

Speakers note

Pim Bedet, Vice Admiral, Commander Northwood

Operational challenges of maritime cooperation during counter-piracy missions

More than 90% of the world trade is transported via the sea and the significance of seaborne trade can therefore not be overstated. Thus, safe and reliable shipping around the globe is of utmost importance and the Gulf of Aden (GoA) is a vital waterway for shipping, especially for oil from the Persian Gulf. Possibly the greatest challenge in protecting ships from piracy in the GoA and the Somali Basin is the sheer size of the operations area.

Currently, there are a number of actors that are engaged in Counter- Piracy in the GoA. Not only NATO and the EU, but also individual nations and other, sometimes recently formed Alliances. The fact that so many actors are working in the same area and ultimately with the same goal, to deter pirates from seizing and threatening commercial shipping, creates many challenges. Undoubtedly, the main challenge is the successful coordination of all counter piracy activities. These vary from building a common operational picture to intelligence sharing and data exchange and include de-confliction of tasks and different Rules of engagement. Also, there are areas such as engagement with regional actors and capability sharing where synergy might be gained if all actors are able to work together towards a common end.

NATO is extremely well suited to conduct a counter piracy mission. A proven Command Structure exists as well as trust between the nations, some of which have been a member of NATO for more than 60 years. There are standard Joint Operating procedures and there are "ready use" assets that are trained and available. Also, a proven intelligence network exists. NATO has been involved in combatting piracy in the region since 2007 when it first crossed the region during a deployment around Africa. Since the end of 2008, it has conducted one counter piracy mission in the region under the name Allied Provider and has presently been on station since March of 2009 with Operation Allied Protector. NATO has also planned an enhanced counter piracy mission that will include air and special forces components under the name Operation Ocean Shield. Once nations allocate units and issues such as legal arrangements have been solved, this operation can be executed at short notice"