

From the Outside Looking in: Creating Greater Maritime Visibility to Enhance Maritime Security



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Introduction

The theme of this year's Galle Dialogue is "Greater Maritime Visibility for Enhanced Maritime Security." This is an important topic for such a high-level gathering of the world's maritime leaders and I am honored to be a participant in this dialogue. As you may have noticed, the title of my presentation is "From the Outside Looking In: Creating Greater Maritime Visibility to Enhance Maritime Security".

In one respect, "From the outside looking in" refers to my personal perspective, as I am one of a relatively small number of speakers who does not come from a background in uniformed military service. That being said, unlike most civilians, I have actually had the opportunity to spend significant amounts of time at sea, in many cases aboard ships of the navies and coast guards represented here today. I've also had the opportunity to work alongside commanders of multinational maritime forces as they seek to fuse information, coordinate forces, collaborate across multiple inter-agencies, and reach out to local mariner communities to promote maritime security. As such, I'm not a complete outsider to the operational side of maritime security but my perspective may be somewhat outside the norm for this room.

But most importantly, the title of my presentation reflects my ambition to "reverse the lens" on maritime visibility and maritime security. Rather than focusing on the necessity of—and modalities for—creating shared visibility across navies and coast guards to bolster maritime security—which, of course, is critically important as has been articulately expressed by many of the speakers so far—I would like to address the impact of creating visibility of collective approaches to maritime security as a means to shape perceptions, change behaviors, and deter illicit activities amongst those that are bringing insecurity to the maritime environment.

Simply put, I would argue that there is great value in the observable presence of combined maritime forces in addressing maritime insecurity. That observable presence can come from ships at sea and aircraft overhead, engagement with maritime communities and maritime organizations, public outreach activities, demonstration events, and media engagement. My bottom line is that creating greater visibility of multinational maritime efforts can directly enhance maritime security. And I would offer that we should not "sell ourselves short" by focusing excessively on largely hidden intelligence and information sharing mechanisms and building proprietary networks and fusion centers. These are

1. <https://www.cna.org/indian-ocean>

important tools, of course, but being seen—both by those that would threaten maritime security and by those that look to you to be producers of maritime security—is also a very important tool.

Four Examples of Maritime Visibility

Let me offer you a few examples of cases in which the visibility of the multinational maritime effort had a direct impact on maritime security. In fact, at CNA we study the cross-border and borderless threats of terrorism and piracy in the maritime domain in our Program on Transnational Challenges. For two of the cases that I will offer, many in the room might have actually participated in these operations so I won't spend too much time on the details. For the other two, there may be some of you who are a bit less familiar with the details, but I suspect you'll begin to see some similarities.

As an academic, I appreciate that it may be difficult to establish a definitive cause and effect relationship between specific visible naval actions and particular decisions made by individual actors in the maritime environment (especially the decision "not to act"), but I am confident that there are strong correlations between visible, collective naval actions and observable changes in behavior by actors in the maritime environment in each of these cases.

1. Multinational Counter Piracy efforts off the Coast of Somalia

In 2007 and 2008 piracy events off the coast of Somalia began to increase dramatically. In 2009, the U.S. Navy, its regional partners, and several other countries from beyond the region established the Combined Maritime Forces counter-piracy task force, CTF151.

The resultant multinational effort created visibility in three important ways.

1. It sparked multinational cooperation amongst navies in a clear, open, publically visible, and collaborative fashion. The CTF151 Mission is to disrupt piracy at sea and to engage with

regional and other partners to build capacity and improve relevant capabilities in order to protect global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation.

It is a multinational force with rotating command every 3-6 months. Force flow constantly changing with vessels, aircraft, and personnel. It works in conjunction with EUNAVFOR op ATALANTA and NATO Operation Ocean Shield (while that was active) and a host of other nations, including Brunei, Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore.

2. It created mechanisms for promoting direct outreach, collaboration and coordination amongst those countries that are either not members of the CTF151 construct, other international naval groupings, such as NATO or the EUNAVFOR, international organizations such as the IMO, and the shipping industry by creating the SHADE (Shared Awareness and Deconfliction) process:²

a. SHADE meetings: these meetings offered a mechanism to deconflict as well as to share and improve tactics. It was the catalyst for creating the MSTC. States operating independently soon joined: China, India, Japan, Russia, and South Korea.

b. The Mercury System- developed as a result of the SHADE meetings, it's an electronic information sharing platform, aka the "Facebook of counter-piracy." Allowed the real-time exchange of the positions of assets and the speedy dissemination of incident reports.

c. Private Sector: NATO cooperated closely with industry via NATO's Shipping Center. The Center shared with the shipping industry the evolving nature of the piracy threat. Helped create the best management practices for industry to deter Somali piracy.

3. It created publically facing, highly

2. <https://maritime-executive.com/blog/ocean-shield-achieved-its-mission>

visible means to engage the commercial maritime community, civilian officials and the media, including

a. Creating the Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC) through the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. “The purpose of this corridor is to provide a recommended merchant traffic route around which Naval Forces can focus their presence and surveillance efforts and the Combined Maritime Force headquarters... recommended that all vessels use the MSTC to benefit from military presence and surveillance.”³

b. Developing and providing “Best practices” guidelines adhered to by the commercial shipping community, which include

- Maintaining a proactive 24 hour lookout
- Reporting suspicious activities
- Removing access ladders
- Protecting the lowest points of access
- Using deck lighting, netting, razor wire, electrical fencing, fire hoses, and surveillance and detection equipment
- Engages in evasive maneuvering and speed during attack
- Joining group transits

I would suggest that this formula for a multinational approach that emphasized visibility of that effort across the navies of the world, to the political leaders of concerned nations, to international organizations, to the shipping community, and yes to the pirates, was largely

successful. As you may recall, there were no successful piracy attacks off the coast of Somalia from May 2012-March 2017.⁴ In a 2016 article in which The Economist reported that high-seas piracy has hit a two-decade low, the article’s author noted that “the large naval presence today deters all but the most ruthless buccaneers.”⁵

2. Multinational Counter Piracy/Sea Robbery efforts in the Straits of Malacca

Back in the 2003-2004 timeframe, the nations along the Singapore Straits faced a similarly vexing piracy and sea robbery problem. In response, three regional nations: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore established the Malacca Straits Patrol Framework which was later joined by Thailand.⁶ This collaborative effort had three primary pillars.

Malacca Straits Sea Patrol: launched in 2004 to enhance security in the Straits of Malacca, participating navies conduct coordinated sea patrols while sharing information between ships and their naval operation centers.

“Eyes in the Sky” Combined Maritime Air Patrols: combined maritime air patrol over the straits to reinforce sea patrols with air surveillance. “Using maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) from each country, each MPA carries a Combined Mission Patrol Team of one Mission Commander from the host country and officers from the participating states.”

MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG): The Malacca Straits Patrol Information System (MSP-IS) is an information-sharing platform developed to support the air and sea patrols. “MSP-IS is managed by the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) and comprises an Open and Analyzed Shipping Information System (OASIS) and Sense-Making Analysis and Research Tool (SMART). With the MSP-IS, air and sea assets deployed on scene can quickly pass information

3 <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/maritime-security-transit-corridor-mstc/>

4 <http://www.naval-technology.com/features/featureoperation-ocean-shield-mission-success-5776043/>

5 <https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/09/daily-chart-1>

6 https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2016/apr/21apr16_nr/21apr15_fs.html

7 https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2016/apr/21apr16_nr/21apr15_fs.html

of an unfolding incident to all Monitoring and Action Agencies (MAAs) on a real-time basis.”⁷

This approach also had significant visibility designed into it. It was clear from the outset that member nations saw value in drawing attention to MSP events as a prospective deterrent to pirates. As the Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak noted upon the initiation of the Eyes in the Sky program, “Hopefully this will send a very strong message to the international community that we are serious about maintaining the security of the Malacca Strait.”⁸ Ten years into the program, a recent Singaporean Ministry of Defense news release that quoted two Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) officers in which the Ministry notes that, “Like policemen patrolling a neighbourhood, the MSSP allows the nations to show their presence in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, thereby discouraging sea robbers from attacking commercial vessels.” The release went on to quote a RSM officer as saying “Our presence plays a part in deterrence. If we are around, the small boats wouldn’t dare to do anything since it’s a government vessel with weapons on board.”⁹ Whenever there is a significant exercise, training event, or operation, the public affairs bureaus in the member nations draw attention to this maritime security cooperation.¹⁰

These collective actions by the four littoral states of the Straits have drawn wide attention. In fact, in 2008 a U.S. Naval officer at the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey wrote a thesis on Maritime Security Cooperation in the Straits of Malacca.¹¹ And this high visibility multi-national counter piracy effort also found some measurable success. According to the International Chamber of Commerce’s International Maritime Bureau (IMB), the number of pirate attacks in the Malacca Straits dropped from 38 in 2004 to just one in 2011.¹²

3. Counter illegal migration efforts in the Aegean

Another compelling example of visible multinational maritime operations positively impacting maritime security can be seen in the NATO operations in the Aegean designed to counter illegal migrant transits from Turkey to Greece. In 2016, NATO reported that their operations in the Aegean involved 50 ships from 15 nations resulted in significant reductions in illegal migrant traffic. Unlike the EUNAVFOR ships operating in the central Mediterranean under OPERATION SOPHIA, whose ships are tasked with boarding, searching and seizing boats in the central Mediterranean, the NATO force makes no direct contact with smugglers’ vessels. Instead, it contributes to the disruptions of illegal migrant flows in two ways:

First is by reporting them to either the Greek or Turkish coast guards or Frontex, the European border agency.¹³ Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO General Secretary noted that “the NATO presence provides operational, concrete support to the efforts of the coast guards, the Greek and Turkish coast guards, and to Frontex...we have seen a very substantial reduction in the numbers of illegal crossings [as a result].” The NATO presence, according to Stoltenberg adds value because many of the first sightings have been done by NATO vessels, partly because they are able to operate in both Turkish and Greek territorial waters.”¹⁴ As the 2016 Commander of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, German Rear Admiral Joerg Klein, noted in the spring of last year “what we’ve observed here in the past few months is a clearly improved, a really visibly improved cooperation between the forces deployed here in the territorial waters.”¹⁵

The second is through presence and

8 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4241894.stm>

9 https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resourcelibrary/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/features/2016/may16_cs.html#.WdPw6WYJA

10 For example, see

https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2008/mar/28mar08_nr.html

11 Available at <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a483524.pdf>

12 <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/04/24/malacca-straits-piracy-down-due-to-sea-air-patrols/#lAKtUH50xHA2apGf.99>

13 <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-nato-aegean-patrols-helping-stem-migrant-tide-2016may27-story.html>

14 <http://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-seeks-end-to-nato-patrols-in-aegean-sea-migration-crisis-refugees/>

15 <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-nato-aegean-patrols-helping-stem-migrant-tide-2016may27-story.html>

visibility that serves as a deterrent. In response to a request by the Greek government, the United States Navy agreed to send a ship to participate in NATO's patrols of the Aegean Sea. The US Navy deployed the USNS Grapple, a salvage and dive support ship. Although the USN, like its NATO counterparts, did not have an explicit mission to interdict migrants, visible presence provided NATO the opportunity to contribute to deterring illegal and destabilizing activities at sea. The then USSIXTHFLT Commander, VADM Jamie Foggo encouraged the Grapple's crew to find creative ways to deter illegal action at sea in the Aegean.¹⁶ VADM Foggo reported that the presence of the Grapple drove a precipitous drop in migrant transits across the Aegean in areas patrolled by the US salvage ship.¹⁷

4. Counter narcotics smuggling efforts in the Caribbean

A final example is Operation Martillo in the Caribbean. Operation Martillo is a combined U.S., European, and Western Hemisphere nation effort targeting illicit trafficking routes in coastal waters along the Central American isthmus.¹⁸ The Operation is designed to promote the visibility of the sustained presence of multinational sea, air and law enforcement in known smuggling lanes.

In support of the operation, U.S., partner nation and allied forces' ships and aircraft provide persistent presence in select maritime zones.¹⁹ According to U.S. Coast Guard Rear Adm. Christopher J. Tomney, director of JIATF South, "Since the inauguration of Martillo, the task force has increased its awareness of illicit trafficking patterns, partner nations have supported 50 percent of all interdictions and disruptions operations and tactical communications

have improved, to include coordination and interaction efforts". Admiral Tomney also noted that "While the operation has led to an increase in seizures and disruptions, the most positive outcome from the very beginning has been the increase in participation of partner nation forces in the overall goal of countering transnational organized crime."²⁰ In the 6 months following its inception, JIATF South recorded a 46 metric ton drop in the flow of illicit drugs in the Central American corridor compared to the same period the year before.^[1] In a statement before the House Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security in 2012, RADM Charles Michel, then Director of JIATF South, attributed the dramatic decrease in trafficking flows to "the presence of U.S. ships and aircraft, the efforts of our law enforcement partners and those of our allies and partner nations in the region."²¹ The interdictions conducted under Operation Martillo also provide participating nations the opportunity to draw attention to the successes of the combined effort to important domestic audiences and importantly, to send a deterrent message to traffickers. Participating nations have the opportunity to announce multi-million dollar seizures of narcotics, the interdiction and seizure of smuggling vessels, and the arrests of hundreds of smugglers as part of an ongoing campaign to highlight the organizational and personal toll of illegal operations in the maritime environment. Images of military and law enforcement capabilities—with helicopters, fast boats and navy and coast guard ships in action, piers covered with seized narcotics, and row after row of frightened and cowering smugglers pepper the websites of partner nation governments, provide compelling imagery for reporters, and offer uniformed and civilian officials to make public statements about pervasive presence and effectiveness of the combined force.²²

16 See, for example, CBS news clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFq5Zc-0Spc>

17 Discussion with author, Arlington VA, September, 2017

18 <http://www.southcom.mil/Media/Special-Coverage/Operation-Martillo/>

19 <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/708314/operation-martillo-still-hammering-away-at-illicit-trafficking/>

20 <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/708314/operation-martillo-still-hammering-away-at-illicit-trafficking/>

[1] <https://homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony-Michel.pdf>

21 <https://homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony-Michel.pdf>

22 See, for example, <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/operation-martillo-us-coast-guard-law-enforcement-teams-seize-more-32-tons-cocaine>

Conclusion

In each of these four cases, the visible presence of a cooperative group of nations combining their efforts at sea, in the air, and ashore contributed directly to maritime security. In each of these cases there were multiple actors and agencies coming together to collaborate in promoting maritime security. In each of these cases there was a deliberate effort to let others know that such collaboration was purposeful and sustained. Admittedly there are times when combined maritime operations are best conducted out of the limelight, over the horizon, or behind a veil of secrecy. However, I would argue that when it comes to maritime security, visibility matters and “more visibility is better”.

In conclusion, let me wrap up by quoting an observation from our former Secretary of Navy, Ray Mabus. At the 2016 meeting of the Surface Navy Association he noted “The most important accomplishment that we’ve had in the almost seven years...is our continuing ability to provide presence... [it] reassures our allies and deters adversaries. There is no ‘next best thing’ to being there.”²³ I would say that when it comes to maritime security, the same rule applies. There is nothing more valuable than being there— and being seen as being there. A visible, multinational, collaborative, combined presence assures friends, partners, regional states, and the broader maritime community and can help deter, dissuade, and even defeat those that would contribute to insecurity in the maritime environment

23 <https://breakingdefense.com/2016/01/navys-dilemma-what-kind-of->