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“Protecting Freedom in the Global Age ”

Advisory Panel

Preventing Piracy in the Pacific Ocean



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Forum: Advisory Panel

Issue: Preventing Piracy in the Pacific Ocean

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Introduction

Pacific Ocean is the largest ocean on Earth, lying between Asia, Australia, North America and South America. Due to the growing trade network over the sea, the Pacific has been a very important route for traders between Asia and North America, especially China, Japan, Taiwan and the United States. The United States also increased its trade with developing economies in the south Asian region such as Singapore and Malaysia, which all led the economic importance of the Pacific Ocean to increase. The Pacific is also important for its natural resources; however, those are out of this agenda's scope.

Piracy is "an act of robbery on the high seas", even though it may be seen as a dated issue, is still a problem that endangers peoples' lives and that causes economic damage. Modern day piracy is even more threatening, as pirates have access to arms like rocket and grenade launchers, which can cause major harm to vessels. Pirates now use modern navigation systems and faster boats, making it harder for governments to capture and juridify pirates.

Definition of Key Terms

Maritime: Relating to navigation or human activity on the sea.

Corruption: Dishonest or illegal behavior of government officials, like a police officer detaining innocents based on their ethnicity, etc.

General Overview

Piracy has been an issue for as long as sailing became a part of humans' lives. It goes as long as to 300BC. However; piracy increased rapidly towards the end of the seventeenth century. From this time on, the upcoming hundred years were recognized as "Golden Age of Piracy". These pirates used a black flag with a skull and crossbones, named "Jolly Roger," which is commonly associated with pirates in popular culture.

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Figure 1: The Jolly Roger Flag

Countries like the United States, Spain, and Great Britain fought with these maritime pirates with what is called a “Prize Law.” This basically grants vessels to capture pirate ships and their loot.

After the 1800s, piracy declined greatly. However, it returned in the late 20th century. Maritime piracy costs \$15 billion to companies annually. The Pacific, Indian Ocean, East Asia and East Africa are places where pirates threaten lives of crewmembers.

There are different types of piracy, as it developed within the centuries. First type of piracy is very similar to mugging. Pirates randomly attack a passing vessel and pirates take crewmembers valuable items, like a cell phone, or if there is any, cash. Another type is when pirates plan an attack to a vessel in advance. Pirates may gather information from corrupt government officials, for example that a ship is carrying a large amount of money, and take custody of valuables on board. Lastly, pirates may take over a whole ship with its cargo and sell the shipping contents in black market. The ship then becomes a pirate ship, and in these kinds of attacks, crew is mostly killed. In addition to these, in some regions there are “ghost ships”. These are ships with a legit registration and a proper flag; however, they attack cargo ships and attain their goods to then sell in the black market.

Today, many often relate piracy to terrorism, as terrorist groups have hijacked ships for getting access to resources or for other reasons.

Treaties and Events

Law of Prize - As stated earlier (General Overview, p.2), some countries adopted “Law of Prize” to combat piracy in the past; however, it is open to dispute whether this is an effective and ethical solution.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – This convention takes some measures against piracy. Mainly, it sets a legal framework under which nations can combat piracy. Delegates can check out articles 100 to 107 of the convention to further evaluate.

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United States Policy for the Repression of Piracy and other Criminal Acts of Violence at Sea (June 2007) - The US has been very active in the combat against piracy, as US war and trade ships reach all across the world. In 2007, the President of the US at the time George W. Bush signed this legal action that allows American warships to prosecute pirates, if encountered with a maritime piracy event. This policy became an example for other nations to legislate a similar policy.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

It is known some ships carry what is called an electric fence. This basically neutralizes pirates that try to break into a ship by electrocuting them. Other than this, some ships use nets, lasers, water cannons, and LRADs (Long Range Acoustic Device) to distract or prevent pirates from attacking the ship. However, it isn't cost effective to put up such systems on each and every ship.

Other than the UNCLOS, there hasn't been a significant attempt to directly solve this issue. It is debatable though, whether the UNCLOS is enough to end piracy in the Pacific, considering the vast size of the ocean. However, the UN has tackled piracy in other seas like the Somalia coasts and the Gulf of Guinea. In Somalia, for example, the Security Council passed resolution S/RES/2442 which encourages the states in the region and any willing Member State to cooperate with Somalia in the fight against piracy, by means of providing arms and units. The resolution also encourages the parliament of Somalia, the main executive body, to improve its coast guard law and to continue their effort on bringing pirates to justice. In addition to these, the resolution asks Member States to assist Somalia, upon request, to improve their naval forces.

Possible Solutions

Even though putting up patrol units may seem like a viable solution, the delegates should consider the fact that this may lead to armed conflicts, considering that the region is already populated with armed vessels that belong to conflicting countries like the US and China. In the case that delegates wish to deploy armed maritime forces in the Pacific to combat pirates, there should be very strict regulations that ensure these units won't cause further trouble.

Another solution attempt may be to help underdeveloped countries like Somalia, in which pirates are suspected to be harbored, detain pirates. Delegates may consider sending such countries technical staff, under the supervision of UN, who will help locate pirate ships. Delegates can also come up with international treaties or conventions that aim to standardize maritime vehicle regulations in all Member States. This can help prevent ghost ships. With this solution, delegates should keep in mind Member States' sovereignties, and come up with solutions that do not interfere with other Member States' internal affairs.

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