

## **Piracy and HOA Operations**

The seizure on 8 April 2009 of the U.S. merchant ship *Maersk Alabama* by Somali pirates illustrates the importance of international cooperation in maintaining law and order on the high seas. In recent times, naval operations off the Horn of Africa (HOA) represented an expansion of the Global War on Terrorism from fighting Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan to a broader effort to defeat international terrorist organizations and to deter states and non-state actors from supporting terror. Al Qaeda and similar groups had previously been active or were then operating in Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Kenya. On 5 November 2001, the commander of Central Command authorized the development of a strategic concept of operations for the region, and approved maritime interception operations and operations to monitor the situation in the area. The Horn of Africa maritime area of responsibility included the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and a huge area of the Arabian Sea off East Africa.

On 3 February 2002, Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, stood up Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, Horn of Africa Maritime Interception Operations (HOA MIO) task force, to deny the sea to terrorists by countering the illegal movement of weaponry, people, and other materials. By 2006, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States had contributed ships and aircraft to the task force.

The typical Combined Task Force 150 mission involved monitoring, inspecting, boarding, and stopping suspect ships and dhows. These operations sought to gather

intelligence, inhibit terrorism, and curb piracy, armed robbery, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and other illegal activity. Between its establishment and the summer of 2005, the ships of Task Force-150 boarded nearly 1,500 vessels within its area of responsibility.

Each coalition navy operated under rules of engagement promulgated by its own national government. Some countries issued rules so “robust” that their ships could participate in a broad range of missions, nearly interchangeably with U.S. warships. Other countries’ rules limited and sometimes precluded their ships from conducting certain kinds of operations at the tactical level. In general, for the various task force and task unit staffs, the challenge remained being aware of who could do what and then vectoring units accordingly.

Other problems arose from national limitations on the types of missions navies could perform at the operational level. These restrictions differed from rules of engagement, which generally governed the action of a unit in a particular tactical situation. For example, some nations’ navies were not permitted to perform maritime interception operations in the North Arabian Gulf. Initially, Japan’s forces were not permitted to perform any missions except for delivery of fuel to U.S. forces and self-defense of their own units. The limitations varied from nation to nation and required mission planners to remain alert when changes in assigned forces occurred.

The well-defined boundaries of the various kinds of naval operations facilitated the commitment of naval forces by nations whose diplomatic aims differed from those of the United States. Thus the French and others could stay out of the Iraq war in 2003 while continuing to support the war on terror.

In January 2009, Vice Admiral William E. Gortney stood up Combined Task Force 151 precisely because, as he put it, “Some navies in our coalition did not have the authority to conduct counter-piracy missions. The establishment of 151 will allow those nations to operate under the auspices of CTF 150, while allowing other nations to join CTF 151 to support our goal of deterring, disrupting and eventually bringing to justice the maritime criminals involved in piracy events.” Establishing Combined Task Force 151 to focus on the counter-piracy mission enabled Combined Task Force 150 to remain focused on security operations.

Admiral Gortney cautioned that although the new task force is a positive step, the efforts of coalition and international navies won’t solve the problem of piracy. Proactive measures by merchant mariners and efforts ashore by the international community also must be part of the equation, he declared.

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