



Maritime Terrorism and Piracy Past, Present and Future

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Introduction

Whereas records of acts of piracy reach as far back as the fourteenth-century BC, this study confines itself to the present century.

Maritime terrorism, like all forms of terrorism, stems primarily from political, ideological or religious sources. Terrorists thus seek to identify and target industrial infrastructures. They may focus attention on so-called choke points and mega-harbours, which account for 75% of all international sea transport activities sustained by approx. 50000 ships utilizing 2800 ports.

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Analysis

Definitions

I begin the present study by way of two definitions:

Maritime Terrorism

No universally accepted definition of maritime terrorism exists; the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Working Group has thus provided a comprehensive definition thereof: "... the undertaking of terrorist acts and activities within the maritime environment, using or against vessels or fixed platforms at sea or in port, or against and one of their passengers or personnel, against coastal facilities or settlement, including tourist resorts, port areas or port towns or cities."¹

Piracy

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Article 101 defines piracy as: "any legal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew of the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft. . . on the high seas against another ship or aircraft. . . [and] any act of voluntary participation [in a private ship]."² The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) defines piracy as *the act of boarding any vessel with intent to commit theft or any other crime, and with an intent or capacity to use force in furtherance of that act.*³

Maritime Terrorism – The Past

Whereas records of acts of piracy reach as far back as the fourteenth-century BC, this study confines itself to the present century. Though short-term memory appears to be an almost universal flaw, we should make a concerted effort to keep in mind the objectives of Al-Qaida chief strategist for maritime terrorism, Abdul Al Rahman Al Nashiri, also known as the Prince of the Sea. Nashiri, who was arrested in November 2020 in the United Emirates, developed a strategy which included the following four tactics:

- Ramming or detonating medium-sized ships in the vicinity of other ships or in harbours;
- Attacking super tankers from the air with small planes packed with explosives;
- The use of divers for underwater attacks against ships;
- Attacks against cruise liners and the taking of hostages.⁴

¹ Feldt, Lutz; Dr. Roell, Peter; Thiele, Ralph D.: "Maritime Security – Perspectives for a Comprehensive Approach", in: International Relations and Security Network (ISN), Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Issue No. 222, April 2013, [Maritime Security: Perspectives for a Comprehensive Approach - Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich](#)

² Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, Cornell University, New York, USA, [piracy | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute \(cornell.edu\)](#)

³ „Modern High Seas Piracy“, [Modern High Seas Piracy \(cargolaw.com\)](#)

See also Article 101: Definition of piracy, UNCLOS July 2018, [Article 101: Definition of piracy - ONBOARD SOS MEDITERRANEEONBOARD SOS MEDITERRANEE](#)

See also Mason, R. Chuck: Piracy: "A Legal Definition", in: Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, December 13, 2010, [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20101019_R41455_72e8efbb8ff4763dd099a3a5eb4a6d89a3cb043b.pdf](#)

⁴ [Dr. Roell, Peter: "Terrorism and Counter-terrorism – A View from Europe", lecture presented on the occasion of the joint conference Myanmar, the Maritime Domain and Maritime Cooperation in Asia. Myanmar, Institute for Strategic and International Studies \(MIIS\) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation \(KAS\) on Dec. 6, 2016 in Yangon, Myanmar, in: International Relations and Security Network \(ISN\), Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zurich, Issue No. 460, Dec. 2016, p. 2.](#)



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Several, successfully executed maritime attacks serve to demonstrate terrorist intentions:

October 2000

One such successful attack was carried out against the U.S. destroyer USS Cole in Yemen resulting in the death of seventeen U.S. sailors, and leaving 39 wounded. An exhaustive FBI investigation concluded that members of the Al Qaeda terrorist network planned and carried out the bombing.

October 2002

The French oil tanker Limburg was attacked off Ash Shahir by an Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group. One member of the crew was killed, twelve were injured, and 90000 tons of oil leaked into the Gulf of Aden. The monthly container traffic in Yemen shrank from 43000 to 3000. The country's economy declined by 1% of GDP and 3.000 dockworkers were made redundant. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack on the Jihad.net. The thirty-nine-year-old Saudi, Ahmed a-Darbi, pleaded guilty of five charges relating to the bombing. US prosecutors said that al-Darbi helped plan the bombing, including the purchase of the vessels used in the attack.

February 2004

The Abu Sayyaf Group attacked a ferry in the Philippines; 116 people lost their lives in the blast, including 114 passengers and two crew members. This amounted to the worst terrorist attack at sea.

August 2005

Israel's security service Shin Bet warned four Israeli cruise liners en route to Turkey about a possible terror attack, and redirected their ships to Cyprus.

November 2008

Ten members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamic militant organisation based in Pakistan, carried out a series of twelve coordinated shootings and bombing attacks across Mumbai, which lasted four days, and resulted in 166 fatalities and at least 308 injured. The attackers travelled by sea from Karachi, Pakistan, across the Arabian Sea, hijacked an Indian fishing trawler, killed four members of the crew and forced the captain to sail to Mumbai. After murdering the captain, the attackers entered Mumbai on a rubber dinghy.

July 2009

Egypt's security authorities prevented an attack against the Suez Canal and the adjacent oil pipeline. According to sources in Cairo the terror group consisted of 24 Egyptians and one Palestinian.

July 2010

A suicide attack was carried out by the Abdullah Azzam Brigade (another Al Qaeda-affiliated militant group) on the Japanese oil tanker, M. Star, in the Strait of Hormuz. One member of the crew was injured and the hull severely damaged.

<http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/8c4a8dc2-0b01-4d70-9bcc-b4f90150a1e0>



The terrorist attacks of 2016 ought not to be overlooked: On August 5, Indonesia's elite counter-terrorism forces arrested six Indonesian men who allegedly plotted an attack on Marina Bay in Singapore, using rockets launched from Batam Island, Indonesia.

In retaliation to failed missile attacks on a U.S. Navy destroyer the U.S. military launched cruise missile strikes on three coastal radar sites in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, on October 13, 2016.⁵

Piracy – The Past

In its annual Piracy and Armed Robbery Ships report of 2000, the ICC's International Maritime Bureau (IMB) showed an alarming rise in piracy and armed robbery in Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Malacca Straits, India, Ecuador and the Red Sea. With 119 incidents, Indonesia reported the highest number of attacks; 86 ships were boarded, two ships were highjacked and attempted attacks were made on another 31 ships. The IMB concluded that the frequency of attacks shows no indications of decreasing unless Indonesia takes serious steps to address the problem. The Malacca Straits witnessed a dramatic increase in attacks, rising from two to as much as 75 in 1999, despite the Royal Malaysian Police having stepped up its patrols in the area. Fifty-five attacks occurred in Bangladesh, up from 25 in 1999; India witnessed 35 attacks, up from fourteen in 1999; in Ecuador thirteen occurred, up from two in 1999, with a reported thirteen attempted boardings in the southern part of the Red Sea.⁶

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Sulu-Celebes Seas became an area of international concern due to the presence of the ASG in the Sulu archipelago. The ASG "forged links with transnational terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda. During the early 2000s, to generate funds for its activities, ASG committed a series of kidnappings-for-ransom in Malaysian and Philippine coastal resorts, and in February 2014 sank a ferry in Manila Bay killing 116 people. In July 2014, the ASG pledged allegiance to the Middle East-based terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS).⁷

According to the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre, there were ten actual and six attempted attacks in the Sulu-Celebes Seas in 2016. The frequency of incidents declined to three actual and four attempted attacks in 2017; and in the first half of 2018, only one attempted attack was reported. In the thirteen actual attacks, a total of 61 crew members were abducted: 28 have been released – often following the payment of a ransom by the ship owner – seventeen were rescued, seven were killed and nine were held captive during the period in question.⁸

Finally, on 19 June 2017 the three littoral states – Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines – agreed to strengthen communication and the exchange information, to coordinate naval patrols, to combine air patrols and to exchange intelligence information. Air patrols began in October 2017.

As a German, I vividly recall the kidnapping of the Wallert family. On April 23, 2000, the terrorist organization Abu Sayyaf kidnapped a group of tourists on the island of Sipadan in Malaysia and took them to the Philippine

⁵ Ibid, p. 2-4.

⁶ ICC International Chamber of Commerce: "Piracy attacks rise to alarming new levels, ICC report reveals", London, 01/02/2001, [Piracy attacks rise to alarming new levels, ICC report reveals - ICC - International Chamber of Commerce \(iccwbo.org\)](http://www.iccwbo.org)

⁷ Storey, Ian: "Trilateral Security Cooperation in the Sulu-Celebes Seas: A Work in Progress", in: Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, Issue: 2018 No. 48, 27 August 2018, [ISEAS Perspective 2018 48@50.pdf](http://www.yusofishak.com)

⁸ Ibid.



Island of Jolo. July 2000 saw the release of Ms. Wallert, with her husband, Werner, being released one month later on August 27. Their son Marc was finally released following 140 days captivity.⁹

Negotiators claimed that Libya played a prominent role in the negotiations for the Sipadan hostages, paying \$1 million for the freedom of each foreigner, though not for the French journalist. Libya insisted that the money would be redirected for development projects in the impoverished Southern Philippines, and would not go into Abu Sayyaf pockets. However, the released hostages claimed that they saw signs of money flooding into the rebel camp, such as new clothes, jewellery, and talk of speedboats and motorcycles.¹⁰

In any event, without the professional cooperation and the formidable work of excellent crises managers at national and international levels, the release of the hostages would have hardly been possible.

Following this brief outline of the problem and more recent history of maritime terrorism and piracy, I would like to draw attention to an analysis by my colleague Maxim Worcester entitled *Time to rethink the Fight against Maritime Piracy in the Indian Ocean*. Decision-makers must understand that combating maritime terrorism and piracy at sea remains insufficient for removing the threat. To ensure success, suitable measures need to be taken onshore.¹¹ Back in 2011, Worcester recommended that:

- The first step should be a new look at the maritime laws governing the use of force on the high seas and within territorial coastal areas. These laws need to be taken into the twenty-first century and adapted to present-day threats.
- The rules of engagement of the naval units charged with protecting the trade routes should be brought into alignment. The types of naval vessels required for greater efficacy in combating piracy must be subject to detail analysis.
- The employment of private security companies should be regulated and agreed.
- Shipping companies must conform to basic security requirements when operating in dangerous areas and should at all times comply with due care and respect to crews and cargo. Investment in superior passive defence measures must be guaranteed, adopting active measures if and when required.
- To reduce the attractiveness of piracy, police and security services should actively combat international criminal organisations involved in piracy as rapidly as possible, thereby ensuring that piracy cannot be used by terrorist organisations to advance their aims.
- The banking community should take a much closer look at money laundering and report all suspicious transactions to the authorities.

⁹ "In Geiselhaft: Entführung und Freilassung der Familie Wallert", in: NDR, 27 Oktober 2020.

¹⁰ Gomez Jim: "European Hostages Leave Philippines," in: AP, 11 September 2000.

¹¹ Worcester, Maxim: "Time to rethink the fight against maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean", in: International Relations and Security Network (ISN), Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, 25 February 2011, [Time to Rethink the Fight Against Maritime Piracy in the Indian Ocean - Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich](#)

See also Dr. Roell, Peter: "Combating Piracy and Maritime Terrorism – A Common Challenge for Europe and Asia", in: International Relations and Security Network (ISN), Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Issue No. 223, April 2013, [Combating Piracy and Maritime Terrorism: A Common Challenge for Europe and Asia – Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich](#)



- Long-term plans to ensure stability in Somalia and the establishment of an effective coast guard need to be drawn up and funding made available. This could be in the form of a public-private partnership involving suitably qualified private security companies.

Maritime Terrorism – The Present

On 29 July 2021, the oil tanker MT Mercer Street, travelling from Tanzania to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was allegedly attacked by a drone just off the Oman coast. In the attack, the ship suffered damage to its bridge, and its Romanian captain and a British bodyguard were killed. The Iranian government formally denied any involvement.¹² The US Central Command (CENTCOM) investigated the incident and concluded that Iran was indeed behind the attack on MT Mercer Street. The report determined that the ship was targeted in unsuccessful attacks on 29 July by two unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) packed with explosives. A third UAV attack on 30 July, significantly damaged the ship and resulted in the two deaths.¹³

The findings included the following: Explosive chemical tests revealed traces of RDX, a nitrate-based explosive, “indicating that the (drone) had been rigged to cause injury and destruction.” Explosive experts were able to recover severed pieces of the UAV, including the vertical stabilizer and internal components, which were practically identical to previously collected examples of Iranian one-way attack (drones). The distance from the Iranian coast to the attack location was within the range of documented Iranian one-way drone attacks.¹⁴

Similarly of interest was the statement issued by the EU and the G7 nations in support of the U.S. findings: “This was a deliberate and targeted attack, and a clear violation of international law. All available evidence clearly points to Iran. Iran’s behaviour, alongside its support to proxy forces and non-state actors, threatens international peace and security. We call on Iran to stop all activities inconsistent with relevant U.S. Security Council resolutions, and call on all parties to play a constructive role in fostering regional stability and peace.”¹⁵

Attacks on oil tankers had been carried out as early as May and June 2019. On 12 May 2019, four commercial ships anchored on the United Arab Emirates territorial waters for bunkering in the Port of Fujairah. An initial assessment determined that 1.5 to 3.0 m holes near or below the waterline of all the ships were probably caused by explosive charges. The United States accused Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as being directly responsible for the attacks, and the findings of an Emirati-led international investigation into the attacks stated that a sophisticated and coordinated operation by divers from fast boats utilized limpet mines to breach the ships’ hulls, and thus concluded that a “state actor” is the most likely culprit.¹⁶

A similar incident occurred on 13 June 2019, when two oil tankers were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz while transiting the Gulf of Oman; these were allegedly attacked with limpet mines or flying objects, and sustained

¹² Gardner, Frank: “Mercer Street: Tanker blast evidence points to Iran, says US”, in: BBC NEWS, 7 August 2021, [Mercer Street: Tanker blast evidence points to Iran, says US - BBC News](#)

See also: „Iranian UAV Attack Against MOTOR TANKER MERCER STREET, 6 August 2021, United States Central Command, [PowerPoint Presentation \(centcom.mil\)](#)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ziezulewicz, Geoff: “Here’s why CENTCOM thinks Iran was behind a fatal drone attack on a ship last month”, in: MilitaryTimes, 6 August 2021, [Here’s why CENTCOM thinks Iran was behind a fatal drone attack on a ship last month \(militarytimes.com\)](#)

¹⁵ “Report: Drone Attack on the Tanker Mercer Street Came From Yemen”, in: The Maritime Executive, 9 August 2021, [Report: Drone Attack on the Tanker Mercer Street Came From Yemen \(maritime-executive.com\)](#)

¹⁶ “US ‘blames Iran’ for damage to tankers in Gulf of Oman”, in: BBC NEWS, 14 May 2019, [US ‘blames Iran’ for damage to tankers in Gulf of Oman - BBC News](#)



fire damage. The United States blamed Iran for the attacks; Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom supported U.S. allegations.¹⁷

On 3 August 2021 the Asphalt Princess, a double-hull tanker used to transport bitumen and asphalt, was seized on its approach to the congested Strait of Hormuz. The men raiding the vessel were reportedly armed and apparently ordered it to sail to Iran. On 4 August 2021 the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) twittered that those who boarded the vessel had left, adding “Vessel is safe. Incident complete.”¹⁸

Piracy – The Present

A report from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) on 14 October 2021 provides up-to-date insights into the development of piracy and armed robbery. For the first nine months of 2021 the IMB reported 97 incidents of piracy and armed robbery, the lowest level of reported incidents since 1994. The IMB’s Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) reported 85 vessels boarded, nine attempted attacks, two vessels fired upon and one vessel hijacked.¹⁹

While in 2021 incidents have been down to their lowest level since decades, violence against seafarers has continued with 51 crew members kidnapped, eight taken hostage, five threatened, three injured, two assaulted and one killed. The IMB PRC warned that seafarers must remain vigilant as violence against crews remains high in many regions of the world.²⁰

The IMB report has issued details on the following regions:

Decrease in the Gulf of Guinea

Twenty-eight incidents of piracy and armed robbery were confirmed within the first nine months of 2021 compared to 46 over the same period in 2020. Most notably, Nigeria only reported four incidents within the first nine months of 2021 compared to 17 in 2020 and 41 in 2018. Crew kidnappings in the region have dropped with only one crew member kidnapped in the third quarter of 2021 compared to 31 crew members taken in five separate incidents during the third quarter 2020. All incidents occurring in the third quarter of 2021 targeted vessels at anchor, whereas the average successful kidnapping location in the third quarter of 2020 was approx. 199 NM off shore.

Worrying Signs in Singapore Straits

The Singapore Straits reported 20 incidents of armed robbery – the highest number recorded since 1991. Reported incidents in the Singapore Straits are up from a total of fifteen in 2020, and just one incident in 2019. These attacks are low-level and opportunistic in nature, but the IMB warns that the perpetrators pose a direct threat to seafarers and vessels at sea. In four incidents crew members were either threatened, actually assaulted, or injured.

Concern off the Coast of Peru

¹⁷ Wintour, Patrick and Borger, Julian: “Two oil tankers attacked in Gulf of Oman”, in: The Guardian, 13 June 2019, [Two oil tankers attacked in Gulf of Oman | Middle East and north Africa | The Guardian](#)

¹⁸ “MV Asphalt Princess: Suspected hijackers leave ship off UAE”, in: BBC NEWS, 4 August 2021, [MV Asphalt Princess: Suspected hijackers leave ship off UAE - BBC News](#)

¹⁹ “Piracy and armed robbery incidents at lowest level in decades, but IMB cautions against complacency”, in : ICC International Chamber of Commerce News, London and Kuala Lumpur, 14 October 2021, [Piracy and armed robbery incidents at lowest level in decades, but IMB cautions against complacency - ICC - International Chamber of Commerce \(iccwbo.org\)](#)

²⁰ Ibid.



The Callao Anchorage in Peru is another region that has witnessed an increase of piracy activity, with fifteen reported incidents in 2021 – the highest number since 1991. As with the Singapore Straits, these incidents are low-level thefts with the use of knives amounting to 60% of the incidents. Attackers in the region are capable of carrying out violent assaults: Three crew members were taken hostage along with a further individual, each of whom were assaulted or threatened during the first nine months of 2021.

Improvements in Indonesia

The IMB PRC reported a noticeable reduction in the number of reported incidents in Indonesian waters, with only six low-level incidents reported within the first nine months of 2021 compared to 23 incidents during the same period in 2020. This amounts to the lowest total of reported piracy and armed robbery incidents in Indonesian waters since 1993. The IMB PRC report commends the policies and pre-emptive response measures implemented by the Indonesian Marine Police.²¹

A study by Patricia Schneider “Maritime Terrorism and Sea Piracy: Current Challenges” is worth mentioning here.²² In her analysis Schneider describes the course of piracy attacks, provides a detailed account of the global development of piracy, discusses the hotspots of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea and traces the global development in maritime terrorism.

Maritime Terrorism – The Future

A brief look at previous maritime terrorist attacks may provide us with an idea of their future potential targets:

Warships, oil tankers, oil refineries, oil platforms, cruise liners, passenger ships at harbour or at sea, ferries, naval and critical infrastructure, choke points etc. Compared to the total number of terrorist attacks worldwide, the percentage with respect to maritime terrorism is relatively small, but protecting the important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) still remains strategic priority.

We may recall an accident occurring between the 23-29 March 2021, when the Ever Given, a TEU container ship blocked the Suez Canal for six days. Data from Llyod’s List showed that the stranded ship was holding up a daily estimated \$9.6bn of trade along the waterways. The German insurer Allianz announced on 28 March 2021 that the blockade could cost global trade something in the region of \$6bn to \$10bn a week, thus reducing annual trade growth by 0.2 to 0.4 percentage points.²³ A successful maritime terrorist attack on one or more ships in the Suez Canal would have serious economic, political and psychological consequences.

In his book “The Revenge of Geography – What the Map Tells us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate”,²⁴ Robert D. Kaplan emphasizes and refers to a fundamental reality that geography remains, as it has throughout history, one of the most powerful drivers of world events. Similarly, in his book “Macht der

²¹ Ibid.

²² Schneider, Patricia: “Maritimer Terrorismus und Seepiraterie: aktuelle Herausforderungen” (Maritime Terrorism and Sea Piracy: Current Challenges), in: Jäger, Thomas und Thiele, Ralph Thiele (eds.) “Der Politische Islamismus als hybrider Akteur globaler Reichweite”, Carola Hartmann Miles-Verlag Berlin, 2021, p. 112-138.

²³ Russon Mary-Ann: “The cost of the Suez Canal blockade”, in: BBC NEWS, 29 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56559073>

²⁴ Kaplan, Robert D., “The Revenge of Geography – What the Map Tells us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate”, Random House Publishing Group, New York 2012.



Geographie – Wie sich die Weltpolitik anhand von 10 Karten erklären lässt“, Tim Marshall refers to the importance of geography in world politics.²⁵

What this shows is that in the future regional geographic features – such choke points as the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits, or archipelagic islands in the Philippines and Indonesia – will be attractive targets for maritime terrorist attacks. Furthermore, choke points such as Bab al Mandat, Bosphorus, Straits of Gibraltar, the English Channel or the Panama Canal may well become potential terrorist targets.

While mega-harbours such as Kobe, Tokyo, Yokohama, Pusan, Shanghai, Kaohsiung, Hong Kong or their equivalents in the United States and in Europe may likewise be the focus of terrorists, they have extensive security measures in place – something which is not the case in smaller ports in Africa and parts of Asia.

In many Western countries, intelligence collection on international terrorism, including maritime terrorism, ceases to have highest priority. In the USA, for example, intelligence collection on China comes first. In the future, attention will also be paid to the topic of maritime terrorism.

To supplement information gathered through state sources, EU decision-makers should also draw on the comprehensive knowledge sources of private institutions. ISPSW recommended the following:

- a) Provision of analyses on multiple aspects relating to maritime security.
- b) Operative recommendations for action: political, economic and military options, including “worst-case scenarios”.
- c) Mediations of information gleaned from international conferences and workshops (themes, contents).
- d) Participation in the elaboration of educational measures by EU member states in zones in and around the Indian Ocean and bordering regions.
- e) Lectures on maritime security
- f) Establishing contacts to those persons and organizations concerned with maritime security worldwide.

A comprehensive understanding of security policy entails an analysis of the interplay of political, economic, social, ecological and military dimensions; maritime terrorism may only be fought where state institutions and the private sector cooperate successfully.

Piracy – The Future

On 1 August 2021, the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre published the following forward-looking press release: “On 1st August 2021, the Federal Republic of Germany has joined the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) as the twenty-first Contracting Party. The ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) warmly welcomes Germany’s accession to the Agreement.

Germany’s accession to the ReCAAP further expands and strengthens the ReCAAP ISC’s information sharing network on piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia. It demonstrates the crucial role international cooperation plays to collectively address these maritime crimes.

²⁵ Marshall, Tim; “Macht der Geographie – Wie sich Weltpolitik anhand von 10 Karten erklären lässt“, dtv Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2015. Title of the original English edition: “Prisoners of Geography”, Elliott & Thompson Ltd., London, 2015. See also Harm de Blij, “Why Geography Matters – More than ever”, Oxford University Press, 2012.



ReCAAP ISC is looking forward to working closely with Germany, together with other Contracting Parties, to promote maritime safety in Asia.”²⁶ It should be added, furthermore, that ReCAAP is the first regional government-to-government agreement for promoting and enhancing cooperation in the struggle against piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia. The Agreement came into force on 4 September, 2006 with fourteen Asian countries as contracting parties, and the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ReCAAP ISC) was established on 29 November 2006.²⁷

With the accession of Germany, 21 States now comprise the contracting parties of the ReCAAP. In Asia: Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam. In Europe: Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom. Furthermore, Australia and the United States of America.

To fulfil its vision as the information hub for combating piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia, ReCAAP ISC enhances regional cooperation through information sharing, capacity building and cooperative arrangements.²⁸

Build on what has been tried and tested and transform it in the future, is the motto according to which the Combined Military Forces (CMF), EU NAVFOR (The European Naval Force) and the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) play and will continue to play – as part of the struggle against piracy – an important role.

With 34 willing nations, CMF is a multi-national naval partnership the purpose of which is to promote security, stability and prosperity across approximately 3.2 million square miles of international waters, which encompass some of the world’s most important shipping lanes. It comprises three task forces: CTF 150 (maritime security and counter terrorism), CTF 151 (counter piracy) and CTF 152 (Arabian Gulf security and cooperation).²⁹

EU NAVFOR: Piracy and other maritime security issues have continued to pose a threat to mariners who transit the Southern Red Sea, the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. In late 2020, Operation ATALANTA, the former European Union Naval Force, was extended to December 2022 and the mandate adjusted to reflect its new responsibilities. The operation will maintain its core mission to protect vessels of the World Food Programme (WFP) and other vulnerable shipping and deter, prevent and repress piracy and armed robbery at sea.³⁰

As a secondary task, Operation Atalanta will monitor fishing activities off the coast of Somalia, as well as arms and drug trafficking, illicit charcoal trade and illegal unreported and unregulated fishing; contribute to the enforcement of the weapons embargo on Somalia and counter drug trafficking; support the regional Maritime Security Architecture and cooperate with regional actors and missions, such as the Regional Operations Centre, the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, the Combined Maritime Forces of Operation AGENOR.³¹

²⁶ Press Release “Federal Republic of Germany joins ReCAAP”, ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre, 1 August 2021, https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/news/2021/Press%20Release_02Aug21.pdf

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 1-2.

²⁹ “Combined Maritime Forces”, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/>

³⁰ EU Naval Force Somalia Operation ATALANTA, <http://eunavfor.eu/mission>

³¹ Ibid, p. 1-2.



Data collated since 2008, demonstrate that EU NAVFOR, in cooperation with her counter-piracy partners, has become highly effective in pre-empting and thus preventing attacks.³² For this reason it is advisable to continue the ATALANTA operation in the future.

MSCHOA: The Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa is an integral part of EU NAVFOR and fully integrated into the Operational Headquarters located in Brest. MSCHOA manages the EU NAVFOR voluntary registration scheme (VRS) for vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden, the Somali Basin and off the Horn of Africa. It also administers an interactive website that enables EU NAVFOR to communicate the latest counter-piracy guidance to owners and operators who have vessels transiting the region and strongly encourages them to register with MSCHOA VRS.³³

Since MSCHOA has proven itself in the context of combating piracy and Securing the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs), this organization – staffed by military and civilian EU NAVFOR personnel – will continue to make valuable contributions in the future.

Looking at the Gulf of Guinea on Africa's west coast in 2021, we observe a switch from the hotspot Gulf of Aden near Somalia. Pirates operating within the Gulf of Guinea are well-equipped to attack vessels far beyond shorelines and have no compunction about taking violent action against innocent crews. Although there has been a reduction in pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, this region is likely to remain a hotspot in the years to come, which is why the IMB Reporting Centre recommends the coastal response agencies and independent international navies tasked in the region to actively respond to reported incidents; it encourages their efforts in making the Gulf of Guinea safer for seafarers.³⁴

Despite the decline of piracy incidents around Somalia and neighbouring waters, the IMB Reporting Centre encourages vessels to implement BMP5 recommended practices while transiting these waters as Somali pirates continue to possess the capacity to carry out attacks.³⁵

As for the development of Piracy in Asia, I would like to refer to the comprehensive ReCAAP Annual Report 2020 "Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia."³⁶ In terms of the threat situation, there are unlikely to be any major changes in the year 2022.

The information in the "Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers" is also recommended. The guidelines include defence and protective measures in the event of piracy and armed robbery in the Western Indian Ocean Region, the Gulf of Guinea Region and in the Asian Region.³⁷

Attention should also be paid to the increasing number of maritime drone attacks initiated by Houthi rebels. Håvard Haugstvedt points out that "maritime security experts should be alert to the threat that technologies currently deployed by the Houthis will spread to other seas. Iran may be deliberately using the Red Sea as a testing area for new naval technologies, or the Houthis may be pioneering these technologies on their own. But

³² Ibid. P. 3

³³ See EU Naval Force – Somalia, Operation ATALANTA, "MSCHOA", <https://eunavfor.eu/MSCHOA>

³⁴ "Gulf of Guinea remains world's piracy hotspot in 2021, according to IMB's latest figures", London and Kuala Lumpur, 14 April 2021, [Gulf of Guinea remains world's piracy hotspot in 2021, according to IMB's latest figures - ICC - International Chamber of Commerce \(iccwbo.org\)](https://www.iccwbo.org/news/press-releases/gulf-of-guinea-remains-worlds-piracy-hotspot-in-2021-according-to-imb-s-latest-figures-icc-international-chamber-of-commerce/)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See publication ReCAAP, Information Sharing Centre: "Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia, Annual Report January-December 2020, [ReCAAP ISC Annual Report 2020 v1\(1\).pdf](https://www.recaap.org/ReCAAP_ISC_Annual_Report_2020_v1(1).pdf)

³⁷ "Global Counter Piracy Guidance for Companies, Masters and Seafarers, Witherby Publishing Group Ltd., Livingston, Scotland, June 2018, [global-counter-piracy-guidance-bmp_low_17-07-18.pdf \(imo.org\)](https://www.imo.org/publications/2018/06/global-counter-piracy-guidance-bmp-low-17-07-18.pdf)



either way, Iran will be eager to learn from the Houthis' experiences and tactics. It will be important to develop effective countermeasures before maritime drones potentially appear in the Strait of Hormuz as well".³⁸

Learning from neighbours. For the above reasons, I would like to conclude my study with a look at a current position paper by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, entitled Priority Paper for the Danish Efforts to Combat Piracy and other Types of Maritime Crime 2019-2022.

The paper discusses the current situation in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa. The strategic considerations of Copenhagen are also presented, along with measures and recommendations for combating piracy and maritime crime. The causes of piracy and maritime crime are also given mention. Strategic instruments that would underpin a comprehensive approach round off the position paper. Overall, a well-structured, informative and inspiring paper.³⁹ Naturally, in combating maritime terrorism and piracy other states may orientate themselves on their respective interests and capabilities.

When analysing maritime terrorist attacks (including piracy attacks) one might do well to cite the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) government programme of 2017-2022: "By political Islam is meant groups and organisations whose ideological foundation is Islam; these latter seek to alter the fundamental political and social order through to the rejection of our constitutional state with a view to the Islamisation of society. Political Islam, which can lead to radicalisation, anti-Semitism, violence and terrorism, has no place in our society".⁴⁰ The Al-Qaida network's and affiliated groups' activities, the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Laskar-e-Taiba and the Houthi rebels, are all clear indications of the above. While the latter are currently on the defensive following renewed cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, these and other such terrorist groups remain dangerous. Personally, however, I find the term *Islamist political Islam* more fitting than *political Islam*.

By way of conclusion, I quote the NATO motto: "Vigilance is the price of freedom".

Comment: The article reflects the personal views of the author and was first published at the European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP), Vienna, Austria, January 2022.

<https://www.eictp.eu/en/maritime-terrorism-and-piracy/>

³⁸ Haugstvedt, Håvard, "Red Seas Drones: How to counter Houthi maritime tactics", in: War on the Rocks, Texas National Security Review, September 3, 2021, [Red Sea Drones: How to Counter Houthi Maritime Tactics - War on the Rocks](#)

³⁹ Priority Paper for the Danish efforts to piracy and other types of maritime crime 2019-2022, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, [Prioritetspapir Pirateri UK ISBN.pdf](#)

⁴⁰ see [171216_1614_regierungsprogramm.pdf \(wienerzeitung.at\)](#)



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