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CHALLENGES TO INDIA'S COASTAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of coastal security is still evolving in Indian context. Coastal security is a compartment of maritime security. Unlike land borders, the international maritime boundary lines are not marked and the approach of threat to the coast can follow very many flexible routes from far and wide. Defending coastline is a complex task because coastal border can't be defined as easily as land border. Besides, it is not the defence of the coastline alone but also that of the oceanic area under India's jurisdiction. Hence, India's coastline remains vulnerable to activities, such as illegal fishing, immigration, poaching and smuggling. These activities, if not checked and contained in time results to crimes, piracy and smuggling by anti nationals. Combined with radical thinking and vested interests, they give rise to maritime terrorism, especially when aided and abetted by proxy state power. India's coasts have always been vulnerable to criminals and anti national activities. Numerous cases of smuggling of goods, explosives and narcotics into the country through these coasts have been reported over the years.



KEYWORDS: *Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) ; Contiguous Zone (CZ) ; Maritime security (MS); State Marine Police Force (SMPF); Maritime Terrorism (MT); Trafficking; Piracy; illegal immigration;*

INTRODUCTION

Maritime Environment : The India has 7516 km coastline; 11 maritime states and Island territories ;more than 1000 islands ; 12 Nautical miles territorial waters and 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from the base line of our shores that is 2.01 million Sq Km of sea area. Coastline harbours are having 12 major ports and 200 minor ports; that handles over 95 percent of trade by volume and 70 percent of trade by value. Development of port infrastructure and connecting of inland water is envisaged under the "Sagarmala project" to promote shipping and commerce. As per estimates around 1 Lakh ships transit every year through our maritime Zones and carry about 66 percent of the world' s oil , 50 percent of the containers and 33 percent of bilk cargo. Over vast Exclusive Economic Zone, both on the east and west coast are rich in marine resources. Sea basins in the South of Mumbai, Krishna and Godavari in Andhra Pradesh and Cauvery in Tamil Nadu provide us with crude and gas for fuelling our economy. The government has also offered new blocks for exploration of oil and gas with some being deep-water under the New Exploration Licensing policy (NELP). The Indian fishing industry produces about 6.4 million tons of sea food yearly. It ranks 3rd in the world and in seafood production.

About 2.5 Lakh fishing boats engage in fishing activity everyday in our maritime Zones. Further, the country's vast expanse- the presence of industrial units, military installations, satellite and missile launching ranges, nuclear power plants, shipping traffic and wholesome economic activities-are dotted all around our coasts which are essential for growth of our country . An attack on any of these will cost us an enormous loss of life and property and also adversely impact on our economy.¹

Organization of Indian Coast Guard:

One of the earliest challenges to the coastal security witnessed by the country is in early 70's seaport smuggling that is emanating from the sea. Along with rising trends of smuggling through sea routes, which gave rise to parallel economy, and the inadequacies faced by various agencies which were programmed at that time to be with a growing hazard, the government of India constituted committee to study and recommend the national check on sea coast smuggling. Around the same time we enacted maritime Zones of India Act 1976 (claiming stakes over the Exclusive Economic zone) There were an urgent need felt for dedicated maritime force to protect and safeguard our maritime interest because of the discovery of Mumbai high offshore area of exploration of oil and gas and the rampant poaching by foreign fishing vessels. Rustamji committee was formed in 1974 by the government of India which recommended the setting up of a force for a peacetime maritime charter: And that is the Indian Coast Guard was formed on the 1st February 1977 and formally established on 18th August 1978 by the enactment of Coast guard act of 1978 and it is functioning as an Armed force union under the ministry of defence. It is also an executive arm for enforcing all national legislation in the Maritime Zones of India. The remainder of the charter of the Coast Guard, that is been section 14 of the Coast Guard Act 1978.²

Maritime Security

To understand the meaning of coastal security, it is necessary to understand what is maritime security? Maritime security is prevention of international damage to national interest through sabotage, subversion, piracy, terrorism, hijack, gun-running, smuggling, human trafficking, poaching and other illegal activity that falls short of open warfare within EEZ. It also involves the security of sea lanes used by own merchant navy, ships trading in our port and the ships of friendly nations and hence includes vessel security on the high seas. Maritime security is subdivided into: 01. Port security; 02. Vessel security; 03 Facility Security; 04Geo-political security; 05 Energy security; 06 Environmental security; Coastal security

Coastal Security:

The concept of coastal security is still evolving in Indian context. Defending a coastline is a complex task because coastal border can't be defined as easily as a land border. Besides, it is not the defence of the coastline alone but also that of the oceanic area under India's jurisdiction. Hence, the measures are equally complex. The fundamental responsibility of Maritime security, which includes coastal security, too, lies with the Indian navy. The policing responsibility of Indian territorial waters extending to the EEZ has been entrusted to the Coast Guard, which also falls under the Ministry of Defence. The customs Department which is mainly involved in checking smuggling of contraband items and drug trafficking is another major player in coastal security. Then there are state marine police under creation by coastal states; they naturally come under their own different states. Thus as we see, forces coming under different heads of the central Government as well as the different states are found to be working together in harmony for a common goal in Maritime/Coastal security. While delegating the coastal security responsibilities to the Coast Guard, the government has not absolved the Indian Navy of the same. Indian navy continues to be the primary force for defence of India's coast and maritime interests. ³

Coastal Security Challenges:

Beyond all doubts, coastal security is a subset of maritime security. Unlike land borders, maritime boundary is not demarcated anywhere. So the threats which develop, say of Somalia, can reach up to Kerala of Mumbai or Saurashtra coast anywhere. There is no channelizing of the threat, it may arise from anywhere and it may land anywhere along our vast coast, which is 7500km including our island territories. Island territories are more vulnerable to these kinds of threats. Our threats starts from innocuous looking activity like illegal fishing in the Indian waters including the EEZ is rampant on the east and Southern coast, especially from the mechanized fleets operating out of Myanmar, Thailand, Taiwan, and Indonesia, Malaysia etc. The fleets of mechanised boats are supported by processing mother ships, thus the fleet keeps poaching into the Indian EEZ for fishing over long stretches of time. The fishing trawlers are modern and equipped with latest navigational equipment including fish finding Sonar's, depleting the natural resources, otherwise rightfully should have been exploited by our fishermen. The traders between India and neighbourhood countries have traditionally followed the trade winds, despite modernization and increase of traffic through all-weather bulk carriers, clandestinely trade through smuggling route takes place on regular basis. The dhows from Indian coast of Maharashtra and Gujarat clandestinely make trips to the Gulf and North African countries, smuggling live animals, onion, ginger.....and assorted spices, in their return journey they smuggle in animal hide, dates, diesel to drugs or anything that could be in the undesired list. This illegal trade has multi – dimensional implication that include revenue leakage, clandestine imports of drugs, gun running and national security risks etc. The negative implication of such illegal trade on the national security has noticed during 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts and 2008 Mumbai attack. ⁴

The human trafficking is rampant in the A&N islands especially between Myanmar and Nicobar islands. It is recorded that some of the ships passing through the islands, anchor and indulge in nefarious activities. The sea around Malacca straights including sea around Nicobar group of Island are also known for sea piracy. Therefore, A& N islands sometimes become haven for such elements. Smuggling of diesel oil and illegal sales on the high seas has been observed to be rampant, leading to revenue leakages. Sea west of male, north and west of Seychelles going all the way up to African coast is notorious for large scale piracy. Apparently, Somali pirates operate close to the west of Lakshadweep Islands. The armed mercenaries with their flotilla moving around Indian coast escorting ships for their safe passage and for soliciting the escorting business, thereby, bringing in private weapons closer to our coasts.

The 1993 Mumbai serial Bomb blast and the modus operandi of smuggling explosives to Raigad coast of Maharashtra shook the nation and highlighted the emergent need of coastal security mechanism. Certain limited measures were established and sanctions were imposed by the Government of India post this incident to prevent the landing of contraband and aimed at infiltration along the Maharashtra and Gujarat coast. Simultaneously, operation Swan was launched in April 1993 along Maharashtra and Gujarat coast which had multilayered surveillance by various agencies. It was a joint close coast patrolling by state Police and customs. They engaged in coastal shore using the hired fishing boats. The Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guards were engaged in surveillance operations into the high seas.

An integrated approach towards the security of the entire coast of the country gathered momentum only post Kargil war in May 1999. The report by the concerned ministers recommended enhancing the Maritime security including coastal security and port security in February 2001. Based on the recommendation, the Maritime Police Force was created to ensure and secure the coastline with a manmade to make surveillance up to 12 NM from the baseline. Although the Government of India has sanctioned many projects to Indian Coast guard and coastal police but could not make a much of headway because of various issues. But the recommendations of the group of ministers for improving the coastal security mechanism could not be implemented by other stakeholders within the given timeframe.

The Mumbai attack of 2008 was a shock to the nation and brought to the fore that no single agency is capable of adequately equipped to deal with the growing menace that is emanating from the sea. Hence, there was a paradigm shift in approaches for coastal security. The cabinet committee on security, in its meeting, on 16th April 2009, approved various provisions for strengthening the coastal security mechanism. As a result, the Indian Navy was brought to the core of coastal security architecture and designated as the authority responsible for the overall maritime security including coastal security and offshore security. The Indian Navy was also made responsible for coastal Defence of the nation soon to be assisted by the Indian coast Guard, the Marine Police and various central and state agencies. The existing commanders in Chief have been designated as commander of the coastal Defence. The challenges poised for effective control of the Indian waters and its EEZ is multidimensional. Utmost importance should be given to have effective mechanism, since a large numbers on the coast are dependent on the sea for their livelihood; importance of keeping the waters safer for protecting the national interests seems to have been neglected for too long. ⁵

India's western neighbour, Pakistan, is a paranoid state which has encouraged the spread of religious fundamentalists in its society and armed forces to its own detriment. By freely exporting terrorism as an instrument of state policy it has sought to mount pressure on India across its land borders. The erection of fencing, along 1300 miles of the Indo-Pak border, has, however, forced Pakistan to modify its strategy and start using the sea as an alternate infiltration route across our west coast. In 1993 a few tons of arms and explosive, landed by the Pak ISI on the Ratnagiri coast, were transported by the mafia to perpetrate the Mumbai carnage. Fifteen years later, an ISI trained terrorist group sailed all the way, by boat, from Karachi, and landed in the heart of Mumbai to play havoc with this city for three days. The 26/11 terror-attack on Mumbai clearly highlighted the poor state of our intelligence, the gaps in ocean surveillance and the huge challenges of effectively policing and guarding a long and vulnerable coastline. In the five years 26/11 a number of measures has been implemented to rectify the lacunae in our coastal security. ⁶

Government Response:

In a somewhat convoluted arrangement, the Navy has been designated as the authority responsible for overall maritime security, and existing Commanders-in-Chief of Eastern and Western Naval Commands have been designated as 'C-in-C Coastal Defence'. At the same time the Coast Guard has been designated as the 'authority for coastal security' in territorial waters, and the DG Coast Guard has been designated as 'Commander Coastal Command'. The state governments have been tasked to raise maritime police forces for security of the coastal belt. Responsibility for overall coordination between state and central agencies in matters relating to coastal security rests with the Coastal Guard. Therefore, she has an all encompassing domain of the Indian coast and the sea under India's jurisdiction. In addition, Indian navy being a blue water global force, she has the responsibility to protect Indian interests on high seas round the globe. The policing duties of Indian Navy along the coast have been reduced by delegating the same to the coast guard and other security agencies to free the navy from day to day policing and attend to their strategic task that these day includes anti-piracy patrolling in places far away from Indian waters. Joint Operation Centres (JOCs) have been set up at Mumbai, Vishakhapatnam, Kochi and Port Blair under charge of the naval Cs-in-C. The 26/11 incident lead to some clarity, Patrolling of shallow waters has been assigned to the marine police; Indian customs has also been strengthened to curb smuggling within 24 nautical miles. Post Mumbai attacks; a small beginning has been made by the government of India in the form of phase wise modernization of coastal security apparatus. Though most of the items covered were part of recommendation of group of minister's report of 2001 on coastal security, the phase wise up gradation only got the acceptance post Mumbai attack. Perhaps the biggest failure of successive governments has been its inability to comprehend the problem and work towards finding solution. Resource crunch and fiscal management during budget session forces government to delay procurement of planned capital resources has led to a situation of glaring inadequate infrastructure. The training of personnel and maintenance of equipment has routinely become casualty of government apathy. The factors undermining the effective

coastal surveillance mechanism also include perception differences between agencies involved included blurred roles. Monitoring of thousands of fishing boats /trawlers movements from the minor and major ports all along Indian subcontinent on daily basis is a nightmare for any security or policing agencies. It is estimated that at least ten thousands fishing boats move in and out of Mumbai port alone, and over sixty thousands fishing boats and trawlers operate daily from the coastal areas of Gujarat and Maharashtra alone keeping a track of Indian boats and trawlers and distinguishing the illegal foreign boats (especially originating from Pakistan and other nations from Gulf) is near impossible. If we add up all coastal states, the numbers seems baffling to monitor and control without modern methods of identification.

While all these are steps in the right direction, we need to remember that the coastal security paradigm is extremely complex and involves not only centre-state relationships but cuts across many agencies and organizations. Given the overlap of functions and responsibilities, there is need to exercise caution against the possibility of confusion in live operational situations. There is a need to ensure that the vital Joint Operations Centres continuously fed with up-to-date intelligence, unimpeded, by inter-agency turf-wars and rivalries, for quick analysis and dissemination to the C in C Coastal Defence. An area of weakness is the marine police which constitute our last line of defence against coastal attack. State police forces have generally been unprepared and reluctant to shoulder this new responsibility. It needs to be ensured that with help from the navy and coast guard this lacuna is plugged. Finally the coastal radar chain will only be effective if India's two hundred thousand fishing trawlers and boats are registered and electronically tagged. The phase 1 and 2 of the modernization program is essentially intended for effective coastal surveillance and policing of coastal waters, the contiguous coastal borders are now equipped with 36 radars on the west coast and 10 radars on A and N islands, followed by another 38 radar stations to cover the east coast in phase 2 to monitor the movement of vessels up to 25 nautical miles from the shoreline. There is a need for electronic monitoring and identification of trawlers/ fishing boats using technology RF transporters is necessary. It has to be fitted on-board trawlers and fishing boats and interlinking the radar data along with identification data of RF transporters to a regional and national grid for continuous monitoring of vessels called national automatic identification system. However, this measure has been in nascent stage of implementation. ⁷

Action Needed:

Phase 1 has been completed and phase 2 is under different stage of implementation. Intend of the doctrine is for monitoring the large coastline through electronic monitoring and differentiating the legal and illegal vessel activity and thereby creating a mechanism to deliver an effective control over the coastal waters. However, the intend and the actual implementation of the programme is a matter of concern, the concerns are as follows;-

01. Radar identification up to 25 nautical miles has to be overlapping and active 24x7, it means there has to be foolproof radar foot print that must include allowance for maintenance is to be catered through stand by radars available for each location. 02.

Distribution of RF transponders for all the Indian trawlers and fishing vessels is a herculean task and the identification data availability to all coastal centres on real-time basis. 03. Collecting biometric data on compulsory basis is not an easy task, and it needs a steely resolve, the National Maritime Authority is badly needed to oversee such a complex and 04. A large number of patrol vessels are non operational for want of trained maintenance staff, its well-known fact that marine equipment is prone to frequent breakdown and it's assumed that a third of the patrol boats would be under maintenance at any given time; the boats are stored on the stowed for want of slipways. ⁸

CONCLUSION:

India's maritime threats and challenges can be categorised under five broad categories: maritime terrorism; piracy and armed robbery; smuggling and trafficking; infiltration, illegal migration and refugee influx; and the straying of fishermen beyond the maritime boundary. We have seen India's maritime security suffers neglect for generations, despite two-centuries of foreign domination based on

sea power. Due to globalization, the threat of piracy, the exposure of our coastal underbelly on 26/11 and the spectre of growing Chinese naval power have all combined to bring about a 'maritime awakening'. Maritime terrorism have the enormous ability to destroy national security, challenges like smuggling can jeopardise the safety of the nation. Moreover, India's maritime assets, challenges and opportunities urgently call for a multi-disciplinary Maritime Security Agency to conceptualize a vision, draw up plans and coordinate activities in the maritime domain. The time has come to revive maritime consciousness, not just amongst, our decision-makers but also our youth so that they can reclaim their ancient maritime heritage. It is recommended that between every two states a Maritime school on the lines of Sainik schools be started, and boys be trained to get sea legs to take future position as "Men at sea". Such an educational establishment could be an ideal recruitment ground for Maritime police, coast guard, and Indian navy as well as intelligence agencies dedicated for coastal surveillance. A maritime academy could be the ultimate destination for the students of such Maritime schools for grooming for higher positions. Therefore, an urgent need to include the people conversant with the sea, living for generations on the coast line as the stake holders is important.

END NOTES:

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