

Battling Modern-Day Piracy off the Coast of Somalia

The European Union's Operation Atalanta

Movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean* may paint piracy as good, clean fun, but sadly, it is not. Since 2005, commercial shipping in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coast has been increasingly prey to modern-day pirates, who not only endanger cargo and crew, but also threaten the free movement of commerce and humanitarian aid. The EU battles such modern-day piracy through its first European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) naval operation, EU NAVFOR Somalia/Operation Atalanta.

Conducted in support of 2008 UN Security Council Resolutions calling on maritime nations to deploy naval vessels and military aircraft to fight piracy and armed robbery on the high seas, Operation Atalanta protects vulnerable vessels cruising off the Somali coast, including World Food Program vessels delivering food aid to displaced persons in Somalia. Since Operation Atalanta launched in December 2008, naval vessels from EU Member States have intercepted and detained more than 50 pirates and escorted dozens of merchant and aid ships to safety. Aid ships protected by the EU carry supplies to feed approximately 1.6 million Somalis every day.

Thirteen warships and three maritime patrol air surveillance aircraft are currently

assigned to Operation Atalanta. Military personnel involved in the operation can arrest, detain, and transfer persons who have committed—or are suspected of having committed—acts of piracy or armed robbery; they can seize pirate vessels, as well as ships which the pirates have captured, along with the goods on board. Suspects can be prosecuted either by an EU Member State or by Kenya, under a bilateral agreement signed with the EU in March 2009, giving the Kenyan authorities the right to prosecute alleged pirates.

The European naval force operates in a zone comprising the south of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and part of the Indian Ocean, which represents an area comparable to that of the Mediterranean. To ensure coordination with other naval forces fighting piracy in the region, Operation Atalanta is in constant contact with Combined Task Force 151, a U.S.-led coalition; the NATO Maritime Group; and Russian, Indian, Japanese, Malaysian, and Chinese vessels.

Operation Atalanta is funded jointly by the EU Member States, with contributions based on GDP. Common costs for supplying the force are borne by the contributing countries and established according to their involvement in the operation, with each country paying for its own deployment, logistical support, and salaries. Currently, Spain, Germany, France, Greece, Italy, and Sweden are making a permanent operational contribution; Norway (a non-EU country) joined the coalition in August. In the near



EU NAVFOR-Atalanta

future, Belgium and the Netherlands are also expected to participate.

Although Operation Atalanta was originally scheduled to conclude on December 13, 2009, in June the Council of the European Union agreed to extend the operation for an additional year, noting that piracy off the coast of Somalia was likely to remain a serious threat beyond the operation's original expiration date, and that early agreement on extending the operation would facilitate the necessary force generation.

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“Acts of piracy and armed robberies pose a serious threat to the lives of seafarers, the security of the shipping industry and the safety and security of coastal states.”

— European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, responsible for transport

European Security and Defense Policy

The EU's European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) enables the EU to develop its civilian and military capacities for crisis management and conflict prevention at international level, and to conduct operations that help maintain peace and international security in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

The EU and the Crisis in Somalia

Operation Atalanta is only one part of the global action conducted by the EU in the Horn of Africa in response to the political, security, and humanitarian implications of the Somali crisis. The broad involvement of all interested parties in rebuilding Somalia's institutional capacity and restoring law and order ashore is required because these are the root causes of piracy off the Somali coast.

As the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Somalia, the European Union is committed to the country's stabilization. The EU supports the Djibouti peace and reconciliation process facilitated by the UN, and is active in the diplomatic efforts deployed by the international community, in particular within the International Contact Group for Somalia. In its effort to support the peace process, the EU has called on all parties in Somalia to ease the suffering of the population and to work toward the restoration of security, stability, and development.

The EU also supports the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, in his tireless efforts to facilitate progress in the political process, and continues to engage with the Transitional Federal Government led by the new Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke.

The EU and its Member States financially support the African Union's military mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and measures to increase the efficiency of the Somali police force and to combat any abuse and serious violation of human rights.

- The EU's European Development Fund pledged €12 million to the Somali police force through the United Nations Development Program Rule of Law program.
- The EU pledged €60 million to AMISOM from the Africa Peace Facility, in addition to €35.5 million provided from 2007 to mid-2009.
- The EU provided €4.5 million under its Instrument for Stability to support AMISOM planning capacity.
- Between 2008 and 2013, the European Commission and the Member States committed more than €215 million for development aid to Somalia through the European Development Fund, with an emphasis on governance, education, and rural development.

Operation Atalanta has also provided the necessary resources to protect ships linked to deploying and sustaining AMISOM in the field.

In 2008, the number of people in need of humanitarian aid in Somalia nearly doubled from 1.8 million to 3.25 million at the end of the year, and the EU's multilateral humanitarian aid to the region increased from €12 million in 2007 to €45.8 million in 2008. EU Member States also make separate, bilateral contributions to Somalia.



EU NAVFOR-Atalanta safely escorts food aid convoy into Somalia

In July 2009, the Council of the European Union agreed to step up its promotion of peace and development in Somalia. EU efforts will continue to be closely coordinated with all relevant actors, in particular the UN and the African Union.

Europol and Piracy

Following a June 2009 meeting, Europol—the EU's law enforcement organization, which handles criminal intelligence—is developing a plan to exchange operational information and share best practices among EU countries affected by piracy on the high seas.

According to Europol director Rob Wainwright, “[Piracy] is an example of the new dimensional criminal threats which now confront international policing. They can be overcome by a better integration of our common efforts.”



EU Insight is published by the Delegation of the European Commission to the United States.

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ISSN: 1830-5059

Catalogue No: IQ-AB-09-05-EN-C

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Issue No. 32, August 2009

“Piracy is a symptom of the wider instability around the Horn of Africa, where fragile state institutions and poverty fuel organized crime; terrorist financing; and trafficking in people, drugs and small arms and light weapons. In its response, the EU tackled all aspects of the problem. We deployed an ESDP military mission... we started to work with Kenya to enhance their capacity to detain and try suspects. We are planning to strengthen the capacity of coastal states to undertake maritime surveillance. Longer-term development assistance will focus on state-building and strengthening the rule of law in Somalia.”

— Benita Ferrero-Waldner,
European Commissioner for External Relations
and European Neighborhood Policy

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