THE IMPORTANCE OF A MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY FOR THE EU

AF. Gonzalo Vallespín Terry

Actualmente, la Unión Europea (UE) adquiere casi la mitad de su Producto Interior Bruto (PIB) a través del mar, y hay más kilómetros cuadrados de mar que de tierra bajo su jurisdicción. Estos datos muestran la importancia de proteger el entorno marítimo de la UE. Por ello, es de vital importancia para la UE una política marítima común, que asiente las bases de cómo se debe proteger nuestro entorno marítimo.

A través de la teoría de securización del "Copenhagen School", se busca demostrar la importancia de dicha política. El siguiente paso es analizar los factores que afectan a la seguridad, y las zonas geográficas donde actúan. Por último, se llega la conclusión de que, si queremos ser un actor geopolítico mundial, debemos llegar al consenso entre los países miembros, intentar lograr la estabilidad de los países vecinos y potenciar una agencia que pueda lidiar con las amenazas existentes. Con todo, Europa debe proteger su medio de vida más importante: la mar.

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ENSIGN VALLESPIN TERRY

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List of Acronyms

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy

CSDP: Common Security and Defense Policy

EBGT: European Border Guard Team

ESS: European Security Strategy

EU: European Union

EUCAP: European Union Capacity Building Mission

EUNAV: European Union Naval Mission

EUROSUR: European Border Surveillance System

EUTM: European Union Training Mission

FRONTEX: European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union

JO: Joint Operation

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

UK: United Kingdom

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction
1. INTRODUCTION

The bulk of world trade is carried out by sea, as a matter of fact Europe imports most raw materials by sea. Some of the world’s main maritime routes’ choke points lie in the European Union’s (EU) maritime borders, like the Strait of Gibraltar or the Suez Canal. Therefore, it is in the EU’s best interests to ensure that these trade routes are free of threats.

The EU has gone to great lengths in the last two decades to create a common security policy. However, due to their geographical location, not all member states share commerce interest; therefore and inevitably, not all will seek to protect this means of trade with the same determination because each member strives towards that goal in the proportion it finds fit to benefit its interests. Furthermore, it is not a matter of underpinning the blame on those who do not put effort into this cause when, theoretically, the goal is to work towards a common target. Therefore, lack of consensus amongst member states may easily be the biggest problem in defining a common security strategy, but no matter how much effort is put into common security, countries can be skeptical about jeopardizing their interests over a conflict that might not be of their concern.

EU Member States must come together as they have on many other aspects. Once this barrier has been overcome, a maritime security strategy is sure to find a true identity. It is only of common sense to want to combine efforts to protect Europe’s most important source of commerce and income of natural resources.

The objective of this essay is to discuss the importance of a common security strategy in the maritime environment. The ‘Securitization Theory’ of The Copenhagen School provides the proper theoretical basis to explain the factors that are to be considered in defining a maritime security policy and to support the findings of this essay.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH: THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL ‘SECURITIZATION’

The Copenhagen School emerged with the writings of Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde, among others, in the post-Cold War era (Collins 2007: p.110). The main model developed by this school is the ‘Securitization Theory’, which expands the definition of security from its traditionally military view into a wider spectrum including non-military matters such as political,
societal, economic and environmental security (ibid.: p.109-125). In this model, securitizing actors such as political leaders, governments, pressure groups, etc., seek to declare a referent object’s (national sovereignty, a state, collective identities, etc.) survivability as threatened, arising the need to securitize it (ibid.: p.109-110). In this process the securitizing agent must also convince a general or specific audience such as politicians, public opinion, military leaders, etc., that a threat to security exists; and if this audience is persuaded, the securitizing agent will be granted the right to employ extraordinary measures (ibid.: p.111-117).

The five sectors are very closely related and many times the majority or all of them are present in the same issue, as will be demonstrated later on in the essay. It is necessary to explain each sector. Firstly military security refers to the threat or actual use of organized violence against a referent object, which is usually the state. Political Security refers, for the most part, to the internal security of a nation and its government structure. Societal security relates to society in the likes of social unrest or crime rates. Economic security discusses all issues that have repercussions to the economy. Finally, environmental security relates to all those issues that affect the environment (ibid.: p.134-136), pollution being a good example of this.

3. CASE STUDY

The securitization theory is an essential tool to understanding the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The process goes through four different steps in order for the securitization to be successful. In the first step, the securitizing actors are the policy makers who are constantly predicting what consequences arise from the world’s geopolitical events. Second, the EU is the referent object to be securitized and, more to the point in this essay, its maritime element. In the third step, the threats that the EU is to be securitized from are terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), illegal immigration, etc., and the areas where they are present, these threats will be analyzed later on in more depth. Inevitably these threats will affect various security sectors, however, and those that will have a greater role in this essay will be the economic, social and political sectors. Finally, the fourth step is demonstrating to the audience that the threat to security exists. The EU is very transparent when it comes to letting its citizens know what is going on around them. Moreover, member states’ leaders or representatives are present when a decision has to be made regarding security matters. The
successful completion of this process allows for extraordinary measures to be taken, these are for example, the CFSP and more specifically the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the creation of the FRONTEX agency, etc.

3.1. The threats

The European Security Strategy (2003: 3), states that Europe is the largest importer of oil and is also the largest trading entity in the world. Furthermore, it states that security is vital for the UE to be able to maintain this amount of business conduct, not just security within our borders; but also security in neighboring countries and even nations that are on the other side of the globe. These arguments are clear examples of the economic security sector of the securitization theory. The fact of the matter is that the EU conducts business far away, and regional instability in south-east Asia, for instance; could imply economic repercussions in Europe.

The maritime borders are harder to protect than land borders, as one cannot simply put up a fence. Moreover, the sea is a complicated element. Many countries with a maritime responsibility have invested considerable funding in procuring, combining and coordinating many different assets and manpower in an attempt to properly control the sea. And not always have the results been what they were expected to be.

The maritime environment faces threats like terrorism, organized crime, state failure, regional instability, and proliferation of WMD’s (ibid: 3-5) and all have a close relation between them. The piracy issue in Somalia, for example, shows a failed state where there is a worrying amount of instability and where local authorities do not possess the means to counter piracy and organized crime. It is an example of a lack of political, social and environmental security, which in turn will lead to economic insecurity in a different region of the globe. Another example of lack of political and social security leading to economic instability later on is demonstrated in the recent “Arab Spring” in the southern Mediterranean countries, which has been followed with deep concern in Europe.
3.2. Geographical Hotspots

Under the current geopolitical situation, some of the maritime regions of the world that the EU must keep in close observation are the Mediterranean, Black and Adriatic Seas, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and finally the Western African Coast and the Gulf of Guinea. As is inevitable, various security sectors of the securitization theory will arise, depending on the region that is being analyzed. Nevertheless it is the best way to realize that no one region or threat will involve just one security sector.

The North Sea and the North Atlantic can be left out because they can be considered securitized. Being surrounded by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Members States made for a reasonably safe sea. Countries surrounding the Black Sea could be taken into account because of organized crime and drug and weapons trafficking from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Middle East into Europe, however most of these illegitimate activities are carried out through land routes.

3.2.1. Strait of Hormuz

The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz could be considered the most important oil shipping route in the world. In 2013, 35% of world oil tanker traffic transited this strait (EIA 2012). Therefore, it is a very sensible region in Europe’s supply line. Instability could cause huge economic setbacks for the EU. For example, a high amount of maritime traffic in a small span of sea is an excellent condition for terrorist attacks. This relates mainly to the economic securitization sector.

3.2.2. The Horn of Africa

Somalia lies next to one of the most transited maritime trade routes in the world, because here the Asia-Europe and Middle East-Europe trade routes unite before entering the Red Sea. It is also the quickest maritime route to import the much needed Middle Eastern oil into the EU. Piracy has turned out to be a profitable business for Somali pirates and their organized crime organizations, which are so complex that they even have networks in important financial cities across the globe (Stuart Yikona 2013). Pirates hijack many ships and people. This has repercussions in the economic, social and political sectors, because it is not just about the
ransoms, countries try to securitize this issue in order to protect trade and the welfare of their citizens.

The EU was slow in responding, very little was done to address this until the situation had gotten out of hand. However, once the issue had been securitized the EU clearly reacted correctly, by employing extraordinary measures that were not only military means to defend merchant and fishing vessels (EUNAV Atalanta and EUTM Somalia), but also by employing civilian and economic assets as was the EUCAP Nestor. These actions seem to have been effective: in 2009 over 214 ships were attacked (Mark McDonald 2009), resulting in 47 hijackings, however in October 2013 only 17 attacks were reported that year (New York Times 2013).

3.2.3. The Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is perhaps the most important border to be considered because it is the closest area to the EU of the mentioned regions. As of 2012, its southern coast has seen its relative stability turn very unstable due to the “Arab Spring”. This is also a major concern for the EU, as organized crime in the Mediterranean is to blame for illegal immigration and weapons and drug smuggling into the EU.

Affecting political, social, and economic sectors of the securitization theory, these factors imply that the southern Mediterranean could be considered an unstable region, or at least relatively so. The Suez Canal and Red Sea could also be included into this category. Egypt has been involved in a change of political regime in recent years but has so far maintained the Suez Canal secure, so it is definitely an area to be kept under watch.

3.2.4. West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea is an important region because of its oil production and export. In 2013, over 30 pirate attacks were reported. This shows that piracy attacks have increased over the past few years. Again, the main cause for this is the fact that countries in this region do not have stable governments and effective agencies in fighting terrorism. However, it is true that African countries from these regions do possess more naval means to counter piracy and they are taking measures to increase the fight on piracy. Still, the EU should certainly do more in this
region. The security sectors that are present in this region are the same one that in Somalia, the only exception being that insecurity is not as high.

Further north, countries like Senegal or Mauritania lack in raw materials meaning that there is very little prospect for wealth. This is the main cause for illegal immigration. Illegal immigration can cause social and political insecurity in the countries of destination.

4. TAKING ACTION

It has been made clear that the EU faces many challenges, which vary in size and form, throughout the globe and policy makers have taken huge steps in securitizing them, convincing political leaders and the citizens they represent that they are referent objects to be securitized. The creation of the CFSP and the CSDP are a result of the securitization process. But, what more extraordinary measures can be taken?

4.1. Solving Disputes between Member States

Different points of view between Member States tend to erupt in almost any issue. If the discussion concerns a lesser issue these differences are usually put to the side to work together. However, when faced with a greater issue, as for example the invasion of Iraq in 2004, the EU faced itself with the greatest challenge to the integrity of the CSDP (Biscop 2007: 10). At the time, instead of reaching a consensus between all the Member States, it was decided to leave the debate be in the hope that time would make the differences disappear. This shows that even though the ESS is a good document, which should serve as a foundation for any security or defense policies in the future, it is not always taken into account in the policy-making process (ibid: 10-11). But, it is not logical to create this policy-making tool, and not use it.

The main reason why the ESS is not given the proper importance is because not all Member States seek the same objectives. Just as the EU makes an effort in creating policies that help develop neighboring countries in the hope of maintaining the EU more secure and stable; for the same reason, EU Members must seek to share objectives of other Members. It has to be seen as an investment in the future. All Member States should work toward common objectives and policies because on the long term it is beneficial for all. Stability is the key to welfare.
4.2. Helping Development in Neighboring Countries

As the “A Safer Europe in a Better World” document clearly states, in order for Europe to be safe, the world needs to be safe. Truth be told, this is impossible. But it is not that far-fetched to try to stabilize the neighboring countries. It is the most immediate danger to the EU. This is especially necessary in the Mediterranean border.

The Mediterranean is a vital trade route for Europe, as most of the shipping to the EU passes through here. The access to the Mediterranean is also complex. Two traditional choke points: the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar. This means a lot of world shipping passing very close to land. If even part of the coast around these areas where to be unstable, this could have huge implications. Piracy networks could arise practically overnight. There could be a new scenario very much like the one in Somalia. Illegal trafficking could also sparkle, meaning more drugs, weapons and human beings would be smuggled into Europe.

The most effective way to keep Europe safe is by preventing a crisis from ever taking place as far away from Europe as possible.

4.3. Frontex

Once the securitization of the maritime borders is complete, the securitizing agent will take extraordinary measures. One of such extraordinary measures that the EU took was creating the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX) in 2005. Its main mission is to coordinate national border efforts of Member States to ensure the safety of the EU’s borders, including the 35,633 Nautical Miles long sea border. This agency is an excellent tool to protect the EU’s borders from piracy, terrorism, organized crime and illegal trafficking of weapons, drugs, human beings, etc. FRONTEX is, after all, an aggregation of national law enforcement and border patrol assets that have a long experience in fighting these threats.

Each nation protects its own borders by deploying patrol boats, aircraft and many other assets necessary to patrol the seas, creating land-based monitoring stations and coordination centers
from where each country coordinates its own efforts. However, with the creation of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) in 2008, national law enforcement agencies of Member States can now share information between each other, while FRONTEX helps to organize the information and coordinate between institutions and agencies involved in this field. Member States can benefit greatly from sharing efforts because, for example, the best way to bring down terrorist groups or organized crime organizations is with good intelligence.

FRONTEX has European Border Guard Teams (EBGT) at its disposal, these teams are composed of law enforcement agents from Member States and experts on border control who can be deployed anywhere in the EU when need be, as has been the case in the past, for example in the Hera Joint Operation in the Canary Islands area or the most recent Hermes Joint Operation (JO) in the Lampedusa Area. Illegal immigration is a problem that will continue to exist as long as there is financial and economic inequality between countries.

FRONTEX has been the solution, but only on a temporary basis. If the EU wants to put a stop to illegal inflow of immigrants, it cannot contempt itself by creating a temporary mission here and there; it must seek to address the root causes. The best way to do this is by giving proper judicial backing and supranational jurisdiction, enabling FRONTEX to act across the EU and its maritime frontiers against terrorism, illegal immigration, organized crime and smuggling. Agencies carrying out their work in their areas of expertise sometimes see how their work is slowed down by nations due to complex jurisdiction problems resulting in long bureaucratic processes.

When creating a JO, the agency has brought in personnel from different Member States, which has shown good results. And even though a common personnel pool exists, they are only required for temporary missions. FRONTEX should seek to have a much bigger permanent staff.

This Agency has great potential that has yet to be taken advantage of. With more funding, FRONTEX could maintain wider Joint Operations (JO’s), or to be able to supply more personnel or equipment where needed. With a bigger budget, more could be done on a permanent basis.
4.4. A Maritime Task Force

There will come a time when civilian means will not suffice to address the threats, as has been demonstrated by the piracy issue in Somalia where it has been proven that maritime security cannot always be undertaken by purely civilian means, as a result the EU had to deploy military assets. It can be linked to different factors like the fact that the Area of Operations is too far away for law enforcement agencies to act as their means are not designed to be deployed far away from their borders, they do not possess the necessary logistic branch to carry out the mission or simply because they are not designed to cope with such levels of violence.

We have a great example: EUNAVFOR Atalanta was a civilian mission protecting a vital trade and fishing route to the EU and world trade in general which was carried out by ships from different navies, as well as aircraft and other elements. The challenge did not lie on the operational level, as countries train and maintain their military constantly. A frigate, for example, trains in many different kinds of missions throughout the year and if deployed, it will be able to carry out orders regardless of who gives them: NATO, EU, national authority, etc.

The difficulty lies in creating a common military structure to give out these orders. Since the EU had never created a maritime task force, Operation Atalanta had its headquarters located in Northwood, United Kingdom (UK). Northwood was proposed by the UK because it is home of NATO Maritime Component Command Head Quarters, which is in charge of NATO maritime operations, and the UK Maritime Forces Head Quarters, meaning that at the time, the UK was perhaps one of the most qualified Member States to host the maritime headquarters.

Operation Atalanta proves that the EU is capable of deploying a maritime task force when required and that it can accomplish the mission successfully. As was demonstrated earlier, pirate attacks in the area have been drastically reduced. Therefore, a maritime task force can very well be the solution when the situation is above FRONTEX’s capabilities.
5. CONCLUSIONS

The EU is clearly on the right track to implementing and maintaining a dynamic security strategy, however, this strategy is still on a general level. More effort has to be put into the details concerning more specific aspects in the security strategy, specially the maritime aspect.

The documents regarding CSDP are overall very good tools for what they were created, this is to guide the EU when creating defense policies. Also, they are dynamic; which allows for their modification to correct imperfections or to adapt them to changing times. EU Member States have proven to have different approaches to issues, which is understandable, as it is almost impossible that 28 countries share the same view in any topic, however, a more open-minded attitude of all Member States is needed if a common security strategy is to succeed.

The ESS is clear on the fact that in the majority of crisis management situations, military operations have succeeded almost every time and unfortunately follow-up humanitarian or civilian operations have not been as successful. The EU is well aware of this and has made clear the importance of the civilian aspect in crisis management.

Even though Europe is well aware of the different kinds of threats it will face, knowing that these threats are all present in the maritime environment, it has to place more resources into tackling these threats, starting in its maritime borders. By boosting FRONTEX, the EU could, for the most part, properly challenge the threats collected in the ESS before they reach European soil. It is the best weapon Europe has to address the Security aspect of the CSDP.

Neighboring countries are the first frontier the EU must stabilize, and the southern Mediterranean countries are especially sensible after the “Arab Spring” took place. Therefore one of the EU’s main priorities must be to bring peace to these countries, moving danger further away from its borders. By achieving economic, social and political security, these countries could engage the threats more effectively. The safer Europe’s neighbors are; the safer Europe will be.

Europe must pay more attention to the sea as it is the most vulnerable factor to economic security. If economic security cannot be fulfilled, then a domino effect can occur very quickly resulting in lack of social and political security, which could even develop into military
insecurity. Therefore, the sea is the most vital element not only for Europe’s prosperity, but also for its survival. Europe feeds from the sea, it conducts business through the sea and it brings necessary energy and natural resources through the sea. Europe must protect it adapting to a constantly changing world, remembering that “World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it” (Schuman 1950).
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