

Maritime Strategy - a crucial geostrategic and geopolitical challenge in a globalized environment

The maritime domain - multidimensional and multifunctional

Management of the maritime environment provides an opportunity for productive international cooperation. There is abundant literature that tackles important aspects of the Seas. While often the analysis focusses on specific elements, reflections on a maritime strategy as a basis for coherent maritime policies have to start with an understanding of the multidimensional, multifunctional and multinational/international character of this huge area exposed to partially competing interests. In addition, one has not only to sharpen the awareness for the present but as intensively for likely and/or potential natural developments as well as political and economic trends.

Before any discussion of maritime initiatives takes place one is well advised to consider the wider implications. It is important to understand the purpose(s) of such a strategy in order to analyse its full value.

Take the elements of Planet Earth: land above sea level, the sea itself and the air in the atmosphere. The combination of these elements has produced an environment in which life can develop and thrive. Yet these conditions are also the very characteristics that produce constraints on the existence of life on the planet as we know it and for mankind in particular. This fundamental but self evident statement draws attention to the fact that any focus on one of the elements in our environment cannot lose sight of the interdependence of all three for the development of human destiny, if it is to be coherent. Pure statistics tell us that 71% of the earth's surface is under water and that the expanding human population is going to produce ever greater pressure on the habitable land surface of the planet. Additionally most of the maritime activities on and under the sea are for the direct benefit of the human population.

Swivel a globe slowly and before you can identify any form of human activity your eyes will rest on the oceans which together with the sun and the winds create the climate for the existence and development of all forms of life from plants to humans.

The international need to ensure the continued healthy conditions of our planet is clearly recognized. However, it is in the maritime environment that the scope for national, international and multinational initiatives can be most effectively expressed. I would like to mention just a few of the more visible opportunities:

- International shipping for transport of goods and raw materials including fossil fuels. International support for the expansion of globalised trade in new and developing markets by using sea lines of communication.
- The need for international (and multinational) cooperation and development in managing the natural wealth of marine life and necessarily extending the use of it (exploitation) for the benefit of mankind.

- The seas can be used to produce electricity, drinking water and sea salt with innovative environmentally friendly technologies.
- Harmonization of procedures of fossil fuels extraction with a view to limiting the environmental impact of the industry.

The oceans have provided a context for international cooperation since the beginning of time; individuals and companies as well as national and international organizations have needed to broker agreements. Today the legal framework of maritime law addressing geographical rights and responsibilities on and under the sea is negotiated between nation states and the international community, frequently under the auspices of the United Nations. This sound foundation has the potential for broader and closer international multidimensional global activity for the benefit of the environment and mankind.

The U.N., other international and or regional organizations, the still critical nation states, enterprises and nongovernmental organisations build the basis for many forums - from bilateral to global - that deal with the cooperative approach to strategic as well as practical marine issues.

Challenges, risks, dangers

Many of the risks and dangers that have been described and analyzed as being relevant for the foreseeable future impact on the maritime domain.

Any instable or even failed coastal state carries the risks of giving room to terrorist and organized crime. Those can and will use this opportunity to interfere with the sea traffic to extort ransom money or to plunder the cargo. In addition, terrorists can take ships hostage in an attempt to use them as weapons at sea or from sea to coast, in particular in harbor areas with disastrous effects. LNG tankers brought to explosion close to populated areas or ships as platforms from which to shoot rockets, even as “dirty bombs” are not fictitious. That those attacks have not yet happened is no proof that this cannot or will not become brutal reality.

But the concentration on the threat by non state actors should not make us forget that the preferred co-operative solutions between nation states and regional alliances or organizations might not be taken for granted. Especially the run for exploitation of the resources under the seas or the control of particular chokepoints are examples that can lead to non-cooperative developments potentially leading to political, economic and military confrontation or even conflict. The foreseeable development in the “High North” – to just mention this obvious example - requires early measures by the coastal states and the international community to reach solutions that avoid or at least mitigate the potential for confrontation.

An integrated security strategy for the maritime domain

Any integrated maritime policy of the EU will have to include maritime security as an essential part. The reality of three pillars in the EU should not continue to widely lead to separate approaches. Any analyses of the threats we face (or may face) in the maritime domain strengthen the evidence that the long standing differentiation between internal

and external security does not allow to build optimum solutions with existing and future capabilities of the EU memberstates and the EU proper to protect our populations by i.e. deterring or preventing terrorist attacks.

Three years ago, the European Commission has started a process for a “Maritime Policy for the Union” by publishing a “Green Paper”. This contains all maritime areas and activities of interest for the EU and its member states. Very specifically, it discusses the improvement of the life in coastal regions, EU leadership in sustainable maritime development and maritime governance. The important field that the “Green Paper” does not cover and cannot tackle is the maritime security, since this is excluded from the competences of the Commission.

The intergovernmental European Security Strategy is the basis for positioning and directing the EU in the broad area of foreign and security policy including the ten year old ESDP. As it sets the EU as a global player maritime issues deserve prominent considerations. Those are not explicitly addressed in this document.

If the European Union and its Member states are to take on the task to develop a maritime strategy with security as the centerpiece, they will have to decide, whether it has to comprise all functional areas or whether they want to limit it to one or several of the economic uses described above. They need also to clarify to which extent safety at the Seas as well as in the territorial waters of the EU MS should or must be part of the document.

The starting point of this strategy can be described as ensuring methods and measures for the undisturbed, not interrupted execution of the economic function under existing laws and regulation and the protection against identified risks, dangers and threats using passive and active, defensive and offensive measures.

If one views for the purpose of reflection the ESS as kind of equivalent to the U.S. National Security Strategy one could recognize that the U.S. Document is only the highest ranking document in that sphere and is followed by the National Defense Strategy, the National Military Strategy and – as relates to our topic - the National Strategy for Maritime Security. It is under the guidance of the aims and objectives in those documents that the Navy, the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard for the first time in history developed and published last year “A cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower”.

Accepting that any direct analogy to the EU situation is not appropriate it nevertheless shows that the EU has had for the last six years her “highest ranking” document with the ESS. But the follow on documents like the Crisis Management Concept, the Headline Goal 2010 (military & civil) Civil-Military Cooperation, to mention a few, are rather limited - while setting a EU “level of ambition” - to the more practical questions of the decisionmaking processes, the capability development procedures and the ways how to execute any Crisis Management Operation (CMO) than the deliberations regarding the more specified common interests and objectives which might lead to CMOs of different efforts and magnitude. The EU of 27 member states (MS) leaves that to a case-by-case consideration recognizing early on that hypothetical, or specific regional or functional scenarios for CMOs will hardly find consensus before a specific development or negative event will trigger activities.

But there are many issues and areas of concern that could be brought forward. Two initial issues require a decision

- first to what extent the “homeland defense” of the territorial waters and the supporting infrastructure ashore can be organized in an increasingly common EU approach, including all available means and capabilities and
- second whether and to what extent the EU as a widely maritime entity and a self declared global player can and will subscribe to the element of seapower that has been and still is a largely national category.

Both issues need reflection of the common purpose, analysis of the set of objectives, assessment of the already available assets and capabilities as well as newly required ones. This requires an incrementally integrated work by representatives from all three pillars of the EU, two of them heavily dependent of engagement and will of the nation even in the start phase. This approach may – and should gain momentum with the Lisbon treaty in force since the 1st of December 2009. The newly selected “EU Foreign Minister” (in treaty language: 'High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy') and the European diplomatic service will lead to the increased connectivity between the Commission and the General Secretariat. The new formulations and perspectives regarding the EU defence combined with enhanced competencies of the EU Parliament judicial and Home affairs and more discussions regarding issues of GFSP & ESDP have the potential for framing the common political purposes, goals and objectives also in the area of a concise maritime security strategy.

Beyond those steps – if undertaken - it will be important to proceed on the notion that any maritime security strategy of the EU will be all the more effective if it successfully reaches out to partners. The most vital one being the U.S. and NATO. Any common, but limited EU seapower assets can be employed all the more effective as part of a close transatlantic framework. This EU capability can become a catalyst for a “Western Compact for Comprehensive Security”. From such a solid basis the outreach to other states and organisations has the chance to create even stronger and more coherent cooperation dealing with the challenges of the maritime domain.

The European Defence Agency has initiated a bottom up and functionally limited approach in pushing the project of common solutions for maritime surveillance, surely a crucial part of any maritime security strategy. The interim report of the team of “wise men” signals a promising beginning as it describes and analyses the complexities of the maritime domain before addressing the requirements of a common EU maritime surveillance that uses all available present means and capabilities of all MS as a beginning for optimum synergies in future multinational developments. With this optimistic outlook one can start the long distance sail for a geostrategically sound, multinationally anchored maritime security strategy that leads to improved prevention and protection against any hazards and threats in the marine domain surrounding the EU.