

Terrorism harbors at sea : Snapshot of Maritime Terrorism

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Introduction

Modern terrorism dates back to the French revolution and has been evolving since then. Among many reasons and sources that aid terrorism, the most common ones are clashes between different cultures, religion and international conflicts. Gone are the days when terrorism was limited to land. Now the scope has shifted to the waters too. Unfortunately, there is no authoritative definition of maritime terrorism. However, what is commonly understood of the term 'terrorism' is one among several forms of armed rebellion with systematic use of violence to achieve some higher cause. With the prefix, 'maritime' added to it the limit of such armed rebels is restricted to the waters. Although maritime terrorism has not been a serious threat one cannot discount from the rather widespread fears that there is something worse may come.

One often tends to think how do terrorist groups benefit from the vastness and lawlessness at the sea? It is primarily through attacks that have sea base as their targets and by using the sea to transport support means like weapons and militants. There are no reliable statistics that have recorded incidents of maritime terrorism. Some of the incidents that have been recorded do not qualify as such either because they do not fall in the category of terrorism or they are not maritime. With the help of continuing threats and ambiguous data, this article tries to make an analysis of maritime terrorism around the globe.

Timeline of maritime terror attacks

The reason for departure from discussions on maritime terrorism in South Asia is the surprise attacks on the PNS Zulfiqar, in 2014 a Pakistani frigate, in Karachi. It had been efficiently planned and executed by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and thus Al Qaeda. The attack is now a case study of how radicalized militant groups decide to sabotage a nation's military assets. The advance intelligence with the Pakistan Navy (PN), also could not prevent the attack. And while prompt action by security agencies prevented things from becoming a full-blown crisis, the convenience

with which TTP militants entered Karachi raised uncomfortable questions on Pakistan's ability to protect its military facilities against terror strikes.

Following the strike on the Zulfiqar, Indian analysts considered the prospect of comparable attacks by militant forces in India's near-seas too. Amidst concerns that Al Qaeda and related groups have developed the potential to hijack naval vessels and stage attacks against Indian vessels within the international waters, the country's naval leadership weighed the likelihood of a terror attack on India's maritime assets.

The Karachi attack seemed eerily almost a bit like the 2011 assault on PNS Mehran when radicalized elements of the Pakistan navy had worked with al-Qaeda to organize and infiltrate a premier naval air base in Karachi.

As a result of the attack on the Zulfiqar, Indian analysts grappled with the contingency of a preemptive Indian strike on a Pakistani naval vessel suspected of harbouring terrorists.

In 2018, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) sought a red-corner notice by Interpol against a counselor in Pakistan's High Commission in Colombo between 2009 and 2016 who had reportedly hired Sri Lankan Muslims to attack various high-profile targets, including military establishments and ports in South India. Apparently, the Pakistani agent was going to send explosives from Manner in Sri Lanka to between Rameswaram and Tuticorin in India by a dinghy. This was to be followed up by two Pakistanis being sent from Colombo to Bangalore via the Maldives on Sri Lankan passports to carry out an attack on the American consulate, a thought that did not come to fruition.

Today, there is an increase in the number of violations by small boats in India's territorial seas, while the state of coastal security remains fraught. Although terrorists haven't targeted any Indian shipping or maritime installations, the likelihood of an Al Qaeda-inspired attack is not merely hypothetical anymore. We know that 70% of the Earth is water and there are nearly 50,000 large ships which carry the cargo traded around the globe. In spite of this information being known to everyone, there are no sufficient laws and policies even today.

Consequences of terror attacks at sea

In the maritime domain, both the passenger and commercial ships are large in number and are also highly profitable. This is sufficient information to analyze the estimate that a potential terror attack might cause. There is a broad classification of the types of consequences a potential terror attack can cause primarily depending on who is affected, how are they affected, and by how much are they affected? Depending on the magnitude and use of weapons, such attacks not only cause harm to property and lives but also a major blow is felt by marine life. The extent of the damage can be such that it can lead to the complete extinction of marine species too. For better analysis, grouping the consequences of the impact of a terror attack, on individuals, private-sector firms, and public sector institutions can be helpful. There can also be a classification based on whether the impact was direct or indirect. For example- a direct consequence would mean that the presumed consequences are met. Presumed consequences primarily are- loss of life, destruction of property or other political interests. However, there are also implied or indirect consequences, that may not be the actually desired consequence but it nonetheless follows. These include businesses getting inoperative; decision making for cargo transportation may change due to psychological fears, etc. Along with instilling fear in the minds of the people, maritime terrorism causes human, economic and tangible consequences at might also turn out to harm the nation's economy

Laws regarding maritime terrorism

In spite of the grave threat surfing our seas, maritime terrorism has not received sufficient status in the international framework of laws and policies. It is high time that matters dealing with maritime terrorism must be regarded as a crime in International Laws. Apart from the list of consequences mentioned earlier, there are arguably two more reasons why maritime terrorism must be a matter of urgent concern.

Firstly, there are terrorist groups like the IS that have committed a number of attacks in the last decade leading to an increase in tension between the states. For example, on 23rd September 2019, a [group affiliated with the IS in the Philippines](#) on two pump boats ambushed and seized three fishermen off the coast of East Sabah (Malaysia).

Secondly, it is consistently being pointed out that maritime terrorism is not only criminal but also one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. It requires the cooperation of states and proper implementation and enforcement of regulations, laws, and policies to suppress it. The most serious manifestations of international crimes include maritime terrorism. Due to the carelessness of the States, very frequent attacks have been witnessed in the past decade. And the numbers will only rise if no proper laws are made.

Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill 2019

Amidst all the threat and fear regarding increase in terrorist activities at the seas, the Anti Maritime Piracy Bill 2019 was introduced in the Lok Sabha. The Bill was introduced after 18 Indians carrying crude oil were kidnapped off the coast of Nigeria. To avoid such incidents and promote the security and safety of maritime trade in India, It has strict rules as to the punishment one is to receive if found to be involved in maritime piracy acts, which also includes provision for death penalty. The provisions against armed robbery and admiralty jurisdictions of certain courts have been invoked to penalize those apprehended by the Indian Navy and Coast guard. However, the absence of a specific law makes the entire process of trying the perpetrators a tiring and a frustrating job. This bill will fulfill the legal requirements needed not only to protect India's maritime trade but also to ensure to achieve the safety of the crew in the sea.

India and Philippines joint security force

The Philippines has emerged as another target for pirate activity and maritime terrorism due to the economy's reliance on agriculture and fisheries, prompting steady development along the coastal areas to propel international trade further.

In trade relations, the connection between India and therefore the Philippines features a lot of room to develop but the build-up has already begun with both the countries being agrarian-based economies and pushing their marine business into the international domain. But we are all conscious of the terrorist activities India is subjected to ashore. This has extended to the high sea also and therefore the Philippines feature a good amount of cases when it involves maritime piracy.

A mixture of those two elements puts the trade relations between both the countries during a compromising position.

To enable simple business with as little intervention as possible, India and therefore the Philippines entered into a bilateral agreement to combat maritime piracy and terrorism, including aspects of tourism and technology.

Sarathi 2018

Terming maritime terrorism as a serious threat, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that the government has started the method of security audit to spot vulnerable areas within the seas and along the coastline.

After commissioning Coast warship 'Sarathi', he said the government has been successful in addressing the problems concerning maritime security post-Mumbai terror attack in November 2008 which was administered by terrorists who came through the ocean. The Coast warship 'Sarathi' is that the third within the series of six 105 meters offshore patrol vessels. 'Sarathi' meaning 'charioteer' may be a projection of Indian Coast Guard's will and commitment to serve and protect the maritime interests of the state. The ship has been designed and built indigenously by Goa Shipyard Ltd, and fitted with advanced navigation and communication system, and sensors.

The features include an integrated bridge system, integrated machinery system, power management system and high power external fire fighting system. ICGS 'Sarathi' is meant to hold one twin-engine light helicopter and five high-speed boats, including two for fast boarding operations, search and rescue, enforcement and maritime patrol stumped .

The ship is additionally capable of carrying pollution response equipment to combat any oil spill contamination stumped. The ship draws 2,350 tones and is propelled by two 9,100 KW diesel to achieve a maximum speed of 23 knots and has an endurance of 6,000 nautical miles at economical speed. The ship features a complement of 14 officers and 98 men.

Conclusion

A perusal of the existing international instruments to be used for the suppression of international terrorism at sea indicates that they are in a state of transition. This is due to different reasons. The most prominent of them is that the community of States has to deal with a new type of organized crime and a new type of offender. International terrorism works within an international network which makes it easy to switch the basis from which operations are launched. Modern forms of communication allow weapons and other necessary supplies to be transported to the targeted State. The criminals, who are carrying out such attacks, are not threatened by the fear of subsequently being prosecuted. Emphasis should be made on the precautionary measure to avoid such situations to arise in the first place. Precautionary steps will not only save life and property but will also save the time and purse of the courts.

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