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"Making the maritime environment a safer place to live and work"



Piracy Threat in the Mozambique Channel increases as Operation Copper is Reduced to an Electronic Listening Operation



Maritime Security in the Mozambique Channel

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has provided a permanent presence in the Mozambique Channel since January 2011 on Operation Copper. Operation Copper is primarily an anti-piracy operation, in which SANDF has deployed a rotation of Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV's), Frigates and Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA).

Similar to EUNAVFOR's Operation Atalanta and NATO's now terminated Operation Ocean Shield in the HRA, the assets available to Operation Copper have been progressively reduced. As Frigates and OPV's were withdrawn, the operation became dependent on the MPA, and now due to technical problems the SA Air Force is unable to field any of its fleet of C-47TP MPAs for patrols in the channel.

Operation Copper has therefore evolved into an Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) operation with no assets actually deployed to the Mozambique Channel. While the mission remains to deter and warn of piracy, it is likely that the only forces available to assist a vessel under attack will be local coastguard or local military assets. It should also be noted that SANDF will not be able to assist in Search and Rescue operations in the Mozambique Channel.

The withdrawal of military assets in the Mozambique Channel comes at the same time as two hijackings off Somalia (MV Aris 13 and Dhow Casayr II No. 30) within the past two weeks. The second hijacking, no doubt encouraged by the success of the hijack of MV Aris 13 means that there is now a Somali pirate mother vessel operating off the coast of Somalia. Our concern is that criminals will take advantage of the collapsed security framework in the Mozambique Channel.

The likelihood of a piracy incident taking place in the Mozambique Channel is probably at its highest level since 2010. Should something happen, it is believed unlikely that SANDF will be able to respond quickly, given that many of their maritime and air assets are currently unserviceable.

Vessels transiting through the Mozambique Channel and surrounding region are strongly advised to ensure that they risk manage their voyage and in doing so, conduct a full review of BMP 4 and other relevant security measures, including the establishment of their citadel and the use of armed guards.

