

MARITIME SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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The importance of the maritime domain is beyond any comparison. It is of almost no use to start throwing numbers about the worth of the merchandise transported through the world's oceans nor the volume or worth of the cargo in which oil and natural gas are transported globally. The problem is that in the high seas the environment is enormous and complex. High seas are an unregulated and complex space, thus extremely vulnerable to maritime threats. In the case of the Mediterranean, maritime security is too vague of a definition and has to be further defined. Is it maritime security in the terms of the European Union? Is it in the frame of NATO? Or is exclusively a responsibility of the coastal states?

Modern piracy is a problem that can be encountered in many different areas and regions. It has many common characteristics but the way it appears in each region is unique. The general idea is that modern piracy is connected to failed states such as Somalia. A failed state is not necessarily facing problems with piratical activity neither is state failure a cause of piracy. However, European waters are not currently a threat of piratical activity because of the high levels of response capability and its deterrent effect. As a result, potential pirates cannot use rear bases which are essential in order to launch an attack at sea.ⁱ But Europe's dwindling commitment to maritime security capabilities coupled with instability in weak states in the Maghreb could raise this threat.ⁱⁱ

The Mediterranean Sea is surrounded by areas of great instability. The consequences of the Arab Spring and the economic crisis have created great instability in the borders of the region. Syria's enduring crisis has implications for the stability and security of Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Israel is beleaguered with uncertainties over its future relationship with Palestine. The Maghreb has failed to attain stable governance since the Arab uprisings. Egypt has endured riots after the military removal of the Muslim Brotherhood government. Libya faces an uncertain future after the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi. Mali's crisis that provoked the French intervention points to continuing instabilities in the Sahel region. At the same time, the Eurozone crisis has hit the northern side of the Mediterranean, and most Southern European states currently face an acute economic crisis. Fiscal austerity that comes with the crisis will likely further strain the already inadequate defence spending in

Southern Europe and give rise to new security concerns.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, the recent crisis and uprisings in Ukraine could affect the neighbor states and even the Balkan region.

In this fragile environment the majority of criminal activities concern drugs and arms trafficking. Arms trafficking may vary from light weapons and small arms to WMD components and entire ballistic missile systems.^{iv} Drug trafficking includes cannabis from North Africa, cocaine from South America and heroin from Asia. The entry points to Europe are the least policed areas such as the Balkan coasts in the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea.^v National and multinational efforts are restricted by the fact that one is not authorized, at high seas, to intercept a ship without the consent of the flag state. As a consequence, European nations rely upon bilateral or multilateral agreements.^{vi}

Another issue of maritime security in the Mediterranean is illegal immigration. The migrants often die while crossing the Mediterranean and smugglers are even ready to throw them into the sea in order not to be caught *in flagrante* when the police forces arrive.^{vii} States use their naval, coast guards and police forces to deter, arrest or to rescue illegal migrants in the Mediterranean. Since 2005, the EU is also involved through its external boarder security agency, FRONTEX.^{viii} Control of illegal immigration in Malta, Italy (especially in Lampedusa), Spain and Greece presents a huge constabulary security challenge.^{ix} The recent uprisings, revolutions and instability in the Arab nations of the Southern Mediterranean have exacerbated this problem. Long term future security trends including climate change, water shortages, poverty and dispossession will prompt more movement of people toward wealthier and more liberal environments such as Europe. The maritime route is obvious, albeit dangerous.^x

All of the coastal European states in the Mediterranean (including Turkey) are members of NATO which with the exception of Montenegro, Malta and Cyprus, is helpful for multinational inter-operability. NATO's role in maritime security mainly centers on integrating military tasks across the alliance and amongst partners. Since 9/11, NATO has taken on counter-terrorism as a task.^{xi} The remaining maritime security tasks fall into the domain of the EU, which has the ability to integrate economic power and other constabulary and benign security capabilities. Turkey, Albania and Montenegro are the only coastal European nations that are not members of the EU.^{xii}

Effective responses require good intelligence. This requires governments, the commercial sector and non-government entities to have sufficient levels of trust to engage in intelligence sharing. Information exchange does not present problems when an obvious common purpose exists, such as for disaster relief or countering piracy. However, a reluctance to share information may arise when commercial and other interests (such as border disputes) are involved. Even NATO and EU members have difficulties sharing intelligence, particularly that which comes from communications interceptions and national intelligence agencies.^{xiii}

Endnotes:

ⁱ Germond, Basil & Grove, Eric *Maritime Security in the Mediterranean* The German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2010), p. 13

ⁱⁱ Codner, Michael *The Security of the Mediterranean Sea* p. 31

ⁱⁱⁱ Codner, Michael *The Security of the Mediterranean Sea* p. 29

^{iv} Germond & Grove, p. 14

^v Bockhout, T & Van Solinge, “Drug use and drug trafficking in Europe”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, vol.89, no.1, (1998), p. 101

^{vi} Byers, M., “Policing the High Seas: The Proliferation Security Initiative”, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol.98, no.3, (July 2004), pp. 526-545

^{vii} Germond & Grove, p. 14

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} A. Gomes, ‘Policy responses to people-trafficking in the Mediterranean,’ *Maritime Security in the Mediterranean: Challenges and Policy Responses*, SDA Discussion Paper, June 2011

^x Codner, M., p. 31

^{xi} Codner, M., p. 33

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Ibid