First General Assembly

Combating maritime piracy and
reducing tensions in the Red Sea

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Issue: Combating maritime piracy and reducing tensions in the Red Sea

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Introduction

Maritime piracy and tensions in the Red Sea have become a cause for international concern and United Nations intervention due to the vast implications which it carries concerning international trade, regional stability, and global maritime security. This research report examines the scale and nature of maritime piracy in the Red Sea - outlining key parties, significant events, and the role of the United Nations and other international cooperation in previous attempts to comprehensively address the issue. Furthermore, this report proposes potential solutions and explanations to the effects of previous efforts to mitigate piracy and tensions in the Red Sea.

Definition of Key Terms

Maritime Piracy

Maritime Piracy is defined, for the purposes of this research report, to be 'the plundering, hijacking, or detention of a ship in international waters (Rand).

Red Sea

The Red Sea is a 'narrow strip of water extending southeastward from Suez, Egypt, for about 1,200 miles (1,930km) to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects with the Gulf of Aden and thence with the Arabian Sea' (Britannica). The countries with significant physical connections to the Red Sea will be considered as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Yemen. It is to be noted that Israel and Jordan also have physical connections to the Red Sea through sovereign ports.

International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

The International Maritime Organisation, which will henceforth be referred to as 'the IMO', is 'the United Nations specialised agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine and atmospheric pollution by ships.' (IMO). This agency was created following a 1948 UN conference in Geneva, Switzerland with a large place in the global development of measures to combat maritime piracy.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR)

United Nations Security Council Resolutions are decisions made by the Security Council (SC) of the United Nations which are binding on all United Nations member states. Several resolutions, which will be spoken of throughout this research report, have contributed to the addressing of maritime security and Red Sea tensions, particularly off the Somali coast.

Bab el-Mandeb Strait

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a 'strait between Arabia to the northeast and Africa to the southwest which connects the Reb Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean to the southeast' (Britannica). The Bab el-Mandeb Strait plays a significant strategic role in international shipping operations as well as, correspondingly, a significant location of piracy as a 'chokepoint' in the passage of the Red Sea (National Geographic).

General Overview

The International Community has seen the far-stretching consequences of ongoing tensions and piracy within the Red Sea region. This section will detail several sub-effects of this ongoing matter.

Strategic Importance of the Red Sea Region

The Red Sea Region hosts significant geopolitical and economic importance to all major parties as defined in the subsequent section. Spillover effects are also lobbied on all sea-faring nations in the largest scale, particularly due to the importance of the Red Sea region on international maritime trade. The Red Sea Region is a vital route for global trade with the previously

defined Bab el-Mandeb Strait being a critical chokepoint for such maritime traffic. Movements of trade in this region can have substantial implications for global trade, energy markets, and security concerns within the region.

Nature of Maritime Piracy in the Red Sea

The Red Sea Region and adjacent waters, including the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea have seen varying degrees of piracy throughout previous centuries - with the early 2000s witnessing a surge which is still felt in an ongoing sense. This piracy originally began in Somalia, driven by economic and governmental instability (Karawita). Pirates in the Red Sea utilise a tactic which includes small and fast boats to intercept and board larger commercial vessels. Oil tankers, cargo ships, and fishing vessels are the most prominent targets, with their crews being held for ransom. More sophisticated methods are continually being adapted (Karawita).

Driving Forces of Piracy in the Red Sea

Many coastal communities in the Red Sea regions, especially within the borders of Somalia, suffer from extreme poverty and a thorough lack of economic prosperity. The opportunity to be freed from such poverty is a common driving force into piracy-based roles, despite the illegality of such operations. This is particularly rampant due to weak governance and inadequate maritime law enforcement in countries including Somalia and Yemen, which have allowed for a boost in Red Sea Piracy. The lack of effective national governance due to the presence of internal conflicts further exacerbates the issue of regional piracy (Kawaita).

Impact of Piracy on the Red Sea Region

Both economic disruptions and security issues have largely been both to blame, and impacts, of Red Sea piracy. Significant disruptions to international shipping routes have been recorded which has caused increased costs of maritime insurance and increased costs of vessel security for shipping companies. Higher costs and shipping times for consumers has also been a recorded result. Such piracy and tensions have also contributed to regional instability and complicated international relations.

Examples of such disruptions can be found in the 'Timeline of Events' section, such as the piracy of the MV Faina, MV Sirius Star, and more. Incidents such as these involving American,

European, and Asian shipping vessels, have compounded to represent the international widespread consequences of piracy and tensions in the Red Sea. Such an International maritime presence in this region has expanded the consequences of these actions into non-proximate markets such as that of the United States, European Union, and China, which have seen loss of product in markets, a delayed timeframe of international business, and an overall force of division between a globalising market. This international consequential value is an accrediting argument for swift international action to resolve ongoing tension and maritime crimes.

Major Parties Involved

Yemen

Yemen has been involved in and affected by Red Sea piracy and the corresponding tensions within the region. A particular area to note with the effects on **Yemen** are the country's involvement with piracy in the Red Sea, orchestrated by Houthi forces. As of November 19, 2023, Iran-backed Houthi forces began attacking shipping vessels affiliated with Israel passing through the Red Sea. Since then, at least 40 vessels have been attacked (Al Jazeera).

Somalia

Somalia has historically been home to significant amounts of Red Sea piracy organisations. This has led to internal security challenges due to Somalia's challenges in addressing the large-scale issue, causing trouble in security and governance (UNODC). This has been attributed to economic strain and international isolation as a consequence of this piracy.

Eritrea

Piracy in the Red Sea has directly affected **Eritrea** due to the presence of minimal other land and water borders that are *not* located within the Red Sea. This has led to economic disruption within Eritrea, where the exchange of commodities, economic development, and humanitarian aid has been inhibited (Britannica).

Djibouti

Djibouti is a country of significant strategic importance when addressing conflict, tensions, and piracy within the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This conflict has led to **Djibouti** hosting a significant international presence within its borders, including hosting military bases from the United States, China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. Countries such as France and Italy also hold various military investments within the country in efforts to combat *piracy in the Red Sea*. While Djibouti has seen similar security drawbacks to many other countries in the region, the country has also seen economic benefits from the presence of international forces (IMO).

International Naval Forces

Various **International Naval Forces** have been deployed to maintain security in the Red Sea from a piracy standpoint. Coalitions have been established such as the Combined Maritime Forces (**CMF**), the European Union Naval Force (**EU NAVFOR**) which has created *Operation Atalanta*, and Operation Ocean Shield (**OOS**), created by NATO, and have been deployed for peacekeeping operations in the Red Sea. The roles of these International Naval Forces include the responsibility to patrol the Sea, provide escorts for vulnerable ships, and respond to piracy incidents (EUNAVFOR) (Royal Navy).

Global Shipping Industry

The **Global Shipping Industry** has been fundamentally affected by the widespread presence of piracy and tensions within the Red Sea, as commercial ships and their crews are the primary targets of piracy within the Red Sea. International shipping companies have advocated for more stringent security measures within the region and have taken security measures such as the implementation of private armed guards and adopting evasive manoeuvres in attempts to thwart pirate attacks. The International Chamber of Shipping (**ICS**) has perhaps the most notable industry representative voice advocating for such measures (ICS) (Tseng).

United Nations

The **United Nations** has been a key international organisation that has been

discussing and addressing the issues of *piracy and tensions within the Red Sea*. This includes

the IMO and Security Council, General Assembly, and other designated forums. The United

Nation's Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has also played a substantial role in supporting

regional stability and creating legal frameworks to combat piracy (UNODC) (UN) (Boamah).

Timeline of Key Events

2005-2008: A recorded surge in Red Sea pirate attacks. In 2008 alone, there were 111 reported attacks in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali Coast (IMB, 2008). International responses begin.

June 2008: The UN Security Council adopts resolution 1816, allowing international naval forces to enter Somali territorial waters to combat piracy. (United Nations Security Council, 2008)

September 2008: The MV Faina is hijacked while carrying tanks and assorted military hardware. The ship is released following a $3.2m USD ransom payment. (BBC News)

October 2008: The European Union launches Operation Atalanta (EU NAVFOR) to protect vulnerable vessels and deter piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

November 2008: The MV Sirius Star oil tanker is captured by Somali pirates. The ship and crew are released following a $3m USD ransom payment. (Reuters)

2009: NATO launches Operations Allied Protector and Ocean Shield to disrupt and deter piracy and to escort aid vessels of the World Food Programme into Somalian territory. (NATO, Allied Protector) (NATO, Operation Shield)

2011: Over 200 pirate attacks are reported in 2011, with more than 30 ships hijacked. This includes the MV Savina Caylyn and MV Irene SL, both oil tankers which carried a combined $300m USD of crude oil. (IMB, 2011) (The Guardian)

2012: The United Nations adopts Resolution 2077, renewing international efforts to combat piracy and emphasising the need for comprehensive solutions, including addressing root causes such as poverty and governance. (United Nations Security Council, 2012)

Since 2012, piracy in the Red Sea has been decreasing significantly. However, ongoing vigilance has been maintained - with a new focus on improving governance and economic stability in coastal areas including Somalia to address the root causes of Red Sea piracy. (IMB, 2021) (UNODC, 2023)

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has launched **five** significant resolutions on this topic which include the

following:

- Resolution 1816, June 2, 2008 (Resolution 1816)

Authorised international naval forces to enter Somali territorial waters to combat piracy.

- Resolution 1846, December 2, 2008 (Resolution 1846)

Extended Resolution 1816 and encouraged nations to deploy naval vessels to actively combat piracy.

- Resolution 1851, December 16, 2008 (Resolution 1851)

Allowed international forces to take action on Somali territory to suppress piracy.

- Resolution 1897, November 30, 2009 (Resolution 1897)

Called for nations to prosecute captured pirates and improve judicial capacities to handle piracy cases.

- Resolution 2077, November 21, 2012 (Resolution 2077)

Renewed prior authorisations and emphasised the need for long-term solutions.

Note: All summaries were generated based on legislation within such official copies. It is recommended to read these resolutions personally to understand specifics and meaning pertaining to each sovereign nation.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

International Naval Patrols

The deployment of multinational naval forces has been significant in the determent of pirate attacks. Operations such as EU NAVFOR, Operation Atalanta, and Operation Ocean Shield have been pivotal and largely attributed to lowering successful piracy numbers within the Red Sea since 2012. (EU NAVFOR) (Operation Atalanta) (Operation Ocean Shield)

United Nations Resolutions || Accompanying Legal Framework

The United Nations, as outlined above, has implemented various measures to combat Red Sea piracy. These measures have been successful in the way of allowing for International Naval Patrols to succeed *legally*. The legal frameworks that were created by these resolutions have also been quite successful in allowing countries such as Kenya and the Seychelles to facilitate the prosecution of captured pirates.

Private Security Measures

While the appraisal on such a matter is complex, it is largely agreed that Private Security Measures on vessels have contributed to lowering piracy rates in the Red Sea but have not been extensive enough to which point that vessels can entirely defend themselves against growingly innovative pirate forces.

Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Best Management Practices, which are guidelines implemnted by the shipping industry to mitigate piracy risks, include measures such as increased vigilance, secure anchorage areas, and installation of physical barriers on ships, and more. These measures have been rather effective to preventing boardings and hijackings, alas it may be appraised that these new tactics are being adjusted accordingly to by pirates.

Possible Solutions

The Establishment of Joint Task Forces

Establishing joint task forces with participation from any willing regional or international navies may prove effective in establishing coordinated and strategic patrol of piracy hotspots to prevent further piracy and proving as a deterrent for tensions. Such task forces ideally may include countries which have not yet established formal naval operations in the Red Sea.

Support for Economic Development and Stability

Establishing investment for coastal communities, particularly in Yemen and Somalia, could provide economic opportunity in these areas which would turn many away from the dangerous and illegal business of piracy and instead contribute to development within their respective nations. With international support for such measures, this could provide strong motivation for many to leave piracy behind.

International Peacekeeping Action in Yemen

As one of the primary homelands of pirates in the Red Sea, the stability of Yemen's economy, government, and security situation could meaningfully address the root causes of Yemeni pirate action, providing safer business within Yemen and discouraging the acts of piracy. United Nations peacekeeping forces may endeavour to intervene in ongoing Yemeni conflicts in seek of peace and prosperity in the nation, reducing tensions and piracy if executed successfully.

International Recognition of Somaliland

With a separated Somalia and Somaliland nations, ongoing conflict may be reduced and both Somalia and Somaliland will gain an opportunity to elect representative governments which can address these issues with a more comprehensive national focus in mind. With this division, both countries can proceed to focusing on stability-centric approaches to governance which can provide development away from piracy industries. With Somaliland's national attachment to Somalia, the territory is losing International credibility which harms their economy and diplomatic relations which, in turn, harms Somalia as a whole. With international recognition of the Somaliland territory, the International Community may see a decrease in hostilities, increase in local development, and decrease in overall piracy.

Enhanced International Legal Cooperation

Encouraging international cooperation in legal matters, especially extradition agreements, can ensure that pirates are prosecuted fully for their crimes regardless of where they were captured.

Enhanced Community Education and Involvement

Addressing this issue with local matters, the United Nations can choose to allocate resources to education and awareness campaigns in coastal regions to inform communities about the dangers and consequences of piracy. These campaigns can promote new paths for civilians away from piracy. Similarly, the United Nations may provide local communities with resources to establish community watch programs and reporting systems for suspicious activities. Empowering citizens to take part in security measures can establish a national identity against piracy through a sense of ownership and responsibility.

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