MARITIME PIRACY - GS III MAINS

Q. Maritime piracy poses a severe economic threat by disrupting global trade routes. Discuss the menace of maritime piracy in the present geo-political context. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *Navy secures release of fishing vessel with crew of 11 Iranians, 8 Pakistanis*

What's in the news?
- Recently, the Indian Navy foiled a piracy attempt on an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel, FV Omaril, off the east coast of Somalia on February 2 and ensured the release of the crew, 11 Iranian and eight Pakistani nationals along with the boat.

What is Maritime Piracy?
- Maritime piracy refers to criminal acts committed on the high seas, involving robbery, hijacking, or kidnapping for ransom.

Menace of Maritime Piracy:
1. Economic Impact:
- Maritime piracy poses a severe economic threat by disrupting global trade routes.
- Piracy incidents lead to increased shipping costs, insurance premiums, and delays in cargo deliveries.
- These economic repercussions affect not only the shipping industry but also contribute to the rising costs of goods for consumers worldwide.

2. Human Cost:
- Beyond the economic toll, maritime piracy exacts a human cost. Seafarers face the risk of violence, abduction and even loss of life.
- Prolonged captivity in pirate strongholds creates harrowing conditions for those unfortunate enough to fall victim to these criminal acts.
- The psychological toll on seafarers and their families is immeasurable.

3. Impact on Regional Stability:
- Piracy often thrives in regions with political instability and weak governance.
- The activities of pirate networks can exacerbate existing tensions, contribute to lawlessness, and hinder socio-economic development in affected areas.

4. Poor Policing:
- The coastal countries have weak maritime forces or none at all.

5. Shipping Choke Points:
- The areas have high concentrations of shipping traffic, being either choke points in shipping routes where ships are forced to converge or slow down by geography, or anchorages where ships remain stationary for days before entering port.

6. Poor Law and Order situation:
- Poor governance or turmoil on land close to these areas leads to unemployment, poverty and consequently, crime.

7. Jurisdictional Ambiguities:
- These areas are mostly international waters, international straits, or archipelagic waters which are long stretches of sea that fall within the maritime jurisdiction of several countries.

Global Efforts:

1. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):
- UNCLOS provides the legal framework for addressing piracy at the international level.
- It delineates the rights and responsibilities of states concerning the use of the seas and establishes the jurisdiction for prosecuting pirates.
- UNCLOS has played a crucial role in shaping global responses to piracy and facilitating cooperation among nations.

2. Combined Maritime Forces (CMF):
- It is a multinational naval partnership, operating in the Indian Ocean region to counter piracy, terrorism, and other illegal activities.
- The Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) specifically focuses on anti-piracy efforts, conducting patrols and coordinating with regional navies to deter and disrupt pirate activities.

3. European Union Naval Force Operation Atalanta:
- Operation Atalanta, launched by the European Union in 2008, is a naval mission dedicated to combating piracy off the coast of Somalia.
- It involves the deployment of naval assets, including warships and maritime patrol aircraft, to ensure the security of shipping lanes and deter pirate activities.

4. Industry Best Practices and Guidelines:
- The shipping industry has actively contributed to anti-piracy efforts by adopting best practices and guidelines for vessel security.
- Measures such as the use of secure transit corridors, employing onboard security personnel, and enhancing communication and coordination among vessels have contributed to reducing the vulnerability of ships to pirate attacks.

5. Regional Cooperation:
- Regional organizations and initiatives, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Djibouti Code of Conduct, play a vital role in fostering regional cooperation to address maritime security challenges.
- By sharing information, conducting joint patrols, and building capacity among coastal states, these initiatives contribute to a collective effort against piracy.

6. Public-Private Partnerships:
- Collaboration between governments, private shipping companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has proven effective in countering piracy.
- Initiatives like the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) provide a platform for information exchange and coordination between naval forces and the shipping industry.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Visible Presence:
- Maritime forces need to maintain a visible presence that aims to deter pirates from carrying out attacks.

2. Surveillance:
- Maritime forces need to undertake surveillance of the high-risk area, identify suspect vessels, and report them for further investigation. This is supported by information fusion centers ashore.

3. Provide Necessary Warnings:
- Maritime forces need to warn passing ships about suspect vessels and announce escort schedules, if any, so that merchant ships transiting the high-risk area can join convoys between designated points.

4. Proactive Intervention:
- Maritime forces need to proactively or reactively intervene to manage a developing situation, foil a piracy attempt, or rescue a hijacked vessel while trying to ensure minimum casualties and damage.

5. Practice Maritime Intervention Operations (MIO):
- Marine commandos are the most effective in intervention operations.
- The Indian Navy has developed extremely high expertise in MIO.
- Once the pirates have been overcome by the commandos, the crew is released from the safe zone on board.

6. Be a Part of Coalition:
- Naval ships can operate as part of a US-coordinated maritime coalition of forces, led by rotation by a commander of one of the participating forces.
- They use a common communication protocol, maintain presence, and share information to thwart piracy attempts. Surveillance aircraft also form part of this coalition force.