

*‘Centre d’Etude de Droit Militaire et de Droit de la Guerre’
‘Studiecentrum voor Militair Recht en Oorlogsrecht’*



*International Society for Military Law and the Law of War
‘Société Internationale de Droit Militaire et de Droit de la Guerre’*

‘SILENT LEGES INTER ARMA?’

Conference IX

Bruges, 17 September 2026

Dealing with the Shadow Fleet in accordance
with International and National Law

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Agenda

- Countering the Shadow Fleet at Sea
- The approach of the EU: EUNAVFOR MED Op. IRINI
- Merchant Ships from the perspective of the law of Naval Warfare



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Law of the Sea

➤ Art.110 UNCLOS

➤ Art. 58 UNCLOS

➤ Customary Law



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Forces from ITS Thaon di Revel (P430) boarded MV Sun (IMO: 9293117) to verify the tanker's flag on Aug. 30, 2026.



Source: <https://news.usni.org/2026/09/02/european-union-naval-force-intercepts-suspected-russian-shadow-fleet-tanker>



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ITS Thaon di Revel (P430), intercepted sanctioned tanker MT Toa Payoh (IMO: 9298492) on Aug. 2, 2026.



Source: <https://www.difesa.it/primopiano/operazione-irini-nave-thaon-di-revel-abborda-petroliera-sanzionata-dallue-e-appartenente-alla-flotta-ombra-russa-per-verificarne-la-bandiera/108191.html>



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The legal framework:

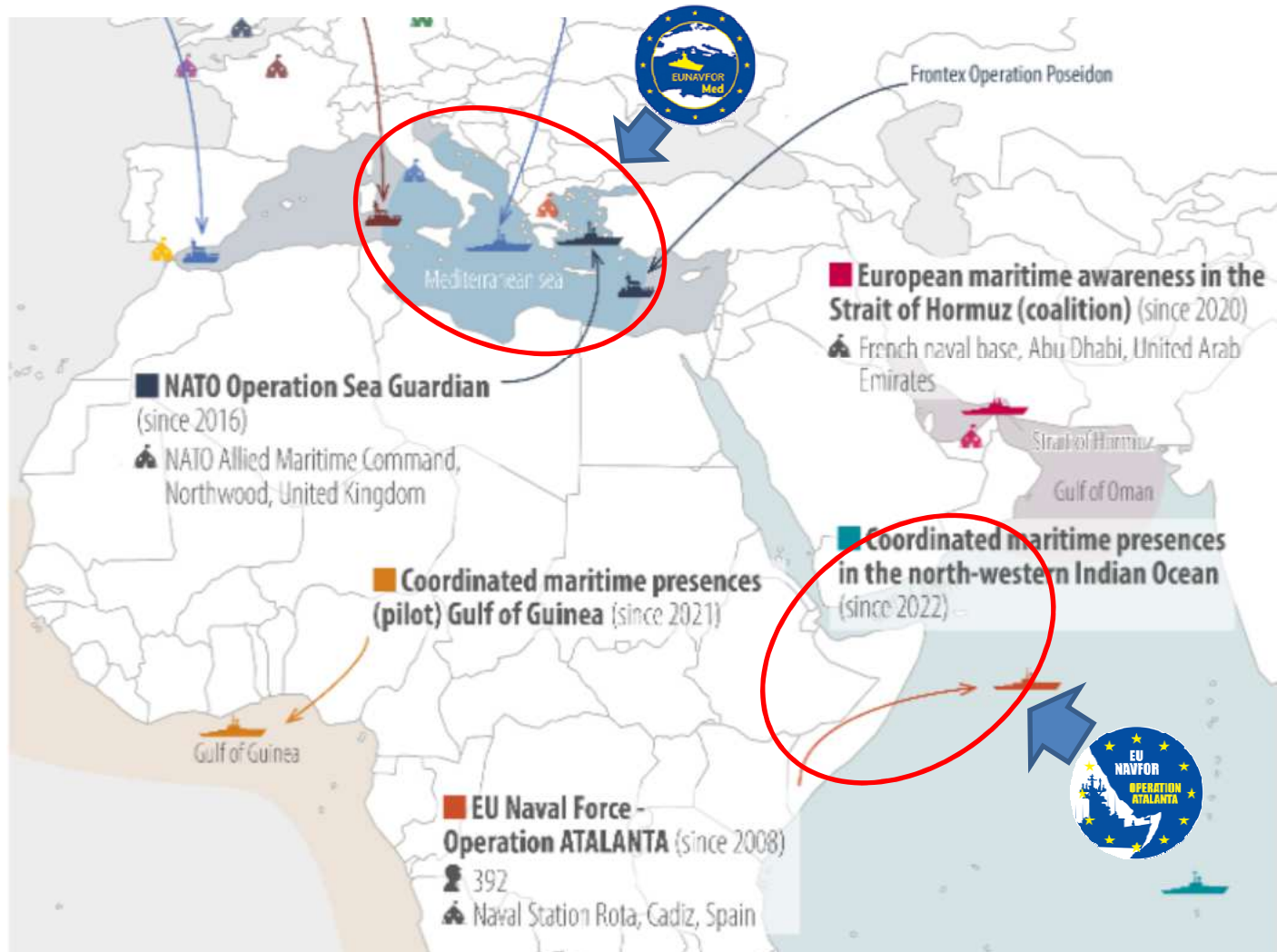
- COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2025/488 of 11 March 2025
*“shall conduct monitoring and surveillance activities and gather information on illicit activities other than the trafficking of arms and related materiel and illicit exports of petroleum from Libya, as well as information useful to the protection of critical maritime infrastructure and to contingency planning, thereby contributing further to **maritime situational awareness** in the Area of Operation and in the Joint Operation Area.”*
- POLITICAL AND SECURITY COMMITTEE DECISION (CFSP)
2026/1884 of 16 July 2026
- UNSC Resolution 2804 (2025) of 25 November 2025 expired on 25 May 2026



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Where?



Source: <https://io.wp.com/epthintank.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/European-maritime-security-landscape.png?ssl=1> (image modified)



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➤ Right to visit

➤ Enforcement measures



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Ukraine hits Russian 'shadow fleet' oil tankers with naval drones in the Black Sea



Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-30/ukraine-attacks-two-russian-oil-tankers-black-sea/106084470>

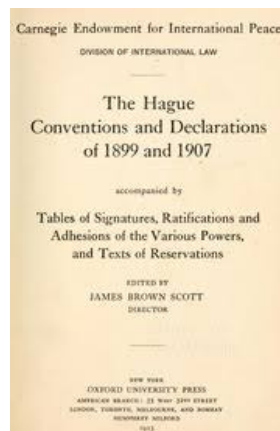


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Legal issues:

- STATUS OF MERCHANT VESSELS DURING AN ARMED CONFLICT
- ENEMY VS. NEUTRAL MERCHANT VESSELS – RELEVANCE OF THE FLAG
- RELEVANT MARITIME ZONES





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WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Info gathering
- Interception
- Boarding
- Diverting
- Seizing
- Targeting?





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Thank you for your attention!