

## **Ten Years after ‘26/11’: A Paradigm Shift in Maritime Security Governance in India?**

**Author:** Himadri Das\*

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On 26 November 2008 (‘26/11’), a group of terrorists from Pakistan undertook attacks at several locations in Mumbai.<sup>1</sup> The siege ended three days later. By then, the terrorists had killed or injured more than 400 people.<sup>2</sup> The terrorists had sailed from Pakistan and landed at Mumbai using the sea route. *En route* they had also hijacked an Indian fishing vessel *Kuber*.<sup>3</sup> Earlier, the sea route had also been used to traffic arms and ammunition for the Mumbai blasts (1993).

State-specific initiatives for joint patrolling of coastal areas by the navy, coast guard, and police were launched in Tamil Nadu in 1990 (Op *Tasha*), and in Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1993 (Op *Swan*).<sup>4,5</sup> These measures were in response to the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lanka and the Mumbai blasts respectively. The Group of Ministers (GoM) Report of 2001 recognised that India’s long coastline had remained “largely unprotected and unguarded.”<sup>6</sup> The report recommended comprehensive measures for border management, including for maritime borders and island territories. In addition to setting-up the Border Management Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), strengthening of the Indian Coast Guard and the raising of the State Marine Police (SMP) were some of the other major recommendations for management of coastal borders.<sup>7,8</sup>

The unprecedented ‘26/11’ attacks highlighted the pressing need to holistically review the construct for coastal security in India. By February 2009, a series of initiatives were set into motion to strengthen coastal security.<sup>9</sup> This brief

encapsulates some of the major initiatives and undertakes a succinct analysis of the ten years since '26/11'.

## **Key Initiatives for Strengthening Coastal Security**

### ***Policy Coordination***

The establishment of coordinating committees at multiple levels of governance—National Committee for Coastal and Maritime Security (NCSMCS) in 2009, Steering Committee for Review of Coastal Security (SCRCS) in 2013, and the State and District level Coastal Security Committees in 2016—have institutionalised mechanisms for policy coordination and implementation.<sup>10,11,12</sup> These committees, with multi-stakeholder representation, reflect a shift towards a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to maritime security. The present approach is not only broader in terms of agencies involved (going beyond traditional security agencies), but also deeper in terms of the levels at which activities are being monitored. Notwithstanding, a long-standing recommendation for a single-point apex level body, such as the proposed National Maritime Authority (NMA) is yet to be realised.<sup>13</sup>

Specific roles and responsibilities for security agencies for coastal security have been formulated, with the Indian Navy being responsible for overall maritime security (including coastal security) and the Indian Coast Guard for coastal security in territorial waters (with the SMP).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, towards exercising criminal jurisdiction, at least one Coastal Police Station (CPS) in every state now exercises jurisdiction in international waters, compared to only two police stations earlier (one on each coast).<sup>15</sup>

While there have been considerable efforts at strengthening the legislative framework for overall maritime security such as through the Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill, the Marine Fisheries (Regulation and Management) Bill, and the Merchant Shipping Bill, these bills are pending enactment.<sup>16, 17,18</sup>

## ***Capacity Building, Capability Enhancement, and Operational Coordination***

Capacities and capabilities of maritime security agencies, particularly the Indian Coast Guard have been significantly augmented and enhanced. The Indian Navy has augmented its capacity for Low Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO) by the raising of a battalion-strength Sagar Prahari Bal (SPB) and the induction of over 100 Fast Interceptor Craft (FICs) and Immediate Support Vessels (ISVs).<sup>19</sup> The Indian Coast Guard has significantly grown since '26/11' and is amongst the largest in the world. The growth story encompasses raising of additional Regional Headquarters; induction of ships, surface craft and aircraft; recruitment of additional manpower, and, infrastructure development.<sup>20</sup> According to media reports, the Indian Coast Guard has plans to become a 190-ship and 100-aircraft force in another five years.<sup>21</sup> Coastal States, through the Coastal Security Scheme (CSS) Phase II, have been able to establish additional Coastal Police Stations (CPS) and develop infrastructure such as jetties.<sup>22</sup> However, as parliamentary reports indicate, the implementation of CSS has its fair share of issues.<sup>23</sup> For a relatively new force, some of these are perhaps teething issues.

There have been proposals for setting-up a central force for coastal policing and for shifting the Indian Coast Guard under the MHA.<sup>24,25</sup> Reportedly, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is not in favour of the latter.<sup>26</sup> The raising of additional central force for coastal security also seems to be an antithesis to the 'one border—one force' recommendation of the GoM Report of 2001.<sup>27</sup> As such, the coastal security construct in India is crowded with numerous stakeholders.

Operational Coordination has received a significant fillip by the establishment of Joint Operations Centres (JOCs) by the Indian Navy, duly supported by the Coastal Security Operations Centres of the Indian Coast Guard.<sup>28</sup> Real-time linkages and a common operational plot amongst all the Operations Centres facilitates quick coordinated actions to emerging situations and threats. The 'hub and spoke' model between the Indian Coast Guard and CPS provides further linkages at with CPS at the local level.<sup>29</sup> Formulation of Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) has further streamlined inter-agency coordination.<sup>30</sup>

The conduct of biannual coastal security exercises in all coastal States and Union Territories involving all stakeholders—perhaps a one-of-a-kind exercise in India, if not in the world—facilitates review of operational readiness, including identification of voids and mechanisms to address them.<sup>31</sup> Progressively, the scale and complexity of such exercises has been enhanced, and the largest of such exercise encompassing all coastal States is planned in early 2019.<sup>32</sup>

A significant milestone has been the recent operationalisation of the National Academy for Coastal Policing (NACP) at Okha, Gujarat.<sup>33</sup> This is likely to address the training requirements of the coastal police. Hitherto, the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard were undertaking maritime orientation training for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and SMP respectively.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup> The setting-up of dedicated training facilities in all coastal states, akin to the NACP, will also contribute in developing the human component of combat power.

### ***Maritime Domain Awareness***

Enhanced awareness of the maritime domain has been facilitated by the setting-up of a Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN), a chain of coastal radars, by the Indian Coast Guard) and the National Automatic Identification System (NAIS) by the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships.<sup>37,38,39</sup> The Indian Navy has set-up a National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) Network, which facilitates interlinking naval and coast guard stations and the development of a common operational plot.<sup>40</sup> The Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC), is the nerve-centre of the NC3I network and is perhaps an unparalleled facility in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).<sup>41</sup>

While Phase II of the CSN has been sanctioned, the Indian Navy is steering the National Maritime Domain Awareness Project (NMDAP) to integrate all stakeholders and maritime information systems into one common grid.<sup>42, 43</sup> Considering oceanic seamlessness, the proposed Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) will also provided vital information for developing domain awareness.<sup>44</sup> Despite the veritable revolution in domain awareness for

coastal security, ensuring gap-free electronic surveillance remains a daunting challenge.

### ***Sectoral Initiatives***

Since '26/11', the fisheries sector has indeed been an area of increasing focus. Colour-coding of boats, online registration of fishing vessels and fishing licensing, and, issuance of biometric cards have been some of the notable initiatives.<sup>45, 46</sup> Development of suitable tracking system for fishing vessels has been progressed, but a final solution is yet to emerge.<sup>47</sup> Considering the increasing vagaries of nature, this is critical not only from a security perspective, but also from a safety and human security perspective. The setting-up of the proposed Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) Centres for marine fisheries, coupled with the envisaged tracking system would further strengthen fisheries management.<sup>48,49</sup>

In the port sector, while the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) code is applicable for all ports dealing with international trade, based on audit of non-major ports, guidelines for security of non-major ports have been prepared.<sup>50</sup> The induction of Immediate Support Vessels (ISVs) and enhanced electronic surveillance through the Vessel and Air Traffic Management System (VATMS) has also strengthened the security of the offshore sector.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Community Engagement***

The community is a key element of the coastal security construct. The concept of community policing, essentially a policing concept, has been extended to the maritime domain. Community Interaction Programmes (CIPs) and Toll Free Numbers in coastal States facilitate interaction between coastal communities and security agencies, and serve the dual purposes of security and safety.<sup>52,53</sup> A mobile application, *Sagara*, to facilitate communication between fishers and government agencies has been launched in Kerala as a pilot project.<sup>54</sup> The inclusion of coastal security as a topic in the coastal adult literacy programme of Kerala—*Askhara Sagaram*—is also a stronger indicator of the wider understanding of security matters

in the government, and the need for wider sensitisation.<sup>55</sup> These efforts need to be emulated elsewhere as well.

## ***Summary***

Having covered some of the major initiatives, a succinct analysis of the developments in the decade after '26/11' is listed below:

*Firstly*, the developments in the past decade are in consonance with established models and best practices for maritime security governance. The whole-of-government approach for policy coordination, and focus on inter-agency coordination, are the key elements in this regard.

*Secondly*, these initiatives have been taken on a national-level basis involving all coastal States and Union Territories, and unlike in earlier years, have not been localised to specific coastal States. Consequently, the scope and scale of these efforts are unprecedented.

*Thirdly*, significant capacity augmentation and capability development of maritime security agencies has been undertaken, especially for the Indian Coast Guard and the SMP.

*Fourthly*, there has been an enhanced focus on technological solutions to domain awareness and inter-agency coordination. These efforts have been effectively leveraged to upscale to national and international levels.

*Fifthly*, considering the federal nature of governance, and policing being a State subject, there are challenges to bringing in uniformity across all States.

*Sixthly*, several sectoral initiatives have been taken to strengthen security. Considering multiple sectors involved, some sectors such as fisheries, need greater focus than others. Similarly, within sectors, certain aspects merit greater attention, such as non-major ports within the port sector.

*Seventhly*, an inclusive approach to security has been adopted by including the community as a key stakeholder (community as ‘eyes and ears’ of the security agencies).

*Eighthly*, the inter-agency linkages through the coastal security construct can be effectively leveraged to deal with other contingencies and scenarios such as Search and Rescue (SAR), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), urban coastal flooding, etc.

*Ninthly*, the legislative framework for security remains largely unchanged.

*Finally*, as multiple reports of the government suggest, there remains a lot needs to be done in multiple areas. While projects such as CSN have transited into the next phase, some others, such as the implementation of the CSS are well behind their initial timelines. Further, some recommendations, such as that of a single-point apex level body, the NMDAP, and strengthening of the legislative framework are yet to be implemented.

Moving forward, addressing outstanding recommendations of the numerous audits and examinations by Parliamentary Committees and the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), and completion of ongoing projects should be a priority. Due consideration to unresolved issues, un-actioned recommendations, and emerging questions, could also provide vital inputs for the future. For the future, some of the more significant points of reflection pertain to the following:

*First*, will the much recommended single-point apex body for maritime affairs give further impetus to the reform process?

*Second*, is the legislative framework for maritime security appropriate for the envisaged threats, and are all agencies appropriately empowered?

*Third*, is there a scope to institutionalise periodic independent audits of the maritime security sector through objective criterion, such as those envisaged in documents

such as the US *Maritime Security Sector Reform Guide*? Such systems could provide much needed periodic course corrections and inputs for continuing reform.

*Fourth*, with the long-term plan of the Indian Coast Guard to be a close to 200-ship and 100-aircraft Coast Guard by 2023, is there are case to recalibrate engagement of other agencies for coastal security?

*Fifth*, considering enduring issues with the implementation of the CSS, whether raising another CAPF under MHA would be useful?

*Sixth*, would placing the Indian Coast Guard under the MHA serve the larger objectives?

*Seventh*, how could gap-free electronic surveillance of the Indian coastline and adjoining sea areas be ensured?

*Eighth*, what measures can be taken to ensure that security considerations are an intrinsic element in every maritime endeavour, irrespective of the sector? Furthermore, what are the specific areas of concern within each sector which need to be addressed on priority?

*Ninth*, what could be done to ensure that the construct remains responsive to emerging threats such as cyber threats, unmanned vessels/ aircraft, and improvisations, such as Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIED).

*And finally*, what measures could be taken to institutionalise community engagement for security?

## **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, in the past decade, there have indeed been some significant developments in the management of maritime security in India – more has been witnessed in the past decade, than in the previous six decades. Certainly, there has been an exponential progress since ‘26/11’, and it would only be reasonable to assume that the concept of



‘coastal security’, which has witnessed increasing global attention, has a strong Indian connect. Regrettably, these developments gained traction only after ‘26/11’, despite the earlier recommendation of the GoM.

Like anywhere else in the world, it would be wishful to assume that the work has been done, or to assume impenetrability of the Indian coastline. However, there is reasonable assurance that necessary systems are in place to deter and to respond to non-traditional threats in the maritime domain. Considering the scope, scale and nature of the reforms undertaken, it would only be fair to suggest that the past decade has witnessed a paradigm shift in the governance of maritime security in India, especially coastal security. However, the gains need to be further consolidated and strengthened. In short, the reforms of the maritime security sector need to continue. India’s wider aspirations as a regional player can only be realised if its own maritime backyard remains safe and secure. Safety and security is also inextricably linked to overall economic development, national prosperity, and the well-being of the citizens.

Despite the inherent advantage with the aggressor in asymmetric scenarios, there is every reason to believe that overall the security of the Indian coastline has indeed been strengthened. However, should it be tested, every link in the chain should be able to bear the strain.

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*\* Himadri Das is a serving officer in the Indian Navy. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect the official policy, the Indian Navy, the NMF or the Government of India. He can be reached at [himadridas@rediffmail.com](mailto:himadridas@rediffmail.com).*

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