

TREADING TURBULENT WATERS: PAKISTAN'S READINESS TO THE LOOMING THREAT OF MARITIME TERRORISM

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Abstract

Houthis' recent attacks on Merchant ships in the Red Sea have renewed focus on maritime terrorism. These attacks have pushed the global power centres to think seriously about this intensifying threat to international maritime trade and movement. South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, have already faced the issue of marine terrorism, yet it has remained primarily a neglected field of enquiry, particularly in Pakistan. This paper aims to fill this void in the literature by critically analysing the threat of Maritime terrorism to Pakistan and how prepared it is to counter this problem. This paper attempts to dissect the threats that exist in the Arabian Sea and how maritime terrorism has the potential to push Pakistan and India into a new conflict, which may have grave consequences for the global community. The paper starts with an overview of maritime terrorism and how it has evolved over time and with technological advancements. This follows an analysis of marine terrorism incidents in India and Pakistan and how Pakistan has built up its organisational structure to cover the threats posed by it. It contends that Pakistan has a ready organisational structure; it requires improved inter-departmental coordination and more importantly, constitutional cover. In the end, the paper provides policy recommendations at the organisational, national and regional levels to address the issue of maritime terrorism.

Keywords: Maritime Terrorism, PNS Mehran, Mumbai Attack, Indo-Pak Maritime Dispute, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, Joint Maritime Coordination Information Centre (JMICC).

Introduction

From Gilgamesh's quest through the waters of death in the epic of Gilgamesh to present times, global politics is heavily concentrated on the seas. Oceans have always been a part of human imagination. At present, the international maritime domain presents a complex and complicated environment. With the renewed and extensive focus on the maritime domain in the ongoing power contestation by state and non-state actors, it is vital to ensure the protection of the marine domain. However, a singular state cannot accomplish the complex challenge of protecting maritime boundaries from illicit activity. It requires collaborative effort as there are

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convergence and divergence of interests. The targeting of Merchant ships in the Red Sea with ballistic missiles that killed crew members of different nationalities by the Houthis is a case in point.¹

Resulting in deaths and injuries to crew members, it has also affected the routine voyages through the Suez Canal, some of which are now being re-routed through the Cape of Good Hope, increasing challenges to the global supply chain network. What if such a misfortune hits the crisis-prone South Asia, where India and Pakistan, two nuclear states have disputed land and maritime borders? With almost non-existent diplomatic contact and any meaningful engagement unlikely in the future, the impact of marine terrorism needs to be studied in detail to understand its effects on the two states, especially since both states have been victims of such acts. This paper addresses the threat of Maritime Terrorism to Pakistan and explicates Pakistan's efforts to cater for this threat. The paper also dissects the threat of maritime terrorism and its associated complexities, which may have the potential to push Pakistan and India into a new conflict and subsequently have grave consequences for the global community. This paper will contribute towards the minimal research in the field of Maritime Security, especially in the South Asian region, and proffer a way forward for Pakistan to strengthen its response against the Maritime Terrorism threat.

Maritime Terrorism: A Historical Overview

Just like terrorism, there is no international consensus on the definition of Maritime terrorism. Out of the many academic definitions of Maritime Terrorism, in this paper, we will use Peter Chalk's definition as we consider it the most comprehensive. According to Chalk, Maritime Terrorism is:

“The undertaking of terrorist acts and activities within the maritime environment, using or against vessels or fixed platforms at sea or in port, or against any one of their passengers or personnel, against coastal facilities or settlements, including tourist resorts, port areas and port towns or cities.”

UN General Assembly Resolution 40/61 urged all states to unilaterally and collectively work towards eliminating terrorism. The ‘United Nations Convention for Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Maritime Navigation’ was adopted as a follow-up. However, it has remained silent on the definition of Maritime Terrorism. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) further complicates the situation. UNCLOS also fails to describe or classify acts of terrorism at sea. The closest that it comes to it is by using the word violence, which refers to defining piracy in article 101.²

Especially several incidents since World War II can be characterised as Maritime Terrorism. Amongst the earliest recorded incidents in modern times, almost six decades ago, in January 1961, was the hijacking of a Portuguese ocean liner, Santa Maria of Companhia Colonial De Navegacao, with more than 600 passengers on

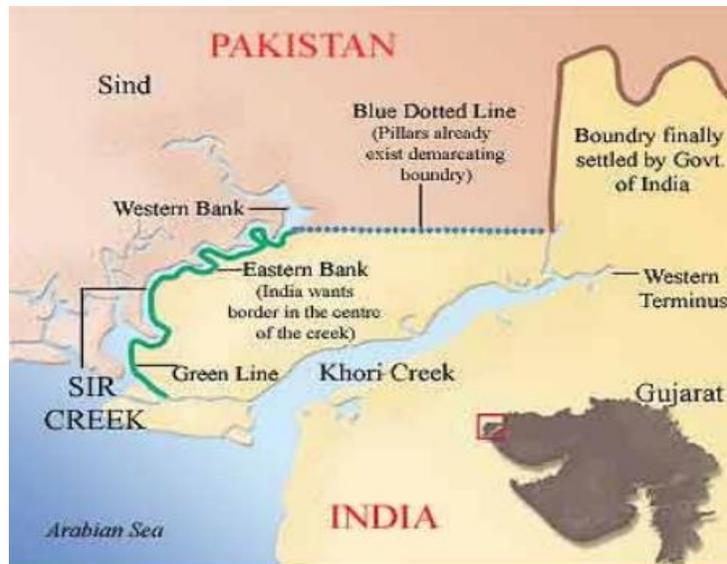
board.³ This hijacking was a political protest against the Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar. This wasn't a one-off isolated incident that fits the definition of 'Maritime Terrorism' Peter Chalk gave.⁴ The bombing of the Greek Charter Ship Sounion in Beirut while destined for Israel and included 250 American passengers, the firing of mortars on NATO warships berthed in Lisbon in 1985,⁵ and the hijacking of Achille Lauro in 1985 with more than 400 passengers⁶ are different illustrations of the phenomenon called Maritime Terrorism.⁷ However, the incident that shook maritime security experts was the 2000 bombing of the American Navy Ship USS Cole by Al-Qaeda while it was berthed in Aden, Yemen. The fact that a top-flight American warship was targeted and suffered substantial damages, along with the death of 17 American service members, rang alarm bells.⁸ While the bombing of the USS Cole was vital as it ushered in a new urgency to make sense of maritime terrorism, the most significant incident in terms of the number of casualties (116 killed) was the bombing of the Super Ferry 14 in 2004 as it left the Manila Harbour. What further complicated the situation was that it took more than six months to ascertain that the incident was a terrorist attack.⁹

Furthermore, Maritime Terrorism is not just limited to ships and ports but also the targeting of pipelines, submarine cables (power and communication), oil rigs, etc. The September 2022 terrorist attack on the Russian Nordstream gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea point is a case in point. Despite the intelligence community's financial and technological resources and cooperation, the German, Danish and Norwegian governments have yet to identify the force behind the attacks on the Nordstream pipeline near the Danish Island of Bornholm. A similar concern is with Submarine cables. Some 500 submarine cables currently carry about 97 per cent of global internet traffic, with the remaining 3 per cent being serviced by satellites.¹⁰ The targeting of submarine cables is a rare event but not something that hasn't happened before. An incident in 2013 was reported in Egypt where the Coast Guard arrested divers trying to cut submarine cables to disrupt telecommunication services.¹¹ Similarly, in 2023, three incidents of damage to a gas pipeline and two submarine cables between Finland, Estonia and Sweden caused much commotion within the European community. The Swedish Prime Minister remarked that the damage to submarine (telecom cables) between Sweden and Estonia was 'purposeful'.¹² A Hong Kong-flagged ship is suspected of damaging the wires, with criminal investigations underway.¹³

Another trend in this area is the increased use of Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and Uncrewed Surface Vessels (USVs) in the maritime domain, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean Region. The targeting of the Saudi frigate Al-Madinah using a USV has petrified the global shipping community. Whether Houthis in Yemen are terrorists or not, the use of USVs by Houthis in the Red Sea to target merchant shipping is a glaring example of the threat posed by such platforms to global shipping.¹⁴

What drives Maritime Terrorism?

There are 16 continental shelf boundaries amongst the eight littoral states of the Persian Gulf connected to the Arabian Sea through the Strait of Hormuz. Only seven of those have been negotiated.¹⁵ The remaining nine are subdued and might even progress towards a solution. The improved political and diplomatic connections within the Gulf states and between Gulf states and Iran are expected to resolve these disputes further or at least not significantly hinder peace in the region in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the incidents of maritime terrorism that have taken place, particularly in the last decade in the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, are primarily linked to proxy wars between regional countries such as Iran, Israel, Yemen, etc. Territorial disputes have not yet been an issue over which these countries have used proxies to enforce their opinion. However, one dispute in the Arabian Sea has a history and the capacity to flare up and cause turmoil in the world community. The 'Sir Creek Dispute' between Pakistan and India is a territorial dispute that extends into a disputed maritime boundary between the two states. Historically, Sir Creek has remained relatively quiet except for the downing of an unarmed Pakistan Navy Atlantique Aircraft in 1999 on a training mission in a non-disputed part of Pakistani territory when the two countries were again mired in a conflict in the Kashmir region.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the maritime boundary, an extension of the Sir Creek dispute, remains active, with both countries claiming to capture fishermen from their neighbouring countries fishing illegally.¹⁷



Sir Creek Dispute¹⁸

Why people get involved in such terrorist activities has been researched extensively in the last two decades. Still, a study conducted in Kuwait showed that religious identity development, personnel connections, propaganda, defence of Islam

and social marginalisation are some of the key contributors to a person's decision to become a terrorist.¹⁹ Some researchers have identified past trauma, discrimination, marginalisation, etc., as reasons for conversion into a terrorist.²⁰ Randy Burum has identified three influential factors, 'Injustice, Identity, & Belonging', over a person who eventually becomes a terrorist. The study suggests that the root cause of terrorism is the combined effect of the drivers, as mentioned above, regardless of the ideology or beliefs of a terrorist/terrorist organisation.²¹

Poverty is a social evil that itself is not the root cause of terrorism, but its exploitation by the powerful to cater for their agendas.²² In a recent study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Pakistan and India have been grouped as lower-middle-income countries.²³ The economic conditions of the fishing communities within Pakistan and India are similar. According to a study conducted to ascertain the socioeconomic status of the fishermen community of Danti village in Valsad district of Gujarat, it was found that 51.3% of the fishermen didn't earn more than One Lac Indian Rupees per year (2011 figures and at an average of Indian Rupees to a US\$ makes 2175 US\$ per year). The study also found that only 23.7% of fishermen had pukka (concrete) houses, while 66.7% had semi-pukka houses. And the most critical finding was the support available from the government. Technical and financial aid from the government was availed by just 4.7% of the fishermen community engaged in the study.²⁴

Pakistan's fishing industry amounts to just 0.32% of Pakistan's GDP despite having an exclusive economic zone of 290,000 square km and a coastline of 1001 km. Similarities between Indian and Pakistani Fishermen can be gauged from the study on Ibrahim Hyderi, a fishing village close to Karachi. The population of this fishing village, Ibrahim Hyderi, is estimated to be around 150,000, and more than 90% of the people are either fishermen or indirectly involved in the fishing industry. However, an alarming statistic shows that 77.5% of the fishermen who responded to the study's query do not work on a boat owned by them. That indicates a waged labour system with average monthly wages of around US\$130 (2016-17 figures). The wages fall dramatically during the off-season (May to August) and rise when the catch is good.²⁵

Echidna 26 in the Arabian Sea: The Potential Threat of Maritime Terrorism in the India-Pakistan Scenario

The sheer number of ships traversing through the geopolitically charged area of the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and Arabian Sea provides ample opportunity for a willing and resourceful non-state actor to take its shot in this target-rich environment. With India supplying arms to Israel to be used in the Gaza genocide, this can be used as a motivation by non-state actors and proxies to target ships leaving Indian Ports for Israel.²⁷ If India's recent behaviour is to be considered, its response to such an eventuality would not be muted nor subdued. Any attack by any non-state actor on any Maritime infrastructure or asset would be treated with much suspicion against Pakistan by India, albeit without much concrete evidence. India's

response is most likely to be hyper-aggressive against Pakistan, especially with the Hindutva-driven mentality in New Delhi.

In South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, very few maritime terrorism incidents have taken place. The 1973 hijacking of a Greek Freighter berthed at Karachi Port by the operatives of the “Moslem International Guerrillas” demanding the release of two Arabs serving time for a bombing at the Athens Airport in Greece is the first reported case of maritime terrorism in South Asia.²⁸ However, it was the Mumbai attacks of 2008 in India and the PNS Mehran attack in 2011 that brought the spotlight on marine terrorism in the region.

Maritime Terrorism in South Asia: 2008 Mumbai and 2011 PNS Mehran Attacks

The terrorist attacks in Mumbai on 26 November 2008, leaving 174 people dead, were carried out by terrorists who allegedly entered Mumbai through the sea route. This was a significant incident as many foreigners were also killed in this attack, and it raised doubts about the security of a major coastal city like Mumbai. However, it pushed India to make earnest efforts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically and demand absolute cooperation from Pakistan in bringing the culprits to justice. Pakistan did offer cooperation based on hard evidence from the Indian government, which nevertheless has remained a sore issue. Pakistan also came under severe pressure from the US to act against the people and organisations who had been involved in the terrorist incident, especially after the conviction of David Coleman Headley, a.k.a. Daood Gilani, in the US on charges of abetting terrorism and killing US citizens in India.²⁹

The attack on PNS Mehran in 2011 was also a wake-up call for Pakistani security agencies, especially in the Maritime domain.³⁰ This was the first time that a Naval base had been a direct target of terrorist activity. It was a central terrorist act and happened just a month after the attack on PN buses carrying naval personnel in Karachi and around twenty days after the raid on Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad. The capture of a serving Indian Naval Officer Commander Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav by Pakistan in 2016 opened a new Pandora's box. It gave credence to the Pakistani claims of Indian involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan. He admitted to visiting Karachi as far back as 2005 and 2006 and to financing and colluding with terrorist organisations in Pakistan. He also admitted meeting and cooperating with Anil Kumar, who was ultimately responsible for financing Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a Pakistan-based terrorist outfit, to undertake attacks like the one on PNS Mehran.³¹

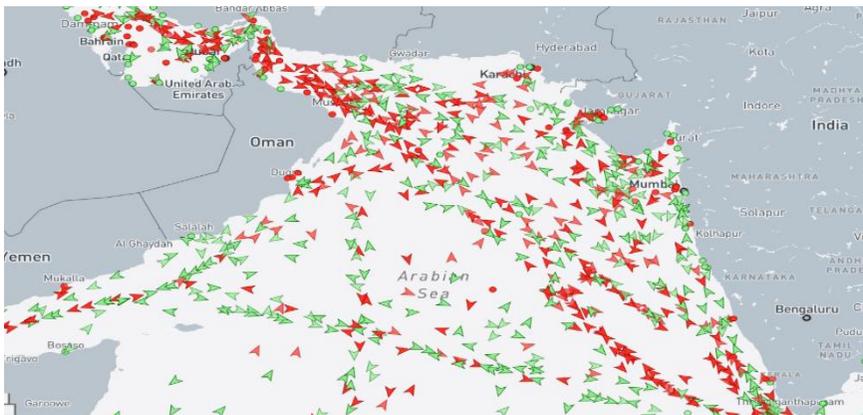
Further complicating the environment are incidents like the suspected sinking of a fishing boat by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on January 1, 2015, in which the Indians claimed to have intercepted a fishing boat 225 NM off the coast of Gujrat.³² Although officially, Indians reiterated their position that the ship was sunk by the crew

itself and committed suicide. What prompted the crew members to destroy it themselves and commit suicide remains a mystery. Then came the admission by the ICG Deputy Inspector General to have ordered the “blow off” the Pakistani fishing boat, bringing further confusion to an already complex situation.³³ The reasons stated by the Indian Navy for rough seas and bad weather can hardly be taken seriously as, at this time of the year, the ocean is usually calm, and sea states experienced are generally between Sea States 1 & 2. Wave heights in September (beginning of the post-monsoon season) are usually between 1-2 m, signifying Sea State conditions of 3-4.³⁴ The sea state recedes to 1-2 till the pre-monsoon season starts in April-May; nevertheless, the danger of a boat 225 NM from the Indian mainland is also unclear. With the aerial ISR assets available to the Indian Navy and ICG, the ship could have easily been tracked for the next 10-12 hours and had it continued to behave suspiciously, the boat could have been boarded during daytime utilising helicopters to offset the rough sea conditions instead of chasing it and forcing the crew to blow themselves up.³⁴

Pakistan: Countering Maritime Terrorism

Pakistan remains aware of the importance of its Maritime Security. Pakistan Navy, in this regard, undertakes Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) regularly to curb illegal human trafficking, drug smuggling and other illicit activities in coordination with PMSA. Furthermore, PN has also developed an elaborate system of coastal security and harbour defence forces (CS & HDF) with a broad concept of keeping an eye on Sindh and Makran Coast, from Sir Creek in the east to Jiwani in the west. Numerous sites have been developed and equipped with various sensors to augment the surveillance activity along the coastline. Nevertheless, the threat at sea is existential. The picture below shows ships at sea at a given time and date (02 Feb 2024, 1930 PST), and that, too, only container ships and tankers. This picture does not show the fishing boats, pleasure boats and other shipping forms.

Merchant Traffic in the Arabian Sea



Source: www.marinetraffic.com

Pakistan's Maritime Security Setup: A Profile of Key Organizations

Pakistan's 1001 km long coastline, with its three major ports and various fish harbours, is home to about 20,000 boats of different sizes, of which 80% are involved in fishing, and the rest are engaged in trade and other activities.³⁵ These boats are primarily made of wood but have lengths of less than 20m and usually operate within 12 NM of the coastline. The ones bigger than 20m operate further into the Sea and are also involved in trade activities with various Gulf countries such as Oman and UAE. Pakistan's Maritime Security from the seaward side is primarily the responsibility of the Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA). PMSA is responsible for regulating and protecting the Maritime Interests of Pakistan and asserting and enforcing national jurisdiction and sovereignty in the Maritime Zones.³⁶

Type of Ships	Induction Date/ Related Info	Additional Info
PMSS Kashmir	Built-in China – Inducted in PMSA in 2018	Length 94 m Endurance 3500 NM at 26 knots
PMSS Kolachi	Built at Karachi and inducted in 2021	
PMSS Sabqat PMSS Rifaqat	Commissioned 2017	EX USCGC Grand Isle (WPB-1338) and EX USCGC KEY BISCAYNE (WPB-1339) – transferred from US Coast Guard
PMSS Barkat PMSS Vehdat PMSS Nusrat PMSS Rehmat	Commissioned in 1990	Length 58 m Endurance 1500 NM at 12 knots

Source: Data Compiled by Authors

PMSA has progressively improved its capability to strengthen its footprint in the area of responsibility. To augment PMSA's efforts to enforce the rule of law in its area of responsibility, the Pakistan Navy lends its services to PMSA through naval air and surface assets to provide requisite surveillance and reconnaissance. The primary reason for PN support is the limited capability of PMSA concerning aerial surveillance. PMSA's air arm is limited to 3 Defender aircraft only, which is insufficient to complete PMSA's mandated tasks. Therefore, the Pakistan Navy has undertaken a bulk of air-based intelligence and surveillance missions for the PMSA. Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone is around 240,000 sq km and has a continental shelf of 50000 sq km.³⁷

Pakistan's EEZ & Continental Shelf



Source: DAWN Newspaper³⁸

With the 18th amendment in place, the territorial waters have become a provincial matter, thus increasing the workload of PMSA to ensure fishermen from Sindh do not trespass into Baluchistan waters for a better catch. In contrast, the Baluch fishermen protest Sindh-based fishermen for trespassing into Baluchistan waters and harming the environment.³⁹ However, the disputed maritime boundary with India due to the non-resolution of Sir Creek remains a significant concern as Indian Fishermen regularly fish in Pakistani waters. PMSA regularly arrests these fishermen for trespassing on Pakistani territory illegally. A similar fate is met by Pakistani fishermen captured by the Indian Coast Guard. Fishermen from both countries traverse the disputed boundary, hoping for a better catch.

In addition to the Pakistan Navy and PMSA, various other organisations, including the Pakistan Coast Guard (PCG), are tasked to ensure coastline security from any illegal activity. PCG's mandate differs in terms of jurisdiction and area of responsibility. Its mandate is limited to the landward side (excluding any ports), as Schedule 1 of the PCG Act mentions.⁴⁰ Pakistan Coast Guard is, in principle, tasked with the prevention of smuggling, illegal immigration/migration, stopping infiltration of enemy agents or saboteurs along coastal areas and supplementing defence in war.⁴¹ Pakistan Customs and Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) are also essential organisations supplementing PN, PMSA and PCG efforts to enhance maritime security. Pakistan Customs is primarily tasked to ensure the import and export of legitimate cargo, prevent contraband items, and collect revenue. In contrast, the Anti-Narcotics Force is tasked with inquiring, investigating and prosecuting all offences related to intoxicants

and narcotics.⁴² Unlike the PCG and PMSA, ANF and Pakistan Customs can prosecute offenders in their specialised courts, but only if the offence directly relates to them. PMSA can apprehend the offender at Sea, but when in the harbour, they must hand the offender to the Police with incrementing evidence for further proceedings. PCG also must hand over the offender to the Police for legal proceedings. The fact is that the Police, with the actual powers of apprehension on land, are one of the weakest links in the whole network. Most of the offenders (not including the Indian Fishermen apprehended by PMSA), when handed over to the Police, get released on bail primarily due to the exploitation of loopholes in the judicial system.⁴³

Lack of coordination is also a significant impediment to ensuring Pakistan's Maritime security. This lack of coordination has often affected the outcome of an extensive operation. For instance, in April 2021, Interpol shared an intelligence report with relevant national intelligence agencies regarding *Ordient*, a Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) tanker transiting towards Pakistan's Gadani Shipbreaking Yard. According to the Interpol report, it carried around 1500 tons of mercury-mixed oil toxic fluids onboard. India and Bangladesh denied permission to scrape the *Ordient* due to serious health, safety, and environmental concerns. However, the vessel's name was changed from *Ordient* to *Cherish* at Mumbai Port, one of India's key ports. Furthermore, its Automatic Identification System (AIS) was switched off for several months before its transit towards Gadani and due to bureaucratic push and pull, procedural delays within and amongst the Ministry of Environment, PMSA, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Balochistan and Customs resulted in the ship being grounded at Gadani for recycling.⁴⁴ A Joint Investigation team was constituted and tasked to investigate the incident. However, the report based on its findings has yet to be submitted.

Joint Maritime Information Coordination Centre (JMICC)

Foreseeing the lack of coordination and considering it a significant impediment to Maritime Security, PN took the initiative back in 2013 to form JMICC.⁴⁵ It is designed to be the information-sharing hub in Pakistan's maritime domain. The centre is supposed to coordinate with various national and regional stakeholders to contribute towards a safe and secure maritime environment in Pakistan's Area of Responsibility. One of the functions of the Joint Maritime Information Organization (JMIO), under which JMICC is to be established as per the yet un-approved JMIO bill of 2018, is to “*manage and maintain the expeditious flow of information relating to incidents of maritime terrorism, piracy, distress at sea, environmental protection, illegal fishing and any other illegal activity within Pakistan's maritime jurisdiction*”.⁴⁶

The proposed bill has identified almost 48 public and private sector organisations and eight international organisations, with coordination to be done to meet the tasks assigned to JMICC. Since the bill has yet to pass through the national legislature, PN, on its resources, is running JMICC to ensure that some coordination mechanism may exist between the concerned agencies. PN has indigenously

developed a Joint Maritime Information Sharing (JMIS) software for JMICC and has equipped it with a modern operations room and associated infrastructure.⁴⁷ More recently, JMICC and PMSA, in collaboration, have launched an android-based application titled “Assistance, Anytime, Anywhere at Sea (AAAS)” to ease connectivity between government agencies and maritime communities, especially in case of emergencies.⁴⁸

Impact of an Act of Maritime Terrorism

Karachi is the hub of all sea trade in Pakistan. Two major ports, Karachi Port and Port Qasim, handle almost all Pakistani exports and imports. Although functional, Gwadar Port handles a minuscule trade compared to Karachi Port and Port Qasim. A similar situation is with India. Almost all oil imports are on the western coast, especially along the coast of Gujrat. The major crude oil import terminals as of 2022 in India are led by Jamnagar (64 million tonnes) and Vadinar (43 million tonnes), followed by Paradip (Eastern Coast- 29 million tonnes) and Mundra (again coast of Gujrat - 18 million tonnes).⁴⁹ The heavy reliance on Indian oil imports poses a dilemma similar to the Indians', as in the case of Karachi and Pakistan. Thus, Maritime Security is a top priority for both countries.

To understand the economic impact of a delay or disruption in maritime trade, we take the example of the Suez Canal blockade of 2021. The sheer cost to trade was over US\$54 billion, causing congestion of over 370 ships.⁵⁰ And the loss was not just in trade. The insurance sector stands to lose around US\$32 billion in compensation.⁵¹ What if this was not just a human mistake or a technical failure but rather an act of terrorism? The costs would have been much higher, as experienced by Yemen in October 2002 after the attack on MV Limburg when ships refused to visit Yemen due to security concerns despite being offered higher fares.⁵²

India, a global hub for information technology (IT), has around 17 submarine cables terminating at 14 distinct cable landing stations in five cities: Mumbai, Chennai, Cochin, Tuticorin, and Trivandrum. Non-availability or a slowdown of data services can cause a huge commotion within the Indian populace, especially within the IT sector. Similarly, Pakistan relies on major submarine cables for its data and voice services; some are routed through India.

Notwithstanding, any act of Maritime terrorism in the Indian area of responsibility and Pakistan will have a grave impact on merchant traffic plying in the Arabian Sea, thus affecting global maritime trade and severely impacting the economies of India and Pakistan. India, with multiple primary and minor ports, has a merchant fleet of 1491 seagoing ships with a total capacity of 13 million Gross Tonnage (GT).⁵³ India could cater to its requirements if there are concerns about foreign-flagged ships not visiting a port due to security reasons. But it's not the case for Pakistan, having just two fully operational ports in Karachi and an abysmal state of national flag carrier 'Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC)'.

Countering Maritime Terrorism against Pakistan: The Way Forward

Domestically, the constitutional role of all the agencies in Pakistan is very well defined. The only way forward at the national level is to strengthen the institution of JMICC with the support of all stakeholders. The JMIO bill needs to be expeditiously processed through the legislature and implemented with sound political conviction. This would ensure the availability of requisite financial resources and help improve performance, coordination, and efficiency while ensuring foolproof maritime security.

Government support for the fishing community in the form of interest-free loans is the need of the hour. However, these loans must also be linked with improved boatbuilding and fishing techniques while enforcing technological solutions to track all fishing boats and fishermen nationally. Developing an export-oriented fishing industry with the help of the private sector would help the fishing community improve its financial situation and thus erode opportunities for VNSAs to exploit the fishing community.

Understanding the trends of how boats at sea operate in different seasons is essential in understanding the routes taken by smugglers and ordinary fishermen. For this, the air arm of the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) must be augmented with the latest platforms to ensure round-the-clock availability of PMSA air units at sea. This may include using locally developed UAVs and aircraft to improve overall surveillance in the area. This would provide the availability of refined data, helping better assimilation of the Arabian Sea's 'Pattern of life' data. With improved information processing at the JMICC level, Pakistan's maritime security threats can be countered early.

Considering the bad blood between Pakistan and India, disputed land and maritime borders, a diplomatic deep freeze and zero cooperation at the intelligence level to counter or cater for any terrorist activity, this seems to be a gold mine for non-state actors willing to make a mark for themselves in the region. It would also be a cause of great humiliation for both nuclear nations, especially for India, which desires to become the 'Net Security Provider' in the region. For Pakistan, the economic impact would be far more severe than India, and rebuilding the trust amongst the maritime community would be slow and painful. Delinking Maritime Security from petty political gains and faulting each other at every forum is the need of the hour for both India & Pakistan. It is also crucial for India to ensure no false flag operation is conducted to malign Pakistan, as was in the case of the Fishing boat incident of 2015.⁵⁴

Resolving the Sir Creek issue is necessary to delimit the maritime boundaries between India and Pakistan. Although Pakistan and India came close to resolving the Sir Creek Issue in 2006, both countries must consider resolving it. This could be done through an environmental lens, as in the cases of Ecuador and Peru.⁵⁵ This would provide the necessary political safeguards to both governments and may prove to be a steppingstone towards resolving other critical disputes.

It would benefit Pakistan and all the regional countries if it leads a Maritime information-sharing mechanism with Iran and GCC countries, especially Oman. Pakistan's maritime security must be delinked from India's ambitions and US concerns about Pakistan-Iran cooperation in the area. Iran envisions the task force to include Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Pakistan, and India, which might take some time. Still, the Maritime Information Fusion Centre, with or without India, can quickly improve Maritime Security and thus create a win-win situation for all. This can improve the coordination mechanisms amongst the regional states and further limit the space for terrorists and smugglers to operate in the region.

Conclusion

Pakistan and India are two noisy neighbours whose role is essential for regional security and the security of the global commons. Any future conflict between these two states in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean region would have a grave impact not just on the two states but on the global economy at a scale far greater than the impacts of Houthis in the Red Sea and Russia-Ukraine conflict. The trigger to such a conflict must be managed effectively, making it imperative for the two states to understand the complexity of their non-cooperation in the maritime domain. It would also require them to cooperate with other regional countries. Only then can it be ensured that the menace of marine terrorism does not rear its head in the region. Policymakers within Pakistan must understand the problems associated with the maritime sector while making all-out efforts to treat the bureaucratic rust hindering progress at the national level. The fifth province of Pakistan, EEZ, needs due care and attention, without which this massive resource would become a playground for maritime terrorists.

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