

## **COUNTRY PAPER 2.**

### **THE ROLE OF THE ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN IN THE PROTECTION OF FISHING GROUNDS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sultanate of Oman is one of many countries that suffer from illegal fishing operations carried out by fishers from neighbouring countries. This is due to the abundance of the fish wealth, the size of the Omani EEZ and also to those fishers' knowledge of the difficulty of discovering them with our ships' radars because of the bad weather conditions. The intruding boats are made of wood, yet they are so strong that they can resist the autumn storms and carry on fishing without being affected. In recent years the number of such boats started to increase year after year, to the extent that more than fifty boats were identified in a single season.

#### **THE AIM**

The aim of this presentation is to describe the role, capability and operational pattern of the Royal Navy of Oman in the protection of this important natural resource.

#### **THE ROLE OF THE ROYAL NAVY OF OMAN**

The Royal Navy of Oman plays a positive role in the process of protecting the fishing grounds. This is one of the principal tasks of the Royal Navy of Oman in time of peace. The Royal Navy of Oman, with its good experience and organization oriented to effecting similar operations, works hard to deter infiltrators and illegal fishermen entering Omani economic and territorial waters, thus attempting to stop illegal exploitation of natural resources.

The members of the Navy cooperate closely with the Royal Air Force of Oman and Royal Oman Police in organizing patrols for ships and observing these patrols. Recently, the Royal Navy of Oman has improved its fleet with modern ships capable of standing up to the autumn storms and staying at sea for long periods without the need for fuel and water supplies. This has enabled the naval units to better impose its presence in the territorial waters of Oman year-round, in cooperation with units of the Royal Air Force of Oman, in the form of reconnaissance planes noted for their superior ability in manoeuvring and low-flying, which facilitates identification of surface targets in the area of interest. These planes can comb a large area as they stay aloft for three hours. This period can be increased by re-fuelling if circumstances require. The boat detection patrols are planned in advance, in coordination between the command of the Royal Navy of Oman and the command of the Royal Air Force of Oman, when defining the likely times and places for illegal fishing operations. The plane patrols and immediately passes information about surface targets to the ships through secure communication channels. On the basis of the information from the patrol planes, the ship heads for the locations of the boats seen, and boards them to obtain following information:

- (i) The name of the boat and its nationality.
- (ii) The captain and the crew's nationality.
- (iii) Last port of call.

- (iv) The quality of the catch.
- (v) The fishing method used.
- (vi) Any other information that may be of use as evidence.

## MAJOR DIFFICULTIES

Any operation performed by the individual at sea is bound to have difficulties, which differ in size and quality from one operation and another. The main difficulties which face the Royal Navy of Oman in its protection of fishing grounds include the following.

- **Establishment of evidence** The operation of obtaining decisive evidence that the suspect vessels been involved in illegal fishing operations in Omani territorial and economic waters is considered to be one of the most important and most complicated tasks facing the officers and crew of the Navy, since any failure to obtain valid and conclusive evidence will certainly have negative results and harm the reputation of the Royal Navy of Oman. Overcoming these difficulties is achieved by:
  - (i) Taking video films and still photographs of the fishing operation, as well as the catch and its size, and relating the photo to a landmark if possible.
  - (ii) Filming the boarding operation, with the date and time recorded on the film.
  - (iii) Recording all the negotiations between the captain of the boat and the boarding party from the naval ship.
  - (iv) Obtaining all information related to the fishing boat.
  - (v) Registering carefully the longitude and latitude position of the suspect boat.
- **Escorting and guarding the arrested vessels** Escorting the boats arrested for illegal fishing is one of the most difficult tasks faced by the ships of the Royal Oman Navy, as such vessels should be escorted safely by the navy ships to the nearest port. It is especially difficult if there is more than one boat involved. The escort operation may last three days to a week or more, depending on the distance to be covered from and to the nearest port. The operation of leading and guarding the boat is achieved in one of two ways, either by towing or in convoy:
  - Towing** The Towing method is used where only one boat only is caught. Despite the difficulty of carrying out this operation in bad weather conditions, such operations are invariably successful.
  - Convoys** This operation needs two or more warships. Usually one ship leads in front and the other brings up the rear of the convoy. Precautions are taken before carrying out the operation, such as evacuating the boat crews except for two in each boat. In addition, two naval ratings are assigned to each boat, and provided with light arms and portable communication equipment.

Previous experience has proved the inefficacy of allowing the crews to remain on their boats, because they resort to using trickery to try to escape. For example, from time to time some of them pretend that there is a breakdown in the motors or the steering. Others sail at high speed so that the other boats cannot keep up with them. Some boats slow down to a minimum speed which results in extending the distances between one boat and another, making it difficult to control them. Other clever tricks are apparent absolute obedience during daylight, but as soon as it gets dark, they turn off their sailing lights and attempt to escape by all means possible.

Ultimately, the role of the Royal Navy of Oman ends by delivering those boats to the Royal Oman Police, as represented by the Coastguard.