Maritime Terrorism
India Must be Prepared
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As the war on terrorism initiated in Afghanistan approaches its final stages, the United States and its coalition partners are searching with a 'fine tooth comb' for the elusive Osama bin Laden. At sea, the international coalition is hunting for bin Laden's terror ships termed as the 'phantom fleet'.[1] Assisted by maritime reconnaissance aircraft and satellites, the naval war effort aims to prevent Osama and Al Qaeda operatives from escaping by the sea route.

Reports in January 2002 indicated that the search of a freighter by a US navy vessel revealed that a group of Al Qaeda terrorists had been hiding inside a shipping container. The group escaped from the container a short time before the ship was searched. This discovery prompted an increase in surveillance on ships as well as trucks carrying shipping containers leaving

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[1]   The Coalition is reportedly hunting the world for approximately 20 ships thought to make up the Al Qaeda's terrorist fleet. The ships were identified sometime in September 2001 as a result of a joint intelligence operation reportedly led by the Norwegian security service and America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with the help of international shipping registries. See "Hunt for 20 terror ships", *The Observer International*, London, December 23, 2001.

Afghanistan for Pakistani ports.[2] In another incident at sea, m. v. *Nisha*, a cargo vessel owned by The Great Eastern Shipping Company, was intercepted on December 21, 2001, on a tip-off that it was reportedly transporting terrorist arsenal.[3] The ship was tracked as it had raised suspicion because it docked in Djibouti, neighboring Somalia, a base of the Al Qaeda terror network. Osama bin Laden reportedly maintains a clandestine shipping fleet flying a variety of 'flags of convenience', allowing him to hide his ownership and transport goods, arms, drugs and recruits with little official scrutiny. In 1998, one of bin Laden's cargo freighters unloaded supplies in Kenya for the suicide bombers who, weeks later, destroyed the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.[4]

A US bulletin has warned merchant ships transiting the Arabian Sea to co-operate with the maritime forces.[5] The warning noted that vessel assisting or transporting terrorists will be boarded and may also run the risk of sinking or seizure in case they did not co-operate. The Al Qaeda is reported to own about 20 merchant vessels capable of undertaking ocean passage. According to Rear Admiral Mark P. Fitzgerald, Commander, *USS Theodore Roosevelt* carrier battle group operating in the Arabian Sea, the coalition ships have 'pretty much sealed the coast' of Pakistan to vessels that might attempt to smuggle Al Qaeda operatives and Taliban leaders out of the region.[6]

Osama's 'phantom fleet' does not exhaust the threat of maritime terror. The United Nations Conference on Trade And Development (UNCTAD) report for 2001, titled 'Review of Maritime Transport 2001', has noted that world sea-based trade

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[2]   See "Inside the Ring", http://www.gertzfile.com/ring010402.html.

[3]   "Search on Great Eastern Ship Continues", *Business Line*, Chennai, December 24, 2001. Also see "Britain, U.S. tracking Al-Qaeda terror fleet", *The Hindu,* Chennai, December 24, 2001.

[4]   See "U.S. Ports Represent Weakness in Nation's Defenses, Analyses Shows", http://www.military.com/Content/MoreContent/1,12044,FL_ports_103001,00.html.

[5]   See "US Takes War To International Waters; Navy Stops Suspicious Vessels, Officials Say", www.krwashington.com/content/krwashington/2001/12/07/washington/BC_ATTACKS_NAVY_WA_national_foreign.htm - 6k -

[6]   "U.S. allies in Arabian Gulf providing 'critical' role in war campaign", http://www.dailynewslosangeles.com/socal/terrorist/0102/07/terror05.asp.

recorded its 15th consecutive annual increase and was pegged at 5.88 billion tons.[7] Besides, the worldwide fleet of merchant vessels also witnessed a growth of 1.2 per cent totaling 808.4 million tons in the beginning of 2001.[8] Given these trends, sea-based commerce has created a mood of great optimism. While this optimism is a welcome sign, maritime infrastructure, be it military or commercial, is being threatened from several directions: piracy, drug trafficking, gunrunning, human smuggling, maritime theft and fraud, illegal fishing, pollution and terrorism. The very fact that *more than 80 per cent of the world trade is carried on ships*, underlines the reality that the threat from terrorism is far from rare. A more careful consideration highlights that maritime infrastructure and the associated industry are attractive targets, and this is a realization that has resulted in significant reassessments by various states regarding the security of their ports and shipping assets.

This paper examines the threat of terrorism in the maritime environment. It discusses the vulnerability of port infrastructure and merchant shipping to terrorist attacks. It also suggests strategies to enhance port infrastructure security. Given that India is a maritime state with a long coastline – 11 major and 163 minor ports and 85 per cent of its trade is carried by sea-borne transport – the paper examines the Indian naval and coast guard capability to counter terrorism at sea.

Ports

While the world grapples with security measures in the wake of September 11, 2001 multiple terrorist attacks in the United States, several states have ordered review of port security, as fears grow that ships carrying terrorists may be berthing in their ports. Unfortunately, most people do not associate terrorism with ports and harbors. On the contrary, water is an easy medium for intrusion that finds no parallel in land security. Swimmers, divers, fishing boats, subsurface vessels and floating objects serve as excellent means to prevent detection.

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[7]   See "Review of Maritime Transport, 2001",
        www.unctad.org/en/pub/ps1rmt2001.en.htm.
[8]   Ibid.

It is now increasingly accepted that seaports are a safe haven for terrorist activity. Large container vessels, big cargo ships and passenger liners dock at ports almost everyday. Huge tankers steam into harbors and tie up at terminals to discharge oil and gas into pipeline terminals. These vessels are subjected to routine crew and cargo manifest inspections. The cargo is rarely subjected to thorough inspection. Although the introduction of shipping containers in 1956 was a revolution in the process of shipping vast amounts of goods across the ocean, these boxes, which can be easily shifted to railroad cars or trucks have emerged as an important tool for terrorists. Today, we have container vessels like the Regina Maersk capable of transporting as many as 6600 TEU (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units) containers.[9] After the container door is closed and the plastic seal placed (under varying degrees and seriousness of inspection), these boxes are allowed to move into seaport terminals, aboard container ships, and on to trains and truck, with only the scantiest of information about their contents.

As regards containers, only a few are examined for their content. According to maritime security experts, containers are the most suitable means of transporting men and material for terrorist activities, including weapons of mass destruction. For instance, in New Orleans, a container labeled as empty held oil exploration tools that were radioactive. When customs officials opened the container in the port, beeper-size radiation alarms on their belts screamed a warning. The inspectors had to summon a decontamination team.[10] According to US custom authorities, only 2 per cent of the cargo containers that enter seaports each day are inspected.[11] In October 2001, a suspected Al Qaeda hijacker smuggled himself halfway around the world locked

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9   See 'Containerisation', www.choicegroup.co.in/html/cntrzation.htm. From vessels that used to carry 226 TEU's in 1957, there are today vessels that can carry 6600 TEUs. Maersk Sealand alone has approximately 21 vessels that can carry over 6000 TEUs. Their 'S'-Class Post Panamax vessels can carry 6600 TEU's. Other lines having over 6000 TEU vessels in their fleet are MSC, P&ONL Hanjin, Hyundai Merchant Marine, and CMA-CGM. The world fleet at present consists of 32 vessels of 6000 TEUs and above, with another 40 in the order books and many more to follow.

10   "Port of Entry Now Means Point of Anxiety", *The New York Times*, December 23, 2001.

11   Ibid.

inside a shipping container with his own bed and toilet.[12] Apparently, he was carrying airport maps and airside security passes for Canada, Thailand and Egypt. A laptop computer, two mobile phones, cameras, a Canadian passport, other identity documents and a certificate indicating that he is an aircraft mechanic was found on his person.

Crewmembers of these vessels belong to different nationalities. Their numbers vary depending on the size and type of the vessel. It could be as low as 10 or as high as 60. In the case of cruise liners, their numbers may even exceed 100. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), it is virtually impossible to verify the authenticity of the identity of the crew.[13] A significant problem in this context is that of counterfeit and improperly issued mariner documentation, particularly among the third world seafarer supplying countries. The IMB has issued a warning to ship operators about the thousands of unqualified crew and masters working illegally with false papers and has called for tighter security by authorities issuing certificates. The alert follows the release of statistics showing that of 54 maritime administrations surveyed, more than 12,000 cases of forged certificates of competency were reported.[14] These figures highlight the gravity of the situation. Many ships that set off to sea with cargo are sailed by crewmen with false passports and competency certificates. The IMB also believes that, at times, the issuing authorities themselves are to blame. For instance, the Coast Guard office in Puerto Rico was reported to have issued

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[12]   See "Terrorist In A Box: Business-class Suspect Caught In Container", http://hypocrisytoday. com/stowaway. html; Rizik Amid Farid, an Egyptian stowaway, was discovered on the dockside in Gioia Tauro in southern Italy. According to Italian media reports, it was a "reasonable inference" that his intention had been to gain admittance to an airport in Canada and perhaps commandeer an aircraft with the help of accomplices and fly it over the border to the United States. Port Said, Egypt, where Farid's journey began, is at the junction of Africa and Asia and a vital sea route between east and west. It is also a popular drug smuggling point for Southwestern and Southeastern Asian heroin and opium, and hashish from Lebanon moving to Europe and the US.

[13]   "IMB Calls For clamp-Down on fake maritime documents" , www.iccwbo.org/ccs/news_archives/2001/imb_fakes.asp .

[14]   Ibid.

approximately 500 suspicious certificates of competency.[15] Such cases usually escape detection by the port authorities.

Clearly, the ships' crew themselves can act as a potential threat. Both the Philippines and Indonesia are the largest suppliers of merchant ship crew.[16] These states are home to radical groups like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebels. Under the circumstances, it is virtually impossible to detect potentially undesirable crew members. The situation gets more complicated in case of vessels that fly 'flags of convenience' that employ multinational crews. It is virtually impossible to verify the authenticity of the identity of the crew.

Interestingly, the ship itself is a safe den for undesirable elements. There are several hidden spaces, holds and compartments in the ship that are difficult to inspect. Some spaces are so unfamiliar that it may be difficult to locate them without the help of the ship's compartment drawings. Modern day tankers, bulk carriers and cargo vessels are very large and can easily carry dangerous devices, substances and stowaways within spaces internal to the ship.

'Flag of Convenience' Shipping [17]

As noted earlier, bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terror network are known to own or have chartered approximately 20 merchant vessels capable of undertaking ocean passage. These vessels are suspected to possess 'flag of convenience' (FOC) registry in Liberia, Panama and the Isles of Man.[18] Recent reports and a court testimony suggest that bin Laden's secret shipping fleet, flying a variety of flags of convenience, allows him to hide the ownership of vessels, transport goods, arms, drugs and recruits

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[15] Ibid.

[16] The Philippines, which is home of the Abu Sayyaf militant group, is the world's biggest crew supplier, while Indonesia is home to numerous radical Muslim groups and is the world's second biggest crew supplier. See "The World's Oceans Could Be The Next Target In The War On Terrorism", http://www.emergency.com/cntrterr.htm.

[17] A foreign flag under which a merchant vessel is registered for purposes of reducing operating costs or avoiding government regulations.

[18] See "Terrorism Probe Extends To Shipping: Vessel Holdings, FOC Registries Included In Investigation", www.amo-union.org/Newspaper/Morgue/10-2001/Sections/News/foc.html

with little official scrutiny.[19] A shipbroker in Germany has admitted to acting as a translator when Wahid al Hage – sought in connection with the 1998 bombings of two US embassies in East Africa – an Al Qaeda operative attempted to buy a merchant vessel.[20] As noted earlier, one of bin Laden's cargo freighters unloaded supplies in Kenya for the suicide cadres who subsequently bombed the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.[21]

The presence of FOC[22] vessels has indeed exposed the chinks in the security armor and posed new challenges for maritime forces. An FOC ship is a vessel that flies the flag of a country other than the country of ownership. It enables owners to avoid high registration fees and taxes, and to employ cheap labour under sub-standard conditions. In some cases, private companies rather than the administration may run the national ship registry. For instance, a US private company runs Liberia's registry.[23] In some cases, the registration of vessels can even be done on-line clearly indicating the absence of any regulations.[24] Among the 30 FOC registries, Bahamas, Liberia and Panama are known to possess large merchant fleets accounting for about half the total percentage of global merchant shipping tonnage. There are several benefits for terrorists in owning ships with FOC registry. It is the safest way to smuggle personnel and equipment and perhaps even biological or nuclear weapons into any port.

Several terrorist organisations are known to possess merchant ships. For instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have a flotilla of ships that are engaged in maritime trade. Most of these are registered in FOC countries known as "pan-ho-lib" i.e. Panama, Honduras and Liberia.[25] The LTTE ships are difficult to

19   See "Murky Flag-Of-Convenience Ship Registry System Could Hamper Effort To Uncover Terrorist Assets", www.amo-union.org/Newspaper/Morgue/11- 2001/Sections/News/foc.html

20   Ibid.

21   "U.S. Ports Represent Weakness in Nation's Defenses, Analyses Shows", http://www.military.com/Content/MoreContent/1,12044,FL_ports_103001,00.html .

22   See "What are FOCs: A brief guide to flags of convenience", www.itf.og.uk/seafarer/foc/Body_foc.html

23   Ibid.

24   "How the Armada Of Terror Menaces Britain", *Observer*, December 23, 2001.

25   "Killing Of Sea Bird Not A Big Blow to LTTE Shipping Operations", *The Sunday Times*, February 1996.

keep track of as they keep changing names and registry. The Lloyds, a London-based financial services authority, lists 11 merchant ships belonging to some Asian front companies but in fact are managed by the elusive Kumaran Pathmanathan (in charge of procurement for the LTTE).[26] Operating under flags of convenience and staffed with a Tamil crew, these cargo ships carry out their activities between Asia and Europe. They are also known to regularly transport illegal immigrants or doing any kind of traffic on behalf of the LTTE.

The January 3, 2002 capture by the Israeli navy of *Karine - A*, a Palestinian Authority ship, carrying 50 tons of lethal ammunition, offers an appropriate example of a change in nomenclature.[27] According to the Lloyds, the vessel was owned by the Beirut-based Diana K Shipping Company and registered in Lebanon. Its original name was *Rim K* and was purchased by Ali Mohammed Abbas, an Iraqi national for $400,000 in August 2001 and was re-registered in Tonga as the *Karine – A*.[28]

According to the International Transport Worker's Federation (ITF) Fair Practices Committee,[29] a union of seafarers and dockers campaigning against FOC, there are 30 countries that are known to offer FOC registry.[30] These are essentially developing and small island states. The ITF believes that there should be a genuine link between the vessel and its flag. This, according to

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[26]   Ibid.

[27]   The ship was sailing in international waters on its way to the Suez Canal. The shipment reportedly included both 122 mm and 107 mm Katyusha rockets, which have ranges of 20 and 8 kilometers respectively. It also contained 80 mm. and 120 mm. mortar shells, various types of anti-tank missiles, anti-tank mines, sniper rifles, Kalashnikov rifles and ammunition. From Gaza, the 122 mm. Katyushas could have threatened Ashkelon and other coastal cities; while from the West Bank, Ben-Gurion International Airport and several major Israeli cities would have been within their range. The shipment also included rubber boats and diving equipment, which would have facilitated sea borne attacks from Gaza against coastal cities. See "Seizing of the Palestinian weapons ship Karine A", www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0l0k0.

[28]   "Arms seizures Backfires, Wounds Israel", www.iansa.org/news/2002/Jan2002/arms_backfire8102.htm .

[29]   The ITF is a federation of 594 transport trade unions in 136 countries, representing around five million workers. It was founded in 1886 in London by the European seafarers' and dockers' union leaders who realized the need to organize internationally against strike breakers. See www.itf.org.uk.

[30]   "What are FOCs: A brief guide to flags of convenience", www.itf.org.uk/seafarers/foc/Body_foc.html.

ITF, would increase accountability and force ship owners to maintain international shipping standards, a practice that does not commonly occur with FOC ships. According to industry experts, flag hopping is a common practice and ship owners tend to switch registry at the first sign of a crackdown by authorities or when engaging in activities involving gun running, drug smuggling, transporting illegal cargo or human beings.[31]

A report presented to the United Nations Sanctions Committee charges the Liberian Corporate and Maritime Shipping Registry (LISCR) with diverting funds to purchase weapons and transport the same to support terrorists in neighboring Sierra Leone.[32] The report exposes the payments made by the LISCR to non-governmental accounts for purchase of weapons in total violation of the sanctions against Liberia. Based on these allegations, a coalition of labour, environmental and human rights groups called on the UN to impose broad trade sanctions on the LISCR because of its involvement in sponsoring terrorism. In response, the prestigious Royal Caribbean Cruise Line decided to re-flag its 14 passenger ships away from Liberia.[33]

In an era of globalization, free flow of capital and an interdependent economy, several terrorist networks have a fluid and mobile nature. Given such a context, it is easy for them to indulge in narcotics smuggling, gun running and contraband trade, bulk of which is carried over the sea. These groups are taking full advantage of globalization and harnessing the resultant benefits. Unfortunately, maritime shipping, in particular FOC registry, is the soft under-belly of the maritime world. It offers the best vehicle to transport terrorist-owned weapons and a safe haven for terrorist-sponsored subversive activity at sea.

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[31]   Ibid.

[32]   The report chronicles four payments made by the LISCR to non-governmental accounts in excess of $925,000 for weapons that are "in violation of the sanctions" currently in place. The LISCR is the world's second largest registry, and is the Liberian government's biggest money-maker, contributing, reportedly, $ 18 million to national coffers in the year 2001. See "UN Accuses Liberian-Flag of Arms Purchases", www.us-flag.org/unaclibofarp.html.

[33]   "Terrorism: World   Shippers   Need   To   'Wake   Up'", www.nationaudio.com/News/EastAfrican/26112001/Maritime/Maritime12.html .

FOC vessels have now come to challenge national security. Their presence clearly highlights the dangers involved when nations charter such vessels to haul strategic cargo like oil. It is also a reminder that nations need to revitalize national fleets and challenge FOC vessels. Ships with FOC registry should not be allowed till they register under either the vessel's country of origin or actual as opposed to paper ownership. States should press for provisions in the generally accepted Law of the Sea,[34] which forbids flags of convenience, and compel ships to register with the country to which they actually belong.

Unfortunately, for small monetary gains, shipping companies tend to jeopardize national security. The states have also failed to discourage FOC vessels either to enter their ports or allowing their own ship owners to register under FOC flags. There is an urgent need to eliminate the FOC system. If the maritime community is to effectively challenge the forces of terrorism, it is imperative to establish a framework for a genuine link between the flag a vessel flies and the state it belongs to.

Cruise Liners

Ironically, cruise liners have been attractive targets for terrorists. In 1961, political insurgents embarked the Portuguese passenger liner *Santa Maria*.[35] On July 11, 1988, *City of Poros*, a

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[34] The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources. It enshrines the notion that all problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be addressed as a whole. The Convention was opened for signature on December 10, 1982 in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The Convention entered into force in accordance with its article 308 on November 16, 1994, 12 months after the date of deposit of the sixtieth instrument of ratification or accession. Today, it is the globally recognized regime dealing with all matters relating to the law of the sea. The Convention comprises 320 articles and nine annexes, governing all aspects of ocean space, such as delimitation, environmental control, marine scientific research, economic and commercial activities, transfer of technology and the settlement of disputes relating to ocean matters. For full text see:
http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm

[35] Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, "Piracy, Terrorism and Insurgent Passenger" in Natoline Ronzitte , *Maritime Terrorism and International Law*; London: Maritnus Nijoff, 1991, pp. 56-58. Portuguese and Spanish insurgents took over the ship as a revolt against Salazar and Franco in the African colonies

Greek cruise ferry carrying 500 tourists was attacked by terrorists.[36] Three terrorists belonging to the Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO) boarded the vessel, opened fire with submachine guns and tossed hand grenades onto the deck killing at least nine persons and injuring approximately 100 others.[37] The ANO had planned to hold the passengers hostage against the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel. But, it was the hijacking of the Italian cruise vessel *Achille Lauro* in October 1985 that emerged as the seminal moment in the history of modem maritime terrorism.[38]

The *Achille Lauro* incident was a wake-up call that resulted in the introduction of several security measures like boarding through metal detectors, hand baggage checks through X Ray machines, CCTVs (Close Circuit Television) for surveillance and inspections of the ship's hull, etc. Cruise line companies like the Royal Caribbean now hire contractors to provide intelligence and assist in devising risk management strategies.[39] The industry is aware of its high profile nature and is conscious of the fact that what happens on one cruise liner affects the entire industry. The events of September 11, 2001, have severely damaged the tourism sector and could threaten up to approximately nine million jobs worldwide.[40] Similar effects have been felt by the hotel industry with a drop-off in business. Fewer passengers have been embarking on liners. Renaissance Cruise, a major corporation in

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and on the Iberian peninsula. Their plan was to sail the vessel to Fernando Po, subsequently seize Spanish guinea and finally launch an attack on Angola.

[36] See "1988 Anti-Shipping Activity Messages (ASAM)", www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/ASAM-1988.htm .

[37] http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/terror2.htm.

[38] Four heavily armed Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) terrorists hijacked the *Achille Lauro*, carrying more than 400 passengers and crew, off Egypt. The hijackers demand that Israel free 50 Palestinian prisoners. The terrorists killed a disabled American tourist and threw his body overboard. After a two-day drama, the hijackers surrendered in exchange for a pledge of safe passage. But, when an Egyptian jet attempted to fly the hijackers to freedom, US Navy F-14 fighters intercepted it and forced it to land in Sicily. Counter-terrorist units from the US resolved the incident before an assault became necessary. Source: www.specialoperations.com/Images_Folder/library2/achille.html.

[39] See "Cruise Control", www.securitymanagement.com/library/000.

[40] See, "ILO Meetings Examine Terrorist Impact on Tourism, Aviation", http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01102518.htm.

this sector, filed for bankruptcy, stating that it was a victim of the fallout of terrorism.[41] Similarly, the London-based P&O Princess Cruises and the US-based Royal Caribbean announced a merger noting that ships around the world were half-empty.[42] At the World Tourism Organisation's 14th General Assembly and the Millennium Conference of Tourism Leaders in October 2001, held at Osaka, Japan, the participants were unanimous in their opinion that 'terrorism is the direct enemy of tourism.'[43] There is little doubt that the tourism industry faces a major crisis situation and it will take some time for it to recover from the fallout of the September 11 attacks.

Geography of Maritime Terrorism

It is true that most of the terrorist activities take place on land rather than at sea. Since the 1970s, perhaps due to turmoil in the Middle East, the phenomenon of terrorism has been gathering momentum, and today one finds a large number of terrorist groups located in the Middle East region. These groups have pervaded every facet of human activity and can be found all over the world. There have been no discernable geographical areas for maritime targets, and terrorist have struck in Latin America, Europe, Middle East, Asia-Pacific and in South and South East Asia. With the center of gravity of international terrorism shifting from Middle East to Pakistan - Afghanistan, there appears to be a confluence between groups located in the Asia Pacific region and those in the Middle East. Among the two dozen terrorist groups identified to have been engaged in maritime terrorism, approximately nine are currently active and five of these operate in the Asia Pacific region.[44] Moreover, these groups have built

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41   "Renaissance Cruises Filing for Bankruptcy", www.seaview.co.uk/cruiselines/renaissance.

42   Royal Caribbean Chairman and Chief Executive Richard Fain said that there was a deepening slump in travel after the September 11 terrorist attacks. See "Royal Caribbean, Princess to Merge", *The Los Angeles Times,* November 21, 2001.

43   "General Assembly unifies global tourism industry in crisis", www.hotelbenchmark.com/frames.htm?http%3A//www.hotelbenchmark.com/tourism/tourism_PR_Japan.htm .

44   "The Asymmetric Threat From Maritime terrorism", Jane's Navy International, October 2001, p.26.

sophisticated organisations that run an efficient network of commercial as also terrorist activities, pursuing their business with total impunity.

According to military experts, future conflicts will take place in the littorals, i.e. where the sea meets the land. A large proportion of world population is located in the littorals. Besides, much of the industrial infrastructure and wealth are concentrated in these areas (coastal regions), which also serve as nodes for transport of trade and culture, as also the hub of illegal activity, be it contraband trade, drug smuggling, gun running or human smuggling. The sea serves as an easy highway and acts as a catalyst for promoting such activities. A quick look at the geography of the Asia Pacific region indicates that terrorist hubs in Asia are located in the littorals: LTTE in Jaffna, Sri Lanka; Al Qaeda in Yemen, Somalia, Singapore and Pakistan; the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines, the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia. These hubs are home to these terrorist groups and from here they undertake their activity with near impunity. It can thus be argued that the center of gravity of terrorism at sea is currently located in the Asia pacific region. This is further flavoured with the Golden Crescent – Golden Triangle, high sea piracy region and, more importantly, maritime area.

Vulnerability of Warships Against Terrorist Attack

On October 12, 2000, *USS Cole*, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer was attacked by terrorists in Aden harbor, Yemen.[45] While the ship was refueling offshore, a small craft, filled with explosives, approached the ship and exploded. Allowing any unidentified vessel to pull up along side of the Cole was indeed a major security lapse on the part of the ship's duty staff.

In December 2001, Singapore authorities arrested 15 suspected Islamist militants, with links to the Al Qaeda, planning

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[45] "Terrorism Suspected in Navy Ship Attack", *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2000. An Inflatable raft rammed a US Navy destroyer igniting an explosion which killed four US sailors, left 10 missing and 35 injured in what the Pentagon believed was a terror attack. Also see "US Navy destroyer attacked in Yemen, 4 killed, 10 missing", *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, October 13, 2000.

to blow up US naval vessels and a bus that was to transport American military service personnel.[46] A tape released by the Singapore government features a man describing how explosives could be carried on a bicycle without arousing suspicion. One plot involved bombing US Navy vessels in a special "kill zone" along the northeastern shores of Singapore and the bus that was targeted carried US military personnel between a naval base used by visiting warships and a train station. The US Navy has a logistics unit in Singapore, and warships going to and from Afghanistan have been docked for replenishment in the new naval facility specially designed to accommodate US aircraft carriers.

The LTTE is one of the most ruthless and dangerous terrorist groups in the world. It is active in sea piracy, smuggling, gun running, narcotics, money laundering, abduction and assassinations. Sri Lanka has lost approximately a dozen naval vessels as a result of LTTE attacks both in harbor and at sea. The LTTE has engaged in wolf pack tactics, used high-speed boats filled with explosives and rammed into naval vessels. It is reported to be experimenting with a human suicide torpedo.[47]

A relatively unknown Greek group calling itself 'Revolutionary Organisation – 17 November' (RO-17N or 17N), fanatically nationalistic, anti-establishment, anti-American and anti-NATO, has carried out over 100 attacks and killed 22 people, ranging from US Embassy employees and military personnel to Greek parliamentarians and ship-owners.[48] It carried out an

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[46]   "Singapore Says Terror Ring Planned Attacks on Americans", *Los Angeles Times,* January 12, 2002. The terror cell, which called itself Jemaah Islamiah, had been reportedly operating in Singapore for years and many of its cadres had traveled to Afghanistan for weapons training in camps run by Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. Singapore Defense Minister Tony Tan said that the terrorists had planned to blow up embassies and military installations.

Also see http://www.pakistanlink.com/headlines/Jan/08/07.html.

[47]   "The Asymmetric Threat From Maritime terrorism'", *Jane's Navy International*, London, October 2001, p. 28.

[48]   See "The Cold Killers of 17 November Who always Go Free", http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupe/eh/terror/greecebk/prologue.htm. HMS Ark Royal, with a crew of 1,000, was targeted with rockets when it docked in Pireaus in 1994. Heavy rain prevented the rockets from detonating. What distinguishes the 17 November from other terrorist organizations is that in 22 years, not a single member of the group has been arrested. Indeed, the identity of no member of 17 November is said to be

abortive missile attack in April 1994 against the British aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* under NATO command and temporarily docked at Piraeus. [49]

Developing Strategy

It is evident that seaports are a weak link of maritime enterprise against terrorism. Compared to the attention being given to airline security, port security has gone unnoticed even though these are the nerve centers of the economy and the ends of the energy lifelines. A bulk of India's oil and gas requirements are being funneled into the country through these highly vulnerable terminals. Given the potential dangers, security at seaports is far from adequate. Port officials are conscious of scenarios such as a fully loaded tanker exploding in the harbours, explosives in containers, ship hijacking and terrorists as stowaways. They are aware of these weaknesses but are constrained due to lack of adequate security personnel and equipment. The question before them, however, is how to enhance security in such a dynamic environment against such elusive threats.

In essence, seaports are nodes in a network where cargo is loaded/unloaded from ships, trucks, trains and at times aircraft. Associated with this network are the shore infrastructure involving people, transport vehicles and goods that are loaded and offloaded at terminals on land. Therefore, seaport security must always be examined in the context of transportation security. In other words, to improve security within the port , there is a need to institute parallel security efforts along the entire transportation chain. We need, consequently, to move upstream and build concentric security circles around loading terminals, transportation route and the port itself. These arrangements would have to be dovetailed into local security systems, laws and regulations.

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known to Greek, American or European police and intelligence agencies. It is a claim no other terrorist group can make.

[49]   "N17: Greece's Secret", http://geopolitical.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jir/jir0006 09_1_n.html.

The first concentric circle (the outer most) involves the point of loading. Any container to be shipped through a port must be loaded in an approved facility. These facilities should prevent unauthorized entry and the loading process be monitored by camera. Cargo and vehicle scanners are used to store images so that they can be cross-checked with images taken by inspectors at a transshipment or arrival destination. Containers should be fitted with seals provided by the container terminal authorities.

The second circle (middle) of the security perimeter would be the area between the point of loading and the seaport perimeter. Subsequent to loading, containers transit over land or on an aircraft before arriving at the seaport. The drivers of trucks that deliver goods to the port should be subjected to mandatory background checks. It may not be possible to monitor the entire route of transit but check points can be established to track movements. For instance, Global Positioning System (GPS) transponders and electronic tags could also be placed on shipping containers so that they could be tracked en-route. An electronic sensor installed in the interior of the container could be programmed to set off an alarm if the container were opened illegally at some point during transit.

The ports (inner circle) themselves are vulnerable to attacks. This calls for assessing port vulnerability, restricting access to essential personnel, background checks of port employees and new training standards for port security personnel. Introduction of vital security equipment like surveillance boats, cameras and vessel tracking devices would go a long way to enhance security. Information sharing between local and state agencies is the key to intelligence success.

India's Maritime Environment

India has a long coastline and is blessed with 11 major and 163 minor ports. 85 per cent of Indian trade is carried by sea borne transport. In year 2001, Indian ports together handled 290 million tons of traffic. The Indian Navy and the Coast Guard are responsible for maintaining maritime order in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (IEEZ) of approximately 2.3 million square kilometers. They are well equipped in terms of surface

ships and maritime aircraft to undertake patrolling and surveillance of the sea areas. The naval forces also include special helicopters for deployment of quick reaction forces, marine commandos, diving teams and damage control units. The Indian Coast Guard has grown over the years and plays a dominant role in policing Indian waters with patrol vessels, interceptor boats and aircraft. In addition, marine customs and police forces are also responsible for handling criminal acts in and off Indian ports. As a multi-mission force, the Indian Coast Guard, ensures security of India's coastal areas and seaport security. As the lead agency, it provides a valuable service to the ports by making them safer, cleaner and more secure. It works in close conjunction with the Indian Navy, customs authorities and the marine police.

The Indian capability to challenge terrorism at sea was well demonstrated during the capture of mercenaries who held the Maldives Minister of Education as a hostage in November 1988. Two trawlers carrying 150 People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) mercenaries landed in the Maldives.[50] They quickly overpowered the Maldivian Militia using rockets and machine guns and attacked the President's residence. A 'panicked' Maldivian government sent out calls asking for assistance and India responded with the launching of *Operation Cactus* and a large contingent of paratroopers made an unopposed landing in the capital Male. The island was secured within 30 minutes after the arrival of forces. Shortly afterwards, a vessel was seen fleeing Male with mercenaries and hostages including the Maldives Minister of Education. An Indian Navy maritime reconnaissance aircraft detected the ship and Indian navy vessels then captured the ship.[51]

Similarly, the Indian coast guard, responsible for maintaining order at sea in the IEEZ, demonstrated its capability by capturing m.v. *Alondra Rainbow*, a 7000 ton Panama-registered vessel belonging to Japanese owners, hijacked by pirates in the Malacca Straits.[52] Following a worldwide alert by the Piracy Reporting

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[50] "Operation Cactus", www.bharat-rakshak.com/CONFLICTS/OperationCactus.html
[51] Ibid.
[52] The *MV Alondra Rainbow* was hijacked in November 1999. The vessel was *en route* from Kuala Tanjung, Indonesia to Milke in Japan. See Vijay

Center (PRC), Kuala Lumpur, and a prompt siting report by m.v. *Shuhadaa*, a merchant ship operating in the area, the Indian coast guard moved into action even as the pirates offered resistance to prevent arrest. Meanwhile, a Thai fishing boat picked up a life raft carrying 10 people some 60 nautical miles west of the Thai province of Satun who revealed that they were the crew of the ill-fated *Alondra Rainbow*. The pirated vessel was finally captured and the incident highlighted the importance of special forces to board vessels and apprehend culprits, as also the relevance of close cooperation between the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, the PRC and the Indian government.

Response to Terrorism

There is a need to develop new responses to challenges from asymmetric threats such as terrorism. The relevant tools could include vulnerability assessments, action plans, quick response teams and damage assessment. A model port guide, with special attention to security guidelines, counter-terrorism, contingency plans, real-time cargo, people, vessel tracking systems and rigorous analytic models, needs to be prepared and implemented in all Indian ports. It is important to harness off-the-shelf technologies such as radar systems for harbour monitoring, underwater detection systems, closed circuit TV systems, infra red devices and an efficient command-control-communication (C3) system that is linked with both national and international intelligence agencies. Smart identification cards, biometrics and information technology can provide solutions to counter asymmetric threats to ports from weapons of mass destruction and terrorist attacks. These technologies can also prevent terrorists from using seaports as havens for their criminal activities.

In countering any threat, forewarned is forearmed. What is needed, therefore, is an efficient security system that can challenge the forces of terror. Such a system should be capable of carrying out multiple functions such as denial, prevention, delay, detection, assessment as also response. It also has to do with

Sakhuja, "Maritime Order and Piracy", *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, vol. xxiv, no. 5, pp. 935-6.

having access to detailed intelligence regarding adversaries and sharing that information more effectively among security agencies and international partners. Besides, maritime security agencies like the navy, coast guard and marine police also need to extend the defensive perimeter of port security seawards, and counter asymmetric threats away from the port area.

Given the limitations of any nation to handle or unilaterally respond to multiple threats, co-operation among states is extremely important. Co-operation helps to deploy powerful forces to bear at the best place, at the right moment, resulting in a rapid and overwhelming response. Post-September 11, international initiatives have indicated that combating terrorism requires commonality of purpose, opinion, interests, values and a co-ordinated approach to combat forces inimical to peace and security. A country as powerful as the United States could not have gone ahead unilaterally to counter terrorism. It needed international co-operation to track terrorists, quickly deploy military forces, undertake surveillance, obtain tactical intelligence, base facilities, or even to over-fly national air spaces. The very fact that as many as 10 navies from Asia, Europe and the Persian Gulf were deployed to either carry out strikes in Afghanistan, or intercept vessels suspected of carrying terrorists, is a pointer towards the growing relevance and importance of multinational naval cooperation.

Conclusion

Terrorism today stalks the maritime environment. Terrorists increasingly recognize maritime infrastructure as the soft underbelly of states that can be attacked with minimal effort. More significantly, they have the capacity and capability to disrupt and destroy maritime enterprise and threaten peaceful use of the seas. This is a wakeup call for naval forces and coast guards to reinforce their capabilities to challenge the menace of terrorism at sea. The maritime community appears to be more and more pessimistic on the ability of states and the international community to contain the problem. This calls for greater co-operation among states and a need to develop new strategies to counter terrorism.