

Combined Maritime Forces: U.S Global Naval Force in the Arabian Sea

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The U.S. Navy blog site ran a feature on the U.S.-created and -led multinational Combined Maritime Forces operation throughout the Arabian Sea on June 28. [1]

Established in February 2002 toward the beginning of the so-called global war on terror, it has in the interim expanded to include 35-40 ships engaged in what are identified as anti-piracy operations and the “promotion of security, stability and prosperity” in 2.5 million square miles of international waters from the Horn of Africa to the western coast of Pakistan and from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden separating Somalia from Yemen: A zone taking in recent and current American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization theaters of war in Iraq, Afghanistan- Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen; indeed the central focus of Western military operations and geopolitical strategy over the past decade. [2]

Two and a half years ago Washington claimed that its campaign and that of its NATO allies in Afghanistan had proven so successful that it had driven al-Qaeda elements out of South Asia, forcing them to – somehow, it was never explained how – flee across the entire width of the Arabian Sea to Somalia and Yemen [3], although overall developments related to the intractable, and unwinnable, war in Afghanistan in the interim hardly bear out the first half of that self-deluding assessment.

The over decade-long Combined Maritime Forces initiative is commanded by American Vice Admiral John Miller, who is simultaneously commander of U.S Naval Forces Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Fleet, all three based in Bahrain. Its deputy commander is Commodore Simon Ancona of the Royal Navy, who also serves as the United Kingdom Maritime Component commander in charge of Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships in the Middle East. The U.S. Fifth Fleet has a Carrier Strike Group, Expeditionary Strike Group, at most times two nuclear-powered supercarriers and other ships and aircraft with 15,000 service members assigned to them.

Combined Maritime Forces consists of three combined task forces (CFTs) — CTF 150, CTF 151 and CTF 152 – which are identified as conducting maritime security, counter-piracy and Persian Gulf maritime security operations, respectively.

The Combined Maritime Forces website describes the geostrategic importance of its area of operation as encompassing “some of the world’s most important shipping lanes,” from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman and the Laccadive Sea; where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Arabian Sea and where the latter connects with the Persian Gulf and where it flows into the Bay of Bengal.

Combined Maritime Forces now includes naval forces from 26 nations, all but one, Thailand,

NATO members states, partners and Troop Contributing Nations for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

Member states: The U.S., Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Turkey.

Partners: Australia, Bahrain, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, New Zealand, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia [4], South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.

Troop Contributing Nations not yet in the second category: Malaysia and Singapore.

Combined Task Force 150 operates in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Red Sea and Indian Ocean and has been commanded at various times by the U.S., Britain, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and Pakistan.

The strategic significance of CTF 150's geographical scope is described by Combined Maritime Forces as follows:

"This area is a vital artery of world trade that includes the main shipping routes from the Far East to Europe and the US with over 23,000 shipping movements per year. Over one third of the world's oil passes through the Area of Operation (AOR) each year. In addition the AOR contains three narrow waterways, know as 'choke points', where vessels are required to pass closely between two shorelines..."

Combined Task Force 151 is deployed to the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia, covering 1.1 million square miles. It has been commanded by the U.S., Denmark, Turkey, Pakistan and South Korea. CTF 151 coordinates all its activities with NATO and the European Union Naval Force Somalia, which are conducting Operation Ocean Shield and Operation Atalanta, respectively.

Combined Task Force 152 operates in what Combined Maritime Forces refers to as the Arabian Gulf; that is, what most of the world knows as the Persian Gulf. The use of the first description is a naked affront to Iran and is meant to be just that. CTF 152 operates in conjunction with the navies of the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It has been commanded by the U.S., Britain, Italy, Australia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

The Combined Maritime Forces website offers this concise background information (and at least implicitly reveals why the CTF 152 is present where it is):

"Today the Gulf is one of the most strategic waterways in the world due to its importance in world oil transportation. It contains in the region of 700 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, representing over half of the world's oil reserves, and over 2,000 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (45% of the world total). Arabian Gulf countries maintain about one-third of the world's productive oil capacity. The majority of the oil exported from the Arabian Gulf is transported by sea."

The U.S. and its military allies in Canada, Europe, the Asia-Pacific region and the Persian Gulf have their warships and shipborne aircraft positioned in the most economically and geostrategically vital stretch of water in the world. To protect their own interests in the manner the world's sole military superpower employs throughout most of the planet -

maintaining the presence of overwhelming firepower – and whenever it suits them to threaten the fundamental interests of others.

Notes

1) U.S. Navy Partnerships: An International Maritime Force

<http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2012/06/28/u-s-navy-partnerships-an-international-maritime-force/>

2) Arabian Sea: Center Of West's 21st Century War

Stop NATO

October 25, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/arabian-sea-center-of-wests-21st-century-war/>

3) U.S., NATO Expand Afghan War To Horn Of Africa And Indian Ocean

Stop NATO

January 8, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/01/08/u-s-nato-expand-afghan-war-to-horn-of-africa-and-indian-ocean-2/>

4) Saudi Arabia: Persian Gulf Of Strategic Interest To NATO

Stop NATO

June 19, 2012

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/saudi-arabia-persian-gulf-of-strategi-c-interest-to-nato/>

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