European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

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Introduction

In 1890, an American naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan, then holding the rank of Captain, published his seminal work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*. Although chiefly historical in its nature, his enquiry expressed some broader, universal fundamentals of the use of sea power and its importance to the state. Among the most interesting observations is the relation Mahan notices between the volume of a country's maritime trade and the necessity to protect the shipping as far as possible throughout the voyage:

The necessity of a navy, in the restricted sense of the word, springs… from the existence of a peaceful shipping, and disappears with it, except in the case of a nation which has aggressive tendencies, and keeps up a navy merely as a branch of the military establishment (Mahan, 1890: 26).

This correlation may seem obsolete in today's globalised world in which the maritime 'global commons' are protected chiefly by the US Navy, and the majority of commercial shipping borne by the four largest controlled fleets (Greece 16.17, Japan 15.76, Germany 9.17, China 8.63 percent – in sum, half of global deadweight tonnage) is actually 'foreign flag' (75 percent on average) (UNCTAD, 2011: 43).[1] If we were to suppose that state actors behave in a rational manner – maximising benefits and minimising losses – we could conclude that undisrupted flow of maritime commerce is ultimately in the common interest of the vast majority of states which profit from it.

At the same time, however, there exist certain security scenarios in which this interest may be perceived by a group of actors to be of secondary importance. In the case of military conflict, for example, the belligerent states would most probably deem their own survival more vital than the potential losses due to disruption of maritime commerce. Such a possibility would inevitably mean a serious blow also to the economies of countries not being party to the conflict. To illustrate this hypothetical interdependence, we may use the case of the European Union member states and the vulnerability of commercial shipping in Southeast Asia.

The EU countries are heavily dependent on imports from East and Southeast Asia. Trade with China alone accounted for 17 percent of EU-27 imports in the first ten months of 2011 (Eurostat, 2012: 1). The majority of Asian goods may well be assumed to reach Europe by sea, since around 90 percent of the EU's external trade is estimated to be transported by maritime routes (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2010: 1). The length and trajectory of the Europe–East Asia sea lines of communication (SLOCs) are primarily determined by the 'chokepoints' through which the ships have to pass. The most efficient route between, for example, Greece and Hong Kong would include the Suez Canal, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Gulf of Aden), the Strait of Malacca and then the South China Sea. A major disruption at any of these points would force commercial fleets to choose alternative routes, causing considerable delays, or to cease shipping altogether.

The recent years have witnessed considerable efforts, either within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or as part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), to provide the Europe-bound SLOCs with needed protection as far eastwards as the Gulf of Aden and the Western part of the Indian Ocean, including the Seychelles.

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

Beyond that point, the EU member states have had little influence, either individually or as a collective, over the security of Europe-bound shipping.

Meanwhile, the security situation in Southeast Asia seems increasingly volatile as the growing military might of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) makes China more assertive in pursuing its territorial claims in the South China Sea. In a mild, collective (though not necessarily coordinated) balancing act, several members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) began in 2010 to seek closer security cooperation with the United States, the world's sole superpower and traditional provider of international security in the Pacific. The attitude of the American policymakers towards the Asia-Pacific rim has been evolving gradually towards a willingness to check China's rise by 'pivoting' the main focus of US foreign and defence policy to that region. It remains debatable whether a strengthened US presence is likely to stabilise the security situation in East and Southeast Asia.

It is reasonable to expect that in the event of a military conflict in the Western Pacific, one of the belligerents would be the People's Republic of China (PRC). In such case, reliance on the US to enforce peace is increasingly likely to turn out to be an underestimation of the PRC's military potential. Growing numbers of commentators and scholars argue that Chinese anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities would render the costs of US interference unpalatable, thus denying any external influence over a protracted military conflict in China's immediate neighbourhood.

In this context, it seems a pertinent question what the European countries have done, and still can do, to ensure the free flow of maritime commerce in Southeast Asia. When compared to the United States, EU member states have rather limited military capabilities at their disposal. Moreover, utilising those resources in a conflict scenario in Southeast Asia most probably would not be a viable solution. Apart from raw military force, however, states have other tools to influence other participants in the international political system.

The EU remains, to a large extent, a 'civilian power' and, as such, prefers diplomacy and, more broadly, 'soft power' instruments. Yet, the topic of Pacific military rivalries and territorial disputes, and of their possible global impact, has been significantly absent from the debates on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Among the most plausible explanations is the fact that the EU member states are reluctant to risk worsening their economic relations with China by addressing delicate security issues. In the case of Southeast Asian stability, limited CFSP efforts are complimented by independent initiatives of the three major European stakeholders in the region – the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

To account for the complex dynamics governing the European responses to the emerging threats to maritime commerce, the discussion retraces both the individual and collective initiatives of the EU member states during the period between 2007 and the Summer of 2012. The timeframe opens with the emergence of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region. Those events prompted an international naval response to protect the vital maritime chokepoint. Meanwhile, the security environment in Southeast Asia has become increasingly unstable. Although it took some time for the EU leadership to appreciate the gravity of the situation, the Union has already had a modest track record of diplomatic engagement in the distant region. The analysis ends with the results of the 19th ASEAN Regional Forum in Phnom Penh in July 2012.

The main research questions, which have to be addressed, spring from the tension between the tenets of Mahan's theory of sea power and the EU's inability to meet the proposed strategic requirements. The EU member states lack the capabilities, either unilaterally or collectively, to ensure through potential military presence the security of the relevant SLOCs at the crucial chokepoints in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the overall reliance of the EU economies on imports from the region seems to necessitate other forms of European engagement. This peculiar tension, which may be called a 'necessity-capabilities gap', invites the following questions:

a) Is there any compelling evidence implying that the Mahanian logic is applied, to a viable extent, by the EU member states through the CSDP or through NATO or international coalitions? How did the initiatives develop, and what are their limits?

b) What CFSP initiatives have been taken towards the region beyond the EU member states' collective power

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

projection reach – i.e. Southeast Asia? How can these policies be interpreted from a Mahanian perspective?

c) What factors may be argued to have influenced the EU's behaviour to follow the particular path in addressing the problem of securing the flow of maritime commerce from East and Southeast Asia? What does the overall evidence tell about the character of the EU as a global security actor?

As will be evident from the analysis in the following chapters, the answers to the above questions are of a complex nature and do not fall smoothly into a single research tradition present in the international relations scholarship. For example, notions of 'security dilemma' and 'balance of power', relevant to the present security situation in Southeast Asia, are deeply rooted in the realist school of international relations scholarship – represented by scholars such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and – more recently – by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer. The stabilising effects of 'economic interdependence' are highlighted by liberal scholars such as Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, and Andrew Moravcsik. Realism and liberalism – both based on the premise of rational state behaviour – often fall short of producing compelling, well-rounded explanations of practical problems of international relations. To fill the gaps between the theoretical accounts and the 'messy' reality of the international political system, it seems necessary to include in the equation the epistemic subjectivity inherent in human nature. The causal importance of inter-subjective meanings and identities is the central focus of constructivist scholars – Alexander Wendt, Friedrich Kratochwil, and John Ruggie, among many others.

Each of the three schools of thought above may be hoped to offer crucial insights into the complex causal relations at work here. One feels strongly compelled to attempt utilizing analytical concepts across the inter-paradigm boundaries. For this purpose, in my analysis I decided to apply 'analytic eclecticism', an approach proposed by Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein who define it as:

any approach that seeks to extricate, translate, and selectively integrate analytic elements – concepts, logics, mechanisms and interpretations – of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010: 10).

Although this approach seemingly permits a great deal of analytical 'freedom', eclectic research has to meet several criteria. Firstly, analytic eclecticism is characterised by open-ended formulation of problems which is devoid of 'hidden agendas' to advance any of the paradigm-bound 'camps'. This way, it is possible to avoid the over-simplification of the discussed causal relationships. Secondly, the analysis has to be limited to providing a middle-range causal account. Arguably, the incompatibility between contending paradigms increases when the analysis becomes entangled in metatheoretical deliberations. By assuming a middle-range approach, we are able to establish "a more expansive and flexible view of causality [which] is indispensable for revealing those hidden relationships and complex interaction effects that tend to elude paradigm-bound research" (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010: 21). The last criterion for analytic eclecticism is the intent to arrive at complex, insightful conclusions that present pragmatic value for practical policy debates.

The above requirements imply a need to restrain our ontological and epistemological position to hover between positivism and interpretivism, embracing potential causal significance of both material and ideational factors. This inclusiveness entails the necessity to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to arrive at a complex, insightful account of the identified problems.

The following analysis is divided into two main chapters, directly corresponding with the first two of the research questions stated above. The first chapter explores the causal story behind the EU member states' increasing military efforts to protect Europe-bound SLOCs. A significant intensification of such initiatives took place in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001. Starting with NATO Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean and the establishment of the US-led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in the Western part of the Indian Ocean, several European countries entered the path of increasing naval cooperation to protect the free flow of maritime commerce. With the addition of two more task forces in 2004 and 2009, the CMF has grown both in numbers and in scope, engaging also Japan, South Korea and several ASEAN states. Meanwhile, NATO extended its activities in 2008 to

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

combating piracy off the Horn of Africa through a streak of naval operations – Allied Provider, Allied Protector, and the current Operation Ocean Shield. The EU did not remain idle either – since 2008, the Union has been conducting its own, independent counter-piracy effort, European Naval Force Somalia – Operation ATALANTA (EU NAVFOR – ATALANTA) within the CSDP framework. It is worth noticing that the UK, France and Germany have been eagerly participating in all of the above initiatives, their officers most often working at the very top of the chain of command.

The second chapter is devoted to explaining the dynamics that shape both individual and collective efforts of the EU member states to influence the security of the relevant SLOCs in the region beyond the viable reach of their power projection capabilities. The EU has been increasingly active in influencing the regional integration and security cooperation in the Western Pacific, using chiefly the ASEAN-centric mechanisms of ASEM, ARF, and the ASEAN-EU Dialogue. Unfortunately, none of the European states has managed to gain membership in neither the triennial ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) nor at the East Asia Summit. Apart from the EU-level, there have been some promising individual initiatives concerning the region. The most successful among them has been the Asia Security Summit (also known as the Shangri-La Dialogue) organised annually by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) since 2002. Notably, among the participating countries are the UK, France, and Germany. All the above initiatives may be argued to represent a collective European intent to create a stable security architecture in Southeast Asia.

The findings of the two main chapters shall provide some clues to the answer to the third research question. The prominence of the EU-3 – the UK, France, and Germany – in both military and diplomatic initiatives towards protecting the flow of maritime commerce may be argued to reveal certain characteristics of the EU as a global security actor. The concluding chapter addresses the complex set of geopolitical and historical factors that seem to bear a still-considerable influence on the EU's international posture. Finally, Mahan's concepts on the utility of sea power are reconsidered in the light of the European behaviour. The discussion closes with a judgement on whether the theories of a 19th century naval officer remain relevant in today's complex international political system.

Chapter 1: European Union and Its Member States' Engagement in the Western Indian Ocean

This chapter analyses the complex context and characteristics of the European Union's response to the problem of piracy off the coast of Somalia. This issue deserves special attention because it has prompted the EU to launch its first naval operation within the CSDP framework.

The discussion starts with a brief introduction to the strategic importance of maritime piracy in the Western Indian Ocean. This region serves as a crucial highway for the maritime commerce between Europe and Asia. Additionally, as will be shown, the Indian Ocean is gradually becoming an arena of great power competition. In this context, critical thought is given to the actual scale of the threat posed by the Somali piracy to international shipping.

After this brief introduction, we take a closer look at the internal (intra-EU operational level) and external (global context) mechanisms that have shaped the EU NAVFOR Operation ATALANTA. It is quite revealing to analyse this operation vis-à-vis the broader European vision both of the EU's role in Africa and of its character as an aspiring global security actor. It also has to be underscored that ATALANTA has taken place among a variety of operations carried out by extra-regional alliances, coalitions, and national initiatives to safeguard international shipping and, more broadly, to ensure maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean. Arguably, the manner in which the EU has managed to co-shape and coordinate this eclectic operational environment offers useful insights on applicability of the naval theories of Mahan.

A closer analysis of the European contributions to ATALANTA reveals also certain facts about the limits to the coherence of the EU member states' geopolitical stances and the way they have influenced the EU's 'actorness'. Discussed economic data (i.e. figures reflecting member states' direct dependence on stable global trade) reveal a close correlation with the particular states' geographic situation and history. These findings suggest an argument that the EU's naval engagement in the Western Indian Ocean does not serve all EU member states in equal degree. In fact, this happens to be mirrored in the composition of the EU NAVFOR and in other contributions to Operation ATALANTA.

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

Taking a step further, the discussion addresses also the role of the so-called EU-3 – Germany, France, and the United Kingdom – in directing the EU's first naval intervention. The final question that arises is whether these prominent European states are able to avoid upsetting the increasingly fragile balance between the great power players in the Indian Ocean – the United States, India, and China.

1.1. Strategic Importance of the Western Indian Ocean

Contemporary maritime piracy is a troubling phenomenon and a considerable operational challenge for sophisticated North American and European navies. It is important to ascertain to what degree this phenomenon poses a strategic concern on both the regional and global level. Piratical activity off the Horn of Africa ought to be analysed in a broader context, as one of the factors operating in the vast, heterogeneous security environment of the Indian Ocean.

The most important fact from the European perspective is the immense volume of commercial shipping conducted through the Indian Ocean. The economies of many of the 27 member states of the European Union rely heavily on international trade with African and Asian countries situated in the Indian Ocean rim, and with East-Asian countries whose maritime trade with Europe requires transit through that same area. Twenty of those countries were listed among the EU-27's fifty major export recipients in 2010, receiving 32.9 percent of the EU's overall international exports (Eurostat, 2011: 31). Simultaneously, twenty-two of those countries were among the EU's top fifty import providers, accounting for 42.1 percent of the Union's overall imports (Eurostat, 2011: 32). This sea-based interdependence between Europe and Asia renders the Indian Ocean "an area of crucial geostrategic importance" for the inhabitants of both continents, placing the region at the forefront of world geopolitics "at least for many decades to come, and most probably for the entire twenty-first century" (Bouchard and Crumplin, 2010: 27).

Apart from the purely economic dimension, Indian Ocean gradually evolves into an arena of potential great power competition between the United States and the two aspiring Asian powers, India and China (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2008: 57). Additionally, the Indian Ocean region, stretching over a vast area, lacks a unified, hierarchical political architecture. If we were to arbitrarily visualise this region as a single system, it would consist of a mosaic of 'regional sub-systems' such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This mosaic would include also 'peripheral regional systems' like the African Union, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Bouchard and Crumplin, 2010: 42). The fragmented organisational environment poses a considerable challenge for multilateral initiatives in combating the common threat posed by maritime piracy.

However ominous the combination of high commercial stakes with the lack of established security arrangements may seem, piratical activities off the Somali coast have had a rather marginal impact on the flow of commerce in the Indian Ocean. Against an estimated traffic of 16,000 vessels a year passing through the Gulf of Aden, there were around 200 pirate attacks in the area in 2009. This means that only 1.25 percent of all vessels were attacked, half of them being successfully captured (Middleton, 2010: 19). Still, possibly as many as 50 percent of all attacks are not reported, as that would raise maritime insurance premiums, which "would, in most cases, greatly outweigh [costs] resulting from a piracy attack" (Chalk, 2008: 7). More sceptical observers point to the fact that the negative ratio between costs and gains of counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden makes the whole effort unsustainable. As estimated by Martin Murphy, a total sum of over $1.825 billion is spent annually on deployments to prevent pirates snatching between $40 and $80 million in ransoms (Murphy, 2011: 136). This enormous discrepancy prompts us to seek for other motivations behind the EU's counter-piracy engagement.

1.2. Counter-Piracy and Effective Multilateralism

Several European governments committed their navies to policing the Gulf of Aden in response to a surge in hijackings of private vessels which took place around 2005 (Murphy, 2011: 129). Along with attacks on Somali-bound vessels operating as part of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), those incidents drew international attention to emerging maritime consequences of the unstable situation on shore. Beginning in 2007, naval escorts in the area were conducted by France, Denmark and the Netherlands (Homan and Kamerling, 2010: 71).

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted several resolutions addressing the problem of Somali piracy. The official UN encouragement provided the EU with an opportunity to deploy its first naval operation, EU Naval Force Somalia – Operation ATALANTA, within the CSDP framework. Its main aim was to protect WFP vessels and other vulnerable shipping, including supplies for the African Union's Military Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

It is important to note that Operation ATALANTA was initiated as just one of a number of necessary tools serving the EU's overarching strategy for the African continent. To address the problem of the high proportion of 'fragile states' in certain parts of Africa, the EU and its member states committed themselves to build effective and credible central institutions in those states (Commission of the European Communities, 2005: 24).

Understandably, the EU's governance-enhancing efforts ran the risk of being frustrated by the emergence of piratical activity off the Somali coast. Supply shipment disruption posed a serious threat to the success of both WFP and AMISOM endeavours. It may be stated that Somali piracy was creating a 'vicious circle' by effectively preventing the international community from addressing the problem's root causes – wide-spread poverty and insufficient governance. This observation hints at a possible motivation behind the EU's naval engagement off the Somali coast.

Although, as argued by Martin Murphy, the pirates retain an overwhelming cost advantage (Murphy, 2011: 137), it seems necessary to keep their activity in check as long as it is necessary for the on-shore, political solutions to take effect. The main aim here is not just to alleviate the problem in its present form. The intent seems to be, above all, to prevent the instability from spreading further and developing into an even more formidable and unmanageable threat to the vital SLOCs.[2]

Apart from the African dimension, the EU NAVFOR counter-piracy deployment seems to have played an interesting role in the greater scheme of the EU's global foreign policy and security posture. The *European Security Strategy* published in 2003 outlined the ideational pillars upon which the EU develops and employs its CFSP framework. The authors of the document appreciated the significant change that has taken place in the international environment since the end of the Cold War. Security crises such as state failure and organised crime even in distant regions may eventually affect European states. Among the most important conclusions of the document was the observation that in today's globalised, interconnected world "the first line of defence will often be abroad" (Council of the European Union, 2003: 7). This strong accentuation of interventionism was complemented with an explicit commitment to the concept of effective multilateralism:

In a world of global threats, global markets and global media, our security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system. The development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order is our objective (Council of the European Union, 2003: 9).

It seems that the UN call for an international response to Somali piracy provided a perfect environment for the EU to promote its role as an influential multilateral global player. The Gulf of Aden, and the broader area of the Western Indian Ocean has been quite a busy theatre of naval operations since 2002 when the Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150) of the US-led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) was established to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The CMF gathers 26 nations from North America, Europe, the Persian Gulf, and even East Asia.[3] Within this force, a separate component, the CTF-151 was formed in January 2009 to perform counter-piracy duties under the authority of UNSC resolutions from 2008. Simultaneously, in late 2008, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) initiated its own counter-piracy effort in the form of three consecutive operations – Allied Provider (October-December 2008), Allied Protector (March-August 2009), and the ongoing (since August 2009) Operation Ocean Shield. In addition to the above initiatives, there have been also autonomous national escort operations conducted *inter alia* by China, Russia, India, Iran, Japan, and South Korea (Uphadyaya, 2010: 139).

As many note, since 2008 the Gulf of Aden has witnessed "perhaps the most eclectic and diverse armada of naval firepower ever assembled" (Kraska, 2009: 197). In this environment, the EU's broad, multilateral approach to counter-piracy resulted in significant accomplishments in several fields, which proved that the Union is capable of making unique, meaningful contributions to this international effort.

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

Since its deployment in December 2008, EU NAVFOR has played an active role in coordinating the multitude of naval initiatives in the theatre. In cooperation with the CMF and NATO, the EU has co-chaired and sponsored the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings at the Royal Bahrain Naval Base in Manama, Bahrain (Schaeffer, 2012: 1). During these regular staff-level meetings, "tactical and operational coordination is discussed and agreements are made… with regard to the division of tasks, optimizing the use of available assets and coordination of the geographic presence" (Homan and Kamerling, 2010: 85). The most recent, 24th SHADE meeting was attended by delegates from more than 27 countries and 20 organisations, including "senior personnel from partner navies, law enforcement agencies, the shipping industry and various governments" (CMF, 2012a: 1). The fact that in early 2012 China, India and Japan[4] – three major powers in Asia whose relations are often tense – decided to closely coordinate their naval escorts in the Gulf of Aden may be understood as evidence of the positive integrating effects of those countries' cooperation within SHADE.

EU NAVFOR has also established the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA). The Centre's basic task is to provide 24 hour manned monitoring of vessels transiting through the Gulf of Aden (EU NAVFOR, 2012: 8). The most important role of MSCHOA is to serve as an interface between the shipping companies and the assets deployed by the CMF, EU and NATO (Homan and Kamerling, 2010: 74). In February 2009, MSCHOA established in the Gulf of Aden the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) (ICC, 2012: 1). The IRTC is a 560 nautical miles long, rectangular area in which the international naval assets are deployed constantly, to provide merchant ships with a corridor of tight security.

In addition to naval activities, the EU is engaged in several other initiatives aiming at reducing the threat to international shipping in the Western Indian Ocean. Since 2009, the EU has been running the Critical Maritime Routes Programme. Its main objective has been "enabling maritime administration and law enforcement in the region to respond effectively to armed robbery against ships and piracy by providing them with the necessary training and equipment" (European Commission, 2011: 16). Within this framework, the EU has supported the implementation of the 2009 Djibouti Code of Conduct[5] brokered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (EEAS, 2012: 1). The Critical Maritime Routes Programme and several other projects have been managed as part of the Instrument for Stability which was devised in 2006 to "complemen[t] existing EU geographic and thematic instruments and policies, Common Foreign and Security Policy actions, regional and international organisations and bilateral programmes carried out by EU Member States" (European Commission, 2011: 20).

The concept of regional capacity-building was eventually adopted also in the CSDP dimension. In April 2010, the EU launched the Military Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) that has provided specialist training for the Somali National Security Forces (NSF). Additionally, on 16th July 2012, the Council of the European Union approved the launch of EUCAP Nestor, a new civilian mission that will be deployed in order to "strengthe[n] the sea-going maritime capacities in the countries in the region (with the exception of Somalia) and, in Somalia, the training of a coastal police force as well as of judges" (Council of the European Union, 2012a: 1). It seems evident that in addressing the unstable maritime security situation in the Western Indian Ocean, the EU is determined to gradually transmit the counter-piracy burden away from EU NAVFOR. Thus, the EU's first naval deployment may be understood as a short-term response which is prerequisite for implementing and coordinating region-wide development of necessary governance and policing capabilities.

To close this part of the discussion let us focus our attention on how the European Union's approach to Somali piracy may be interpreted in Mahanian terms. Once the UNSC appreciated the gravity of the situation in the Gulf of Aden and officially sanctioned a potential international naval response, the EU did not hesitate to deploy its first ever naval CSDP operation. Arguably, the Western Indian Ocean was precisely the farthest the European countries could project their naval power without arising suspicion among the emerging Asian powers, India and China. The 'tyranny of distance' has kept mutual threat perceptions between the EU and the two states at marginal levels, and the Europeans seem to have hardly any motivation to change it. Quite to the contrary, the EU's engagement off the Somali coast has served as a unique opportunity to develop closer security ties in the maritime domain with other global stakeholders dependent on the region's SLOCs.

In today's globalised world, the safety of international shipping appears to be a common good for most nations. This

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

means that in order to remain relevant, Mahan's concept of the nexus between shipping industry and navy has to be slightly modified. In his article 'Maritime Strategy in a Globalising World', Geoffrey Till discusses the contemporary shift from the strictly Mahanian, state-centric interpretation towards a broader understanding of maritime security. Till observes that the newly emergent asymmetric threats have prompted many states (mostly North American and European) to pursue constabulary and low-intensity capabilities for their navies and to deploy them to perform 'postmodern collaborative' operations (Till, 2007: 571).

This postmodern tendency found its expression in the concept of a 'Thousand-Ship Navy' proposed in 2005 by the then-US Navy Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Mullen. This concept envisaged a purely voluntary "global maritime partnership that unites maritime forces, port operators, commercial shippers, and international, governmental and nongovernmental agencies to address mutual concerns" (Cavas, 2006: 1). Commenting on this idea, Till provides a revealing suggestion:

the concept should probably be redefined as a global maritime community of major stakeholders in the system who are pledged to defend it against all threats. A sense of naval togetherness is an important precondition for this; sustaining it through mutual cooperation, combined exercises, staff exchanges and port visits therefore becomes increasingly important (Till, 2007: 573).

It is rather difficult not to notice that the present multinational counter-piracy engagement in the Gulf of Aden fits perfectly the above description. Navies representing major stakeholders of the global economy who are dependent on the SLOCs in the Indian Ocean combine their efforts to combat a common asymmetrical threat. It may certainly be understood as a considerable success of the EU to actively participate in this undertaking, and even help shape it along with the US-led CMF and NATO. The naval component of the CSDP has provided a satisfactory short-term tool to curb Somali piracy, enabling at the same time the broader CFSP concept of effective multilateralism to be put into practice. The EU has also assumed a multi-faceted approach to the transit region of its vital maritime routes. Through capacity-building initiatives, the EU seems relatively likely – compared with the CMF and NATO – to make lasting improvements in the security of the vital SLOCs.

1.3. Inside the European Union's 'Black Box'

Until now, our discussion of the EU's counter-piracy engagement has been based upon a simplified assumption of the Union's coherent 'actorness'. To make the analysis complete, we shall attempt to dissect to some degree the intra-EU mechanisms that have shaped its actions in the Gulf of Aden. As will be evident soon, the EU proves not to be as coherent an actor as it might have appeared in the initial stadia of the analysis.

It is quite useful to begin with looking more closely at the composition of the EU NAVFOR force. Apparently, the decisive majority of contributions (warships, aircraft, personnel) has come from the western club of EU-15 (Homan and Kamerling, 2010: 75). This regularity is mirrored in the case of the EUTM Somalia. Upon transferring the above data on the EU-27 map we see that several states have chosen not to address the issue of the Gulf of Aden security at all. There have been no contributions from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.[6] The overall picture of the EU at present is divided roughly between the EU-15 and the post-2004 member states – with few insignificant exceptions (passive Austria, and participating Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Romania) on both sides of the arbitrary boundary.

This apparent neglect by Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) may seem puzzling, especially if one considers potential political gains to be won through participation in these relatively low-risk deployments. As argued by Janne Matlary, member states can actually increase their standing within a particular organisation through initiating or at least participating in collective deployments. He observes that "being passive, keeping one's military tool statically deployed behind own borders is unimportant and counterproductive in both NATO and the EU setting" (Matlary, 2009: 89).

The most compelling of possible explanations for this neglect is the fact that the volume of extra-EU-27 trade in the 'new Europe' is considerably lower than in the EU-15 countries. In 2010, the 12 new member states accounted for

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

just 7.7 percent of the extra-EU exports and 9.3 percent of overall imports by the EU-27 (Eurostat, 2011: 86). Factors that have led to this weak economic globalisation may be retraced in history. Most importantly, most of today's CEECs, subdued by the great powers of the time, did not exist on the map throughout the 19th century which saw the foundations of globalisation being established by Western European colonialism. After the brief euphoria of independence during the two decades of the *interbellum*, those countries were devastated during World War II and eventually barred behind the Iron Curtain. Almost half a century of communist governance and international isolation as Warsaw Pact allies, or as USSR republics, considerably stifled those countries' economic development. Because of their history, which has been closely interwoven with their geographic location, CEECs do not yet possess globalised economies and thus are less dependent on the security of extra-European maritime transport. Additionally, they cannot boast rich maritime or naval traditions, and have a different (less – if at all – sea-oriented) strategic vision than their Western European counterparts. In this context, it seems quite natural that CEECs preferred participation in other deployments (e.g. EUMM Georgia, EUPOL Afghanistan, EULEX Kosovo) over the engagement in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region.

Although the EU-15 is clearly more coherent than the EU-27, also in this group there can be distinguished several countries whose influence both off the Somali coast and in the broader Indian Ocean region is more significant than that of others. This part of the discussion focuses on the EU-3 – Germany, France and the UK.

The first of them has proved to be a problematic partner when it comes to robust military deployments overseas. Consecutive German governments opposed most famously Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002 and Operation Unified Protector in 2011. The country's deeply rooted pacifism is "naturally based in the historical legacy of the Second World War" (Matlary, 2009: 149). Yet the Gulf of Aden has witnessed considerable contributions from the German navy within the CMF, EU and NATO. This enthusiastic engagement from an otherwise cautious security actor has been most likely caused by a combination of two major factors. Firstly, the country's volume of extra-EU trade is immense – constituting 28.1 percent of EU-27 exports and 19.4 percent of imports (Eurostat, 2011: 86).[7] Such a globalised economy is bound to be highly dependent on maritime transport. Secondly, counter-piracy operations are of a constabulary nature – resulting in arrests and confiscations rather than in casualties. On-shore capacity-building missions provide a similar low-risk environment. Thus the relatively benign character of the international initiatives in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region makes them palatable for the German decision-makers and public opinion. In effect, German contributions have been on par with robust deployments by Italy and Spain.

Yet undeniably the most significant contributions, and influence, come from the two countries that have traditionally led the development of the CSDP – France and the United Kingdom. EU NAVFOR Operation ATALANTA, the EU's first naval mission, was launched during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union. French officers have been always present at the top of the EU NAVFOR chain of command, either as Deputy Operational Commanders or as Force Commanders. Also, France has delegated more assets than any other participating country. Although British deployments within the EU NAVFOR have been rather limited (compared with deployments within the CMF and NATO), the UK has taken upon its shoulders the burden of running the Operational Headquarters in Northwood.[8]

There have been also several important unilateral (i.e. outside the CFSP) initiatives by both countries. France chose for itself the role of the counter-piracy trailblazer in 2007 when it started individual escorts for UN WPF vessels (Gullestrup and Stumbaum, 2010: 111). In 2009, France deployed a mission to Djibouti to train several hundreds of Somali security forces officers as a precursor of the EUTM Somalia mission (Homan and Kamerling, 2010: 96).

Meanwhile, the UK has been significantly active in coordinating the international counter-piracy engagement in the Western Indian Ocean. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operation, set up by the Royal Navy in Dubai in 2001, shifted its focus towards counter-piracy assistance as early as in 2007. UKMTO served as a contact point for merchant vessels before the MSCHOA was established. At present, the office provides positional information of passing vessels and, if necessary, liaises them with the CMF, NATO and EU NAVFOR forces (Royal Navy, 2012: 1). Another British achievement is the country's chairmanship in one of the Working Groups of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). Established in January 2009, CGPCS (including representatives from 60 countries and 21 organisations) meets regularly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and reports its

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

progress periodically to the UNSC (CGPCS, 2011: 1).

Also important is the fact that the two countries are the only EU member states that possess territories in the Indian Ocean. France bears authority over the Mayotte and La Réunion (both hosting military bases) near Madagascar, as well as several Islands and archipelagos within the so-called French Southern and Antarctic Lands. The UK owns the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), located just in the middle of the Indian Ocean, which hosts a US naval base. This Franco-British presence, along with the overwhelming presence of the US Navy's 5th Fleet may be argued to unsettle important global actors such as China and Russia (Berlin, 2010: 60). The crowdedness of the Indian Ocean may prove also worrisome for New Delhi as Indian strategists tend towards a 'Monroe Doctrine' of their own (Holmes, 2010: 166).

If we apply Janne Matlary's argument that "indirect power through multilateral institutions is a logical choice for security policy at a time where legitimacy is important" (Matlary, 2009: 91), we may arrive at the conclusion that counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden may be the key to reducing the Eurasian threat perceptions in the Indian Ocean region. By engaging in counter-piracy operations and cooperating with a variety of extra-regional states, Western powers have been able to establish a new, post-Mahanian *raison d'être* for their naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and thus further legitimise it.

1.4. Conclusion

In the course of the above discussion several important observations were made both in reference to the various aspects of international counter-piracy efforts and about the character of the European Union as an aspiring global security player.

The geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean region has been confirmed. At the same time, the evidence and opinions gathered point to the fact that asymmetrical threats, such as piracy and maritime terrorism, are unable, in their present state, to pose a truly existential threat to the global economy. In fact, it appears that naval initiatives to curb piracy are bound to be cost-inefficient and thus unsustainable over an extended period of time.

To fully understand the utility of EU NAVFOR ATALANTA one has to put this operation into its proper context, i.e. to analyze it as just one of several EU initiatives to shape African security. The Union's first naval deployment appears to have been an attempt to break the vicious circle in which piracy undermined international aid for the under-developed parts of the continent.

Simultaneously, EU NAVFOR has played a crucial role in the EU's foreign policy stance of effective multilateralism. The multinational engagement in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region has provided the EU with a unique opportunity to build closer security ties with distant countries by jointly shaping the counter-piracy efforts in cooperation with the CMF and NATO. European Union has proved to be a valuable contributor to the regional security situation by engaging in on-shore capacity-building in the area of governance and policing. Arguably, transferring the main counter-piracy responsibility to the regional states is a viable answer to the problem of cost-inefficiency of the strictly naval approach.

Contemporary international counter-piracy activities also shed some light on the SLOCs-oriented theory of naval power of Admiral Mahan. It seems that in a globalised world the safety of maritime commerce is a common good for most countries. Consequently, non-state threats to it are likely to be addressed by coalitions that combine naval assets from countries normally too distant to have common security interests. Thus, the protection of SLOCs has shifted from being a national effort, aimed against another state, to being an international one, aimed at combating a common threat to a collective of interdependent economies.

The last major observation is that even the successful EU engagement in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region has had certain limitations. Those among the EU member states whose economies are not yet well integrated into the global economy have shied away from taking part in this particular engagement. Luckily, the two major European security players, France and the UK, have managed to play an active and constructive part in the international

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

counter-piracy effort. As a result, European states may be argued to have retained a say in international security affairs in the Indian Ocean region.

Chapter 2: European Union and Its Member States' Engagement in Southeast Asia

This chapter analyzes the importance of Southeast Asia for the security of Europe-bound maritime commerce as well as the efforts made by the European Union and its member states to address the growing challenges present in the region. The discussion revolves mainly around the issue of sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. The growing frequency of maritime incidents and diplomatic rows between China and several ASEAN states – such as the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff with the Philippines – prompts one to consider the possibilities of an armed confrontation in the region.

The first part of the analysis attempts to define and evaluate potential consequences of a major military showdown in Southeast Asia. Taken into account are various factors and trends such as the rapid changes in regional distribution of military power or the significance of the American 'strategic pivot' towards Asia-Pacific. The findings of the first section are then juxtaposed to the recent track record of the EU and its member states' diplomatic engagement in Southeast Asia. As in the previous chapter, additional scrutiny is given to the question of coherence of the collective European agency.

The final point of the discussion seeks to explain the dynamics of the EU's diplomatic engagement in Southeast Asia by analyzing the changing European perceptions of the security situation in the South China Sea. The growing realisation of the issue's gravity is evident in recent debates among scholars and researchers across the Atlantic. There has been an ongoing discussion concerning the desirable role of the EU in Asia-Pacific as well as the limits of the European ability to exert influence in the region increasingly dominated by great power competition.

An additional issue addressed in the discussion is the extent of relevance of Admiral Mahan's thought in today's complex globalised world. Securing distant waterways by naval means may prove rather troublesome, leaving even the most prominent European states little choice other than to limit themselves to the soft power of EU-coordinated diplomacy.

2.1. Southeast Asian Security and Its Implications for European States

It may well be argued that Southeast Asia is a region of crucial importance to the EU member states' collective economic interest. With more than €206 billion of trade in goods and services in 2011, the ASEAN countries made up for the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe – after the US and China – whereas the EU was ASEAN's second largest trading partner after China. Meanwhile, the total stock of mutual investments between the EU and ASEAN has accumulated to more than €125 billion (European Commission, 2012: 1).

However telling these statistics are, they cannot reflect additional, indirect aspects of the EU member states' economic dependence on the region. What figures fail to show is the fact that the key maritime routes linking Europe to China, South Korea and Japan – each of them a major trading partner – lead exactly through Southeast Asia.

The Malay Archipelago constitutes a natural barrier between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, and the few straits serve as gateways for commercial shipping. The most important of them are the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Other chokepoints available for exploitation are the Sunda, Karimata, Lombok, and Makassar Straits. In case of closure of the above, alternative routes would lead either through the Torres Strait (off Papua New Guinea) or even around Australia (Bouchard and Crumplin, 2010: 32).

For the sake of reference, we may conduct a simplified calculation of the possible differences in the shipping distance. The shortest maritime route from Kagoshima (Japan) to Bristol (UK) – via the Malacca Strait – is approximately 10,467 nautical miles long. If a commercial vessel chose to travel through the Torres Strait, its journey would be 32 percent longer (13,787 nmi). If the vessel had to reach Bristol by going around Australia – via the Bass Strait – it would have to travel 15,690 nmi (around 50 percent more).[9] Clearly, such significant extension of

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

maritime shipping routes would cause extra fuel expenses and would sap the efficiency of the shipping industry, being highly detrimental to European economies.

The scenario that has the greatest potential to result in a major disruption of maritime traffic in Southeast Asia is an inter-state confrontation in the South China Sea. Such an event could effectively force the shipping industry to avoid passage through the Malay Archipelago over an extended period of time. Although the security situation in the South China Sea remains relatively stable compared with recent tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, there have been intensifying signals that prompt close attention to the disputed waters.

The South China Sea has long been a regional hotspot because of several unresolved national claims such as "territorial sovereignty over island groups, maritime rights to exploit resources in the water column and seabed and freedom of navigation" (Fravel, 2012: 33). Among the chief factors fuelling the rising tensions is the significant rise of China's power in relation to its neighbours. As argued by Hugh White, the emerging disproportionate distribution of power is eroding the region's 'post-Vietnam order' (White, 2008: 91). Relevant figures could not be more telling: Chinese military spending, which in 1990 marginally surpassed the combined expenditure of the ten Southeast Asian countries, rose steadily to become double that of ASEAN in 2008 (Storey, 2011: 152).

The material trends present in the Western Pacific region have been accompanied by unfavourable ideational conditions such as the lack of a shared cultural legacy or of established traditions of international cooperation (Buzan, 2003: 164). Yet perhaps the most crucial factor is the "unexpected but undeniable coexistence of nationalism and globalisation" (White, 2008: 92). Taking all the above factors into consideration, many experts claim that, without proper solutions in place, the tensions in the South China Sea could easily reach "irreversible levels" (International Crisis Group, 2012: 34).

Meanwhile, ASEAN, some of whose member states are entangled in the disputes, remains on the sidelines. The organisation has proved to have limited authority over national policies on the issue. It seems that among the main causes of this disunity is the organisation's institutional culture, the so-called 'ASEAN Way', which is designed as a "process of regional interactions and cooperation based on discreteness, informality, consensus building and non-confrontational bargaining styles" as opposed to "the adversarial posturing, majority vote and other legalistic decision-making procedures in Western multilateral organizations" (Acharya, 2001 cited in Eaton and Stubbs, 2006: 138).

Another important factor is the consequence of ASEAN's expansion in the late 1990s. Among the new members, especially Myanmar and Cambodia have potential to pose problems due to the strong political and economic leverage China has over those countries (Eaton and Stubbs, 2006: 141). In July 2012, Beijing used Cambodia's chairmanship of ASEAN to prevent the organisation from producing a joint communiqué that was meant to include the Philippines' objections to China's recent activities in the South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2012: 31).[10] China's assertiveness in its preference for keeping the issue off official multilateral agendas is argued to have sent "a sobering message concerning China's future behaviour toward the region" (Ott, 2012: 1).

The PRC has also been reluctant to support ASEAN's dispute management mechanisms. China's interference in the outcomes of the 2012 Phnom Penh summit has set back progress on the 'code of conduct' which is meant as a legally binding follow-up to the declarations of 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2012: 31).

Faced with the inaction of ASEAN, several of its member states have chosen to pursue engagement of extra-regional actors. Recently, both Vietnam and the Philippines have been keen on developing closer ties with the United States (International Crisis Group, 2012: 22). Although the US has already been quite active in Southeast Asia in its efforts to improve counter-terrorism and maritime security in the region post-9/11 (Tan, 2010: 27), recently it has devoted increasing attention to keeping the rising China in check.

The prominence of the South China Sea in the relations between the two powers was further raised in 2010 as China announced that it now considered the disputed waters as "part of the core interests that concerned its sovereignty and territorial integrity, putting the issue on par with Tibet and Taiwan" (Tan, 2010: 28). The US, on the other hand,

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

commenced the so-called 'strategic pivot' towards Asia. This strategic rebalancing of attention and, to some extent, resources gained extensive media coverage with the publication of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's article 'America's Pacific Century' in the *Foreign Policy* magazine. The concept was also supported in a document released in January 2012 by the US Department of Defense, according to which "U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia" (US Department of Defense, 2012: 2).

From a realist standpoint, it is precisely the increasing commitment of the US and China (leaving ASEAN sidelined) that is going to define the East Asian security environment in the coming years (Eaton and Stubbs, 2006: 139). It should be added that the emerging balance of power is far from creating a stable security environment in the region. Quite to the contrary, a balance of power resulting from a parity in amassed military hardware may, at some point in time, prove explosive. The pitfalls of such a situation are underscored by Hans J. Morgenthau who observes that "it is not hard to see that most of the wars that have been fought since the beginning of the modern state system have their origin in the balance of power" (Morgenthau, 2006: 221).

To conclude this section, let us devote some attention to an important trend which is commonly overlooked. It may be argued that the Chinese leadership may become more assertive on the South China Sea issue once it has managed to reduce the country's reliance on shipping via the Malacca Strait by diversifying oil and gas import routes. There have been documented efforts by the Chinese government to develop port facilities (also naval bases) in countries such as Pakistan or Myanmar, and to establish pipelines connecting them to Chinese territory (Cooper, 2009: 8). This would enable the PRC to receive a significant share of vital energy exports from the Persian Gulf and Western Africa independently from the security situation in the Malay Archipelago. The result would be an ominous combination of increasingly unstable balance of power with decreasing inter-state economic interdependence in the region. The advent of this undesirable situation may be not so distant in time, which is yet another case in favour of a prompt international engagement in Southeast Asia.

2.2. The European Union's Engagement in Southeast Asia

This section focuses on what has been accomplished by the European Union in terms of addressing the growing tensions in Southeast Asia. The EU has a long tradition of constructive relations with ASEAN. In 1980, formal cooperation and relationship was established between ASEAN and the European Economic Community (ASEAN, 2012a: 1). In the follow-up to the European Commission's communication *Towards a New Strategy for Asia*, in November 1994 Singapore and France proposed to develop the inter-regional partnership through regular EU-Asia summits. The same year witnessed also the inauguration of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with the EU as one of the dialogue partners. Two years later, in 1996, the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was held in Bangkok.

Of all the initiatives especially the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meetings (being part of the ASEAN-EU Dialogue relations) and the ARF summits provide opportunities for the EU to bear a degree of political influence on Southeast Asian maritime security issues. However, it has not been until recently that the EU began addressing the security dimension more vigorously.

Present relations are guided by the 2007 Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership which expressed commitment from both sides to step up cooperation in several areas including 'Political and Security' (ASEAN, 2007: 3). The commitments of the Nuremberg Declaration were reiterated in the *Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017)* adopted at the 19th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in April 2012. Additionally, the document gave more prominence to areas such as maritime security, conflict prevention and the promotion of joint management of marine resources (ASEAN, 2012b: 1-2).

Of particular importance is also the EU's participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum. The ARF provides an opportunity to discuss Southeast Asian security with officials of all major stakeholders – including the US, Russia and China – present at the same venue. The ARF became the EU's primary forum to address the South China Sea issue since 2010, when Vietnam used its ASEAN chairmanship to put the hotspot on the official agenda (International Crisis Group, 2012: 23). The EU's intensifying engagement in the ARF was strengthened further by the adoption of

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

the *Joint EU – US statement on the Asia-Pacific region* during the ASEAN Regional Forum held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in July 2012. Both sides expressed the will to align themselves diplomatically to advance regional stability. The issue of Southeast Asian maritime security was addressed in a common voice:

Both sides plan to work with Asian partners on increasing maritime security based on international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and lend assistance to the development of confidence building measures to reduce the risk of crises and conflict. On the South China Sea, both sides continue to encourage ASEAN and China to advance a Code of Conduct and to resolve territorial and maritime disputes through peaceful, diplomatic and cooperative solutions (Council of the European Union, 2012b: 2).

Thus far, we have discussed the 'collective' aspect of European engagement in Southeast Asia. Both Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM) and ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meetings are attended by representatives of all 27 EU member states. At the ASEAN Regional Forum, the EU-27 interests are represented by the European Union High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy.[11] There still seems to be room for improvement, especially if we compare the EU's diplomatic engagement with the efforts of the US or Russia. The EU has not yet managed to secure a seat at the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) and at the East Asia Summit – both of which are crucial forums for addressing the region's security.

Because of the tremendous geographical distance between the two regions, it proves extremely difficult for the European states to exert unilateral influence in Southeast Asia and in the broader Asia-Pacific region. There have been, however, subtle traces of individual engagement by the EU-3.

Since 2002, the London-based Institute for International Security Studies has organised annual IISS Asia Security Summits in Singapore – more commonly known as the Shangri-La Dialogue. The high level meetings have gathered senior officials and defence professionals from the Asia-Pacific – including Russia, China, India, the US and Canada. Among the visitors of the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore were some of the most crucial figures such as US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta or Chinese Minister of National Defence General Liang Guanglie. The meetings have seen also regular attendance of UK officials as well as sporadic attendance of German and French representatives. Notably, the EU-3 were the only European states invited.

During the 2012 summit, the three countries were represented by an unprecedented number of speakers. The most significant statements were made in the speech of the French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian who claimed that Europe's "benign neglect" towards Asia belongs to the past as "Asia/Pacific will be an increasing commitment area for the EU and its member-states, among which France is intending to play her full role" (Le Drian, 2012: 1). His vision of European engagement entailed working towards establishing a regional security structure in South-East Asia "in a way that is far from any out of date 'containment' concept" (Le Drian, 2012: 1).

Apart from the Shangri-La Dialogue, the UK and France have made unilateral steps to enhance their involvement in Southeast Asia. The two countries are the only EU member states that have signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia along with the EU itself (in the person of the High Representative Baroness Catherine Ashton). Interestingly, France was the first among them, signing the TAC as early as in 2007 – both the UK and the EU signed the treaty during the ARF in July 2012.

Overall, however, one may conclude that the 'gap' between the influence of the EU-3 and that of the rest of the EU-27 in Southeast Asia has not been as significant as it has been in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region. Although the EU-3 have proven to be the only EU member states able to speak with their individual voice in Southeast Asia, their achievements in this area have been admittedly limited. It seems that in order to influence Asia-Pacific the EU-3 would struggle without the legitimacy and combined economic leverage provided by operating within the intergovernmental mechanism of the CFSP. While leading the EU decision-making, those three countries would still be able to protect their lucrative trade relations with China by delegating political responsibility for unwelcome decisions to the EU. Also, all 27 member states could benefit from diversifying their trade relations in Asia as it would give the EU more diplomatic 'freedom of manoeuvre' vis-à-vis the PRC.

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

2.3. The Debate on Europe's Role in Southeast Asia

As shown in the previous section, the European states' engagement (either collective or individual) in Southeast Asia gathered significant momentum during the last few years. It is important to search for explanations that would convincingly account for the quick shift from 'benign neglect' to open commitment.

The signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation by France in 2007 may be understood not only as a consequence of the country's long tradition of bilateral relations in the region but also as exploiting the clout the EU gained through the deployment of the Aceh Monitoring Mission in Indonesia in 2005-2006 (Colonna, 2007: 1). However, the French engagement at that time did not bear any direct connection with the maritime dimension of Southeast Asian security.

This seems understandable as the political tensions surrounding the South China Sea, although cyclically recurrent for several decades, have been on a notable upswing only since 2007 (Storey, 2011: 151). Additionally, a meaningful increase in the number of maritime incidents in the region began in late 2008 (with the most intense period beginning in early 2010 and continuing today) (CNAS, 2012: 1). These events, combined with the American 'pivot' towards Asia-Pacific sent a clear signal to the Europeans: a new centre of the globalised world emerges, one that is troubled by several issues that ought to be closely followed and addressed with diligence.

There has been, however, an additional factor that has facilitated the change of European approaches. Beginning with sporadic publications in 2010-11, there emerged a lively debate among European (and also some American) think-tankers and scholars about the EU's most appropriate course of action in Asia.

In late November 2010, the Brussels-based European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) issued a short report concluding one of the meetings within the framework of the Institute's 'Roundtable Series on Maritime Security around Asia'. One of the most important acknowledgements in the document was that Admiral Mahan's observations are still relevant as "[p]rosperity is still concerned with the free passage of trade and energy supplies and the suppression of piracy" (EIAS, 2010: 2). In this context, the authors observed that the European presence in Southeast Asia had been very limited.

In September 2011, in response to the growing frequency of maritime incidents in the South China Sea, the EIAS attempted to address the hotspot in another report. The authors argued that "due to the significant level of trade that is dependent on the freedom of navigation in, and stability around, the South China Sea, the EU has an interest in the area, which, therefore, it must defend" (EIAS, 2011: 4). At the same time, they observed, the EU had been reluctant to engage their naval assets in the region. It preferred 'soft', diplomatic solutions. The authors suggested that the EU's efforts could be more successful if the Union was represented "at a very senior level at meetings with ASEAN" (EIAS, 2011: 5).

The recognition of the EU's 'neglect' of Asian security issues was still present in 2012. At the time when Americans toned down the narrative of the war on terror characteristic of the 'Afghan period', replacing it with the 'pivot' to Asia, Europeans shifted their perspective inwards – from expeditionary warfare and nation-building to the ongoing financial crisis in the Euro zone. As observed by Jonas Parello-Plesner, "Europeans are currently preoccupied with the eurocrisis and there is little bandwidth for thinking long-term and beyond the crisis" (Dempsey, 2012: 1). Meanwhile, experts step up the efforts to underscore the necessity to engage in Southeast Asia. They do so also by employing a logic approximate to Mahan's thought:

[The EU] needs to make sure that the constant flow of manufactured goods from China, Thailand, Vietnam, and other countries is not interrupted. It wants to sell its own products to the region and it needs to keep the waterways that connect the two economic centers open and safe. If there is anything that the Europeans can do to minimize a threat to those interests, they have a clear obligation to act (Speck, 2012: 1).

The crucial question that still remains to be answered is how exactly the EU is going to engage in the Asia-Pacific. It should not be a surprise that many American observers would like to see a naval commitment from EU member states. It is argued that, in peacetime, the Europeans could take over – either within the EU CSDP or via NATO – the

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

main bulk of maritime security responsibilities in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea thus creating a 'geographic division of labour' with the US (Holmes, 2012: 1). Although this and several other naval-centric prescriptions for the EU members seem sound in their own right, it is difficult to expect them to enjoy too much enthusiasm since the recent Europe-wide austerity cuts have hit also the member states' defence budgets.

On the other hand, the EU could be quite successful in limiting itself to its traditional niche of a 'normative power'. As argued by Patryk Pawlak and Eleni Ekmektsioglou, such an approach is highly advisable as it would not only match European capabilities and experience but also complement the more robust American stance (Pawlak and Ekmektsioglou, 2012a: 1). Additionally, the EU should refrain from an 'overt alignment' (i.e. naval cooperation in Asia-Pacific) with the US so as to avoid raising suspicions of Western containment among the Chinese leadership (Pawlak and Ekmektsioglou, 2012b: 1).

The above are only a few excerpts from an emerging debate about the future of European engagement in Southeast Asian security issues. This debate may be expected to intensify as at its core lies a tension between the necessity to secure the free flow of maritime commerce in distant waters and the inability of the EU member states to provide it with material (i.e. naval) means. Admiral Mahan's theory of sea power, if applied strictly, seems to have only limited relevance to the problem faced by the Europeans. Securing vital SLOCs in distant waters with naval assets implies operating from a 'position of strength'. At the time Mahan wrote his work, the global distribution of power was strongly Euro-centric. At present, it would be difficult to imagine European military engagement in any maritime contingency in Asia-Pacific. Additional factors at play, such as the unprecedented level of global economic interdependence and the highly developed international society, raise both economic and political costs of unsolicited (i.e. not invited by UNSC resolutions) naval interventionism to unacceptable heights.

In this situation, EU member states are constrained to using purely political means to secure Southeast Asian waterways. They have to rely on confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy – preferably coordinated by the European External Action Service (EEAS).

2.4. Conclusion

As shown in the above discussion, regional stability in Southeast Asia ought to be perceived as crucial to the prosperity of European states. Not only does the EU-27 enjoy considerable trade relations with its Asian partners, but it is also dependent on undisrupted flow of maritime commerce through that region.

In recent years there have emerged several unfavourable trends that have the potential to challenge the stability of the Asia-Pacific security environment. China's growing capabilities, combined with the passiveness of ASEAN and America's shift towards Asia, have been pushing the region towards an unstable, almost Cold War-like balance of power.

Faced with these developments, the EU recently began to commit more attention to the problems of Southeast Asian security, including the lingering disputes concerning the South China Sea. The EU has been increasingly active within the ASEAN-based dialogues such as the ASEAN Regional Forum. Most importantly, the Union has chosen to combine its diplomatic efforts with one of the most influential stakeholders in the region – the United States. A next viable step would be to enhance the EU's cooperation with those ASEAN members which possess considerable clout in the region and, at the same time, are not vigorously pursuing any territorial or sovereignty claims – Singapore and Indonesia.

There may also be discerned individual initiatives of certain EU member states to gain some say on the Asia-Pacific security matters. As seen on the example of the Shangri-La Dialogue and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, Britain, France and, to lesser extent, Germany surreptitiously seek avenues of exerting influence outside the CFSP framework. Yet, because of the 'tyranny of distance' between the two continents, individual efforts of the EU-3 have little to offer.

Parallel to the increasing European activity in Southeast Asia has been the lively debate among scholars and

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012
Written by Rafal Nedzarek

observers concerning the viable paths the EU could follow to become a more relevant participant in the region. Although there has been a number of American voices in favour of a naval European commitment, it seems that the most viable course of action for the EU is to strengthen its diplomatic engagement and to support a rules-based resolution of any destabilising territorial disputes.

In addressing the problems of Asia-Pacific maritime security, the European Union is likely to act as a 'civilian power', exploiting its normative prestige to stabilise the region which is far beyond the legitimate naval reach of its member states. Unilateral maritime interventionism implied by Mahan's concept of sea power seems to be too costly in a modern international environment. The significance of these limitations is addressed in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Conclusion

In the course of the above analysis, it has been shown that the security of maritime commerce passing through the Indian Ocean is of paramount importance to the European economies. Both the European Union leadership and national governments of some of the EU member states share a growing recognition of the fact that the emerging threats to maritime commerce ought to be actively addressed.

To analyse their recent efforts in this field, the above analysis assumed as its ordering logic the theory of naval power proposed by Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. However, it should be emphasized that his observations were not treated axiomatically but rather served as a point of reference. The analysis was divided into two parts by drawing an arbitrary line in the middle of the Indian Ocean which demarcated the easternmost boundary of the European navies' activities.

The first chapter focused on various counter-piracy initiatives in which European states have been taking part since around 2007. Those included not only strictly naval operations conducted by the EU, NATO and the US-led CMF, but also the EU's initiatives aimed at political stabilisation and capacity building in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region.

The unprecedented variety of initiatives and countries involved in combating Somali piracy seems to be indicative of a qualitative change in the way state actors secure maritime commerce. There seems to have emerged a "global maritime community of major stakeholders" dependent on uninterrupted shipping of goods (Till, 2007: 573). The evidence of material interdependence and the record of multilateral initiatives point to the existence of such a structure (even if it has not been politically acknowledged).

This emerging configuration seems to have influenced, to some extent, the way in which states employ their respective navies. Firstly, the navies' traditional Cold War role of supporting land-based operations and providing one of the pillars of nuclear deterrence has been expanded with a prominent constabulary component to protect the SLOCs. Secondly, it is important to note that the latter tasks tend to be performed by multinational coalitions against non-state actors. This postmodern, post-Mahanian context seems to invite a multilateral approach towards governing international security.

It may be argued that the most successful response to this invitation came from the European Union and its member states. Fulfilling its commitment to the concept of 'effective multilateralism', pronounced in the *European Security Strategy* in 2003, the EU has excelled not only as a participant but also as a skilful coordinator of the multinational inter-regional efforts to secure maritime commerce. Notable achievements in this respect include establishing the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa and the steady support of the implementation of the Djibouti Code of Conduct among its signatories.

Overall, the EU engagement in securing its vital maritime trade routes can be considered a success. Although it is still too early for a definitive assessment, as the EU NAVFOR mandate has been extended until 2014, recent statistics reflect quite positively on the effectiveness of the multinational efforts (Shanker, 2012: 1). Additionally, the EU has earned considerable merit for its broad, multifaceted approach to the problem of maritime piracy. The Union's unique approach is well expressed by the words of the current EU NAVFOR commander Rear Admiral

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

Duncan Potts:

The end of piracy is set by conditions ashore… There is no silver bullet for counterpiracy. You need to pull on all the levers, some judicial, some financial, some military and some governance/security. The EU, as one institution, can pull many of those levers (Hale, 2012: 1).

Much more problematic has been the EU's engagement in the regional security in Southeast Asia, which was the subject matter of the second chapter of this dissertation. Firstly, the crucial chokepoints of the Malay Archipelago and the volatile area of the South China Sea prove to lie beyond the feasible reach of the European navies. Secondly, the current power distribution among the international actors combined with potentially unacceptable costs of unilateral naval interventionism leave the EU with little choice but to limit itself to the role of a 'civilian power'.

The task of addressing sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea presents a considerable challenge due to several negative factors. The chief of them is China's steady emergence as a regional power, or even hegemon. This preponderant power is contrasted with the inability of ASEAN to agree on a common stance that would counterbalance Chinese assertiveness. The organisation's malaise has prompted several ASEAN states to seek to engage the United States in the regional equation. It seems that the recent American strategic shift towards Asia-Pacific is not only raising threat perceptions within the Chinese leadership but is also creating an unstable balance of power with an explosive potential.

It was not until recently that the EU intensified its engagement in the maritime security of the region. The EU-27 was able to express its collective concerns at the ASEAN Regional Forum. At the 2012 ARF summit the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton issued a joint statement in which they encouraged peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes in accordance with international law. This diplomatic alignment is a natural consequence of the two sides' common stance. At the same time, however, it shows that the EU lacks the necessary clout to effectively influence Southeast Asian security issues on its own.

During the discussion in the two main chapters, additional attention was devoted to the behaviour of individual EU member states. The question of coherence is crucial to the EU's ability to be a successful global actor also in the security dimension. Particular attention was given to the EU-3 – UK, France and Germany – as they are most likely to play prominent roles both within the EU's collective CFSP framework and outside of it. This approach has proven beneficial for the analysis and yielded valuable observations.

In the case of the European states' counter-piracy efforts in the Western Indian Ocean the EU-3 has played a leading role – with the initiative of the French presidency, Britain-based headquarters and relatively robust German deployments. Yet, those three countries have not dominated the EU counter-piracy efforts, remaining rather *primi inter pares* as the EU-15 has also made significant contributions to the EU NAVFOR. A considerable gap, however, is observable between the 'old Union' and the post-2004 member states. The limited participation of the latter seems to be a result of the low level of globalisation of their economies combined with meagre resources at their disposal. There seem to be no short-term solutions at hand to alleviate this shortcoming – the only way being to wait for those countries to catch up economically with the EU-15. However problematic, this mixed participation has not been detrimental to the overall EU counter-piracy effort.

The picture has been different in Southeast Asia. Although the EU-3 has aspired to prominence in the security dialogue through the Shangri-La meetings, and France and Britain managed to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN, their actual influence has been limited at best. Although the three countries have proven to be the only EU member states that could afford to speak with their individual voice in Asia, the only viable option for them is to address Asian security within the CFSP framework. This solution offers not only the leverage of the enormous trading block but also an opportunity to delegate political responsibility to the EU if necessary actions put the member states in an awkward spot vis-à-vis their crucial trading partner – i.e. China.

The above considerations have led us to the final question about the character of the EU as a global security actor. So far, the EU's international behaviour has been dependent on several 'layers'. These may be understood as a

European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

function of the geographic distance and the power distribution between the EU and the particular region. The first layer encompasses the countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the rest of Africa and its coasts. In this area the EU enjoys a certain level of autonomy, even if it chooses to coordinate its efforts with the US. If necessary, the European states have the potential to intervene militarily in this area as has been seen in the Gulf of Aden. The next layer includes Russia and Central Asia. Here, European military interventions and broader security policies have been absolutely dependent on the US and NATO. The final layer encompasses the rest of the globe. At this point the EU is left with just a few, non-military tools to influence international security – i.e. promoting multilateralism, regional integration and adherence to international law. Within this model, Southeast Asia would be located in this final layer.

Borrowing from Pascal Vennesson's typology of the European Union's alternative grand strategies (Vennesson, 2010: 58), we may argue that what we see is a "superpower EU" within the first layer, a "Euro-Atlantic EU" within the second layer, and a "civilian power EU" in the outermost layer. Thus, the same Union that participates in a robust naval intervention in the Gulf of Aden-Horn of Africa region has had a quite limited and benign portfolio in Southeast Asia.

If we were to assume that the EU is going to continue to exist in its present form, we could extrapolate a prediction that this layered approach is here to stay. It is of paramount importance whether the continuing Euro-crisis is going to be solved before it inflicts irreparable rifts within the EU-27. Even if the EU emerges triumphant from its current woes, there remains the question of how quickly the European economies will recuperate. The looming Europe-wide defence budget cuts limit the EU's capacity for military intervention, whereas the faltering economies of the member states shrink the EU's economic leverage as a major trading block. The longer the crisis saps the EU member states' resources the less likely they are to be active security players, either individually or collectively.

To conclude our discussion let us go back to the 19th century theory of naval power proposed by Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan and consider its relevance to the discussed modern scenarios. It seems that as long as there is a clear primacy of shipping as a means of commercial transport the necessity of being able to secure one's maritime trade routes will persist. There have been, however, major political and military changes since *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783* was first published in 1890.

Firstly, SLOC protection became sidelined as just one of several ways of utilising a navy. Technological advancements enabled vessels to serve as crucial support for land-based operations by using the unprecedented range and precision of conventional weapons. Additionally, equipped with nuclear warheads, some of the naval assets became an important element of states' nuclear deterrent.

Secondly, today's international system is characterised by a relatively 'even', multipolar distribution of power. Faced with the steady rise of countries such as Russia, China and India, the Western powers cannot afford to deploy naval assets wherever they want. It must also be noted that the level of destructive power spread across the globe is unprecedented in history. This, among other factors, has resulted in a state of prolonged peace among the great powers. In consequence, there is usually little need for state-versus-state naval deployments to secure SLOCs.

The above factors create a situation in which SLOC protection bears only a basic resemblance to the Mahanian logic. As legitimacy is paramount, naval initiatives of this sort tend to be carried out by multinational, often inter-regional coalitions against non-state, asymmetrical threats such as piracy. It appears that what is left for a strict application of the state-centric Mahanian approach is a really specific niche. Arguably, the present situation in the Strait of Hormuz presents such a niche. For various reasons, the Iranian government has decided that the waterway on which so many countries – including the Islamic Republic itself – rely may be taken hostage to advance the overriding interests of the Iranian national security agenda. A similar situation might occur in the South China Sea. Although a distant possibility, this scenario deserves further consideration from European scholars and decision-makers.

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European Efforts to Protect Maritime Commerce in the Indian Ocean, 2007-2012

Written by Rafal Nedzarek

[1] Data as of 1st January 2011.

[2] There exists certain potential for cooperation between the pirates and the al-Shabaab terrorist organisation in Somalia. So far, however, there has been no evidence of a piracy-terrorism nexus (Murphy, 2011: 139)

[3] The 26 CMF member nations are: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the UK and US (CMF, 2012b: 1).

[4] Reportedly, South Korean authorities expressed their interest in joining the arrangement (Associated Press, 2012: 1)

[5] Since 6th July 2012, there are 20 signatories to the Djibouti Code of Conduct (IMO, 2012: 1).

[6] Denmark is not included in the discussion as it has opted out of participation in CSDP.

[7] For comparison, the UK extra-EU trade accounts for 10.5 percent of exports and 13.6 percent of imports; France accounts for 11.4 percent and 9.7 percent respectively (Eurostat, 2011: 86).

[8] It is important to note that Northwood has hosted not only the EU NAVFOR OHQ but also Allied Maritime Command HQ coordinating NATO's counter-piracy operations.

[9] Distances calculated at http://www.searates.com/reference/portdistance/

[10] This failure is quite significant as it was the first time in the bloc's 45-year history that a regional conference ended without a joint statement (Cheang, 2012: 1).

[11] The High Representative also accompanies foreign ministers of the EU member states at the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meetings.

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