

Maritime security post-9/11: challenges and response

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Introduction

Besides containing tremendous amounts of resources, the seas have traditionally also provided a sense of security to the littorals that enabled them to concentrate on threats emanating from the land frontiers. With advancements in technology and seafaring, however, the scope and extent of challenges emerging from the seas has also enhanced. While on the one hand, having a coastline and access to open seas provides extensive opportunities to prosper and promote national interests; the ever-increasing issues of maritime security continue to weigh on the minds of the rulers, on the other hand.

The realm of maritime security includes, but is not limited to, inter-state territorial disputes, political instabilities, transnational crimes such as maritime terrorism, piracy, human smuggling, drugs and arms trafficking, and environmental degradation. Interdependence of States on each other's resources, products and services, and increased mobility at sea, have further compounded the problem. Majority of the countries today depend on the safety and security of sea lanes for their trade. Availability of the technology to explore the ocean and the seabed resources has also caused interests to clash. Thus, one can safely assume that more than any thing else, economics will determine the future maritime demeanour of States (and non-State actors).

Maritime security, therefore, is related to security issues pertaining to sea, which could include political, economic, military, scientific or technological aspects, with sea trade being the most critical factor for the global community. In the new millennium, however, the concept of maritime security has been redefined to include newer dimensions. Interdependency has gained impetus owing to the cumulative impact of globalization, depleting energy resources and the asymmetric dimension of security concerns.

In the economic context, sea trade and sea-based energy resources have gained exponential significance in recent decades.¹ Reduction in resources on land has forced nations to look elsewhere for the fulfilment of their food and energy needs.

Furthermore, the 9/11 incidents, and the irrational reaction of U.S., completely upset the security apparatus of the world, and States had to reconfigure their security perceptions in haste. Unlike the past, the threat was

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now from the non-State actors (or the sole superpower relentlessly pursuing them) rather than the conventional State-to-State antagonism. This paradigm shift in security perception world over has also affected the maritime environment and forced States to re-strategize their force structures and roles.

In the global maritime context, the new asymmetric threats demand more than mere military undertaking to counter them; a scenario grossly different than the traditional military scene, which had clearly-defined adversaries and theatres of action. In today's environment, great emphasis is placed on policing and constabulary roles to counter non-military, transnational and asymmetric threats. Maritime forces are by design ideally suited to operate in asymmetric environment due to their inherent flexibility, reach, sustainability and the ability to create synergetic effects in multinational configurations.²

In the regional maritime context, the Indian Ocean perhaps presents the most intricate problems in the security perspective. It is home to several Muslim countries and some of the world's most important Sea Lanes of Communication. About half of the world's trade by value and one-third of its oil consumption pass through this ocean. A total of 17 million barrels³ of crude oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz each day. Consequently, maritime security and stability of North Arabian Sea has attained great significance with respect to freedom of navigation and uninterrupted flow of trade. Thus, energy security in the region has emerged as a vital interest, particularly for the world's leading economies, both regional and extra-regional.

The aim of this paper is to study the various maritime security challenges confronting littorals of the Indian Ocean in general and those of the Arabian Sea in particular; as also to analyse Pakistan's contribution to regional security efforts and recommend a way forward.

Geostrategic environment in Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean; with an area of 28 million square miles, covering 20 per cent of earth's water expanse and washing the shores of three continents; is the smallest but the most strategic waterway encompassing 30 littorals and 11 land-locked States with 1,284 islands. The littoral countries are widely disparate in size, population and per capita incomes.⁴ Of the three temperate oceans of the world, the Indian Ocean presents the trickiest problems for security management. Contrary to the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, the Indian Ocean has not so far developed an overarching security system that could meet the challenge of maritime security.⁵

Other than the security aspect, two key characteristics distinguish the Indian Ocean from the Atlantic and the Pacific. First, only one-fifth of the total trade is conducted among the countries of the Indian Ocean themselves as 80 per cent of the trade is extra-regional. In the Atlantic and the Pacific, the proportion is

exactly the opposite. Secondly, contrary to the Atlantic and the Pacific as "open" oceans, the Indian Ocean can be accessed only through several choke points.⁶

The energy factor multiplies the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean exponentially. Nearly one out of every three barrels of oil reserves in the world lies beneath two countries: Saudi Arabia with 259 billion barrels and Iraq 112 billion.⁷ The world's demand for energy grew by 95 per cent in the last 30 years. It is projected to grow by another 33 per cent during the next 15 years, and by 45 per cent in the next 20 years. The Gulf region has almost 60 per cent of the world's proven oil and 45 per cent of the world's gas reserves.⁸

The region houses two nuclear adversaries, Pakistan and India, with a host of unresolved issues. The problems between the oil-rich Gulf States further accentuate the situation, providing a major cause of energy insecurity. Because of the possibility of interruption of the Sea Lanes of Communication, these conflicts always have the potential to acquire an international dimension. Because of that, the safety and security of the Sea Lanes of Communication and choke points have become strategically important for regional as well as extra regional stakeholders. The situation has provided a justification for extra-regional forces to maintain a permanent presence in the Arabian Sea.

Maritime terrorism

Jane's Intelligence Review defines maritime terrorism as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change, in the maritime domain." The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) working group defines maritime terrorism as "the undertaking of terrorist attacks and activities within the maritime environment, against maritime assets and infrastructure."⁹ Fortunately, the world's oceans have so far not been a major focus of terrorist activities. According to a study, seaborne strikes have constituted only two per cent of all international incidents over the last 30 years.

Nevertheless, the maritime realm is by design conducive to these types of threat contingencies. Given their vastness and largely unregulated area covering more than 130 million square miles of the earth's surface, the planet's oceans lie beyond the strict jurisdiction of any one State, meaning that they are by definition anarchic. A complex network of territorial waters, estuaries and river systems, which in most cases is poorly managed and monitored, links these oceans.

In recent decades, the phenomenon of maritime terrorism has drawn global concern. There is always the danger of terrorists using relatively unguarded and vulnerable sea routes to undertake acts of maritime terrorism. The attacks on USS COLE in 2000 and the French tanker LIMBURG in 2002, off Yemen, and the suicide attack on Iraqi oil platforms in April 2004 were clear manifestations of this threat.¹⁰

Even as the South-East Asian nations have taken steps to curb this threat, the increased acts of maritime violence in the Arabian Sea are alarming and necessitate immediate measures from regional and extra regional forces. While many of these incidents may seem to be low-scaled and isolated; their impact on the economy and morale of the seafarers cannot be overemphasized. A case in point is the suicide attack against the MV LIMBURG in October 2002. Although the incident resulted in only three deaths (two of which were of the bombers), it directly contributed to a short-term collapse of international shipping business in the Gulf of Aden and nearby waters, leading to a \$ 0.48/barrel hike in the price of Brent crude oil and, as a result of the tripling of war-risk premiums levied on ships calling at Aden, causing the Yemeni economy to lose an estimated \$ 3.8 million a month in port revenues.¹¹

Maritime terrorism has assumed a new dimension in the post-9/11 era. The precision and ingenuity with which 9/11 strikes were planned and executed created a wave of alarm about the likelihood of similar strikes at coastal and maritime targets and transportation of personnel, weapons and finances using the medium of ocean.

Post-9/11, scenario-building exercises have suggested a number of maritime terror eventualities:¹²

- **Ship as a barrier** One of the frequently suggested attack situations involves sinking a large vessel in the Strait of Hormuz or Malacca Straits, thus blocking all traffic. Initially, an attack of this nature may cause a major traffic jam as at its narrowest point; the straits are only two miles wide. If a number of ships were sunk, the straits could conceivably be blocked.
- **Ship as a weapon** One of the more terrifying scenarios involves the detonation of a high-risk load such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) in harbours. Pirates have hijacked large tankers in the past, but the capacity to detonate a tanker's payload has not been demonstrated. LNG, which is probably the most potentially dangerous cargo, could be ignited and cause catastrophic fire damage.
- **Mining** Though rarely discussed, mining would be an effective strategy for terrorists to close the narrow straits. Media and political attention would be high, even if the claim of mines is made without incident. However, the damage caused by a mine would depend on the type of mine and type of ship engaged; the latter being out of the control of the terrorists.
- **Small boat attack** An attack in which a small, explosive-laden boat rams into the hull of a larger vessel can be extremely lethal, especially in the congested harbours. This type of attack was successfully employed off Yemen by Al Qaeda, on the *USS Cole* and *MV Limburg*. An attractive feature of the small boat attack, from a terrorist perspective, is the relatively low amount of training and coordination required.

From this discussion it can be safely concluded that the threat of terrorism at sea is a reality of the 21st century. However, its differentiation from traditional maritime crimes has to be recognised.

Piracy

As long as valuables have been transported by sea, pirates have been around to steal them. Piracy has evolved from the Golden Age into a modern day phenomenon that is often violent and sometimes deadly. Most scholars define piracy as a criminal tactic that targets maritime resources, trade, or personnel for economic interests (financial gain). According to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), piracy is “any illegal act of violence, detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends ... on the high seas against another ship ... outside the jurisdiction of any state.”¹³

Piracy remains one of the chief threats to maritime security in the region. According to the International Maritime Bureau Annual Report, maritime hijacking saw an unprecedented rise in 2008. In 2008, there was a worldwide total of 293 incidents of piracy against ships, which is up more than 11 per cent from 2007 when 263 incidents were reported. The increase is attributed to the number of attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the eastern coast of Somalia. In addition, 2008 saw the largest tanker ever hijacked by Somali pirates, and successful attacks being carried out at greater distances from land than in previous years. All types of vessels with varying freeboards and speeds were targeted. The pirates boarding the vessels were also better armed than in previous years, and prepared to assault and injure the crew.¹⁴ On the positive side, there has been a decline in other regions. The report identifies IOR as the most prevalent area of piracy in the world with the Horn of Africa, Indonesia, India and Bangladesh being the emergent hotspots.

Piracy trends in the Indian Ocean and instances of piracy around the globe indicate that today’s professional pirates are well-organized and well-equipped, wielding modern arms and high-technology communications, surveillance, and navigation equipment. The pirates are not hesitant to take hostages and may even resort to kidnap-for-ransom tactics. The latest examples are the seizure of an Iranian ship, ‘Delight’, by pirates in the Gulf of Aden on November 18, 2008 and hijacking of a Saudi super tanker, ‘Sirius Star’, by Somali pirates off East African coast also in November 2008, which was later released after payment of U.S. \$ 3 m ransom. In April 2009, in two separate incidents, the pirates attacked and hijacked a container ship and a bulk carrier; both the ships were taken to an undisclosed location in Somalia.

Like human trafficking, piracy is also motivated by economic forces but the rewards for a successful hijacking are inordinately higher. The pirates operating off African coast are typically Somali fishermen hired by powerful warlords. The vast majority of the profit goes to the warlords, who use the money to remain in

power and to buy sophisticated weapons and equipment such as GPS, and satellite phones.¹⁵ In order to gain time and space advantage for reaction against piracy, International Maritime Bureau has advised ships, not making scheduled call on ports in Somalia, to keep as far as possible from the coast, preferably beyond 600 nautical miles from the Somali coastline thus forcing pirates to venture farther out to sea to capture the larger merchant vessels that draw higher ransoms. It may be noted that recently the pirates have attacked vessels as far as 500nm from the coast. Additionally, a Group Transit programme has also been introduced for vessels transiting through the Gulf of Aden.

There are five main types of piracy currently occurring in waters around the globe:¹⁶

- **Thefts and attacks on vessels at anchor or pier side.** A common type of attack is low-level armed robbery that occurs while ships are docked or moored. Perpetrators, normally armed with small arms, approach via small, high speed boats, seeking cash or other high-value personal items.
- **Robbery of vessels at sea.** Piracy at sea typically involves more violence because crews are detained while the attackers ransack the vessel. These types of attackers are usually well-armed and well-organized.
- **Hijacking of vessels.** Most hijacked vessels are converted for illegal trade. The hijacked vessel's cargo is offloaded and sold. The vessel is then falsely reregistered and issued fraudulent documents, enabling the on-load of new cargo, which in turn is usually sold on the black market. This type of "phantom ship" operation is typically perpetrated by highly trained and heavily armed pirate groups.
- **Yacht piracy.** "Yacht jacking" is an attack against a private vessel, targeting cash and marketable merchandise. This type of piracy is most common in seas where numerous private, well-stocked yachts sail, for instance the Caribbean.
- **Kidnap-for-ransom.** Pirates board a vessel for robbery but also kidnap senior crew members. Later, ransom is demanded from ship owners in exchange for safe return of the crew members. This type of piracy is normally conducted by well-organized groups such as pirate gangs, criminal syndicates, or terrorist groups.

Drugs & arms trafficking

An important adjunct to maritime terrorism is drugs and arms trafficking. With huge profit margins, drug trafficking is by far the most lucrative means of making quick money, which is used to finance terror networks and arms trafficking. The sea also provides a safe medium for transferring arms and ammunition worldwide.¹⁷ Drug trafficking is known to be the second largest profitable illegal business in the world after arms sales. With the enormous profit ratios involved, the networks that carry out such functions are highly influential

and have access to latest technology. Advances in communications, transportation, and globalization have virtually made every part of the world easily accessible, and today's illegal drug business and its associated activities are no longer just a localized or regional problem.

Afghanistan, presently, supplies an estimated 93 per cent of the global market of illegal opiates, such as heroin, opium, and morphine.¹⁸ Owing to ingenuity of drug traffickers, the impact of Afghanistan's poppies is global, not just national. Traffickers adjust routes depending upon weather conditions, effectiveness of law enforcement, and political actions. Reports indicate that drugs are being smuggled in the cargo holds of dhows to Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates via the Arabian Sea. Drug trafficking thus poses a serious challenge to maritime law enforcement agencies.

Narco-terrorism

Narco-terrorism is defined as a complex nexus between illegal drug trade and terrorism. U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency describes narco-terrorism as "a group of organized individuals working together in order to further, or fund, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets with the intention to influence their respective ideologies." The Department of Defence joint doctrine defines narco-terrorism as narco-supported terrorism, which is terrorism that benefits from or uses drug trafficking to further individual or group terrorist activities.¹⁹

The nexus of these two phenomena is admittedly so deep that they are often analyzed under the same parameters. With profit margins running into hundreds of per cent, drug trafficking is by far the most lucrative means of generating funds to fuel ever-growing terrorist activities and insurgencies around the region.²⁰ Drug traffickers benefit from terrorists' military skills, weapons supply, and access to clandestine organizations. Conversely, the terrorists gain a source of revenue and expertise in illicit transfer and laundering of money for their operations. While this symbiotic relationship provides established routes for drug and arms smuggling, it also furnishes terrorists with the logistical infrastructure to move people, arms and material according to their desires.

Twelve of the thirty-six groups on the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Terrorist Organizations List have been identified as being involved in drug trafficking.²¹ Some experts argue that nearly every terrorist group operating today raises some money from drug trade. Many terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and LTTE are directly involved in drug trafficking as the primary means to finance their activities. Al-Qaeda, allegedly, has immensely benefited from the revenues generated from Afghan heroin sales. On December 30, 2003, the U.S. Navy stopped a small fishing boat on the Arabian Sea reportedly carrying drugs and several wanted al-Qaeda suspects, thus vindicating the claim of an unmistakable nexus between the drug cartels and terrorists in Arabian Sea. It is,

therefore, imperative for our maritime law enforcement agencies to surmount the challenge of narco-terrorism.²²

Maritime pollution & environmental disasters

Another non-military challenge to regional maritime security is maritime pollution and environmental disasters. Maritime (or marine) pollution is the introduction by humans of substances or energy into the ocean that changes the quality of the water or affects the physical and biological environment. Regional governments are deeply concerned with major oil spills or wrecks of oil tankers at narrow approaches to harbours and choke points, since such spills or wrecks can seriously affect the flow of merchant shipping traffic. Such pollution may be caused accidentally or by an act of terrorism. Either way, it becomes the combined responsibility of all using that part of the ocean to clear the sea as soon as possible. That takes expertise and resources not available with most nations.

Oil-related disasters at sea are a source of concern not only for environmentalists but mariners and security specialists as well. They create havoc with the ecology in the maritime environment and have the potential to affect maritime security. Petroleum-based hydrocarbons can negatively impact marine life at concentrations as low as one part per billion. The oil tanker *Tasman Spirit*, carrying a cargo of 67,535 tonnes of Iranian light crude oil, grounded in the channel of the port of Karachi on July 27, 2003, spilling about 35,000 tons of oil. Though six years have gone by, the effects of the massive oil spill are still evident on marine life.

Mining

A naval mine is a self-contained explosive device placed in water to destroy ships or submarines. Unlike depth charges, mines are deposited and left to wait until they are triggered by the approach of or contact with an enemy ship. Naval mines can be used offensively, to hamper enemy ships or lock them into a harbour; or defensively, to protect friendly ships and create "safe" zones.²³ Mining of waters is one of the cheapest ways to conduct maritime warfare. Mines can be planted by aircraft, submarines, surface ships, underwater robots, and frogmen, as well as merchant ships, fishing ships, ferries and motor boats. Civilian aircraft or vessels may carry out mining operations, which can even be done by non-State actors to a limited extent. It is not even necessary to carry out actual mining operations; the mere threat or a well calculated disinformation campaign about the laying of a minefield can deter any merchant ship from entering an "affected" channel or strait.

The effectiveness of mines is inherent in its invisibility; they have the advantage of striking the most vulnerable portion of a ship, i.e., its underwater hull. Mines laid in the Persian Gulf in 1987 and the Red Sea in 1984 clearly demonstrated their destructive power by leaving trails of damaged ships. A

concentrated international effort was required to undertake minesweeping operations to clean up the area. Hence, mining in a constricted area like a narrow channel or a strait has the potential to create havoc on international merchant shipping.

Proliferation of WMDs

Post-9/11, countries, particularly the United States, have focused on the threat posed by (weapons of mass destruction) WMD proliferation. The threat is seen as two-fold: rogue States obtaining WMD technology and capabilities, and non-State actors obtaining the same. Fears have centred on non-State actors smuggling a 'dirty bomb' into a port via a container. U.S. fears in this regard led to the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The CSI is designed to scan containers for WMD materials before being shipped to the U.S., while the PSI seeks to forge a coalition of countries committed to interdicting chemical, biological, and nuclear materials on high seas.²⁴

While most major ports in Asia have signed on the CSI, the PSI has proved rather controversial because of sovereignty concerns. A key gap in the PSI framework is that it applies only to commercial, not government transportation; government vehicles (ships, planes, trucks, etc.) cannot legally be interdicted.²⁵ On April 28, 2004, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1540 declaring that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is a threat to international peace and security. Resolution 1540 requires all U.N. member States to establish domestic controls, including legislative measures, to prevent the proliferation of WMDs.²⁶

Smuggling & human trafficking

Another dimension to maritime crime is smuggling of commodities such as oil, consumer goods, etc., and human trafficking, which has grown phenomenally in recent years. Human trafficking has led to the ingress of illegal immigrants in some of the regional countries, which has been a cause of increased social upheaval, disease and crime. During the last decade or so, significant attention has been paid internationally to this aspect because of the fact that the terrorist can also use the same routes and networks that are being used by smugglers and human traffickers. Internationally, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols address these related problems, while different international and regional agencies are involved in specific aspects. According to U.S. government estimates,²⁷ approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year. Eighty per cent of these are females and up to half of them are minors.

Pakistan's contribution to regional maritime security

Pakistan Navy (PN) is entrusted with the seaward defence of Pakistan. Its presence in the North Arabian Sea provides a sense of security to international shipping. From a very modest beginning since independence in 1947, PN has matured into a highly professional and potent naval force in the region. Despite resource constraints, PN has maintained a high level of professional competence through a combination of well trained human resource and innovative use of its four-dimensional assets. Its high quality manpower has been instrumental in training a large number of officers and men of regional navies. PN has also contributed to the professional growth of these regional navies by deputing its officers and men to them.

Changes in the regional and international scenarios in the wake of 9/11 made Pakistan a front line state against War on Terror. PN's area of operations, i.e., the North Arabian Sea, assumed international significance due to close proximity of the perceived epicentre of Global War on Terror. In view of this changed scenario, PN's role was redefined with participation in the global effort for maintaining regional stability.

Pakistan Navy joined a U.S.-led coalition, called Coalition Maritime Campaign Plan (CMCP) in the year 2004. The campaign, which is the maritime component of Operation 'Enduring Freedom' (OEF), is designed to keep a check on sea-borne terrorist elements. The general area of this operation is the North Arabian Sea, including parts of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Pakistan is contributing one ship with embarked helicopters on a regular basis, being part of coalition's operations against maritime terrorism, piracy and drug trafficking. Participation in CMCP, despite being taxing on the limited inventory of PN resources, has been of immense professional value for the personnel in conducting interdiction operations. This has also helped Pakistan Navy compile data about merchant traffic in its area of interest and type of cargo being transported.

It may be emphasised that Pakistan Navy is the only regional navy to form part of CMCP and, despite its resource constraints, has contributed significantly towards regional maritime security. Pakistan Navy was given command of the multi-national task force TF-150 twice, i.e., in 2006 and 2008, which is recognition of its professional ability and dedication to task, and is indicative of increased mutual confidence amongst coalition partners. The command of TF-150 by PN has given due impetus to the concept of collaborative maritime security in North Arabian Sea. The Pakistani task force commanders have been persuading the regional military and political leadership to assist in the coalition efforts and contribute towards a regional maritime cooperative regime.

PN's participation in CMCP has also made it possible to effectively monitor and control smuggling of arms and drugs in the North Arabian Sea. In this

regard, PN ships in conjunction with the coalition forces have successfully apprehended various suspect vessels involved in drugs and arms trafficking. So far, 15 such vessels have been seized by PN ships, which has created deterrence amongst nefarious elements and contributed to curtailing the liberty of action by terrorists in the maritime domain. In 2008, Pakistani ships also averted a piracy attempt when a South Korean ship, MT Sunshine Sky, came under pirate attack off the Yemeni coast. Pakistan Navy task group transiting through the Gulf of Aden immediately arrived at the scene and rescued the ship.

In addition to participation in CMCP, Pakistan Navy has been proactive in encouraging the process of 'Collaborative Maritime Security' between regional and extra-regional navies. In this regard, Pakistan Navy organised and hosted a multi-national exercise AMAN in March 2007, in which 28 countries participated with 14 ships, Special Operation Forces (SOF) and a number of observers. The major participants included the navies of the U.S., China, the U.K., France, Turkey, Italy, Bangladesh and Malaysia. The event afforded an opportunity to the Chinese Navy to show up in a multinational exercise. Their participation is indeed reflective of China's keenness to interact with regional and extra-regional navies with a view to pursuing the shared objective of maritime harmony.²⁸

AMAN-07 was in fact testament of Pakistan's being a responsible country contributing towards peace and stability in the region and a proponent of 'Collaborative Maritime Security'. Owing to the success of AMAN-07, the navy decided to make it a biennial event. Consequently, AMAN-09 was held during March 2009 in which 33 countries from around the globe took part. The interest shown by regional and extra-regional navies in AMAN exercises is indicative of the fact that the international community realizes the need of maritime cooperation in the region and appreciates Pakistan's efforts in this regard.

Pakistan Navy has also contributed regularly and very actively in other bilateral and multilateral exercises with a host of regional and extra-regional countries. That has helped the participating countries in understanding each other's capabilities and limitations, refining standard operating procedures and creating confidence and trust, which is a prerequisite to durable maritime cooperation.

The expeditious and effective assistance provided by PN ships to the victims of 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is worth mentioning in this regard. Two Pakistan Navy ships on a goodwill visit to the Maldives saved 367 foreign tourists, representing 17 nationalities; conducted aerial surveys to judge the extent of damage, distributed food and medicines, and provided medical assistance. Later, another group of ships with three embarked helicopters, a fifty-four men Marine Expeditionary Force besides relief goods, medicines, medical equipment, food supplies, tents and blankets, joined relief efforts in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The ships carried an 80-member paramedical team, along with 15 doctors, to establish

50 bed hospitals in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and elements of an army engineering battalion, for restoring communications infrastructure in the affected areas. After these experiences, all major Pakistan Navy ships carry additional stores to be able to deal with such contingencies most effectively and expeditiously.

Way forward

The solution to all the problems of maritime security lies in maritime cooperation, both at the regional as well as international level. However, to achieve any measure of cooperation among the littorals of Arabian Sea would not be an easy undertaking and requires implementation of an effective 'Regional Maritime Security Regime', which can be realized only through political consensus and commonality of interests. The Indian Ocean, and particularly the Arabian Sea, consists of littorals with varying social, economic and geopolitical backgrounds and ideals that they stand for. Most of the countries in this part of the world have some differences or long-standing enmities with their neighbours or other States of the region. There are issues of sovereignty and lack of trust that need to be addressed before one can think of any worthwhile progress. Another major impediment is the land-oriented mindset of the people and governments, which persists because of the preponderance of land forces, in most cases.

The strategy has to be multi-pronged. Internally, there is a need to propagate the importance of the ocean for the future security and development of the countries aiming to convince the governments and the people that the maritime sector has to play an important role in the advancement of their dreams and, therefore, deserves urgent attention. We also need to address the maritime security issues at the grass roots level. Most of the littorals lack decent maritime infrastructures and the coastal populations are poor and deprived. Combating crime at sea militarily may suppress it, but it will continue to recur when external pressures are withdrawn and, therefore, will not offer a long term solution.

It is thus imperative that while we prepare to combat crime, we should also cooperate in eradicating the root cause. It must be understood that due to the nature of the medium of sea, no country, no matter how powerful it may be, can combat this threat alone. All the stakeholders need to pool in their resources and capabilities to complement each other in order to achieve the optimum results by keeping the costs affordable, both economically as well as politically. Hence, despite differences and reservations, we need to find common grounds and start working on them, step by step.

For example, Pakistan may start with bringing onboard Iran and the Gulf States for a common strategy for implementing a maritime security regime in the North Arabian Sea. One must accept that no initiative in this region could be expected to be completely successful without the participation of India. However, this could just be a step in the right direction without giving any signals of

isolation to any country including India. The effort should be to gradually encourage and involve all the littorals in such an arrangement and ensure that the sensitivities and issues of sovereignty of all are respected. Only then such cooperation can take off. We have already seen that organizations like IOR ARC could not succeed because all the stakeholders were not taken on board. Any similar attempt lacking sincerity and vision is bound to meet the same fate.

While discussing of any such arrangement one cannot, and should not, forget the presence of extra-regional forces, especially the U.S. The U.S., being the only superpower, and with the required wherewithal, has to be included in such an arrangement; and China, by virtue of its proximity and growing international stature, should also be part of such a regime. China is going to play an important role in the region, and it would be wise to understand and acknowledge this fact the sooner the better. The ERF ought to understand and respect the individual sensitivities and operate in unison with the local setup. In addition to participating in the maritime security initiative militarily, the ERF and the richer States must also help the less privileged in developing their maritime infrastructure and eliminating poverty. A term coined by the experts is 'constructive engagement' which would allow the regional and extra-regional navies sharing of operational and doctrinal expertise, generation of interoperability and enhanced awareness of the maritime domain.

Maritime cooperation can thus take the form of joint task forces, joint maritime centres, joint patrolling, etc. Similar initiatives are already being taken by the South-East Asian States and we can benefit from their experiences as well. The important factor would be to treat each country or State with dignity and respect. Once such a regional cooperation has taken roots, it can then be expanded either by cooperating with other similar regional setups or by merging and forming larger cooperative regimes encompassing the entire ocean area and even beyond. Such cooperation may also pave the way to or complement U.N.-mandated peace-keeping.

Conclusion

The Arabian Sea, owing to its geostrategic disposition, will continue to draw attention of regional and extra-regional powers. Nuclearisation and threat of terrorism have further complicated the scenario. Therefore, there is a serious and urgent requirement for all the littorals to sit together and establish an effective security system through dialogue and consensus and by engaging the ERF on common objectives and mutually beneficial activities. The external powers, particularly China and the U.S., must coordinate their efforts to ensure that the benefits are not muted because of competition or suspicion. The system should be based on cooperation and trust, giving equal representation to all the stakeholders. Such a regime should address the problems at the grass-roots level. The partner States need to have compatible technology and resources.

Presently, most of the littorals lack the resources and training to contribute effectively in such an arrangement. Obviously, well equipped and trained littorals can perform much better in the policing roles than the ERF. It is, therefore, imperative to enhance the effectiveness of the regional states by training their manpower and providing adequate resources at their disposal. The ERF can contribute positively by helping the littorals in identification of the issues and their solution through capacity building and cooperation. Pakistan, by virtue of its strategic location and relations with most of the regional States, can play a significant role in establishing an effective maritime security regime in the region.

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