Research Report

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Forum: General Assembly First Committee
Issue: Piracy off the coast of Somalia

Position: Chair

Introduction

A Sri Lankan vessel was on the route from Djibouti to Somalia when it was hijacked by Somali pirates, in March 2017. The ship sent a distress signal on Monday evening, saying it was being approached by high-speed boats. This attack marked an important date in the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia, as similar acts had not taken place since 2012.

Piracy has always been a great problem, especially in Somalia after the civil war erupted. Lots of local citizens, especially fishermen, lost financial stability and started illegal acts, usually with a financial motive. This grew into a bigger problem, with the attacks and hijacks of foreign vessels as main consequence. As of right now, piracy off the coast of Somalia is still an ongoing issue with lots of unnecessary attacks.

Definition of Key Terms

Piracy
Piracy can be defined in several ways, but in this issue it is defined as "the practice of attacking and robbing ships at sea.[1]" This generally includes hijacking vessels, shooting at vessels, taking the crew hostage and demanding large ransoms.

Somali Civil War
The Somali Civil War is a war that has been fought in Somalia since the late 1980's, when the Somali Armed Forces began engaging various armed rebel groups after resistance to the Siad Barre government. It has been ongoing for over 20 years and several parties have joined the conflict, including various terrorist groups like ISIL and al-Shabaab. The conflict has caused around 500.000 casualties and left more than a million people displaced.[2]

General Overview

Piracy off the coast of Somalia started roughly during the second phase of the Somali Civil War, around 2000. The absence of an effective national coast guard led to the exploitation and invasion of fishing grounds by foreign ships. Together with the dumping of illegal waste in the area, this led to the diminishment of the local catch, causing lots of local fishing communities to get in trouble, who responded by forming armed groups and hijacking commercial vessels. This quickly grew into a lucrative trade and acts of piracy have since then started, with financial gain as the main motive.

This issue has caused a lot of problems for several years, until acts of piracy began decreasing around 2012, when several naval forces began fighting piracy in the region. However, warnings have been made that piracy could return in 2015. The hijacking of the Sri Lankan vessel in March 2017 is a proof that the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia has not yet come to an end and it's still pressing.

Major Parties Involved

Somali Pirates and coastal communities

The Somali pirates are the main party involved in this issue. These people, mostly ex-fishermen, have turned to piracy with a financial motive, in order to improve their living as this worsened in most cases during the Somali civil war.

Most of coastal communities in Somalia support piracy, as these communities were dependant on the activity of fishing before and have, since this became more difficult during the civil war, experienced a decrease of income and wealth. It is being said that the pirates are the major economic influx of the livelihoods of these communities, as a whole trade is emerging around the logistics to provide for ships and pirates when they are in port. It is also rumoured that parts of the ransom payments are being re-invested into the coastal communities. Thus, the communities have a great deal of interest in protecting these pirates.[9]

Federal Government of Somalia

The current government of Somalia has existed since 2012, when the interim mandate of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia ended.[7] However, even though the government is recognised by the international community, it is still not being seen as having a central power, as there are several regions in Somalia that are striving for independence and have proclaimed their own government.

The government is facing many challenges as the civil war is still ongoing, of which the most pressing issues are those of Islamic terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab.[8]

Effective actions against piracy have not yet been taken by the government, mostly because of a lack of a central power and the urge of other prioritised issues.

Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

Combined Maritime Forces is a multi-national naval partnership between 32 countries, which exists to promote security, stability and prosperity across approximately 3.2 million square miles of international waters, including the region around Somalia.

Its main focus areas are defeating terrorism and piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment.[4]

CMF is comprised of three combined task forces (CTF): CTF 150, which promotes maritime security and counter-terrorism[5]; CTF 151, of which its main focus is to counter piracy[6] and CTF 152 for Arabian Gulf security and cooperation. CTF 150 and CTF 151 play a particular big role in this issue, as they operate primarily in the Indian Ocean, around Somalia.

Timeline of Events

2000	Second phase of Somali Civil War: piracy off the coast of Somalia started
7 October 2008	UN Security Council resolution 1838 is adopted
March 2017	A Sri Lankan vessel is hijacked by Somali pirates

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

As stated in the section 'Major Parties Involved', a naval partnership called Combine Maritime Forces (CMF) created in order to defeat terrorism, prevent piracy, encourage regional cooperation and promote a safe maritime environment. More about this partnership can be read in the section 'Major Parties Involved'. This naval partnership, amongst naval forces by other countries such as India, has proven to be effective in disrupting acts of piracy in inter alia the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. However, it has proven to be very hard for naval forces to cover all of the water surrounding Somalia. Even if CMF or other international vessels were able to cover a big part of the water, pirates have shifted their area of operation to areas where the naval forces were not present.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution would be launching pre-emptive and preventive attacks in order to physically disable the Somali pirates to proceed their work. This could include destroying their boats or confiscating their weapons, by air strikes or other special-operations raids. However, this might lead to a growing enmity towards the parties that launch such attacks – with in the worst case an increase of terrorist groups, and might not help the situation at all.

Privatising the risk by making merchant ship-owners employ on-board security guards and pay their own insurance premiums might be a possible solution, but it is unlikely to work. Ship-owners say that simply paying the pirates' ransoms is a much more efficient and safe solution, seeing that armed resistance might also pose a higher risk to the ship, the cargo and the crew.[10]

Another possible solution might still be creating a more efficient naval partnership or taskforce primarily focused on the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia. However, this might be hard as an effective partnership has already been created – the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) – and several international vessels are already patrolling the area as well. This solution will only work if the vessels are able to cover an area as big

as the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Gulf and part of the Indian Ocean.

The most effective solution should be sought in the root of the problem, which is the decrease of wealth of the fishing communities after international vessels started exploiting the fishing areas during the second phase of the Somali civil war. Thus, these communities should be aided in a way that they will not turn to piracy for financial gain. The government could give them other opportunities in new job areas, or make sure that they can continue the act of fishing. For this, the Somali government should have a central power and should see piracy as a pressing issue in the country.

Useful documents

- UN Security Council resolution 1838 (S/RES/1838): https://undocs.org/S/RES/1838(2008)

Appendix/Appendices

[1] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/piracy
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somali_Civil_War
[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piracy_off_the_coast_of_Somalia
[4] https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/
1.https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-150-maritime-security/
[6] https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Government_of_Somalia
[8] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094503
[9] https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2009-04-16-voa47-68733422/409931.html
[10] https://www.forbes.com/2009/04/10/somalia-navy-hostage-opinions-contributors-pirates.html