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European Union's Role in the Maritime Security in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The European Union depends on safe oceans for economic development, free trade, transport, energy security, tourism and a good marine environment. Maritime security stresses the importance of protecting the maritime domain from numerous threats, including disputes between states and various forms of transnational crime, but also the need to ensure a good order at sea, which is mandatory for the well-being and prosperity of the citizens. This paper aims to analyze the global maritime security production strategy followed by the European Union in Africa in the last decade and how it has influenced the protection of its member states' interests in two of the most relevant maritime regions – the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. We argue that the EU has, in recent years, become a relevant global co-producer of maritime security in Africa and has even sought to strengthen its role in this area.

Introduction

The sea has been relevant to humankind over the centuries, and it is the largest biosphere on the planet. It generates about half of the oxygen we need, absorbs nearly 25% of all carbon dioxide emissions (and captures 90% of the additional heat produced by such emissions), produces important living resources (with fish constituting a significant animal protein consumed by populations) and provides a substantial set of mineral resources, above all energy, which has been fundamental to the global economic development (United Nations, 2023). About two-thirds of the world's oil and gas supply is either extracted at sea or transported by sea, and up to 99% of global data flows are transmitted through undersea cables (European Commission, 2023:1). But the sea is also the connector par excellence between the different continents since it occupies almost 70% of the surface of the earth, 64% of which is high seas – a relevant set of maritime areas that are not under the authority of any State. In addition, almost 90% of international trade is conducted by the sea – 75% of which passes through canals and straits, making it an attractive target for groups of pirates and armed robbers (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2011).

The importance of the sea can also be seen through the fact that several scholars have dedicated themselves, especially throughout the present century, to the study of its different dimensions. In this sense, it is noteworthy that Steinberg (2001) noted that the sea has been a crucial area for the resources that sustain contemporary life. Till (2009) considered that the sea has been the basis for the prosperity and security of humanity. Kraska (2011) noted, in turn, that the sea was essential for the military tool (in terms of manoeuvre and strategic mobility) and an important vector for migration, smuggling and various illicit traffics and that the history of humanity can be read as a

permanent attempt to dominate the sea. Sloggett (2014) stressed that a secure maritime environment was a vital ingredient for the success of the global economy, and Bueger and Edmunds (2017) referred to the sea as a stage for the projection of geopolitical power, military disputes, a source of specific threats or as a mean that enables various phenomena (for instance, from colonialism to globalization).

The European Union (EU) is heavily dependent on maritime security not only in the spaces within its maritime borders but also in regions far away – since they are considered vital to its own security and of its member states (MS). And the reasons are easy to understand: 90% of its external and 40% of its internal trade is seaborne; around half of its population lives in areas close to the coast; close to 40% of gross domestic product is generated in maritime regions, and 75% of the Union's external trade volume is carried out by sea; the vast majority of oil imports that the EU needs (roughly 90%) use maritime transport; the EU is among the largest importers (3rd) and producers (5th) of marine living resources; over 70 % of the Union's external borders are maritime, and hundreds of millions of passengers transit through its ports every year; finally, of the 27 MS, 22 have coastal areas, representing a large part of the Union's external borders (Pejsova, 2019: 1; Jacques Delors European Information Centre, 2023).

The concept of maritime security emerged in the post-Cold War period, with the appearance of a new (called "broad") vision of security studies, as opposed to the traditional (called "narrow") state-centred vision. Several theorists – among them, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (the most iconic authors of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies) – understood that the concept of security had remained too subordinated, for instance, when compared to the concepts of power and peace and created a new framework of analysis that examined the distinctiveness of security dynamics in five different sectors. Thus, to the political and military sectors followed by the traditionalists (who were in favour of narrowing the concept), those theorists then added, to the newly constructed framework of analysis, the new sectors: economic, societal and environmental. Under these circumstances, in addition to military threats, the new concept of maritime security came to include, also, non-military threats. In this new vision, the military sector concerns relations of forced coercion; the political sector deals with relations of authority; the economic sector focuses on relations of trade, production and finance; the societal sector focuses on relations of collective identity; and the environmental sector is limited to relations between human activity and the planetary biosphere (Buzan et al., 1998: 1-3).

Several theorists have been dedicating themselves to the phenomenon of maritime security, especially throughout the present century. Among them, we highlight Klein (2011: 11), who referred to maritime security to state that it underlies the protection of territory, both terrestrial and maritime, from unlawful acts that may occur at sea or from the sea. Germond (2015: 137) stated, in turn, that maritime security could be understood as a concept (referring to the security of the maritime domain) or as a set of policies, regulations, measures and operations to ensure the security of that domain. Bueger (2015: 161) opted for a holistic definition of the concept by building a matrix where he defined four dimensions (marine environment, economic development, national security, and human security) and four concepts (marine security, seapower, blue economy, and resilience), as well as various risks and threats, and stated that maritime security could be interpreted through the relationships that could be established between all of them.

In summary, we can say that maritime security involves several different entities (public and private), with three distinct aspects in mind: preserving freedom of navigation, protecting maritime commerce, and maintaining good governance of the sea. As we will see in the following chapters, the EU's action as a major maritime security co-producer in different regions of the African continent – Horn of Africa (HoA) and Gulf of Guinea (GoG) – has been aimed at ensuring those three subjects.

In line with what was proposed by Santos and Lima (2019), this study is delimited in terms of content, space and time. Regarding the content, it examines the EU's role in Africa's maritime security. In terms of space, it focuses on two specific regions – the HoA and the GoG. And it covers the period 2008-2022.

The study follows an interpretivist epistemological framework, inductive reasoning and a qualitative research strategy. The research design is a case study, and written documentary sources were used as the main method of data collection.

European Union and the maritime domain

This chapter aims to emphasize the great importance of the maritime domain for the European Union, for her security and for the security of its Member States.

The maritime domain

Europe is surrounded by four seas – Mediterranean, Baltic, North and Black – and two oceans – the Atlantic and Arctic –and the EU also has a presence in the Indian Ocean and in the Caribbean Sea through its outermost regions. As a global trading power, the EU is extremely dependent on safe oceans for economic development, free trade, maritime transport, energy security, tourism and a good marine environment. The oceans are also a valuable source of growth and prosperity for the Union and its citizens (Jacques Delors European Information Centre, 2023).

In March 2022, the Council of the European Union approved the "Strategic Compass", which sets a prominent level of ambition for the European security and defence agenda. With regard to Africa, the document states that the future of this continent is of strategic importance to the EU and that the stability of regions such as the GoG, the HoA and the Mozambique Channel is a security imperative, given the fact that key maritime routes pass through them (Council of the European Union, 2022a). At the same time, there has been growing geopolitical competition in Africa involving both global and regional actors. In these circumstances, compounded by the fact that the maritime domain has become increasingly contested, the strategic compass reaffirms the EU's interest in the sea and the strengthening of the maritime security of both the Union and its MS. Building on the ongoing experience in the GoG and the western Indian Ocean, this new document, therefore, aims to extend the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presences Concept (CMP) to other areas of maritime interest with an impact on EU security, such as the Mediterranean Sea for instance. The EU's strategic compass aims not only to ensure unrestricted access to the high seas and the security of global lines of communication but also to protect the maritime interests of its MS (including the seabed) and critical maritime infrastructures. To this end, it intends to strengthen maritime situational awareness by increasing its capacity to collect, process and share information with other relevant actors, both military and civilian.

To achieve these ambitious goals, the EU intends to continue to develop joint operational, technological and capacity-building solutions using the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)[1] framework. In this sense, it should further develop the mechanism of CMP (both those already implemented and launching new projects), as well as reinforce interactions and coordination

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[1] Following the Foreign Affairs Council (November 2017), 23 MS signed a notification that marked the beginning of the establishment of PESCO. The MS committed themselves to developing defence capabilities, to investing in common projects and to increasing the operational readiness of their armed forces (Permanent Structured Cooperation, 2023). There are eight projects that are being developed in the context of PESCO in the maritime area: Deployable Modular Underwater Intervention Capability Package; Harbour and Maritime Surveillance and Protection; Medium Size Semi-Autonomous Surface Vehicle; Essential Elements of European Escort; Maritime (semi) Autonomous Systems for Mine Countermeasures; Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance; European Patrol Corvette; and Maritime Unmanned Anti-Submarine System (Permanent Structured Cooperation, 2023).

between Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) naval operations and other relevant actors. In order to enhance the Union's maritime operations and the readiness and resilience of its forces, a policy of organizing regular naval exercises of the navies of its MS and coastguards should be pursued, as well as increasing the level of training provided and capacity building.

The action plan proposed in the strategic compass itself to overcome the critical gaps that may remain in the maritime domain points towards making full use of PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF)[2] for the development of high-end interoperable systems and advanced technologies. In this context, a commitment is made, for example, to develop strategic capabilities through projects to ensure a more assertive presence of EU assets at sea, as well as an increasing capacity for power projection, which will involve the need for state-of-the-art naval platforms, including unmanned surface and underwater platforms. The focus on building a class of European Patrol Surface Ship is an example of a programme that could be a significant step in the direction it is intended to take.

European Union Maritime Security Strategy

In this context, maritime security is a necessity for the well-being and prosperity of the Union and the world at large and links issues of internal and external security. Maritime security is then understood as a set of circumstances of the global maritime domain in which national laws and international laws are applied, freedom of navigation is guaranteed, and citizens, infrastructures, transport, the environment and marine resources are protected. Threats to maritime security are multifaceted, constitute a potential danger to European citizens and can be detrimental to the strategic interests of the Union and its MS (Council of the European Union, 2014: 3).

The Maritime Security Strategy adopted by the Council of the European Union in June 2014 (EUMSS), revised in June 2018, represents the maritime dimension of the CSDP, enabling the EU to respond effectively to challenges in the area of maritime security. This document provides the political and strategic framework to address maritime security challenges in an effective and comprehensive manner through the employment of all relevant instruments, but it needs to be updated in light of evolving maritime security challenges and the geopolitical context. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has raised the need for the EU to strengthen its security and increase its capacity to act not only on its own territory but also in its neighbourhood and beyond (Jacques Delors European Information Centre, 2023).

Under these circumstances, on March 10 2023, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a joint Communication on strengthening the EUMSS and a new Action Plan. With these new instruments, the EU aims to reinforce six strategic objectives: step up activities at sea; cooperate with partners; lead in maritime domain awareness; manage risks and threats; enhance capabilities; educate and train (European Commission, 2022: 4).

Concrete actions have been identified for each of these strategic objectives. Within the scope of reinforcing maritime security, the definition of new maritime areas of interest where the concept of CMP can be implemented and the increasing mechanisms to fight against the different illicit acts that may occur in the maritime domain are highlighted. Regarding international cooperation with partners, information exchange and the surveillance of critical maritime infrastructures, including undersea cables, ship and port security, emerge. The leadership that the EU intends to take in the area of maritime situational awareness means that this review of the EUMSS has identified key

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[2] The European Defence Fund is made up of two legally distinct but complementary areas and both are being implemented gradually: the research area; and the capability area (European Defence Agency, 2023a). The Strategic Compass provides for harnessing the full potential of this EU financing instrument, since it is fundamental for strengthening the EU's own defence capabilities and for equipping MS (Council of the European Union, 2022a).

actions to be implemented in a relatively short timeframe, namely ensuring that the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE)[3] is operational by mid-2024, enabling the exchange of classified and unclassified information between authorities from different maritime surveillance sectors (both military and civilian); strengthening the Defence Maritime Surveillance Information Exchange Network (MARSUR)[4] (establishing links between MARSUR and the CISE); and enhancing partner countries' maritime situational awareness, notably through the Gulf of Guinea Inter-Regional Network (GoGIN)[5] project. With regard to risk and threat management, this new document identifies a very extensive number of key actions to be developed, highlighting the following: conducting exercises focused on port protection and the fight against cyber and hybrid threats; using surveillance means and tools (such as remotely piloted aircraft) to patrol and to protect critical maritime infrastructures; and drafting new risk assessments (or strengthening existing ones), contingency plans and disaster recovery plans concerning ports, coastal infrastructures, as well as the safety of passenger ships and transport/supply chains. Regarding capacity building, the key actions identified involve, among others, the development of requirements and concepts for surface and subsurface defence technology and the construction of interoperable unmanned systems to monitor critical maritime infrastructures, the increasing of modern mine countermeasures capabilities and the development of capacity building related to maritime patrol aircraft. Finally, the education and training strategic goal is joined by the following key actions: enhancing cyber, hybrid and space security skills; conducting specific training programmes open to non-EU partners to address existing (and emerging) threats to maritime security; and conducting scenario-based civil-military exercises involving shared authority or shared use of capabilities.

Based on the updated EUMSS, the intention is that by 2025 the mechanisms that have been contributing to maritime security, such as the CISE and the MARSUR, will be developed and strengthened in order to promote interoperability, facilitate the decision-making process and increase operational effectiveness. Also, in accordance with the latest version of the EUMSS, the achievement of greater visibility of the Union's naval forces within and beyond its borders should be pursued, through naval presence (and diplomacy) actions in various regions, an increase in the number (and degree of complexity) of maritime training actions and exercises, and the development of capabilities.

The Role of the European Union in the Horn of Africa

This chapter focuses on the EU's intervention in the Western Indian Ocean in the present century and how it has contributed to its assertion as a relevant co-producer of maritime security in that region.

European Union Naval Force – Operation Atalanta

It is important to note that the EU has consistently contributed to improving security in the HoA, mainly through the implementation of a comprehensive approach that includes instruments

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[3] EU initiative aimed at making European surveillance systems (both EU and European Economic Area MS) interoperable, in order to provide all interested authorities from different sectors with access to additional classified and unclassified information needed to conduct missions at sea, namely: surveillance in various fields (such as maritime security, maritime safety, marine pollution prevention and fisheries control), preparedness and response to pollution at sea, customs, border control, law enforcement and defence (European Maritime Safety Agency, 2023).

[4] MARSUR is a technical solution enabling dialogue between European maritime information systems. It consists of 19 EU MS and Norway and aims to improve common maritime situational awareness by facilitating the exchange of relevant operational information, such as geographical positions of ships, maritime routes, ship identification data, chat services or images of ships and other platforms (European Defence Agency, 2023b).

[5] which aims to improve maritime security and safety in 19 countries of the region, mainly by supporting training and the creation of the regional information sharing network, known as the Yaoundé Architecture (European Union External Action, 2021a).

specifically created for the region: the naval military operation (EU Naval Force - Somalia), the military training mission (EUTM-S); and the civilian capacity-building mission (EUCAP-S).

The first instrument came in November 2008, in support of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1814, 1816 and 1838 – issued during that year –which led the European Council to set up a military operation in the HoA (Operation Atalanta). This was mainly to ensure the protection of merchant vessels chartered by the World Food Programme (WFP) carrying emergency food aid to Somali populations in dire need, but also to prevent and repress acts of piracy in the region (European Council, 2008).

The effectiveness of Operation Atalanta can be easily seen in Figure 1, and it is due to the fact that it has contributed decisively to the almost complete absence of attacks by pirate groups originating from Somalia since 2014.

Figure 1 – Number of piracy incidents in the HoA (2008-2022)
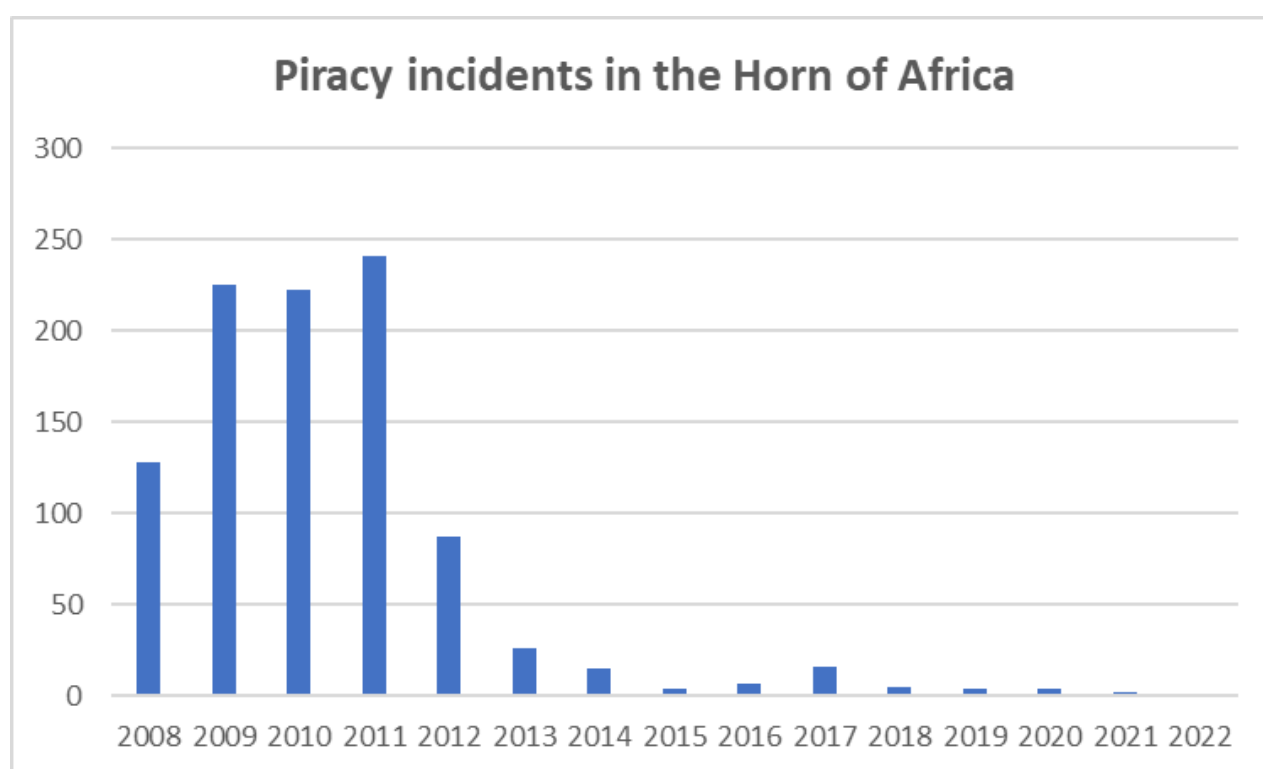
Source: (International Maritime Bureau, 2012), (International Maritime Bureau, 2017), (International Maritime Bureau, 2020), (International Maritime Bureau, 2023)

On the other hand, the escorting of numerous merchant ships chartered by the WFP has ensured the safe arrival of several millions of tonnes of essential food products to more than 3.5 million Somalis. Regarding the disruptions to pirate attacks (in preparation or already underway), the resources of the EU Naval Force arrested dozens of perpetrators, who were subsequently handed over to the authorities of the coastal states in the region with which the EU had concluded agreements so that they could be tried there. Moreover, as this was the first CSDP naval operation, it broke new ground

in many ways. For instance, it made it possible to develop and consolidate links with NATO (in the maritime field). But the sudden increasing presence of several naval forces and means in the maritime spaces of the HoA also highlighted the emergence of new maritime power games. In this sense, operation Atalanta proved to be an essential tool for the EU to engage with global maritime actors, such as NATO, but also with China, Japan and Russia, which were present with several means of their military power at sea in those maritime spaces (Alexandre, 2022: 164).

European Union Training Mission - Somalia

The second instrument, still under the CSDP, came in March 2010 and consisted of a military mission to contribute to the training and education of Somali National Army soldiers. That mission was called EU Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM-S) and represented, once again, the first time that CSDP was used to provide direct basic military training. The three pillars on which the EUTM-S was based were advice, mentoring and training. The objectives of this mission consisted of contributing to increasing the proficiency, effectiveness and credibility of the defence sector in order to enable the Somali authorities to progressively assume the responsibilities for the country's security (European Union External Action, 2019).

EUTM-S has been playing a major role in reforming Somali security institutions (both at the level of the Ministry of Defence and the command of the armed forces), providing military advice at the political and strategic levels to the respective authorities and supporting the building and sustaining of a military training system of its own, adopting a new concept that provides the Somali army with the policies, procedures, expertise and experience to manage its own force generation. It has also focused on developing training for future (Somali) trainers, in close coordination with other international partners, and on collective training, with the ambitious goal of training three light infantry companies (115 soldiers each), three engineering platoons and three training teams (each with 15 soldiers) each year. In total, these activities have been involving more than 500 Somali trainees, along with 14 trainers and two mentors from seven EU countries - including Portugal (Alexandre, 2022: 282) annually.

European Union Maritime Capacity Building Mission - Somalia

Finally, in July 2012, the EU launched the third instrument, the European Union Maritime Capacity Building Mission to Somalia (initially called EUCAP Nestor), a civilian mission - which nevertheless had military expertise - intended to operate in five states in that region: Djibouti, Seychelles, Kenya, Somalia and, later, Tanzania. The purpose was to assist the development of self-sustaining capacities in the HoA that would ensure good governance of those maritime spaces and the subsequent maritime security of the entire region (European External Action Service, 2014).

The mission focused on conducting mentoring, advising, training, and maritime capacity-building activities in the states concerned while involving experts in areas related to law-making and the development of specific organizational structures. In 2015, activities were deactivated in all states where they had been conducted, except Somalia. The mission headquarters was relocated from Djibouti to Somali territory, and in December 2016, the mission was renamed EUCAP Somalia (EUCAP-S) (European External Action Service, 2021).

Key actions included the development of a draft Somaliland coast guard bill and the support to the Somali federal government's national security office in further developing strategic options for a federal coast guard model, a national draft of maritime threat assessment and a national draft of a maritime security plan, as part of the implementation of Somalia's overall maritime security architecture. The mission also supported Somalia's strategic maritime security mechanisms, namely

the national maritime coordination committee and the maritime security coordination committee (Alexandre, 2022: 286-287).

The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa

In 2011, the EU adopted a strategic framework for the HoA, which included actions to be taken to help the people of that region to achieve peace, stability, security, prosperity and responsible governance (Council of the European Council, 2011). To achieve such objectives, the EU committed to:

- Assist all countries in the HoA to build sound and accountable political structures, including civil institutions, enabling people to express their legitimate political aspirations and to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms were respected;
- Work with the countries in the region and international organizations (especially the United Nations and the African Union) to resolve existing conflicts, particularly in Somalia and Sudan, and to avoid potential future conflicts between (or within) countries;
- Ensure that insecurity in the region did not pose a security threat to others beyond its borders, for example, through acts of piracy or terrorism;
- Support efforts to promote economic growth for all countries in the region to enable them to reduce poverty and to increasing prosperity;
- Support regional political and economic cooperation.

This strategic framework and the appointment of a Special Representative for the HoA[6] served to interlink engagement in Somalia within EU policies for the region. In this regard, Ehrhart and Petretto (2012: 44) noted that the EU should (and could) demonstrate its ability to play a leading, coordinating role with regard to engagement policy in Somalia and the region. However, the strategic framework and the appointment of a Special Representative were considered, in the opinion of those academics, the right steps in this direction, particularly as this placed a special focus on Somalia.

Reasons for EU involvement in enhancing maritime security in the Horn of Africa

The question about the reasons for the EU's involvement in operations to combat Somali piracy has been addressed with some frequency, particularly in academic circles, especially considering this was the first naval military mission under the CSDP.

Helly (2009: 393-394), for example, considering that it would have been strong economic and commercial interests that had mobilized key European decision-makers – since more than 15% of world trade passed annually through the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden and a very significant share of Europe's energy imports and European goods exports depended on (safe) transit through those maritime spaces. On the other hand, for countries like France and Spain, where the fishing trade (including in the Indian Ocean) played an important economic role, Somali piracy became a serious threat to their national economic interests.

Ehrhart and Petretto (2012: 9) considered, in turn, the intervention in Somalia's maritime spaces was just another of the challenges that the EU responded to in its effort to improve its approach to foreign and security policy over the past decades. The emergence of the EU as a relevant security co-producer has driven the need to increase the coherence of its internal and external action, i.e., the

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[6] The European Council approved a proposal submitted by the EU High Representative to appoint a Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, with an initial focus on Somalia to deal with piracy, pending the development of action plans to support the implementation of the strategic framework (Council of the European Council, 2011).

generation of a truly comprehensive approach that could make use of the different instruments (military and civilian) at its disposal.

Riddervold (2011: 393) stressed that although all major powers were present with naval forces in the maritime spaces of the HoA by the end of the first decade of this century, there was no evidence that "the actors present were engaged in zero-sum power games over influence in the region", or that "the EU decided to intervene militarily because of any attempt to balance the sphere of interests in Africa".

Restoring peace and security in the HoA region was the main motive for the EU's intervention to combat the Somali piracy phenomenon, according to Paige (2013: 4). The protection of global trade and the human security dimension of the problem were two other relevant reasons for the EU to get involved in that issue.

The Role of the European Union in the Gulf of Guinea

This chapter focuses on the EU's intervention in the GoG region - with the aim of helping the states in the region to achieve peace, security and prosperity through the development of their economies and institutions - and how it has been contributing to the improvement of the maritime security in those spaces.

Main threats to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea region

Piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and transnational organized crime (in particular the one engaged in drugs and arms trafficking) have been the most relevant threats to maritime security in the GoG region since the beginning of this century. However, as the object of this study is piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships, the analysis will be focused on this phenomenon.

Piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships[7] have gained significance in the GoG, especially since 2015, with the region even taking over as the hotspot with the most reported events worldwide between 2018 and 2020, as can be seen in Figure 2 – data provided by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB).

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[7] The difference between maritime piracy and armed robbery lies in the space where the action is conducted: piracy occurs on the high seas – parts of the sea not included in the exclusive economic zone, territorial sea or in the inland waters of a state – and armed robbery is conducted in waters under the sovereignty of a state – territorial sea and inland waters (Alexandre, 2022: 44-45).

Figure 2 – Frequency of piracy / armed robbery attacks (2015-2020)
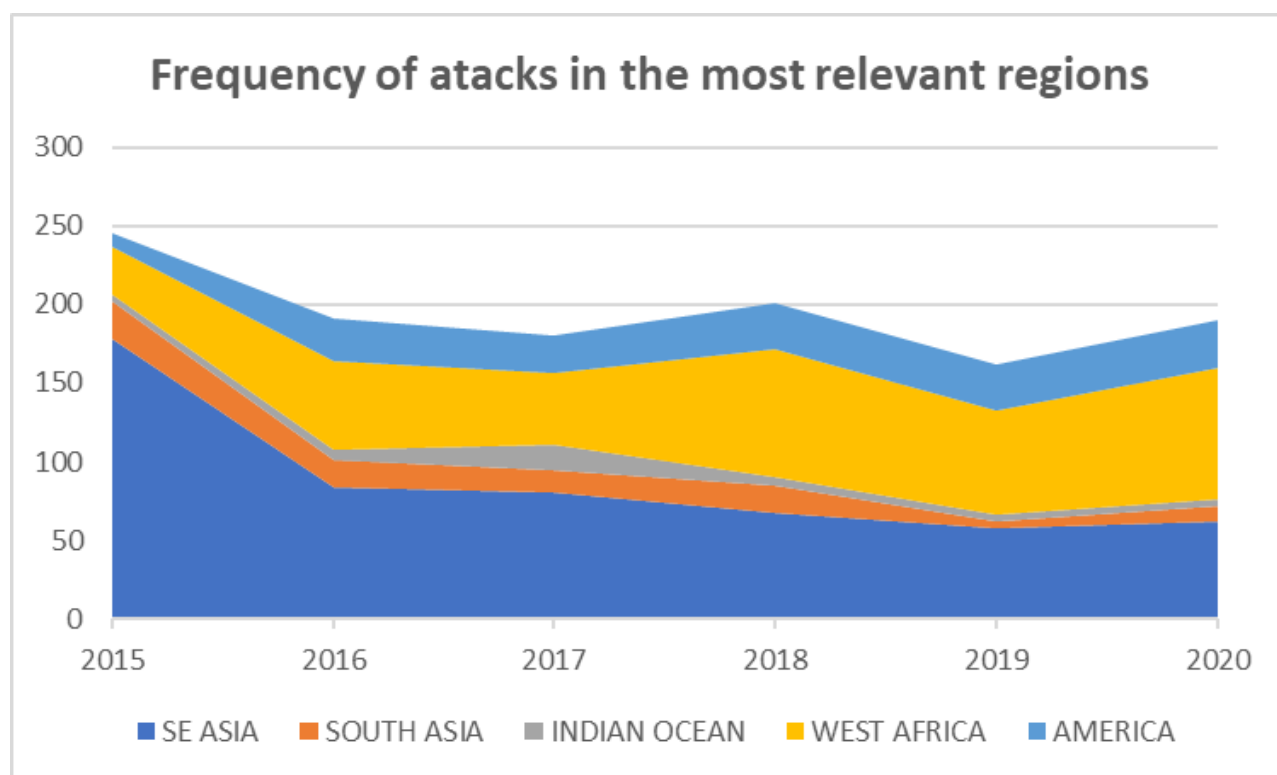
Source: (International Maritime Bureau, 2020)

The three states with the highest number of recorded incidents in the 2016 to 2020 period were Nigeria (187), Ghana (26) and Benin (20) (International Maritime Bureau, 2021). In 2021 and 2022, the number of incidents decreasing worldwide[8], and the GoG was no exception, as can be seen in Figure 3.

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[8] According to Morizur (2021), there may be multiple reasons for this decline in maritime piracy in the GoG region, potentially including, among others, increasing numbers of assets/operations by coastal countries and the EU Coordinated Maritime Presence, a multilateral maritime patrol effort by European nations in the GoG.

Figure 3 – Number of reported incidents between 2017 and 2022
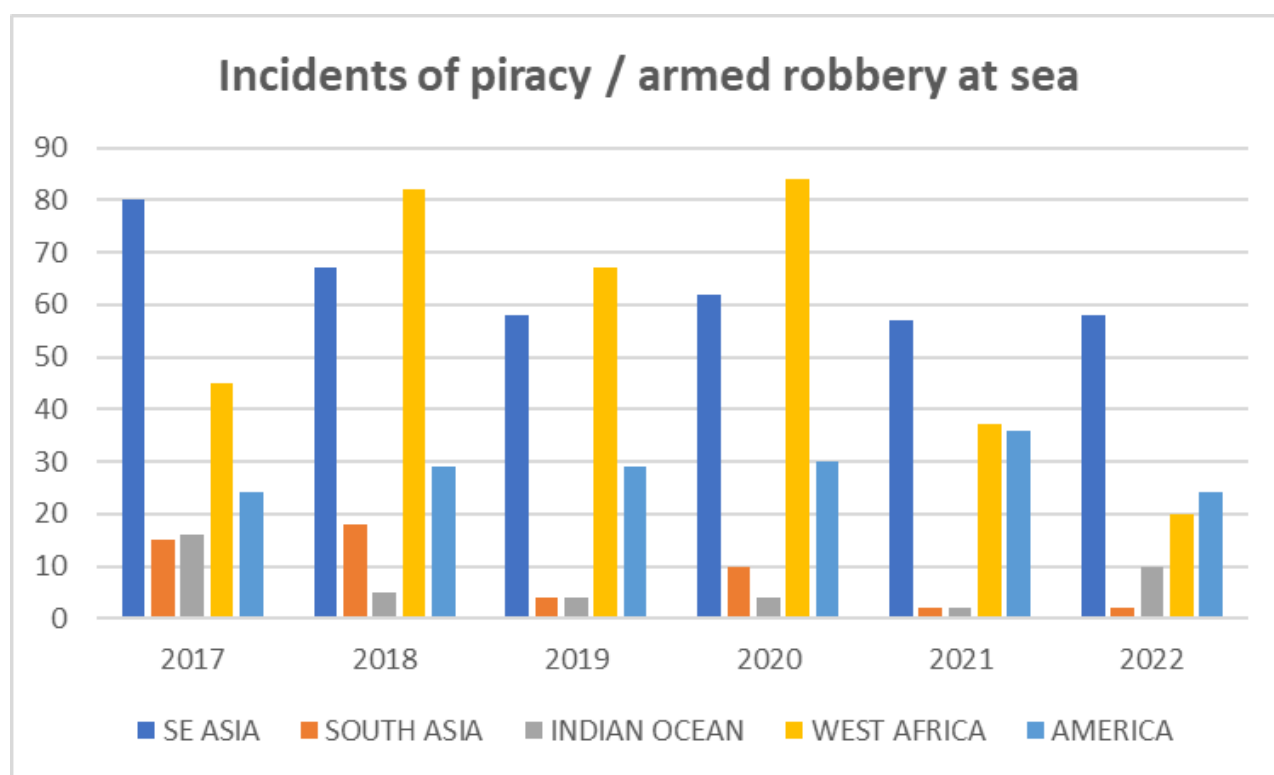
Source: (International Maritime Bureau, 2021), (International Maritime Bureau, 2023)

Considering 2022, we find that in the GoG, there were quite significant incidents involving crew members of ships targeted by pirates/armed robbers when compared with other existing hotspots: of the 16 armed robberies of seafarers on civilian ships, six occurred in those maritime spaces; 29 crew members were taken hostage (out of a total of 41 worldwide); and the only two kidnappings of seafarers for subsequent payment for their release occurred in the GoG (International Maritime Bureau, 2023). This shows that in addition to the GoG being one of the regions where in recent years, more events related to piracy/armed robbery at sea against ships have occurred, it is also the most dangerous for the crew of civilian ships in transit (or active) in those maritime spaces.

In the GoG, several states (including European ones) have been committing their assets at sea for several years. However, the fact remains that it has not been possible to formally set up a maritime security operation (under the aegis of the UNSC) to prevent and disrupt attacks by pirate groups at sea. It was the UNSC's much more restrictive attitude towards the GoG[9] when compared to the one it had adopted just a few years earlier in the HoA region that was one of the reasons for some of the international community's growing alienation from the phenomenon of piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships in the GoG. And of the international organizations that have had assets engaged in the HoA, only the EU has been continuously present in the GoG, although following a different

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[9] It issued only two resolutions (2018 and 2039) and in both it considered that the phenomenon of piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships in the GoG was a regional issue that should involve regional actors and the African Union, with the support of international stakeholders, if (and when) its intervention was requested (United Nations Security Council, 2011), (United Nations Security Council , 2012).

model, as we show below, which is, even so, a clear indicator of the intention to assume a relevant position in the increasing of the maritime security in that region.

Coordinated Maritime Presences Project

What we have been witnessing over the last few years – in the absence of military operations – is an ad hoc commitment of EU MS' military assets in the Gulf of Guinea, dedicated to maritime capacity-building actions for the security structures of the littoral states, in compliance with national orders and/or bilateral agreements.

The EU – which had already launched two naval operations, one in the HoA[10] and the other in the Mediterranean Sea[11] – decided to implement, in January 2021, a pilot project – named Coordinated Maritime Presences Concept – aimed at strengthening its commitment to maritime security in the GoG, with the following objectives: to increase the EU's capacity as a reliable partner and producer of maritime security; to provide greater European operational engagement in that region; to ensure a permanent presence in maritime areas of interest; and to promote international cooperation and partnership at sea (Council of the European Union, 2021).

This concept can be implemented in any maritime region around the globe that is considered by the Council of the EU to be a maritime area of interest. It uses MS' existing naval and air assets in those regions – which have been deployed by the decision of the MS. The implemented model relies on (good) coordination of existing assets – which remain under the national command of the states – and provides continuity, complementarity and cooperation between the actions of those assets. It reinforces awareness, analysis and information sharing among EU MS through the maritime area of interest coordination cell created within the EU Military Staff, making use of the MARSUR network in an operational environment (European Union External Action, 2022a).

The GoG was the first region to be established as a maritime area of interest, and the launch of that pilot project was intended to strengthen the EU's role in the region by supporting the efforts of coastal states and the organizations of the Yaoundé Architecture in achieving concrete responses to growing maritime security challenges, such as piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships (Council of the European Union, 2021).

In February 2022, the Council of the EU decided to extend the initial term of this pilot project, considering that it provided adequate support to address the security challenges affecting freedom of navigation in that region, as it had contributed to reducing maritime security incidents by more than 50% in 2021[12]. On the other hand, it was assumed as an instrument capable of ensuring a continuous presence of EU MS in the region and allowing for increased cooperation and partnerships with the coastal states of the GoG and with the other regional states and maritime security organizations included in the Yaoundé Architecture. The Council of the UE will review the implementation of the CMP Concept in the GoG by February 2024 (Council of the European Union, 2022b).

Reasons for EU involvement in enhancing maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

It should first be noted that the EU's extensive contribution to maritime security in the GoG over the second decade of this century to date is reflected in a wide range of projects covering areas as diverse

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[10] Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta, discussed in the previous chapter.
[11] Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, launched on 31 March 2020 and extended until 31 March 2025, and whose main task was to implement the UN arms embargo on Libya (European Union External Action, 2022b).
[12] According to the IMB, in 2020 there had been 84 reported events of piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships in the GoG region and by 2021 they had fallen to just 37 incidents (International Maritime Bureau, 2022).

as fisheries and port security to combating drugs trafficking and law enforcement at sea (Côrte-Real, 2022: 69). EU programmes for the region – focusing on the legal framework, operational rules, information sharing, training and capacity building – are designed to improve maritime security in the GoG and to actively contribute to the development of the capacities of coastal states in the region (European Union External Action, 2021).

Maritime trade to and from the GoG is driven by the EU, which imports about half of its energy needs (with almost 13% of the oil and 6% of the natural gas it needs coming from the GoG). Nigeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are important suppliers of crude oil to Europe and Nigeria also of natural gas. In these circumstances, ensuring maritime security in the region is crucial for the EU. It should be noted that the GoG is one of the most dynamic and important regions of the global energy sector. One of the reasons is due to the great reserves of oil existent, especially in Nigeria. Secondly, it is also worth noting the general high quality of the oil from this region, given its low viscosity, which contributes to making refining less expensive, especially when compared to oil from other parts of the world (such as Venezuela, for example), which makes it a desirable product in international markets.

According to the British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy 2022, the 2021 oil trade flow diagram shows that Asia-Pacific (87.1 billion tonnes) and Europe (53.2 billion tonnes) are the most relevant oil importing regions from the GoG. And regarding the flow chart of the natural gas trade in the same year, once again, Europe (with 14.8 billion cubic metres) and the Asia-Pacific region (with 14.1 billion cubic metres) are the main importers from the GoG (British Petroleum, 2022).

The need to ensure the security of maritime routes linking the European continent with the GoG is thus the main reason for the EU's involvement in the region, given its position as an important trading partner with most western African coastal states and the growing energy dependence of many EU MS on the GoG's main producer countries.

Conclusions

This article aimed to analyze the strategy of maritime security production at the global level followed by the European Union, in particular in the African regions of the HoA and the GoG, and how it has influenced the protection of the interests of its MS.

The EU has shown in recent years – especially since 2008 when it launched its first naval operation under the CSDP in the HoA region – the will to be a major player as a global co-producer of maritime security. Since then, it has maintained a continuous presence in the region through a comprehensive approach – made up of military and civilian instruments – which has ensured it a leading position in combating not only Somali piracy at sea but also the root causes of the phenomenon on land. The establishment of a strategic framework for the HoA and the appointment of an EU special representative has increased its visibility as a major actor in the pursuit of maritime security in the region. And the fact is that the results achieved confirm that the efforts of the different actors in increasing maritime security in maritime spaces have been successful, as there has been almost no piracy activity since 2017. Among the most significant actors is the EU.

However, in recent years EU action has also been extended to the West African coast, particularly to the GoG, which is truly relevant in geostrategic and geoeconomic terms for the EU, which is highly dependent on energy imports from the region's producer countries. The implementation of the strategic framework for the GoG and the plethora of instruments, initiatives and projects established over recent years with regional organizations and African states – albeit without the formal launch of military operations to address the threats to maritime security, particularly piracy in the absence of a UNSC decision to support such intervention – have earned the EU the leading role in supporting

the fight against illegal activities at sea in that region, which has been declared a maritime area of interest. In those maritime spaces, there was also a significant decrease in the number of incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea against ships in 2021 and 2022, to which the EU's concrete actions contributed a lot.

The Strategic Compass, formally approved in March 2022, will allow the building of an ambitious action plan to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy until 2030. The aim is to make the EU a global co-producer of security that is able to guarantee the protection of its citizens and to make a decisive contribution to international peace and security. In line with the adoption of that strategic document, a new maritime area of interest was established earlier this year, now in the North-West Indian Ocean, with the purpose of strengthening the EU's strategic focus on that region, ensuring a European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific – thus following on from its involvement in the HoA since 2008 – and thereby increasing its international visibility and enhancing its role as a global maritime security co-producer.

In conclusion, it has been possible to prove that the EU's intervention, both through CSDP operations and missions and dedicated programmes and projects in two important maritime spaces in Africa, the HoA and the GoG, has clearly contributed to increasing security in those regions and to protecting the interests of its MS, elevating it to the status of an important global co-producer of maritime security.

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