

JANUARY 2023

EXPLAINING EU MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION THROUGH THE COORDINATED MARITIME PRESENCES TOOL



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**WRITTEN BY:
MOKSH SURI**



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EDITED BY
JAMES EDWARD COLOMBO

Introduction

Since the creation of the European Union's (EU) Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Union has launched three naval operations under this framework. The inclusion of maritime security and anti-piracy operations increasingly shows that EU security and defence cooperation has acquired a naval dimension (Nováky, 2022, pp. 56-57). The three designated naval operations undertaken through CSDP measures are Operation Atlanta (EU NAVFOR), a counter-piracy operation to protect maritime traffic off the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean; Operation Sophia (EU NAVFOR Med), which sought to combat the network of human smugglers and traffickers in the Central Mediterranean from 2015 to 2020; and Operation IRINI (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI), which is focused on the enforcement of the United Nation's arms embargos against Libya since 2020 (Nováky, 2022, p. 57).

The EU's ongoing joint naval operations are impressive considering the CSDP's primary purpose appeared to be conducting land-based military operations in its southern neighbourhood (Nováky, 2022, p. 57). While the EU had launched more than three dozen operations within the purview of the CSDP, the nature of these deployments has primarily been peacekeeping, stabilisation and conflict prevention missions (Scazzieri, 2022). EU maritime operations Atlanta, Sophia and IRINI reflect the shifting European strategic outlook to incorporate a shared naval dimension within CSDP. China's naval expansion in the Indo- Pacific, Russia's increasing naval presence in the High North and the Baltic as well as the Black and Mediterranean Seas and Turkey's hostile maritime acts in the Eastern Mediterranean all put together generate a greater sense of responsibility for the EU to act as a global maritime security provider (Fiott, 2021).

The EU's ambition to increase its naval footprint globally and emerge as an effective maritime security provider is reflected in the Union's strategic documents such as the 2014 EU Maritime Security Strategy and the 2016 EU Global Strategy (Nováky, 2022, p. 57). However, in light of resource commitments and capacity gaps, the EU27 have been looking for flexible mechanisms and tools to pursue permanent naval deployments and increase interoperability between EU27's national naval assets and its partners.

The Coordinated Maritime Presences Tool and the Maritime Areas of Interest

The Council of the EU has developed the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) tool to strengthen the EU's capacity as a reliable partner and increase maritime cooperation outside Europe's vicinity. Brussels has been working to construct flexible doctrines for conducting maritime security operations amidst growing demand for the EU to step up its role as an effective maritime security provider (Nováky, 2022, p. 57). The new CMP tool can be implemented in any maritime area or region of the world that the Council of the EU decides to designate as a Maritime Area of Interest (MAI) (EEAS, 2022). Furthermore, naval deployments under the CMP tool would be outside the jurisdiction of an ordinary CSDP operation, but nonetheless, it would establish a permanent and more visible European maritime presence in the designated MAI (EEAS, 2022; Nováky, 2022).

The CMP concept is a flexible, unconventional, non-CSDP tool without a command-and-control structure that requires EU27 states to volunteer their naval and air assets to perform additional tasks in the designated MAI to the Union (Nováky, 2022, pp. 57-59). The nature of EU27 naval cooperation under the CMP tool will have military assets remain under their respective national chains of command (EEAS, 2022; Nováky, 2022). The CMP MAI Coordination Cell established within the EU military staff will enhance operational awareness and increase analysis and information sharing between member states (EEAS, 2022; Nováky, 2022). The CMP tool also employs the Maritime Surveillance (MARSUR) Network, a solution created by the European Defence Agency which allows cooperation between European maritime information systems to collect and disseminate information on all developments and movements across the region to build a common maritime picture (Nováky, 2022). It is therefore a tool to facilitate information exchange between EU27 states and to enhance interoperability between the EU national naval assets with a flexible command and control structure (Bosilca & Riddervold, 2021; Nováky, 2022).

Gulf of Guinea Pilot case

On 25th January 2021, the EU launched a pilot of its new CMP tool in the Gulf of Guinea and established the region as a MAI to the Union. The Gulf of Guinea is strategically situated in West Africa and covers seventeen countries from Senegal to Angola (Nováky, 2022, p.58). The region is strategically important in light of two factors. First, the Gulf of Guinea is rich in natural resources such as hydrocarbons, minerals and fisheries. Secondly, the region incorporates sea lines of communications (SLOCs) critical to African maritime traffic: the region has 20 commercial ports and further contributes to more than 20% of that traffic (Nováky, 2022, p.58). Due to the persistence of organized violence and low levels of employment opportunities in the region, combined with transnational organized crime such as piracy, illicit arms and drug trafficking has resulted in a surge in the Gulf of Guinea making it the number one piracy hotspot (Nováky, 2022).

Consequently, the EU's decision to conduct a pilot of its new CMP tool in the Gulf of Guinea takes into consideration the need to improve maritime security and governance in the region. In 2020, the region saw 84 attacks on commercial vessels, with 135 people kidnapped for ransom. The Gulf of Guinea now accounts for just over 95% of all kidnappings for ransom at sea (EEAS, 2021). Additionally, the EU also has experience in the region as it has been monitoring its maritime security for several years (Nováky, 2022). Previously in 2014, the EU had adopted the EU Gulf of Guinea Strategy to tackle maritime crime and lent its assistance to regional and sub-regional commitments under the 'Yaoundé Architecture'. The EU also released the EU Gulf of Guinea Action plan to support the enforcement of the EU Gulf of Guinea Strategy. Both of these documents reaffirm the Union's goal is to support regional and intra-regional commitments between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) (EEAS, 2021).

The EU27 member states have also launched multiple multi-million- euro programs in the Gulf of Guinea to strengthen the capacity and capabilities of the littoral states in areas such as fisheries governance, maritime security and countering piracy. Some of the key EU-financed projects and

initiatives working in tandem with the CMP tool are the Critical Maritime Routes Monitoring, the Support and Evaluation Mechanism (CRIMSON), the Gulf of Guinea Inter-Regional Network (GoGIN), the Support to West Africa Integrated Maritime Security (SWAIMS), the Support Programme to the Maritime Security Strategy in Central Africa (PASSMAR), the West and Central Africa Port Security (WeCAPS) and the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP) amongst others (EEAS, 2021).

- CRIMSON seeks to connect and promote a common understanding of all the components of the Critical Maritime Routes Programme currently enforced in the Gulf of Guinea and the Indian Ocean.
- GoGIN was launched in 2016 to improve maritime security mainly by supporting training for the establishment of information-sharing networks which enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the region.
- SWAIMS was initiated in 2019 to support the enforcement of the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy which places an emphasis on law enforcement and governance frameworks in the MAI to the Union.
- PASSMAR was also launched in 2019 to support Central African states with cross-border maritime cooperation and also witnessed participation from key stakeholders in civil society and the private sector.
- WeCAPS was started in 2019 to improve port security in targeted partner countries in West and Central Africa. It will also address vulnerabilities related to port security through assistance to comply with International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) standards.
- SEACOP was started in 2015 and seeks to build capacities and strengthen cooperation against maritime illicit trafficking.

From the Gulf of Guinea to the Indian Ocean

With the CMP tool proving to be an effective and useful instrument in the Gulf of Guinea, the Council of the EU reached two sets of conclusions on 21st February 2022. First, the Council recognized the initial achievements of the CMP Pilot Case in the Gulf of Guinea and decided to extend its implementation by two more years (Council of EU, 2022). Secondly, the Council decided to establish a new Maritime Area of Interest (MAI) in the North Western Indian Ocean, thereby extending the CMP concept to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Although the EU naval forces have patrolled the Western Indian Ocean for over a decade through Operation Atlanta, deploying the CMP tool in the region will increase closely coordinated naval deployments from EU member states and maintain a visible European maritime presence. The North Western Indian Ocean is of strategic importance to the EU as it incorporates two important maritime chokepoints critical to European trade. These are the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and the Bab-El-Mandeb Strait in the Horn of Africa. Maritime chokepoints carry strategic importance in the maritime domain to protect the SLOCs for the free flow of international commerce, essential cargo and energy shipments – each of which is critical to the security of a state.

Utilizing flexible mechanisms like the CMP will also give EU national navies the opportunity to strengthen and upgrade their military-to-military relations with key partners through naval exercises, increased port calls as well as greater information sharing (Nováky, 2022). Given the growing significance of EU naval exercises to their maritime partnerships, the Union's joint exercises with key partners such as the US, UK, Japan, India and South Korea will further increase naval interoperability and enhance the EU's maritime security capabilities. The CMP tool will also encourage the EU27 and its partners to expand cooperation in geospatial and maritime intelligence and create a closely integrated maritime situational awareness picture (Fiott, 2021, p.6).

Scholars and experts have reiterated that bilateral and multilateral forms of naval cooperation are the new emerging practices in the EU's maritime partnerships in its endeavour to be an effective maritime security provider (Fiott, 2021). For instance, the EU and Japan have been conducting passing exercises (PASSEX) in the Horn of Africa to counter piracy and contribute to the freedom of navigation in the region. Similarly, in June 2021, the Indian Navy (IN) and the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) conducted high-tempo exercises in the Gulf of Aden. These exercises saw the participation of five warships from four navies- India's INS Trikand, Italy's ITS Carabinere, the Spanish Navy's ESPS Navarra, and FS Tonnerre and FS Surcouf from France (The Hindu, 2021). Additionally, the Union has also established a European Maritime Awareness Mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) through which EU states like Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as non-EU states like Norway can develop a shared strategic outlook to deescalate tensions in the Persian Gulf between Iran and its adversaries (Scazzieri, 2022). While the EU's visible maritime presence in the Indian Ocean has been strengthened under the CMP tool, it remains to be seen whether the Union will extend the CMP tool to the Indo-Pacific strategic theatre.

CMP Tool in the Indo-Pacific?

Due to the sensitivity of the Indo-Pacific as an emerging centre for great power competition between US and China, it is highly unlikely that the EU27 states will deploy a CSDP naval operation in the Indo-Pacific (Nováky, 2022). France was the first EU member state to put forth a national Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018. It is also the only EU27 state with a permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. The top strategic priorities for Paris are protecting its overseas territories- New Caledonia and French Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean and La Réunion in the Indian Ocean- and its extensive exclusive economic zone (Brattberg & Corre, 2019). As the sole European resident naval power in the Indo-Pacific, Paris believes a collective EU approach to the Indo-Pacific would complement its national strategy and increase the impact of its naval deployments (Nováky, 2022). France also has strong defence relationships with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) members such as India and Japan. Following the release of the French Indo-Pacific Strategy, other EU states like Germany and Netherlands also released their national strategies for the region outlining their strategic outlook and further propelling the Council of the EU to adopt its own EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in 2021.

In the past, European national navies have deployed their assets to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea to participate in Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in close coordination with the Union's partners. Germany also seeks to play a small naval role in the region and deployed its frigate

Bayern which set sail for the Indo-Pacific in August 2021 for a six-month mission to uphold the freedom of navigation in international waters (Nováky, 2022, p.60). France initiated Mission Marianne consisting of a support vessel and nuclear attack submarine to the Indo-Pacific (Fiott, 2021, p.2). However, it remains to be seen whether the CMP tool will be extended to the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Certain guidelines have already been set for the EU's naval engagements in the region through the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Conclusions on the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy adopted by the Council of the EU on the 19th of April 2021 (Nováky, 2022, pp.59-60). Both these documents contain two important observations about the EU's naval ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. First, the EU will explore the possibility of recreating its Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) II activities in the Southern Pacific (Council of EU, 2021). CRIMARIO II is an EU-financed project launched in April 2020 with a budget of €7.5 million and is managed by Expertise France, a French agency for international technical cooperation (Nováky, 2022, p.60). The project will help build a safer and more secure maritime domain awareness through cross-sectoral, inter-agency and cross-regional cooperation. The Union has already extended the geographical scope of CRIMARIO II from the Indian Ocean into South and South-East Asia to contribute to safer sea lines of communication and is now looking to extend it even further (Nováky, 2022, p.60).

Conclusion

The Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) tool will act as a flexible, unconventional, non-CSDP tool without a command-and-control structure that will require EU27 states to volunteer their naval assets to operate in the designated MAI. The Council of the EU's decision to establish a new MAI in the North Western Indian Ocean and now potentially the Indo-Pacific would require structured naval deployments outside Europe's vicinity and will also raise the overall ambition of this tool. The CMP tool will promote greater naval interoperability between the EU's national naval assets and enhance the EU27's role as a global maritime security provider.

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