



# NATO Topic A

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NATO's maritime activities on  
its Southern Border: Control of  
human trafficking in the  
Aegean Sea



## INTRODUCTION

As the Syrian Civil War has progressed, the Middle East has plunged further into chaos and disarray. This has resulted in an increase in the number of refugees both within neighboring nations and within the rest of the world. A particularly large number of these refugees have made their way towards Europe, in the hope of building a more prosperous future far from the threat of persecution and financial instability. The number of applicants peaked in 2015 when the number of first-time applicants totaled 1,325,560, with the top three countries of origin being Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria - warzones. Such a dramatic influx was made easier by the actions of human traffickers, who have sought to profit from the plight of the most vulnerable in our society; they have endangered their lives.

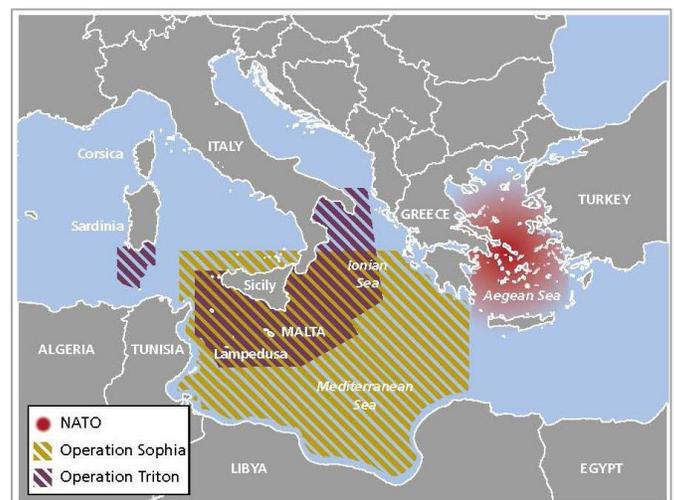
It will be this committee's duty to shape NATO's ongoing response to this crisis. The objectives and the effectiveness of current operations; future operational capacity; the operations and programs of partner agencies and long-term goals must be considered for this committee to successfully negotiate this topic. These areas will be outlined throughout this guide, to allow delegates to familiarize themselves with the challenge facing NATO.

### NATO's naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea

In order to fulfill its roles of providing collective security and undertaking crisis-management missions, NATO members commit their troops and warships to NATO. Currently, the Standing NATO

Maritime Group Two (SNMG2) consists of seven vessels from five members. These vessels include One destroyer, one frigate, one countermeasures vessel, one missile attack boat, one gunboat and two patrol boats. The fleet is currently under the command of Commodore James Morely (Royal Navy).

While NATO has other forces under its command, delegates should focus primarily on using SNMG2 as its primary military tool in this debate.



Source: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/mediterranean-journeys-in-hope/glenda-garelli-martina-tazzioli/warfare-on-logistics-of-migrant-movement>



### **Operation Sea Guardian - the NATO response thus far**

While it does not see combatting human trafficking as one of its primary goals, NATO is willing to provide assistance whenever it is called upon. On February 11, 2016, NATO Defense Ministers chose to deploy NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) to both national and international waters around Greece and Turkey with the goal of providing reconnaissance, monitoring and surveillance assistance to Coast Guard units within the area.

The NATO leadership does not aim to “[stop] or [push] back refugee boats”. Instead, it is hoped that aside from being able to provide valuable intelligence on the movement of refugee boats, the naval presence of NATO will act as a deterrent in its own right. Unlike its European Union partner, FRONTEX, NATO has access to Turkish territory and intelligence networks. This is a major advantage, as it allows NATO to be directly involved in one of the largest transit nations for refugees, and the origin of many of the refugee boats that have set out towards the European Union.

### **Operation Poseidon - FRONTEX's operation within the Aegean Sea**

The European Union's border security agency, FRONTEX, has numerous maritime operations within the Mediterranean Sea. Of these operations, Operation Poseidon focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean. Operation Poseidon provides technical assistance to Greece by helping to strengthen border security, saving lives at sea, and conducting returns and readmissions.

Operation Poseidon is useful as a humanitarian tool, but it has received criticism along with Operation Sophia - a FRONTEX operation aimed at disrupting human trafficking networks in the Central Mediterranean - partly due to its dependence on European Union funds and partly due to the lack of access to Turkish waters. Such a limitation severely decreases the chances of success, since, without cooperation with the country of origin for many of the migrant boats - Turkey - Operation Poseidon is limited to treating the symptoms of the crisis, as opposed to treating it at its source.

### **A Political Solution**

In 2016, the European Union and Turkey signed a deal to reduce the number of migrants crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece. The deal consisted of five key points. Amongst these was the return of migrants - who have not made, or made unsuccessful asylum claims in the EU - to Turkey; the resettlement of migrants who have not tried to illegally enter the EU from Turkey; as well as £2.3bn in financial support for Turkey. The hope was that such a deal would stem the flow of migrants to Europe and ease the pressure on Greece and other nations along the Balkan route, thereby reducing the number of migrants who could fall victim to human trafficking.

The initial data seems to support the EU's decision to sign such a deal. Between December 2016 and February 2017, the number of people crossing the Aegean dropped from 50,000 to 3,500. The deal has become a political weapon in the hands of Turkish President Erdogan, as he has threatened to stop enforcing it and allow a wave of migrants to proceed unhindered to Europe. These threats have thus far been without any follow-up from the Turkish side, but they put the long-term stability and success of the deal into jeopardy. Furthermore, there have been concerns over the legality and the implementation of the deal. For the deal to work, significant human and financial resources have to be shifted to the camps in the Aegean for the processing of applicants to occur at a sufficient speed, this is difficult to achieve when many of the existing officials appear to view the deal as a means of turning migrants away at any cost.

### **Operation Sophia**

Operation Sophia can serve as an interesting case study for NATO. Operation Sophia is part of FRONTEX's attempt to actively break-up human trafficking operations originating from Libya.

The mandate for Operation Sophia is split into four phases:

- The strategic deployment of forces to build an understanding of the nature of human-trafficking within the area;
- The boarding, seizure, and diversion of smugglers' boats in accordance with international law;
- The taking of operational measures against vessels and other assets suspected of being involved in human trafficking;
- The final phase consists of the withdrawal of forces upon the successful completion of their mission.

The mission has been expanded to include the training of the Libyan Navy and Coast Guard amongst its objectives. It is hoped that a newly empowered Libyan Navy and Coast Guard can help restore order to its coastal regions, thus limiting the ability of human traffickers to launch new boats towards Europe.

While Operation Sophia appears to be a strong model, it is not without its flaws. A report by the House of Lords has described it as a "failed mission". Most human traffickers arrested were low-level members of the smuggler networks, furthermore, the intercepts and rescues made by the task force have resulted in traffickers adapting their tactics. They no longer plan to carry migrants all the way, since they can be 'picked-up' inside international waters by the task force.

#### **Taking a more direct route**

On the other end of the spectrum, the committee can choose to a solution that involves some degree of direct intervention in Syria. This approach would assume that while there are 3.1 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey who could choose to take a route across the Aegean, the only way to truly stop the trafficking of migrants would be through the stabilization of Syria. Given that Syria is a warzone, this stabilization would require an active military response from NATO.

This approach contains numerous pitfalls that must be navigated to succeed. The committee would have to consider whether a no-fly-zone will yield satisfactory results or whether 'boots on the ground' are necessary. For either approach to be successfully, a result must be planned. An ally capable of governing must be chosen. Without state-building any intervention to stabilize the country would be doomed to fail and result in a fractured nation and chaos, similar to what can be observed within Libya.

Despite the difficulties involved in direct military action, there is a precedent for it. No-fly-zones have previously been established by NATO over Libya during the Libyan Civil War, and direct action has been taken against both Afghanistan and Kosovo. The Kosovo mission provides a precedent for action against Syria, as the intervention was undertaken under a 'responsibility to protect' framework as NATO attempted to ensure that no ethnic cleansing against the Kosovar Albanians takes place.

# Important Country Positions



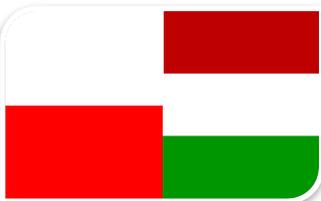
Among the NATO members, the most directly affected are **Greece and Turkey**. The sheer volume of migrants has put an immense strain on their economies as well as their societies. To these nations it is imperative that any if any change to the current NATO policy is made, the change results in a meaningful long-term reduction in the number of migrants within their nation, not just a reduction in human trafficking.



Given its position as one of the destinations for migrants entering the European Union, **Germany** will have a key role within this debate. Chancellor Merkel maintains that allowing the migrants who were stuck in the Balkan route to enter Germany was the right decision on a humanitarian basis, and in the large part, they would do the same. Germany will have to find a balance between upholding their values and taking a more forceful approach to border security.



Another EU nation that will be central to the debate is **Italy**. While Italy does not lie on the Balkan route, it lies on the Central Mediterranean route instead. This means that any action taken to reduce the number of migrants taking the Balkan route will lead to an increase in the number who attempt to cross across the Central Mediterranean from Libya. This will result in a larger burden being placed on Italy. Similarly, to Germany, Italy will have to try to and balance their commitments to their neighbors in the region and their national interest.



With the increasingly hardline stances of their respective governments, **Hungary and Poland** will play the role of the wild cards within this debate. The opposition to migrants from Muslim-majority countries can result in these countries pushing the committee to find an acceptable solution, in much the same way, it can also hinder any progress as they attempt to force their allies into taking more extreme measures to combat human trafficking and migration.



Throughout the course of the Syrian Civil War, there have been many calls for NATO members to intervene militarily in the conflict. While such calls have lessened, they have not gone away. Lately, there has been increased discussions and attempts of trying to reduce human trafficking and migration from **Libya** in Libya. But attempts by the EU to set up refugee centers in Libya have not left the discussion phase. So, any delegate who wishes to introduce the idea of a military intervention in Syria in an attempt provide refugees with a chance to return to their homeland, must take into account the lack of a desire on NATO members as a whole for another costly military intervention in the Middle East.



# International Treaties concerning human trafficking

Treaties that directly address the issue of human trafficking:

- The Palermo Protocol: a supplement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It requires States to criminalize trafficking.

Treaties that address the instruments of human trafficking:

- The international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: It prohibits several practices linked to the trafficking of humans, including various forms of slavery, and forced labour;
- The Convention on the Elimination of ALL Forms of Discrimination against Women: it requires all states to act against the trafficking of women as it fundamentally undermines the ability of women to enjoy their freedoms;
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO): It calls upon States to combat the use of child labour and to devote resources to the rehabilitation of minors who have suffered such forms of abuse.

A comprehensive list can be found at:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/IntInstrumentsconcerningTraffickingpersons\\_Aug2014.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/IntInstrumentsconcerningTraffickingpersons_Aug2014.pdf)

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are current NATO operations in the area capable of addressing the crisis?
2. Should the stated goals of the current mission be updated?
3. If NATO operations should be expanded, of what size and scope should the new operation be?
4. Is a military intervention in Syria constructive? Would it help stabilize the country or just add to the chaos?
5. Can the alliance balance the need for a politically palatable solution with the needs of civilians?



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# Important Further Reading

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For delegates who only have a superficial knowledge of NATO:

*NATO, what is it, why does it still exist, and how does it work?*

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vN4r2hg00s>

*How does NATO help manage crises?*

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4URL2VMnHYs>

*NATO's maritime forces*

Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ctn\\_rx30p84](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ctn_rx30p84)



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