paper, which is complementary to the SEE paper 'The EU & Somalia' which explains Somalia's recent history and the background to the piracy problem, covers the EU's peacekeeping operation and the military training mission.

Background

In June 2008 the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1816 in response to the on-going problem of piracy off the coast of Somalia. The resolution authorised members of the United Nations to support the transitional federal government of Somalia (TFG) in combating piracy and robbery.

The response of the EU in September 2008, whose Member States' shipping was being repeatedly hijacked with crews taken hostage and substantial ransoms demanded, was to establish a naval co-ordinating mission using the EU's military staff in Brussels. The aim was to co-ordinate the forces of Member States in theatre so as to improve the response to attacks. The co-ordination mission also worked with the UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

This operation was preliminary to establishing a naval force under EU command to operate in theatre; that was launched as EU NAVFOR Somalia (Operation Atalanta) in December 2008.

Operation Atalanta

The naval force consists of between four and seven surface combat ships, one or two auxiliary ships and two or three maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft; the exact combination of forces changes, not least because of the monsoon season which has a considerable effect on pirate activity. In addition, some military personnel are used to provide specific protection to vessels under threat. A total of about 1400 personnel are involved.

The military command chain goes back to the operational headquarters at the UK command centre at Northwood and the most senior officer has always been British. All the participating Member States do so voluntarily and several non-EU European countries have been involved; Norway, for example, provided a warship in 2009 and Croatia and the Ukraine have provided staff officers. The area covered by the force is considerable – from the south of the Red Sea across to the western part of the Indian Ocean, including the Seychelles; the EU has an agreement with the latter country so that suspected pirates arrested during counter-piracy operations can be sent there for trial.

The work of the naval force includes providing protection to WFP vessels, they bring about 90 percent of the WFP's food shipments into Somalia, and for ships working for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (a peacekeeping force) as well as intercepting suspected pirate vessels to prevent hijacks.

One role of the naval force is to liaise with other international forces in the area. NATO is involved through Operation Ocean Shield and the US Central Command, based in Bahrain, coordinates a separate international group, the Combined Maritime Force, which is also part of the international effort against piracy. China, Russia, India and others have also independently sent naval vessels to the area but co-ordinate their efforts with the ships of other nations.

The UN Security Council passed a further resolution in October 2011 (UNSCR 2015) calling for states in the region to support efforts to establish special courts to try alleged pirates and for Somalia to develop the necessary prison capacity. The resolution was a response to the difficulties that had emerged in finding ways of bringing alleged pirates to justice; very often international military personnel who had detained suspected pirates were obliged to release them because of the absence of any court with the jurisdiction to try them.

The Military Training Mission

The EU launched a military training mission for Somalia in April 2010 whose purpose is to increase the capacity of the security forces of the TFG. It is a small mission – 124 troops – which operates a training camp at Bihanga in Uganda. Due to end in December 2012, the current training programmes are focused on improving command and control skills.

The EU's Development & Other Assistance

The EU has provided extensive aid to Somalia and is expected to continue to do so. Through the European Development Fund, the EU is spending €215.8 million in Somalia during the period 2008-2013. This provides on-going development assistance in various ways:

- €52 million for governance & security;
- €36 million for education;
- €48 million for economic growth.

Humanitarian aid from the EU is channelled via its humanitarian office (ECHO) and amounts to €198 million since 2005. The UN declared a famine in southern Somalia in July 2011 as a result of the worst drought in the Horn of Africa for many decades. The emergency was officially declared over in February 2012 after a good harvest and an effective international aid response which had included the EU.

The EU is a substantial contributor to the cost of the AMISOM peacekeeping force having made grants totalling €208 million between 2007 and 2012. Uganda is the principal troop contributor to the AMISOM force and the commander of the force is a Ugandan general.

Future Developments

In December 2011, the EU appointed a Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Mr. Alexander Rondos, to co-ordinate the EU's various activities in the region and to support regional and international efforts to achieve peace in the area.¹ Although he has been appointed as part of a wider strategy aimed at improving the situation of the Horn of Africa, his initial duties focus on the problems of Somalia as these have implications for the whole region.

In March 2012 the EU agreed to extend the mandate of the naval force to December 2014, reflecting the fact that while the situation as regards piracy has improved, the problem remains. Crucially, the Foreign Affairs Council also agreed to extend the forces' area of operations, with the consent of the TFG, to Somalia's inland and coastal waters. This will enable the naval force to pursue the pirates back to their home bases.

The EU will continue its focus on building up the institutions of the TFG. Future plans include training and equipping the Coastal Police Force in the Somali regions of Puntland, Somaliland and Galmudug, as well as training and protecting judges in Puntland. In addition consideration is being given to establishing a civilian training mission in order to strengthen the maritime capacity of Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Seychelles.

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¹ The countries of the Horn of Africa are: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda.



Senior European Experts

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