



NAVIGATING THE THRESHOLD FOR MEDIATION

Maritime Security, Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation in
EU External Action

CSDN Discussion Paper

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European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)

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Executive Summary

Over the past decade, maritime security and peace mediation have each become substantial fields within EU external action, but they have developed largely in parallel. This paper examines the resulting gap: where maritime insecurity already contains functions that prevent or contain conflict (e.g., regular and structured communication, liaison, incident management, deconfliction, technical cooperation, confidence-building); and where the connection to dedicated conflict prevention and mediation capacity remains weak, uneven or simply unlabelled.

Drawing on interviews with EU officials, maritime-security practitioners, legal experts and peace mediators, and on four brief illustrative cases (the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden/Yemen, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Black Sea Grain Initiative), **it is not possible to discern a single model of 'maritime mediation'**. Instead, the findings point to a distinction between maritime issues that can themselves become the object of preventive diplomacy or mediation, and maritime dimensions of wider political or armed conflicts that ultimately need to be addressed within a broader political process. The appropriate preventive response depends on the source and political character of the insecurity involved. At the Strait of Hormuz, maritime presence already carries an explicit civilian diplomatic function. In the Gulf of Guinea, technical and relatively depoliticised cooperation carries preventive value precisely because it has not become political. In the Red Sea, political channels exist but remain disconnected from the maritime response. The Black Sea Grain Initiative shows aspects of peace mediation producing a concrete maritime arrangement, implemented through a technical mechanism, and vulnerable to the withdrawal of political consent.

For the EU, the institutional picture mirrors the conceptual one: **the Union has built substantial maritime-security capacity** through the EU Maritime Security Strategy and **substantial mediation capacity** through the EEAS's peace mediation architecture, but **no systematic pathway connects the two**. The practical challenge is recognising the moment a maritime problem acquires a wider political dimension and having the expertise and relationships available to respond.

This discussion paper does not argue for a new institution or arrangement. It recommends **seven graduated, practical steps**: beginning with structured dialogue between the two communities, and extending to a shared vocabulary, better-connected analysis, specialist expertise, reciprocal training, and a stronger civil-society and diplomatic interface. The aim is to connect capacities that, in most respects, already exist.

Introduction

For years, maritime security remained largely isolated within the policy discourse as a highly technical and specialised domain, mostly reserved for naval planners and maritime lawyers rather than diplomats or peace mediation experts. The maritime domain was treated less as a primary theatre of conflict than as an environment operating on its own logic.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the succession of maritime crises that followed (such as the Black Sea, the Red Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, and the attacks to undersea cables and pipelines) forced a fundamental change of perspectives and have brought the maritime dimensions of contemporary conflict much more sharply into view. Practitioners across peace mediation, conflict prevention and maritime security alike have found themselves reaching, a little uncertainly, for concepts built for other purposes. This paper works through that uncertainty rather than resolving it prematurely.

Maritime security itself is hardly new; what has changed is its political salience. The revised **EU Maritime Security Strategy** (EUMSS) and Action Plan, adopted in 2023, structure the Union's ambition around activities at sea, cooperation with partners, maritime domain awareness, risk and threat management, capability development, and education and training. Over the same period, and particularly since the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established, the EU has also built a substantial parallel **architecture for conflict analysis, conflict prevention and peace mediation**. The two fields have travelled largely on separate tracks: one anchored in security governance, maritime law and operational cooperation, the other in the management of political and violent conflict.

Yet **maritime spaces are also political spaces**. Ships and sea lanes connect states whose relationships may be strained or hostile; maritime boundaries and offshore resources raise questions of sovereignty; coastguards and navies encounter one another operationally even where political relations do not allow it elsewhere; conflicts that begin on land increasingly reach commercial shipping and critical infrastructure. At sea, law, security and political conflict meet in unusually direct ways.

This CSDN Discussion Paper aims to examine where existing practice already connects maritime security to conflict prevention and mediation, where the gaps remain, and how dialogue and mediation approaches might be more systematically reflected in EU maritime security policy and implementation.

Understanding Maritime Security and Locating the Nexus

Maritime security has become one of the central organising concepts of ocean governance. It operates as an “essentially contested” concept connecting the dimensions of sea power and national security, marine safety, the blue economy, and human security and resilience (Bueger 2015). Maritime security is described as interconnected, transnational and liminal: in other words, it crosses the line between civilian and military activity, public and private authority, and sea and shore (Bueger and Edmunds 2017, 2024). For example, a fisheries dispute can involve livelihoods, criminal markets and interstate relations at once; an attack on a commercial vessel can implicate an armed conflict ashore and a naval deployment in the same incident.

The EU's own framework reflects this breadth. The 2023 EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) treats a secure maritime domain as essential to ocean governance and a sustainable blue economy and identifies threats ranging from territorial disputes and strategic competition to hybrid threats, critical infrastructure, and climate and environmental degradation. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), on the other hand, offers a useful contrast: it has no comparable overarching definition, working instead through a functional, mandate-based approach centred on the safety and security of shipping. Maritime security has developed less as a bounded legal category than as an umbrella under which different actors organise their response to the risk in front of them.

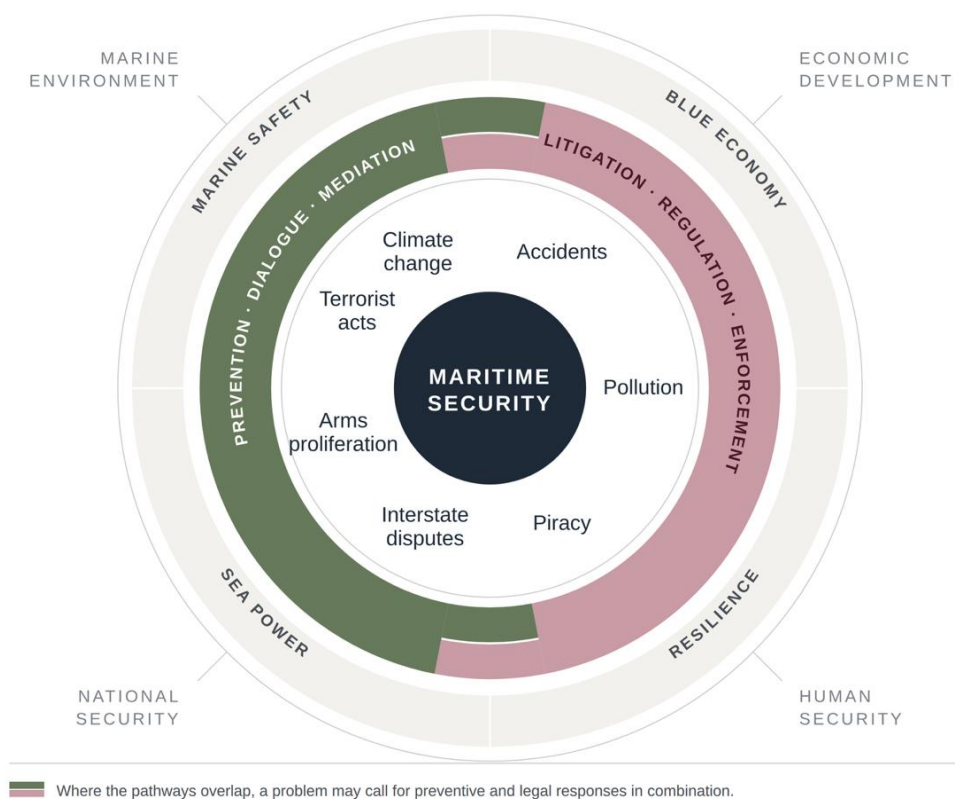
Understood this broadly, the field includes disputes, geopolitical tension and conditions capable of generating political and, occasionally, violent conflict. **Conflict prevention is already visible within maritime security practice, although rarely defined under that name:** deconfliction, incident prevention, confidence-building measures, information exchange, informal dialogue and legal dispute settlement all recur throughout the literature and the interviews conducted for this paper. Maritime diplomacy spans cooperative, persuasive and coercive registers, but remains an instrument that states use to pursue their own objectives, thus a different practice from third-party facilitation. However, read against the 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation, **maritime security practice already sits on a prevention-to-mediation spectrum:** early communication and deconfliction; confidence-building and joint problem-solving; dialogue and crisis management; and, in some cases, facilitation or mediation. This said, these stages do not form a mechanical sequence, and not every maritime-security problem necessarily needs to move toward peace mediation. Indeed, maritime mediation can operate at different levels. **In some contexts, the maritime issue itself is the object of preventive approaches** entailing structured dialogue or mediation (e.g., for disputes or tensions concerning access, navigation, maritime boundaries, fisheries or incidents). However, **in other cases maritime insecurity is one manifestation of a wider political or armed conflict.** Here, arrangements concerning shipping, ports, and naval corridors are also conflict prevention mechanisms and crisis management, and durable solutions for security are likely to depend on their connection to a broader political process. **Distinguishing between these situations helps clarify both the potential and limitations of engagements in the maritime security domain.**

This produces the puzzle at the centre of this discussion paper. **Maritime security has built a sophisticated repertoire of law, regulation, surveillance and regional cooperation, and increasingly addresses problems with a clear political-conflict dimension, yet the connection to conflict prevention and peace mediation remains weak.** The principal taxonomies of maritime security actors rarely include the role of an impartial facilitator or a mediation support structure. Some mechanisms, however, work precisely because their mandates are narrow and deliberately kept out of politics.

At the same time, peace mediation and conflict prevention should not be understood as another sector of maritime security alongside naval defence or marine safety. They are better understood as a cross-cutting capability and thus relevant across every domain of maritime security once a dispute, an insecurity or an escalation risk begins to emerge.

The role of civil society in this constellation is also worth flagging. Some maritime-security institutions give non-state actors real standing: industry bodies, seafarer organisations, and environmental and community groups can hold consultative status inside technical bodies such as the IMO. Yet access runs mainly through industry and expert channels rather than peacebuilding organisations, while researchers working on African maritime security describe the wider civil-society voice as thin and largely disconnected from the security conversation. Section 4 returns to the question through three possible functions: access, analysis and dialogue infrastructure.

The scope of maritime security - Threats, functional domains and response pathways



Adapted from Bueger, "What Is Maritime Security?", *Marine Policy* 53 (2015): 159-164.

The Institutional Architecture and the Missing Political Interface

Contemporary maritime security runs on a dense architecture of international law, regulatory institutions, regional frameworks and operational mechanisms built to regulate navigation, suppress crime, manage risk, build capacity and, where required, provide protective action. Few parts of it were designed to manage the political conflicts that generate or intensify maritime insecurity in the first place.

The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the foundation, establishing maritime zones, jurisdiction and navigational rights alongside a genuine, peaceful settlement architecture. It provides for conciliation and binding procedures through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Court of Justice or arbitration. Its limits become visible once a dispute is embedded in wider political conflict: states may exclude certain boundary and military disputes from this framework, sovereignty questions can sit beyond compulsory procedures, and ratification gaps remove a shared legal basis in precisely some of the cases where one would help most.

UNCLOS manages legal disputes at sea but was never built to manage the political or violent conflict in which a legal dispute may sit.

The **IMO** is the clearest expression of a technical logic: a regulatory mandate with no formal peace mediation or preventive diplomacy function. Yet, the boundary is not sealed: during Russia's war against Ukraine, the IMO Council asked the Secretary-General to work with relevant parties on a safe maritime corridor in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov; the Black Sea Grain Initiative was negotiated politically by the UN and Türkiye, with the IMO and other technical actors supporting implementation once political agreement was in place. **Maritime institutions can supply technical expertise and neutral implementation support around a politically negotiated arrangement without becoming peace mediators themselves.** Their technical character may be exactly what lets cooperation survive.

The **UN Security Council** occupies a different corner, focusing on condemnation, sanctions and enforcement authorisations rather than technical standards. Its response has varied by region: temporary authorisation for action in Somali waters; emphasis on regional strategy and capacity in the Gulf of Guinea; and, in the 2024 Red Sea resolution, condemnation of Houthi attacks alongside encouragement of diplomatic effort and support for the Yemen peace process (see Annex A for resolutions on these resolutions). This said, the **Security Council has addressed maritime security recurrently but without a sustained or systematic approach.** The political connection runs through the wider peace process architecture rather than anything maritime-specific.

A 2024 UN research assessment found **more than twenty international agencies addressing aspects of maritime security under separate mandates, with no body holding a comprehensive mandate.** The pattern echoes what this paper finds inside the EU: substantial activity, and no single body responsible for the whole picture.

Regionally, the architecture keeps devolving downward. The Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendment, and the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and Architecture, link national and multinational coordination centres to information-sharing, training and capacity development. These arrangements carry a preventive effect that is rarely named as such: **repeated professional contact and shared procedure build working relationships across otherwise difficult political lines**. That potential should not be oversold. Deliberate depoliticisation may be exactly what makes mechanisms such as **Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE)** functional. A conflict prevention interface should not necessarily be bolted onto every technical mechanism that succeeds.

Underneath all of this sits a basic requirement: a shared, verified picture of what is actually happening at sea. Practitioners describe **maritime domain awareness less as a technology problem than an information-sharing and trust problem**: agreeing what to share, with whom, and under what filters is itself a confidence-building exercise between affected actors. The EU attempts to consolidate a common picture illustrate the difficulty of doing this across a layered, cross-agency base; smaller multi-agency and bilateral models are often cited as more functional benchmarks.

It appears that in maritime security, the EU does not lack instruments; it lacks a map to them. Even seasoned insiders would need years to trace how its parallel missions and programmes connect, if they connect at all. The EUMSS organises action around six objectives and roughly 150 concrete actions and states explicitly that it should be implemented within the EU's Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises; the 2022 Strategic Compass commits the EU explicitly to early warning, conflict prevention and mediation. However, it seems that neither commitment translates into a systematic route connecting a maritime security problem with a political dimension to the EU's own conflict prevention and mediation expertise.

Thus, **the EU has built substantial capacity in both peace mediation and maritime security fields, largely without either noticing the other**. If conflict prevention and crisis management is to enter this increased political arena, the issue is of how to connect them. The maritime security architecture is well equipped to detect and analyse most dimensions of a fisheries dispute, a contested boundary or an attack on shipping. It has far less capacity to determine when that information might support political de-escalation, dialogue or third-party facilitation.

Expert Perspectives: Where the Nexus Emerges in Practice

Practitioners across very different institutional vantage points converged on a single proposition: **“There is no such thing as just a purely maritime-only conflict”**. Shipping and navigation have been disrupted in the Black Sea by the war in Ukraine, in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden by the war in Yemen and the reverberations of the war in Gaza, and in the Persian Gulf by the long confrontation between Iran, Israel and the United States. As such, piracy is never just a maritime phenomenon, as it also reflects the political and governance conditions on the coastline behind it.

■ When maritime insecurity becomes a mediation concern

This should be the starting point for analysis. Piracy, attacks on shipping, contested access, and fisheries and boundary disputes are not, by themselves, mediation issues. What matters is whether they are tied to a conflict already underway, could feed escalation, or raise the odds of future confrontation. Jurisdiction over pirates and the prosecution questions that follow a seized vessel are serious maritime security problems, but several practitioners interviewed agree that these are, for the most part, not mediation problems: legal and enforcement instruments remain indispensable. What practitioners do describe is a **rise in demand for maritime security-related dialogue** over the past two to four years. This shows also the **growing maritime footprint of interstate confrontation** and armed conflict rather than any expansionist instinct of the mediation field itself.

■ Preventive practice inside a securitised architecture

Within a securitised architecture — where, as one practitioner observed, “people think of law enforcement or kinetic responses as a way to ensure maritime security” — **conflict prevention mechanisms still operate, even where nobody involved define them as such**: communication channels between maritime law enforcement agencies reduce the odds that misunderstanding becomes escalation; codes of conduct set expectations before an incident occurs; negotiated arrangements over access supply predictability precisely when politics supplies none. Reflecting on over a decade of confidence-building initiatives in the South China Sea and Bay of Bengal, a representative of a peace mediation non-governmental organisation described that “establishing confidence building between maritime law enforcement agencies is... a very concrete portfolio of engagement in this terrain.”

The IMO's own account illustrates the tension precisely. Its officials describe a mandate confined by design to international shipping and the protection of seafarers, with no role in naval operations, law enforcement or peacekeeping. Yet the organisation has been drawn further into confidence-building and diplomatic space than its formal remit anticipates. During the Hormuz crisis, it developed an evacuation corridor framework for ships and seafarers trapped in the Persian Gulf and increasingly functioned as a neutral validator of information in crisis. Officials were candid that formalising this role would turn a well-functioning technical body into something more explicitly political, and that there is no member-state appetite for this. The emerging institutional void in

maritime political mediation, on their account, is real; expanding the IMO's mandate is not the obvious way to fill it.

■ Civil society: access, analysis and dialogue infrastructure

On civil society, the IMO is a partial counterexample to the pattern found elsewhere in this research. Close to a hundred non-governmental and industry bodies hold consultative status. During the Hormuz crisis the organisation convened a dedicated industry and seafarer welfare body to feed practitioner information into its response. That engagement runs mainly through industry, shipping and seafarer welfare organisations rather than peacebuilding or community groups. Researchers working on African maritime security describe coastal and fisheries communities, environmental and scientific organisations, and women, peace and security networks as comparatively thinly represented and rarely brought into maritime domain awareness or information-sharing work. Their **potential contribution is broader than representation alone: it includes access to affected communities, analysis of local political and livelihood dynamics**, and dialogue infrastructure that formal security actors may not hold.

■ Technical cooperation and the protection of technical space

None of this should be read as evidence that technical cooperation naturally graduates into political trust. On the contrary, several interviews suggest that **maritime cooperation often works precisely because contentious political questions are kept out of it**. The IMO is the clearest case: a mandate confined to shipping, safety and regulation that has, at moments of crisis, turned into an asset. During the Strait of Hormuz crisis, the IMO developed practical arrangements for vessels and seafarers trapped in the Persian Gulf without attempting to resolve the underlying confrontation, functioning as a trusted source of information when authoritative voices of any kind were scarce. “We don't necessarily use the term mediation when we are engaging on the ground,” one practitioner explained, “and obviously, mediation is a highly political term.” Attaching explicit political language to a functioning technical arrangement can make cooperation harder to sustain. In short, depoliticisation can be protective.

All experts interviewed are clear about the question where technical management begins to run out. **Access and navigation under conditions of confrontation often depend on political assurances that no technical mechanism can itself provide**. A maritime ceasefire has to address questions of prohibited activity, movement and monitoring that do not map neatly onto their equivalents on land. Contested resources may be governed by international law, but the implementation of it can still require cooperation between states who have fallen out of the international legal order. Where negotiation has stalled or become politically sensitive, dialogue or facilitation may help reopen communication or enable parties to assess a problem jointly. Thus, whilst most maritime-boundary disputes properly belong to negotiation, arbitration or adjudication, given the state of the international legal system, **facilitation and mediation can sometimes help create the conditions in which those processes can move forward**.

At the same time, what connects these situations is a point at which maintaining maritime security begins to require communication, restraint or political accommodation that legal, military or technical mechanisms cannot generate on their own. It is here where the potential interface with conflict prevention and mediation becomes relevant. Its purpose is to recognise those situations in which **a narrowly defined political or facilitative function can complement existing maritime expertise.**

As one practitioner put it, the point is not to “hang maritime security on the mediation Christmas tree.” Naval, coastguard, regulatory and legal actors retain expertise that mediators cannot replicate. The contribution of dialogue or mediation is therefore selective and context specific.

One example repeatedly cited by practitioners was the joint committee established between the Yemeni government and Houthi authorities under the Stockholm Agreement in 2018. Meeting aboard a UN vessel allowed the parties to convene rapidly in response to ceasefire violations. Although the arrangement is now largely dormant, practitioners point it out as an example of a bounded maritime confidence-building mechanism: a practical arrangement created in response to a specific political and operational need rather than a permanent mediation architecture.

■ The problem of silent approaches

Where resistance to this kind of engagement exists, it tends to come from a specific level rather than uniformly across the field. Several interviewees distinguished between the operational level, where maritime security agencies often welcome practical support with communication and coordination once they understand what is being offered, and the political level, where the more common response is to question why a mediation organisation is involved at all. Uniformed and operational interlocutors tend to respond better to concrete operational language than to the vocabulary of conflict prevention or mediation itself. Several practitioners noted that leading with terms such as “conflict sensitivity” or “peace mediation” can close a conversation that opens easily around communication, coordination or training. Some of the nexus therefore remains silent in institutional language even where it is visible in practice.

■ Regionalisation and ownership

Regionalisation recurred as a consistent priority across the interviews. EU officials working on the Coordinated Maritime Presences framework in the Gulf of Guinea, describe the deliberate strategy of spreading naval presence and pairing it with capacity-building for the weakest local navies and coastguards as one of the factors contributing to a marked decline in reported piracy since 2020, alongside the Yaoundé Architecture and a shift in local criminal economies. In the Western Indian Ocean, frameworks were instead built incrementally through the Djibouti Code of Conduct and Jeddah Amendment. Practitioners emphasised the importance of ownership: **supporting regional institutions, letting mechanisms mature independently** on their own terms, and letting states already demonstrating useful practice bring others in. Several experts also reported unease about **the growing dependence on externally owned maritime domain awareness systems,**

especially since, as one long-standing designer of these systems argued, establishing a shared operational picture among states is itself a confidence-building measure before anything else.

■ The challenge of politicisation

Politicisation cuts the other way as well. Several interviewees pointed to Gulf states' reluctance to join EU- or US-led naval missions in the Red Sea and the Gulf precisely because **participation risked being read as taking sides** against Iran, the Houthis, or in the wider regional confrontation. This dynamic was also cited for why China, India and other external navies have generally preferred to operate independently of Western-led coordination frameworks rather than within them. The same logic constrains how far any political or mediation track can be formally attached to a maritime-security mission without threatening the mission's own ability to attract broad participation.

■ Where technical management runs out

The limits of the connection between technical and political, as well as the tension between regional initiatives and ownership, were tested directly during the Hormuz crisis, when EU and UN interlocutors explored replicating the Black Sea Grain Initiative model. Interviewees point to two factors determining the failure of the attempt: the Strait was, unlike the Black Sea case, the central point of leverage for one of the parties rather than an incidental casualty of a wider war, leaving little room for even a narrow technical bargain; and the regional states best placed to broker any arrangement (Oman, the UAE, and Qatar) preferred to handle it through their own direct channels rather than through a UN-led process. This episode illustrates concretely the threshold this paper keeps returning to: **a technical deconfliction tool cannot substitute for political consent, and where consent is itself the contested resource, no amount of technical design closes the gap.**

■ The importance of timing

The interviews identify another important gap: while maritime security actors hold increasingly sophisticated information about emerging risks, and the EU holds, separately, real capacity for conflict analysis and mediation, there is no systematic mechanism connecting the two. Currently, there is **no clear route by which a maritime security risk, once it acquires wider conflict significance, reaches the people whose job is conflict prevention.** Any interface would require caution, as classified information, institutional mandates and the protective value of depoliticised cooperation argue against a heavy formal referral mechanism. The EU also needs self-awareness about where it will not be read as neutral. In those cases, the appropriate interface may run through enabling a regional organisation, the UN or a specialist mediation actor rather than acting directly. Additionally, timing matters as much as architecture: one officer with direct field experience described politically sensitive judgement calls being referred to Brussels with a turnaround of roughly three weeks, by which point the situation on the ground might no longer be relevant or possible to address.

The economic stakes help explain why this matters beyond the immediate security picture. During the Hormuz crisis, interviewees reported sharp increases in maritime insurance premiums and wider price effects through shipping-dependent supply chains. They also flagged a subtler risk: political and public attention fades once a maritime crisis leaves the headlines even where the underlying vulnerability persists. The mismatch between the slow burn of the problem and the short attention span of the response strengthens the case for earlier, more structural engagement.

This is also where the paper's central question could sharpen into something actionable: recognising the moment maritime insecurity acquires a wider political dimension is not primarily a matter of new maritime-domain-awareness technology; the information exists. It is a matter of the right expertise and relationships being available on the political-conflict side to receive, interpret and act on it, early enough for prevention or de-escalation to still be realistic options.

Four Illustrative Cases

The relationship between maritime security, conflict prevention and peace mediation takes different forms depending on the source and political character of maritime insecurity. Four cases illustrate this variation and caution against treating mediation as an automatic response to maritime insecurity. They are read for contrast, not for a single shared conclusion.

Case	Nature of conflict	Maritime-security response	Conflict-prevention / mediation dimension	Key lesson
Strait of Hormuz	Interstate/geopolitical confrontation; tanker attacks and seizures; regional rivalry.	EMASOH/AGENOR: naval presence with a civilian diplomatic component.	Senior Civilian Representative and diplomatic track with documented de-escalation aims; interlocutors differ on whether that track remains active or has been paused in favour of Aspides.	Maritime presence can carry a civilian de-escalatory function, but incident management and political dialogue remain weakly connected.
Red Sea / Gulf of Aden / Yemen	Maritime attacks embedded in the Yemen conflict and regional confrontation; in July 2026 the Houthi movement declared a naval blockade targeting Saudi Arabia and Saudi-linked shipping.	Multinational naval protection and escort operations.	Oman-facilitated US-Houthi contacts; exploratory non-governmental dialogue; the wider Yemen mediation architecture.	Political channels exist but are fragmented and not systematically linked to maritime responses; more mediation can crowd an already complex field.

Case	Nature of conflict	Maritime-security response	Conflict-prevention / mediation dimension	Key lesson
Gulf of Guinea	Primarily transnational crime and governance: piracy, armed robbery, trafficking, illegal, unreported and undocumented fishing, oil theft.	Yaoundé Architecture, regional coordination and information-sharing, EU/partner capacity-building.	No dedicated mediation mechanism. Incidents fell from 81 (2020) to 18 (2024); causation should not rest on one mechanism alone.	Technical, depoliticised cooperation can itself be preventive; not every maritime problem needs mediation.
Black Sea Grain Initiative	Interstate war and disruption of maritime trade following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.	Negotiated maritime corridor and Joint Coordination Centre (Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, UN).	UN/Türkiye mediation produced a technically implemented arrangement.	Maritime issues can become concrete products of mediation, but implementation stays vulnerable to political consent and withdrawal.

These cases illustrate three lessons:

- 1) There is **no single model of maritime mediation**: the appropriate function varies with the source and political character of insecurity, from escalation management around a chokepoint to mediation producing a concrete maritime arrangement.
- 2) **Connection between technical cooperation and political conflict management should be selective**, not assumed: sometimes the two need linking, as in the Black Sea; sometimes the narrow, depoliticised character of technical cooperation is itself what makes it work, as in the Gulf of Guinea.
- 3) The practical challenge is **recognising when the character of a problem changes** (from one technical and operational tools can manage to one that needs diplomatic or conflict-prevention capacity) early enough, and with the right expertise and relationships in place.

Taken together, the four cases show the maritime security mediation interface as uneven and context-dependent: worth strengthening in some settings, already functioning informally in others, and in some circumstances best left separate altogether.

Connecting Existing Capacities: Priorities for EU Action

Maritime security, conflict prevention, peace mediation and regional cooperation have each grown into fields in their own right; what remains weak is the connection between them. **The seven recommendations below are formulated to provide an operational perspective within already existing frameworks:** they connect what exists, sharpen the expertise that is already available, and create channels for information and judgement to act once a maritime problem starts to behave like a political one.

1. Start a regular dialogue

An initial EU roundtable involving EEAS maritime-security and (peace) mediation services, geographic desks, FPI, EUSRs, relevant CSDP missions, regional organisations, international partners and civil society could map preventive practices already embedded in maritime cooperation and identify emerging situations with a political dimension. Existing platforms, including the CSDN and the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation, provide also for obvious and interesting starting points for these dialogues. These exchanges should also draw systematically on mediation organisations with sustained experience of maritime-related conflict prevention and confidence-building. EU-supported dialogue should prioritise regional ownership, with regional organisations and trusted regional actors taking the lead, where appropriate, in convening, hosting and sustaining preventive engagement.

2. Build a shared vocabulary

Maritime security and conflict prevention practitioners often describe the same problem in different vocabularies: maritime domain awareness and deconfliction on one side, early warning and confidence-building on the other. A short operational glossary would help bring the two sectors closer. The next round of EU maritime security policy should include conflict prevention in as a cross-cutting thread across its existing objectives, tied explicitly to the Strategic Compass and the Integrated Approach, rather than filed as a separate ambition.

3. Connect information and escalation indicators

EU conflict analysis should build in the maritime dimension wherever it shapes the trajectory of a conflict: ports, fisheries, boundaries, offshore resources, critical infrastructure, shipping routes and chokepoints. The EEAS could connect existing maritime awareness with political and conflict analysis and develop a small set of context sensitive early warning indicators of potential maritime escalation, such as a shifting naval posture, repeated interference with commercial shipping, and escalating resource dispute disruption of strategic waterways or deterioration of

communication and deconfliction channels. These indicators should inform political assessment and consideration of early engagement rather than a trigger mechanism.

4. Build the expertise

The EU should add practitioners with genuine maritime expertise to its conflict prevention and mediation pool, using existing EEAS mediation support capacities, expert mechanisms and framework contracts, alongside FPI-supported instruments and, where CSDP-related engagement is concerned, the European Peace Facility. One concrete option could be represented by small maritime conflict sensitivity-assessment teams, paired by a conflict prevention practitioner with a maritime specialist for brief scoping deployments.

5. Learn from existing initiatives

The conflict prevention function built into the EU Security and Defence Initiative in Support of West African Countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EU SDI GoG) is a positive precedent for connecting conflict prevention and maritime security expertise. Its role is to analyse, advise and support stakeholders on emerging issues related to violent conflict. A Conflict Prevention Adviser Pool for maritime missions, for instance, could help the EU identify where this expertise adds most value and test the lessons in other maritime settings.

6. Institutionalise cross-disciplinary training and capacity building

Conflict prevention thinking should be embedded within maritime security training, and vice versa maritime domain literacy should be integrated in conflict prevention training. Multi-agency scenario exercises and short staff exchanges would help practitioners recognise and act upon the critical thresholds where a maritime security incident becomes a political one.

7. Strengthen the civil society and diplomatic interface

Civil society networks and platforms or specialised organisations could help connect mediation and peacebuilding organisations with actors working on coastal communities, fisheries, climate security and ocean governance. Civil society organisations can provide access, analysis and dialogue infrastructure, including Track 1.5 and Track 2 channels, that state and security actors often lack. Where a specific regional need exists, the EU could partner with private, multilateralism or state mediation actors to support context-specific or regional dialogue arrangements addressing maritime dimensions of conflict, through political backing, convening support expertise or financing. If repeated experience demonstrates a persistent diplomatic coordination gap in a particular region, the EU could also consider whether a focal point, envoy or small Group of Friends respond to a regional need.

These seven recommendations could potentially be sequenced. A roundtable, shared vocabulary and reciprocal training are quick and low-cost, specialist expertise and assessment teams form a second, more operational layer in the medium term. More formal diplomatic mechanisms should follow only where experience demonstrates a need. Funding could support confidential dialogue, joint technical assessments or Track 1.5 processes before escalation narrows the political options available.

The principle underneath these recommendations is connection, not duplication. Maritime security institutions do not need to become mediators, and technical cooperation should not be politicised simply because it carries preventive value. The **practical task is to recognise the political threshold**: the moment insecurity at sea begins to require consent, restraint or accommodation that legal, military or technical mechanisms cannot produce alone. At that point, the EU needs a **selective interface able to connect maritime knowledge with conflict analysis, preventive diplomacy and, where appropriate, mediation.**

The capacities largely exist. What is needed now is building the institutional habit of activating them early enough so they matter when it counts.

Annex A: Supplementary Institutional and Legal Detail

UNCLOS instruments and related regimes referenced in Chapter 3 include SOLAS Chapter XI-2 and the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, which set mandatory risk-management and security requirements for ships and ports, and the SUA Convention, which establishes a criminal-law framework for unlawful acts against maritime navigation, extended by its 2005 Protocol to specified terrorist and WMD-related offences.

UN Security Council practice varies by region. The Somalia piracy resolutions, beginning with Resolution 1816 (2008), temporarily authorised cooperating states, with Somali consent, to act inside Somali territorial waters. In the Gulf of Guinea, Resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) emphasised regional strategy, legal frameworks and maritime capacity. In the Red Sea, Resolution 2722 (2024) condemned Houthi attacks on merchant shipping, reaffirmed navigational rights, called for restraint, and encouraged diplomatic effort and support for the Yemen peace process.

Future drivers: climate, environmental and demographic pressure

Climate change, environmental degradation and new patterns of ocean use will only pull maritime security and political conflict closer together. Sea level rise, shifting fish stocks and livelihood pressure reach communities and political stability ashore; deep sea mining previews the governance, benefit-sharing and jurisdictional disputes to come.

The Gulf of Guinea illustrates the horizon this points toward: Nigeria alone is projected to become the world's third-most-populous country within a generation, concentrating demographic pressure in coastal areas just as the global energy transition reduces demand for the oil exports several regional economies depend on. This combination was flagged by interviewees as a slower-moving but more consequential driver of future maritime insecurity than any single incident at sea. A climate, peace and security lens should sit inside maritime conflict analysis and training as a matter of course, with civil society and scientific expertise bringing these dimensions into rooms that otherwise stay governmental and securitised.

Annex B: Interview Methodology and Constituencies

Consistent with the EPLO Terms of Reference, interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis except when expressively permitted: findings are presented thematically and no interlocutor is quoted or identified without consent, by broad institutional or functional category only.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BBNJ	Agreement under UNCLOS on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EEAS	European External Action Service
EMASOH	European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz
EPF	European Peace Facility
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU	European Union
EUMSS	EU Maritime Security Strategy
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ISPS Code	International Ship and Port Facility Security Code
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
SHADE	Shared Awareness and Deconfliction
SOLAS	International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea
SUA	Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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