



Protection of Trade and Energy Supplies in the Indian Ocean Region

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In the 21st century, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has emerged as a key region on the global maritime map. The region, significant for global energy and trade transfers, however, finds itself threatened by unlawful activities like piracy and maritime terrorism. While various mechanisms are in place for tackling piracy in the Gulf of Aden and in the Malacca Strait, there needs to be greater focus on maritime terrorism, now taking deep roots in the region. As constituent nations strive for a coherent maritime security architecture in the IOR, there is a need to frame acceptable rules for the “global commons” that account for the vast expanse of large maritime spaces in the region. The possibility of evolving a cooperative and participative “Asian Maritime Partnership” to tackle the maritime threats and challenges at the regional level must also be explored.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean extends nearly 10,000 km between the Cape of Good Hope and Australia and about 13,500 km from the Persian Gulf to Antarctica.¹ The vast majority of the world’s population, comprising multi-ethnic and multi-religious

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groups, lives in this region. The Indian Ocean Rim comprises states with varying degrees of economic and social development, governance and political maturity. Vibrant democracies, fragile states, isolationist regimes, economically weak nations in coastal Africa and oil-rich Arab nations, all co-exist in and around the Indian Ocean.

It is through this region that global energy and trade lifelines must transit. To place the issue in perspective, about 100,000 ships ply its waters annually² and roughly 40% of this sea-borne trade passes through the Malacca Strait. The Persian Gulf and adjoining region accounts for 50% of the world's container cargo and 33% of bulk cargo. In 2011, 17 million barrels of oil passed through the Strait of Hormuz every day and 13.6 million barrels went through the Malacca and Singapore Straits in 2009.³ Therefore it becomes incumbent upon all the maritime players in the region and the stake holders to pay serious thought to the unhindered flow of these global trade and energy supplies through the Indian Ocean.

Areas of Maritime Concern

The Indian Ocean has been a focus of constant attention from all actors, state as well as non-state ones, for varied reasons. Twenty per cent of the world's oil production is shipped through this region, with annual European trade moving through the Indian Ocean estimated at over \$1,150 billion. By itself, India has high stakes in the energy trade passing through the region. Seventy-seven per cent of India's trade by value, and over 90% by volume, is carried by sea. The Indian peninsula juts out into one of the most important energy routes leading from the Suez Canal and Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca. India has a coastline of 7500 km and an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 2.013 million sq km. India is therefore naturally obligated to maintain unhindered usage of these trade and energy supply routes of its own as well as those of the others. The Indian offshore assets, fisheries and deep sea interests within the EEZ, major and minor harbours and the overall seaward security of the vast coastline are other vital aspects of the Indian maritime dimension and responsibilities.

India's Oil Dependency

Indian economy is currently growing at about 7% and could become the third largest economy after the United States and China by the middle of this century, if the present growth pattern is sustained. Economic growth and energy consumption being directly

related, India's energy demand is expected to rise at an average of 3–4% annually over the next two decades. India has only 0.4% of the world's oil resources by current estimates, and domestic production (mainly offshore) has not been able to offset the growing demand at all. Oil currently accounts for about 36% of India's primary energy supply, and 70% of this demand is sourced from imports. The dependence on oil imports is expected to further increase to 95% (348 out of a projected demand of 368 million tonnes) by 2025.⁴ The Middle East at present remains the main source of India's energy imports, with more than 65% of crude oil coming from this region alone.

China's Energy Dependence

As the fastest growing Asian country, China has shown in the last three decades that the economic development is the bedrock of its intrinsic national strength. The Chinese growth model is naturally energy intensive. China's oil demand has been growing at more than 5%. Its import crossed 260 million tonnes in 2011. Thus, China's dependence on imported crude oil has risen from 8% in 1994 to 56.5% in 2011 and is likely to rise to 65% by 2015.⁵

The uninterrupted, safe and guaranteed supply of oil and gas has therefore become a serious issue for the Chinese leadership. President Hu Jintao, during a Central Party economic work committee meeting in 2003, was believed to have raised Chinese energy security concerns by stating that more than 80% of the Chinese imported oil has to pass through the Malacca Strait, and that China must actively adopt measures to ensure the security of its energy imports.⁶ This perception has possibly obligated China to strengthen the capacity of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy to operate effectively at long distances from its coastline and be in a position to safeguard China's trade and energy lifelines.

US Maritime Interests in the Indian Ocean Region

The United States has three major maritime interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR):⁷

- preserving a minimum level of maritime security,
- keeping the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) open, and,
- maintaining sea control in support of US interests ashore.

Firstly, as a major power with global interests in security and stability in important regions of the world, the United States has an interest in the maintenance of good order and discipline in the IOR.⁸ Threats include piracy, smuggling, illegal movement of weapons including weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and nuclear material, human trafficking and terrorist movements and sanctuary. Further, advances in technology coupled with globalisation have made it possible for non-state actors, including transnational terrorist organisations, to subvert the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of states.⁹

The second area relates to the protection of the SLOCs. More than 85 million tonnes of oil amounting to about 15% of the US imported oil in 2010 came from the Persian Gulf. Of this, Saudi Arabia alone accounted for about 9% of total US imports.¹⁰ In addition, key democracies and indispensable US allies in northeast Asia, especially South Korea and Japan, also get the bulk of their oil from the Middle East and their energy security is of direct interest to the United States. For instance, Japan and South Korea imported about 60 and 42 million tonnes of oil respectively from Saudi Arabia in 2010.¹¹ A recent estimate indicates that approximately 60% of Japan's and more than two-third of South Korean oil transits the South China Sea.¹² All this oil obviously comes in from the Middle East. As the world's only global sea control naval force, the US Navy has for years provided a common good to the international community by championing the freedom of navigation on the high seas and in the congested straits connecting the world's oceans.¹³

The United States has vital national interests in the Persian Gulf and in South Asia which require continuous communication by sea with its forces engaged ashore. Sustaining this effort requires free movement through the choke points at either end of the Indian Ocean and the uninterrupted transit across it. This ocean is therefore of great importance to the United States in the classic Mahanian sense of both, being a great highway and as also a place to stand in order to influence events ashore.¹⁴ Therefore, sea control of such a vital connection route and staging area is the third requirement of the US Navy.

Areas of Common Concern

The safe transportation of energy from the source to their destinations is the biggest concern of all the heavily energy dependent nations like the United States, Japan,

China and India. Most of the oil traffic from the Gulf headed towards East and Southeast Asia has to negotiate the two major choke points – the Malacca Strait and the Strait of Hormuz. The other choke point lies at Bab-al-Mandab, at the entrance of the Red Sea through which majority of the trade for European and North American destinations and around 3.2 million barrels of oil per day transits. Trouble along these shipping lanes spells trouble for the global economy. The sinking of a ship in a narrow strait or the use of a LPG/crude carrier as a huge bomb in a port or a busy waterway are some scary scenarios which defy the imagination as far as their devastating potential goes.

The biggest threat to the free flow of trade and energy through the IOR are piracy, terrorism or a sinister combination of both. Though the incidents of piracy, robbery and maritime terrorism in Southeast Asian waters have been controlled to a large extent on account of the anti-piracy measures initiated by the littoral countries, the prospect of a rise in such incidents always lurks around the corner. The menace of piracy off the Gulf of Aden will be covered in some detail as it has direct impact on the energy security, particularly of the Asian states.

Piracy Issues: Current Status and Challenges

There is a logical explanation for the Indian Ocean region as an ideal location for piracy. Open waters, impenetrable coastlines, large distances, crowded sea lanes, and most importantly, failed states, have all created the perfect environment for piracy. As the region has attracted more capital and tourists, pirates have simply followed the money. Somalia, with a long and ungoverned coastline, lack of economic opportunity for its populace and defunct governance structures has become an ideal breeding ground for pirates. Out of a total 439 piracy incidents and 45 hijackings in 2011, 237 and 28 respectively were attributed to the Somali pirates.¹⁵ This is the central challenge at present.

Going by the current trends, two-thirds of the Indian Ocean is under the threat of piracy. The major challenges for the anti-piracy effort are the size of the surveillance area and consequent increase in the reaction time. These factors have severely hampered navies from capturing pirates at sea, while inadequate legal mechanisms for their trial has been an issue on land. An all-round cooperative endeavour between national navies and the shipping industry, alongside a determined recourse to private security measures, would go a long way in deterring the pirates.

Terrorism and Possible Link with Piracy

Terrorists now have their operational space ashore restricted due to tighter security, which makes the maritime domain an attractive alternate venue for high profile attacks. The criticality of the maritime sector and vulnerabilities of maritime infrastructure are recognised by the terrorists. Until recently the maritime environment has been relatively unregulated. Some terrorist groups have demonstrated maritime capabilities although maritime terrorism attacks comprise only 2% of all international terrorist incidents over the last three decades.¹⁶ While the probability of major terrorist action at sea remains quite low, the consequences can be very serious, making it essential to develop and maintain response strategies. Figure 1 depicts the piracy and terrorism hot spots in and around the Indian Ocean.

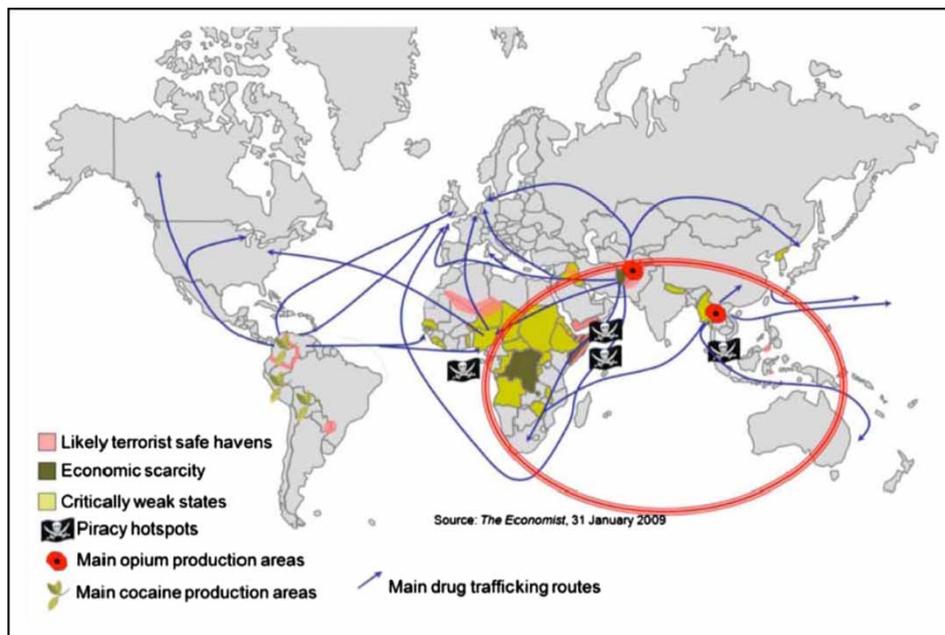


Fig 1. Maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region.

Source: "Proceedings from the Indian Ocean Maritime Security Symposium," Australian National Center for Ocean Resources and Security, University of Woolagong, Australia, April 15–17, 2009, p. 37.

A combination of the terrorists' ability to move freely at sea and the proliferation of nuclear technology constitute the greatest threat to the interconnected industrial economies of the world today. The following quote from a jihadist website as reported in the testimony of General David Petraeus before the US Congress on September 10–11, 2007, makes this point in no uncertain terms:

“It becomes necessary to develop the battle to include the sea, and as the Mujahidin have managed to form martyr brigades on the ground, the sea remains the next strategic step toward ruling the world and restoring the Islamic Caliphate.”¹⁷

Anti-Piracy Efforts in the Gulf of Aden

The Maritime Forces of many countries have been deployed to stem the scourge of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coast. Though some countries are operating under pre-formed groupings such as NATO, the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and the European Union (EU), many other navies are operating independently. The various security initiatives in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy and related missions are mentioned below.

The Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151)

The Combined Task Force 151 under the US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain was established¹⁸ with a clear mandate to counter piracy in the North Arabian Sea region by creating a lawful maritime order and develop security in the maritime environment. It comprises of 20 countries and includes Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Pakistan, among others. CTF 151 also acts as a coordinator for countries like China, India and Russia which are not formally part of the CTF, but their navies are conducting counter-piracy operations in the same region.

Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor and Maritime Security Patrol Area

The US Navy Central Command established a 560 nm long security corridor named the Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA) and the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) in the Gulf of Aden in 2008. This area is currently patrolled

by the coalition forces from sea and air.¹⁹ The MSPA has been widely supported by the shipping community, International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and International Maritime Bureau (IMB). The Indian Navy also conducts convoy escort duties through the IRTC and the Chinese Navy does the same about 15 nm to the north.

Operation ‘Ocean Shield’ by NATO

A Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) has been deployed in the region to enable the World Food Organisation to fulfil its humanitarian aid mission to Somalia. The SNMG comprises about seven ships from Italy, Germany, Greece, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Spain. The operation was named “Ocean Shield” in August 2009. In addition to conducting counter-piracy operations at sea, NATO forces are also engaged in the capacity-building of regional maritime forces to do the same. This force also coordinates with the combined maritime forces, EU naval forces, and other non-NATO forces in the area.²⁰

Operation “Atalanta”

A convoy escort system of the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) named “Operation Atalanta” is being maintained by naval ships of the European Union. The convoys are routed in the area north of Somalia, with protection teams placed on-board. The mandate of the EU Naval Force operating in the region is to contribute to the protection of vessels of the World Food Programme (WFP) delivering aid to Somalia and to support the protection of vessels sailing in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coast. The EU Naval Force has been authorised to use appropriate and necessary measures – including the use of force – to deter, prevent and intervene in order to end acts of piracy and armed robbery that may be committed in the areas where they are present. The EU mandate for the operation remains effective till December 2012.²¹

Gulf Cooperative Council Initiative

The Gulf States, realising that piracy was as much of a problem for them as for the extra regional states, met at Riyadh on June 29, 2009 to discuss the role of the GCC in combating the same in the Gulf of Aden. The six Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) members – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – along with Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Yemen declared that the littoral countries were equally responsible for combating piracy and maintaining the

security of the Red Sea. The formation of an Arab naval taskforce against piracy in accordance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council, with the charter of safeguarding the oil and LNG tankers passing through the Red Sea, was suggested.²² Currently the Gulf States are also coordinating their efforts with multinational forces in light of the growing threat of maritime terrorist attacks on their essential infrastructure including oil facilities, power plants and desalination works.

Independent Anti-Piracy Patrols

Several countries including China, Russia, India, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore have deployed their navies on independent patrols for safety of their merchant ships.

Indian Anti-Piracy Effort

The Indian Navy has maintained a continuous presence in the Gulf of Aden since October 2008 for anti-piracy mission. INS *Tabar* intercepted a pirate mother ship on November 18, 2008. The other ships, their helicopters and marine commandoes have also foiled attacks, arrested pirates as also confiscated arms and ammunition on many occasions. Till mid-2011, 25 Indian naval ships had been deployed on anti-piracy mission and fulfilled their operational roles by escorting as many as 1665 ships of various countries.²³ To date, the Indian naval warships are operating on this mission, independent of other pre-formed groups, but are cooperating with other countries' ships at ground level, on as required basis.

The Indian Navy also augmented its anti-piracy effort when the pirates expanded their areas of operations deeper into the Indian Ocean. An additional warship was deployed off the Seychelles in April–May 2009 and in November–December 2009 to prevent pirate attacks in the region. The Indian Navy and Coast Guard as part of 'Operation Island Watch' have been maintaining surveillance off the Lakshadweep islands over the past several months in 2011.²⁴ The extent of wide-ranging Indian anti-piracy effort in the Indian Ocean and its effectiveness can be gauged from the undermentioned notable successes of the Indian Navy in the year 2011 alone.

- On January 28 and February 5 respectively, the Indian Navy ships apprehended two pirate mother ships from the Arabian Sea and a total of 43 pirates were arrested.

- On March 12, a pirate mother ship *Vega 5* was intercepted about 600 nm west of the Indian coast and the largest ever number of 61 pirates were arrested and 13 hostages rescued.
- On March 26, a combined operation of Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships resulted in the arrest of 12 pirates and rescue of 12 hostages from an Iranian trawler off Lakshadweep.
- On May 5, an Indian naval reconnaissance aircraft came to the assistance of a Chinese merchant ship *MV Full City* which had been boarded by the pirates about 450 nm from the Indian coast. After a prolonged chase of more than 3 hours, it managed to make the pirates leave the ship and flee, thus rescuing the Chinese ship from their clutches.
- On July 16, INS *Godavari* successfully foiled a piracy attempt on a Greek ship *MV Elinakos* by eight Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden by deploying its helicopter and marine commandoes.
- On August 14, 2011, the Indian Navy captured a hijacked ship *Nafis I* of Iranian ownership, about 170 nm north-west of Mumbai having nine foreign nationals with guns and towed the ship to Porbandar for further investigations. The operation was a culmination of coordinated surveillance by the Indian Navy's reconnaissance aircraft and action by the Indian naval warship *Mysore*, ship-borne helicopters and the elite marine commandoes over a period of three days.²⁵

If the media reports are to be taken note of, these Indian naval efforts appear to be having the desired positive effects. The Director of the International Maritime Bureau, Captain P. Mukundan was quoted as saying that “many ships have been taking the route off the Indian coast after the Indian Navy’s strong action against the Somali pirates has resulted in the seas on the Indian side being declared a safe area”.²⁶

Anti-Terrorism Mechanism

Combined Task Force 150

The Combined Maritime Task Force 150 (CTF 150) was originally established in 2001 to support coalition counter-terrorism operations in support of Operation “Enduring Freedom”. During that mission, the task force generally operated in the

Gulf of Oman and the north Arabian Sea. Countries that contributed to maritime operations included Canada, England, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Australia, Singapore, and Pakistan. Though the mission of CTF 150 was centred around counter-terrorism, it was broad in scope and included a variety of operations like terrorist interdiction, maritime security operations, engagement, partner capacity-building and deterrence of destabilising activities such as drug smuggling and weapons trafficking. The CTF 150 mission dominated extra-regional naval operations in the Indian Ocean Region for nearly a decade, till it eventually shifted focus to the Horn of Africa, Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. CTF 150 still continues to operate in the region. However, after the establishment of the CTF 151 in January 2009, the role of CTF 150 has diminished somewhat.

Other Maritime Security Initiatives

Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI)

In order to control the increasing incidents of piracy in the Malacca Strait area, the US Navy sought to formally introduce a concept of Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) in March 2004. The RMSI was not accepted by the Malacca Strait littoral states on the grounds of “sovereign control”. The Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean naval ships thereafter commenced anti-piracy and anti-terrorism patrols in the Strait of Malacca under Operation MALSINDO from July 2004 onwards. In September 2005, “Eyes in the Sky” aerial patrols were started in addition. In 2006, work on the establishment of a radar chain along the Straits was sanctioned with part financing from IMO. In April 2006, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia formally established a security regime for the straits, bringing both the surface and aerial patrols under one umbrella. The countries also agreed to coordinate their patrols through control centres established at various locations. A mechanism for intelligence sharing was also introduced. Thailand has also joined the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI) since early 2009. The MSSI has evolved into a comprehensive security regime that includes surface patrols (MALSINDO), aerial patrols (Eyes in the Sky) and a chain of radar stations along the straits (SURPIC). The MSSI activities resulted in a significant drop in the incidents of piracy in the Malacca Strait and the effectiveness of the MSSI continues to be felt till date, with negligible incidents being reported.

Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery

The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP) was initiated by Japan in 2004 to promote multilateral anti-piracy cooperation. Under the agreement signed in September 2006, the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and also Japan, India, China, Korea, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have committed to cooperate in information sharing, mutual capacity-building and combined operations. An information sharing centre (ISC) has been established at Singapore which carries out an analysis of various transnational crimes, including piracy and provides operational intelligence to the security agencies for combating maritime threats.

CARAT Exercises

The US Navy conducts the annual Coordinated Afloat Readiness and Training Exercise (CARAT) with regional countries for a period of two months each year. These exercises, conducted bilaterally with the various littoral countries, are aimed at combined maritime security operations. This is part of the US strategy to maintain presence and relevance in the region and also contribute to the capacity-building of regional countries.

Five Power Defence Agreement

The Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA) between the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore is yet another multilateral initiative in maritime security. The scope of the FPDA has changed over the years, from air defence of Singapore and Malaysia to disaster relief and humanitarian aid and now, maritime terrorism. Under the FPDA, an annual exercise dealing with maritime security is conducted in the region.

Way Forward

In a reasonably insecure maritime environment in the Indian Ocean, it is imperative to understand that piracy is of more immediate concern to the Indian Ocean littorals than to the extra-regional states. Therefore the problem must be tackled through multilateral mechanisms which bring together all parties, either directly impacted or those who wish to play a responsible role in safeguarding the global commons.

However, most of the Asian nations do not possess the necessary wherewithal to contribute effectively to maritime security. Collaborative capacity-building programmes for these nations can therefore be undertaken towards mutually beneficial outcomes. All other nations who have an interest in the safety and security of the international shipping in the region, of course, have to be taken along as responsible stake holders. The common energy security concerns could therefore provide the necessary linkage for strengthening the cooperation and enhancing the regional security. Some cooperative security initiatives are mentioned below.

Broadening the Scope of Anti-Piracy Effort

Most of the maritime nations have been actively participating in anti-piracy operations off the Somali coast. India has also been at the forefront of anti-piracy maritime effort since October 2008. However, despite the presence of so many navies in the region, piracy in the Gulf of Aden continues to persist. Therefore, a need for broadening the scope of the anti-piracy effort was urgently felt. India, with an aim to play a more pro-active and meaningful role in the evolving counter-piracy framework at international level, proposed a “five-step anti-piracy action plan” to the UN Security Council (UNSC) in January 2011.²⁷ These steps involved tracking the trail of ransom money to different parts of the world; prosecution of the beneficiaries of ransom money for abetting piracy; conduct of naval operations preferably under the UN; sanitisation of the Somali coastline through identified corridors; and the enactment of national laws to criminalise piracy. Taking cognisance of these suggestions, the UNSC passed the Resolution 1976 (2011)²⁸ on Somali Piracy in April 2011 which called for urgent setting up of specialised Somali courts to try pirates, both in Somalia and in the region. It is pertinent to mention that India had co-sponsored the resolution and played an important role in its adoption.

The resolution though recognises that failure to prosecute Somali pirates, due to the lack of adequate national legislation on piracy, results in undermining the anti-piracy effort of the international community. Further, the international community is not vocal enough on the adoption of a comprehensive international law on maritime piracy and on expanding the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to try pirates.²⁹ India is “inclined to support the establishment of a special chamber within the national jurisdiction of a state or states in the region, with UN

participation”.³⁰ for prosecuting the captured pirates. In order to bring about considerable mitigation of the piracy menace, speedy trial of the pirates through UN mandated and internationally accepted mechanisms is a must. India is doing its bit in this effort as explained above. It should be the endeavour of the global community to arrive at a consensus on this aspect as also on the other issues brought up in the Indian proposed “action plan”.

Defining “Rules of the Road” in the Global Commons

International economic activity depends upon the free and uninterrupted flow of commerce across the world’s oceans. While other areas of the global commons (air, cyber, and space) will in due time require shared expectations of appropriate behaviour, doing so in the maritime domain is of utmost urgency, given the volume of commercial cargo and oil transported by sea and the dependency of countries on this cargo for sustainable economic growth. The maritime nations, both regional and extra-regional, could collectively work together to clearly outline “Rules of the Road” for the global commons through institutions like the United Nations or through other new international arrangements.

Asian Maritime Partnership

An ambitious concept of “1000 Ship Navy” was mooted by two US admirals, in September 2005, wherein a voluntary multinational network of maritime forces would collectively undertake the task of “policing and protecting the maritime commons against a wide spectrum of threats”.³¹ While the idea suffered from the largeness of the scale and general lack of consensus, the Asian region may actually conceptualise the same at a much smaller and localised level. The concept could be designated as the “Asian Maritime Partnership”. It would possibly require the regional navies to commit some naval or coast guard assets and resources to the partnership and also undertake the collation of the integrated maritime domain awareness picture at the respective national data centres and disseminating the same to all partners. The setting up of sub-regional data centres, at strategic locations in the Indian Ocean, with interconnectivity between them could be considered. Detractors may cite the legal hurdles, sovereignty issues and divergence of interests etc. to make this idea appear as a non-starter, but interactive discussions and consultations may provide the necessary way ahead for the success of such an initiative.

Malacca and Singapore Straits Safety Mechanism

The Malacca Strait remains the most important maritime link for international trade between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. Any traffic disruption in this passage on account of collision, grounding, pollution, hijacking or terrorist strike would have disastrous consequences for all. The main issues involved are the installation and maintenance of modern navigational aids to regulate the ever increasing traffic density and countering piracy, terrorism and other illegal activities. As the task involved in the security and efficient management of this waterway is enormous, it should become a collective regional responsibility of nations comprising the littorals and the regional stakeholders. Japan, China and India have voluntarily been extending certain financial and other assistance to the littoral states under a “cooperative mechanism” to enhance navigational safety, security and environmental protection in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. This “cooperative mechanism” provides a platform for dialogue between the littoral and user states, as well as a structured framework for cooperation with the international community.³² India participated in the third session of the “Committee on navigation aid facility fund for the of Malacca and Singapore Straits” as a user country in April 2009 and offered cooperation in Project 1, which deals with the removal of wrecks/submerged vessels, as well as committed \$770,000 in support of Project 4, for the tide, tidal current and wind observation system. China has committed to contribute in Projects 2, 4 and 6 of the above “cooperative mechanism”.³³ The US Navy is also participating in a “training the trainers” programme as part of capacity-building. All the stakeholders could therefore find adequate common ground within the framework of this “cooperative mechanism” by making result oriented contributions.

Conclusion

Maritime security of energy transit through the Indian Ocean cannot be controlled or even managed by the any one state, however powerful or committed. It is apparent that the pirates are becoming more adventurous and spreading their operating envelope much deeper into the Indian Ocean. The maritime task forces and similar initiatives can, at best, achieve temporary results while the greater malady continues unabated. Therefore maritime partnerships supported by strong legislations, both domestic and international, are the only answer. Piracy and its possible link to

maritime terrorism have, as yet, not reached uncontrollable proportions. But the alarming rise in the incidents definitely points to a grave future.

In this precarious scenario, the littoral countries as also others which stand to be severely affected in the event of a crisis involving the energy SLOCs in the Indian Ocean cannot afford to let their guard down. The stakes involved are simply too high and hence there is an inescapable necessity to combine and synergise the capabilities of all stake holders in this effort. This is however easier said than done, but the viamedias must be found.

Notes

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 13. Bowditch, "Maritime Threats, Risks, and Priorities in the Indian Ocean." He also stresses the fact that the United States is not selfless in this since America is itself a maritime trading nation with long coastline.
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