

## **India's Evolving Coastal Security Architecture: A Case for a New Central Force**

**Author:** Gurpreet S Khurana\*

**Date:** 23 May 2019

### **Background**

It has now been over a decade since the Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 2008 (26/11) undertaken by the Pakistan-based *Lashkar-e-Tohiba* (LeT) group. Since then, considerable efforts have been made to streamline India's coastal security, including fostering functional synergy among the various agencies involved. However, recent reports indicate that the coastal security architecture is undergoing a re-appraisal, which may lead to its reorientation. For instance, a recent media report states that the Government of India seeks to shift the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), even against MoD objection.<sup>1</sup> The stated reason is the "operational disconnect" between the ICG and the Indian Navy (IN), which has led to the government considering assigning the overall responsibility of coastal security to the ICG.<sup>2</sup>

If India's coastal security has not yet stabilised more than a decade after 26/11, it is an issue of concern, when seen in the context of the emerging contours of its relations with Pakistan, and the latter's increasing propensity to give effect to its strategic objective to "bleed India through a thousand cuts".<sup>3</sup>

### **Government Directives after Mumbai Terrorist Attack (26/11)**

India's current coastal security organisation clearly represents an 'uneasy companionship' between the IN and the ICG, among the various agencies involved. It emanates from the Indian government's response to the new insecurity of 'maritime terrorism' that caused 26/11. In the wake of the 26/11 terrorist attack, the February 2009 directives issued by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) identified the IN as the most capable force to reassure the nation against the emergent asymmetric threat from the sea. Therefore, the CCS directives designated the IN as the "authority responsible for overall Maritime

Security, including Coastal and Offshore Security.” Furthermore, it named the existing naval Commanders-in-Chief (Cs-in-C) as Cs-in-C Coastal Defence whereas the Director General Coast Guard (DGCG) was designated as Commander Coastal Command and entrusted with the responsibility for overall coordination between Central and State agencies in all matters relating to Coastal Security.<sup>4</sup>

## **Let’s Get the Concepts and Roles Clear!**

There are no formal or commonly accepted definitions of concepts like ‘maritime security’,<sup>5</sup> ‘coastal security’ and ‘coastal defence’. Nonetheless, ‘maritime security’ is understood to encompass a host of issues relating to the sea under the broad constructs of national sovereignty, economic development, human security and preservation of the marine environment. The issues include security and safety of seaborne trade and commerce; security of energy; coastal security, coastal defence and offshore security against low-intensity threats; ensuring good order at sea; the safety of Indian citizens engaged in maritime activities; the delimitation and management of international maritime boundaries; and the protection of natural resources in the maritime zones.<sup>6</sup>

‘Coastal security’ — as a subset of ‘maritime security’ — represents the ability of a State to preserve its national security interests in its coastal zone<sup>7</sup> against all maritime threats not only in times of peace, but also conflict.<sup>8</sup> It provides the context for the February 2009 CCS directives in response to 26/11, when coastal security became the “new component of the national security calculus”.<sup>9</sup> Coastal security encompasses multifarious facets such as coastal border management, island security, the maintenance of good order and law-enforcement in coastal zones, as also the security of ports, coastal installations, vessels and people engaged in marine activities.<sup>10</sup>

These concepts need to be identified with the role and functions of the IN and the ICG. The Coast Guard Act, 1978 mandates the ICG with many functions under the rubric of (holistic) maritime security. Article 14 of the CG Act, 1978 states that “It shall be the duty of the Coast Guard to protect by such measures, as it thinks fit, the maritime and other national interests of India in the maritime zones of India”. More specifically, the Act lays down that the responsibilities of the ICG as being *inter alia* “the safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore terminals, installations and other structures and devices in any maritime zone, ...providing protection to fishermen including assistance to them at sea while in distress, to preserve and protect the maritime environment and to prevent and control marine pollution, assisting the customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations, enforcing the provisions of such enactments as are for the time being in force in the maritime zones,...the safety of life and property at sea and collection of 'scientific data...”.<sup>11</sup>

In comparison, the IN's operational missions and tasks are grouped under four roles – military, diplomatic, constabulary and benign – as articulated in the *Indian Maritime Doctrine*. The Doctrine adds that “The essence of all navies is their military character”,<sup>12</sup> indicating the primacy of the military role. In the context of this paper, the role relates to the concept of ‘coastal defence’. This is a term used in the context of both coastal security and national defence. Measures under coastal defence are activated under conditions of imminent attack. Coastal defence, therefore, spans the IN's military and constabulary roles to prevent the ingress of either anti-national elements or ‘traditional’ (military) threats from seaward, across the coastal zone.<sup>13</sup> Coastal defence is also a responsibility of the ICG, given that it is also an armed force of the Union placed under the MoD.<sup>14</sup>

The IN and the ICG, therefore, have clearly differentiated primary roles. For the IN, it is the military role unconstrained by any geographic limits, and for the ICG, it is a more holistic aspect of security and law-enforcement in the Indian maritime zones. This leads to an apparent overlap with regard to a common role of coastal defence; but here too, the two forces have differentiated responsibilities in terms of the prevailing security condition. During peacetime, the responsibility of coastal defence is required to be performed by the ICG, with the IN taking over during an armed conflict.

The aforesaid differentiation of responsibilities provides an adequate rationale why the ICG was not placed under the IN's overall command chain. The CG Act, 1978 states that “The general superintendence, direction and control of the Coast Guard shall vest in, and be exercised by the Central Government and..... the command and supervision of the Coast Guard shall vest in an officer to be appointed by the Central Government as the Director-General of the Coast Guard.”<sup>15</sup>

## **The Prevailing Aberration**

When interpreted in the aforesaid context, the February 2009 CCS directives designating the IN as the lead authority for overall maritime security, naming the existing naval Commanders-in-Chief (Cs-in-C) as Cs-in-C Coastal Defence, and designating the DGCG as Commander Coastal Command ‘effectively’ sought to place the ICG under the IN's authority with regard to a coastal security function optimised for peacetime. As per extant regulations, the ICG would be placed under the functional authority of the IN only in wartime. The *Indian Maritime Doctrine* states that “In war and less than war situations, when so directed by the Union Government, ICG units function under operational control of the IN.”<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the CCS directives do not factor the primacy of IN's military role and the provisions of the Coast Guard Act, 1978 with regard to the "general superintendence, direction and control of the ICG".<sup>17</sup> As a consequence, the CCS directives are not consonant with the extant policy and the 'on ground' realities with regard to the mandated functional relationship between the two forces placed under the MoD.

The objection to this by the ICG – based on both lawful and legitimate grounds – led to the two forces (IN and ICG) evolving a *modus operandi* merely to 'coordinate' their functions. Such 'coordination' is occurring today *sans* 'unity of command', which is the *sine qua non* of any military or law-enforcement operation. This has led to a coastal security organisation wherein the IN is entrusted with 'responsibility' and 'accountability' for India's coastal security, but without commensurate 'authority'. Notably, in its 177<sup>th</sup> Coastal Security Scheme Report of 19 February 2014, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs made a notable statement. The Committee said,

"Coastal security set up in India is a three-layer set up comprising of Navy, Coast guard and marine police. The Committee though appreciating the fact that coastal security is a team effort requiring a lot of coordination between the three agencies, still it is of the opinion that a clear demarcation of jurisdiction and responsibilities should be made. *A clear hierarchy of command at national level should be established so that responsibility for commission and omission during an emergency situation could be fixed* (emphasis added)."<sup>18</sup>

Four years later, in March 2018, the chain of authority continued to be ambiguous, when the 205<sup>th</sup> Coastal Security Scheme Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs stated,

"The Committee, during its deliberations, was apprised about... Lack of a clear coordination mechanism between Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard and coastal police that are guarding the three respective layers of our sea front... The Committee recommends that there should be a clear command chain and defined SOPs with reference to coastal security."<sup>19</sup>

## **The Way Ahead**

In the context of the proposed shift of the ICG from under the MoD to the MHA and the attendant revamp of the coastal security organisation, the succeeding paragraphs examines a few issues and offers related policy recommendations towards developing an optimal model for India from the national-strategic perspective.

It may be conceded that the MHA is the most appropriate government ministry to be entrusted with India's coastal security in peacetime. This is consonant with the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 (as amended up to 5 February 2019),<sup>20</sup> which mandates the MHA for the management of India's international land and

coastal borders and internal security. While these Rules do not explicitly state so, in the context of emerging terrorist threats from seaward, these provisions could be extrapolated to include the security of India's sovereign Territorial Sea – whose seaward limit extends to 12 nautical miles (NM) from the coast/ baseline – and also the enforcement of domestic law in the Contiguous Sea (24 NM seaward limit) with regard to fiscal, immigration and sanitary issues.

### ***Option 1: ICG under MHA in Lead Role***

Shifting the ICG from the MoD to the MHA, making it the lead agency for India's coastal security, and placing the IN in support role seems to be the preferred option among many analysts. Abhijit Singh of the *Observer Research Foundation* (ORF), for instance, opines that "The Coast Guard must be strengthened to play a leadership role in coastal security. All ambiguities from (*sic*) the Coast Guard Act must be removed to ensure all security agencies are clear about the roles and responsibilities they are expected to perform."<sup>21</sup> Pushpita Das of *Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses* (IDSA) avers that "the ICG has the mandate and the capability to shoulder the responsibility of coastal security... we should keep in mind why the ICG was created in the first place. It was because of the reluctance and incapability of the Indian Navy to fight smuggling and enforce law in the coastal waters that they thought of the ICG."<sup>22</sup>

This model has substantive merits. It would be the quickest reorientation of India's approach to the gravest maritime security threat that India encounters today, viz. the asymmetric threat of proxy war propagated by Pakistan. It also involves a minimal re-organisational effort since the ICG is already 'coordinating with the IN and the maritime agencies of the coastal States' through the elaborate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This proposal would, however, also necessitate a legal revamp, particularly the revision of the Coast Guard Act, 1978. This would entail debate on the rationale of placing the ICG under the MoD in the first place, and the rather complex 'turf-related' interests of the various stakeholders in arriving at such a seminal national decision. This bears to potential to delay, and even stall, the decision-making process. As the saying goes, "the devil lies in the detail"!

### ***Option 2: A New CMPF with IN and ICG in Support Role***

Another option for India is to adopt an organisational structure that caters for the nation's long-term vision of overarching national security needs, rather than merely its immediate response to Pakistan's asymmetric military strategy. This option is premised on an India that is poised to become a major maritime power in the coming decades. In this context, possibly the best policy approach is to raise a Central Marine Police Force (CMPF) under the MHA to lead the coastal security structure in synergy with the State Marine Police

forces of the coastal States and Union Territories. This proposal calls for the IN and the ICG to be integral to the India's coastal security architecture, though in support role, rather than any of these being in the lead coastal security role (See Fig. 1 below).

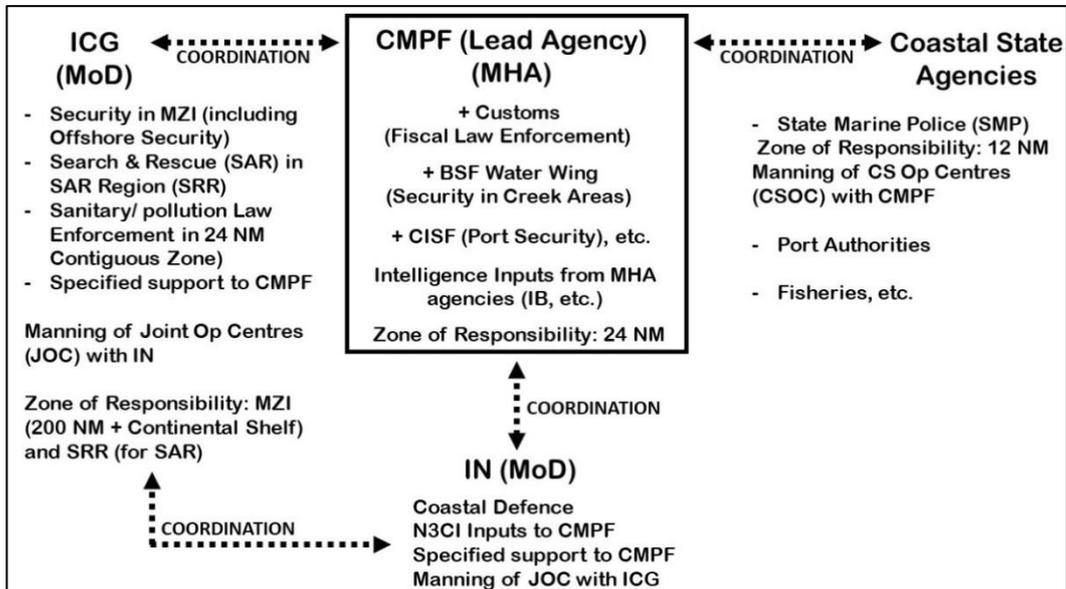


Figure 1 - Proposed Coastal Security Structure  
(Source: Author)

The CMPF zone of responsibility could extend to the 24 nautical mile limit of the Indian Contiguous Zone (without encroaching upon the other specific functional responsibilities of the ICG in this zone), with the various MHA-controlled agencies like BSF Marine Wing and the Central Industrial Police Force (CISF, entrusted with port security), and the Customs (presently under the Ministry of Finance) subsumed into the CMPF. The current formal zone of responsibility of State Marine Police of individual coastal States may be maintained at 12 nautical mile Territorial Sea, even though it would take a few years for the force to develop adequate capability to meet this mandate. The CMPF would need to be mandated to coordinate with the State Marine Police, as well as other departments under the State government such as the fisheries and ports. The MHA-controlled and funded dedicated force (CMPF) would need to be provided comprehensive capability-development assistance by the IN and ICG (under the MoD) until it matures. Thereafter, the CMPF would need to be provided functional support such in terms of providing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and defence intelligence. Furthermore, through the MoD, the IN and ICG may be called upon to undertake a specific joint military or law-enforcement operation beyond the capability of the CMPF, when all assisting forces of the MHA would need to be placed under the command of the 'lead armed force'<sup>23</sup> to ensure unity of command.

This option is also premised on the fact that neither the IN nor the ICG are formally entrusted with coastal security as their primary responsibility, at least until it is a case of coastal defence necessitating measures activated under conditions of imminent attack. The IN's primary role is military, and therefore, it is tasked for coastal defence in contingencies necessitating a response largely to 'military' threats. On the other hand, the ICG is a "an armed force of the Union", whose primary responsibility – as laid down in the Indian Coast Guard Act, 1978 – is to ensure "the security of the maritime zones of India with a view to the protection of maritime and other national interests in such zones."<sup>24</sup>

## **Functional Appraisal of Option 2 (CMPF)**

Abhijit Singh of the ORF avers that "the CMPF option is certainly implementable, provided we have some way of keeping State police agencies firmly plugged into the coastal security organisation. Being integrated into local area awareness and human intelligence networks, these agencies must be integral to the coastal security organisation. The propensity of some coastal States to wriggle out of their coastal security responsibilities and let the Central force do all the 'heavy-lifting' would need to be guarded against." An equitable distribution of responsibility would, therefore, need to be ensured, including while formulating the Standard Operating Procedures (SoP). In addition, as Abhijit suggests, "a suitable representation of the State police in the CMPF – at both senior and junior levels – may make the organisation more effective".<sup>25</sup>

The proposal of raising a central force (CMPF) is not without its attendant challenges. It is not an easy task to raise a new force, especially one that possesses nautical expertise and adaptability to effectively operate in the maritime domain. Particularly for India, this has traditionally been a weak area. Besides, it needs a substantial amount of funding from the Central government, particularly on pay and pension of employed personnel. However, this option is possibly the most appropriate one to cater for India's coastal security imperatives in the longer run. It is also consonant with the current practice in India with regard to the land borders management, wherein the State governments govern the hinterland, and the activities along the international border are regulated by a MHA-administered Central Armed Police Force – like the *Border Security Force* (BSF), the *Sashastra Seema Bal* (SSB), the *Indo-Tibetan Border Police* (ITBP) and the Assam Rifles – in coordination with the concerned State government.

The issue of financial burden may be mitigated by transferring some policing vessels of the IN and ICG specifically inducted for coastal security post-26/11 to the CMPF (except those necessary for force-protection needs). It would offset the initial costs substantially. The major long-term burden of the pay and pension of the new force will need to be grappled by the government, but with the New Pension Scheme – involving a contributory effort by the potential pensioners – would offset the burden to a substantial measure.

The training of the new Central force could be undertaken by the IN and ICG. The IN's *Sagar Prahari Bal* (SPB) located in various coastal States is already involved in training the State Marine Police of the respective States. The SPB could effectively become the 'training team' for the CMPF. It is important to note that since soon after the formation of the ICG in the late-1970s, the IN has been instrumental in comprehensive capability-enhancement of the ICG, and this continues to this day.

The merits for raising the CMPF are many. It would satiate the principle of 'one border, one force', which is being considered for land border management as well. Although substantial financial resources will be required, such investment is essential to ensure security, which cannot be quantified in monetary terms. The other intangible dividends of raising a CMPF are employment generation and the propagation of maritime consciousness among the youth seeking employment in such a force, which is becoming increasingly necessary for India to develop its comprehensive maritime power.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Interestingly, none of the specific responsibilities of the ICG stated in Article 14 of the Coast Guard Act, 1978 indicate that 'guarding the coast' is its primary function ICG, at least in context of India's current national security imperatives. When the ICG was raised in the late-1970s, naming it as the "coast guard" was actually a conceptual aberration. The nomenclature was guided by the contemporary world-wide trends driven by the precedent of the *United States Coast Guard* (USCG). Notably, when USCG was raised in 1790, the concept of maritime zones – including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the extended Continental Shelf – never existed. These were legally formalised much later under in the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, 1982 (UNCLOS). During those days when States enjoyed no sovereign rights over any maritime zone, the 'coast-guard' was possibly an appropriate nomenclature. Nonetheless, even after two centuries, when countries like India raised a force for security of their extensive maritime zones in accordance with the UNCLOS regime, they subconsciously (though erroneously) adopted the US-nomenclature.

Raising a new Central force would leave the IN and ICG to focus on their primary responsibilities, which are likely to dilate in the coming years in geographical scope, tenor and tempo. For instance, the ICG needs to take over from the IN the responsibility of offshore security (as stated in the CG Act, 1978). The force also needs to prepare for the formal addition of the extended continental shelf to India's maritime zones.<sup>26</sup> Due to the increasing shipping and air-traffic density in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the adverse effects of climate change, it would also need to cope with the ever increasing risks of maritime disasters and accidents in India's Search and Rescue Region (SRR) and marine pollution in Indian maritime zones. With the increasing Chinese naval footprint in

the IOR, the IN would be busy as well. It would also need to do more to establish India's role as a 'net security provider' in the Indian Ocean and beyond in consonance with the national-strategic vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region).<sup>27</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

*\*The author, Captain (Dr) Gurpreet S Khurana, Indian Navy, is PhD in Defence Studies and the Executive Director of the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the NMF, the Indian Navy, or the Government of India. He may be contacted at [gurpreet.bulbul@gmail.com](mailto:gurpreet.bulbul@gmail.com)*

## Notes and References

---

<sup>1</sup> Smriti Sinha, "Centre Mulls Placing Coast Guard Under Home Affairs Against MoD Objection", *India.com New Desk*, 01 April 2019, at <https://www.india.com/news/india/centre-mulls-placing-coast-guard-under-home-affairs-against-mod-objection-3617707/> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "India must spend more on intelligence, says Ex-RAW chief Vikram Sood", *Deccan Chronicle*, February 2019, at <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/180219/india-must-spend-more-on-intelligence-says-ex-raw-chief-vikram-sood.html> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>4</sup> "Navy to Head Indian Maritime Security: Antony", *The Hindustan Times*, 28 Feb 2009, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/StoryPage.aspx?sectionName=HomePage&id=7158b2fa-c919-4092-a22b-571ee1c6c820&Headline=Navy+to+head+Indian+maritime+security%3A+Antony> (Accessed 01 March 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Christian Bueger, "What is maritime security?", *Marine Policy*, Vol. 53(2015), pp. 159-164

<sup>6</sup> Gurpreet S Khurana. *Porthole: Geopolitical, Strategic and Maritime Terms and Concepts* (Pentagon Press, new Delhi: 2016), p. 124

<sup>7</sup> The geographical limit of such "coastal zone" is not subject to precise demarcation, owing to the inherent nature of the maritime domain. Unlike sovereign land territory, the maritime periphery of a coastal State lends itself to exposure as an international space, wherein the sovereign rights of the State diminish progressively outwards from the coast in accordance with international law, as codified in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>9</sup> Commander Himadri Das. *Coastal Security: Policy Imperatives for India* (National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi: 2019), p.7

---

<sup>10</sup> Gurpreet S Khurana. *Porthole: Geopolitical, Strategic and Maritime Terms and Concepts* (Pentagon Press, new Delhi: 2016), p. 36

<sup>11</sup> The Coast Guard Act, 1978, at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/ind5395.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>12</sup> Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2009 (updated in 2015), Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) 2009, p.91

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 36

<sup>14</sup> The Coast Guard Act, 1978, at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/ind5395.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19), Art 4(1).

<sup>15</sup> The Coast Guard Act, 1978, at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/ind5395.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19), Art 5(1).

<sup>16</sup> *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 2009 (updated in 2015), Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) 2009, p.89

<sup>17</sup> The Coast Guard Act, 1978, at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/ind5395.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>18</sup> Parliament of India, Rajya Sabha, Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, 177<sup>th</sup> Report on 'Coastal Security Scheme', 19 February 2014, p.29, at <http://164.100.47.5/newcommittee/reports/EnglishCommittees/Committee%20on%20Home%20Affairs/177.pdf> (Accessed on 29 Apr 19).

<sup>19</sup> Parliament of India (Rajya Sabha) Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, 205<sup>th</sup> Report on 'Action Taken by Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the 203<sup>rd</sup> Report on Border Security: Capacity Building and Institutions', 08 Mar 18, p.17, at <http://164.100.47.5/newcommittee/reports/EnglishCommittees/Committee%20on%20Home%20Affairs/205.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>20</sup> Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, (As Amended up to Amendment Series No. 348 dated 5 February 2019), Cabinet Secretariat (Government of India) website, at [https://cabsec.gov.in/writereaddata/allocationbusinessrule/completeaobrules/english/1\\_Upload\\_1187.pdf](https://cabsec.gov.in/writereaddata/allocationbusinessrule/completeaobrules/english/1_Upload_1187.pdf) (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>21</sup> Abhijit Singh, "India's Coastal Security Paradox", *ORF Special Report No 52*, 14 Dec 14, at [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ORF\\_Special\\_Report\\_52\\_Coastal\\_Security.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ORF_Special_Report_52_Coastal_Security.pdf) (Accessed on 01 May 19)

<sup>22</sup> E-mail interview with Dr. Pushpita Das, Research Fellow, *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (IDSA), New Delhi on 01 May 2019.

<sup>23</sup> The 'lead armed force' assuming overall command of the joint operation would depend upon the situation. It would be essentially based upon the appreciation of the imminent threat and, therefore, the capabilities required to counter it. If the involvement of the ICG alone is considered appropriate, the Command would need to be exercised by the ICG. However, if the assessed threat necessitates the involvement of forces from both the ICG and the IN, the Command would need to rest with the IN.

<sup>24</sup> The Coast Guard Act, 1978, at <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/ind5395.pdf> (Accessed on 13 Apr 19).

<sup>25</sup> E-mail interview with Dr. Abhijit Singh, Senior Fellow and Head of Maritime Security Programme, Observer research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi on 04 May 2019.

<sup>26</sup> India had already made a partial submission of its extended continental shelf claim to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) in 2009. See United Nations, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (Updated on 19 May 2010), at

---

[https://www.un.org/depts/los/cles\\_new/submissions\\_files/submission\\_ind\\_48\\_2009.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/cles_new/submissions_files/submission_ind_48_2009.htm)  
(Accessed on 15 Apr 19).

<sup>27</sup> “Mr Modi’s Ocean View”, *The Hindu*, March 17, 2015, at  
<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/%20editorial/mr-modis-ocean-view/article7000182.ece>  
(Accessed on 13 Apr 19).