Volume-08
Issue-08
August-2021

ISSN: 2349-7637 (Online)
RESEARCH HUB International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
https://rhimrj.co.in/ [Peer-Reviewed Journal]

Emerging Non-Traditional Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region

Dr. Mohammad Saqib

Assistant Professor, Department of Defence Studies, Hindu College Moradabad, U.P.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History
Published Online: 20 August 2021

Keywords
Drug Trafficking, Human Trafficking, Maritime Piracy, Maritime Terrorism

***Corresponding Author**
Email saqibdefence@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean Region has evolved into a global commercial and energy corridor. India holds a central position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the importance of the Indian Ocean to the maritime security of the nation is hardly to be emphasised. Non-traditional challenges, such as piracy, terrorism, drug and arms trafficking, and natural catastrophes, are cross-border challenges that impact most of the countries which are either situated in the region, utilise the Indian Ocean as a transit route for their marine commerce, or have a strategic presence there.

Introduction

The Indian Ocean region (IOR) is at a juncture in the Indo-Pacific. It connects the Middle East, Europe, Africa, South Asia, Southeast and Northeast Asia, and is one of the most important economic routes in the world. Over three billion people live in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which consists of 36 littoral states and 14 neighbouring hinterland states. This ocean transports over 40% of global trade and half of the world's container traffic. The Indian Ocean and its vital waterways connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in the shortest and most cost-effective way possible. A new geopolitical struggle is forming in the Indian Ocean as China continues to extend its influence and deepen its interactions across the Indo-Pacific.[1] The security environment in the IOR has been highly unpredictable since the conclusion of the Cold War, and as a result, the regional security paradigm has moved from state-centric traditional security concerns to non-state actors. Security has traditionally been described as a state's ability to safeguard its interests, such as territorial integrity and sovereignty, against external threats. However, in the international domain, non-state actors, as well as states, constitute a threat to security, adding to the existing state-centric traditional concerns.

Non-traditional security (NTS) threats are described as threats to people and governments' existence that originate predominantly from non-state actors. Non-traditional maritime security risks in the IOR vary from piracy and terrorism to other difficulties such as illegal drug and weapon trafficking, human trafficking, climate change, natural catastrophes, illegal migration, maritime terrorism, advancing the blue economy, and food shortages. These issues are not just non-military in character, but also transnational, as they are neither wholly domestic nor entirely inter-state.[2] Non-traditional issues cannot be totally avoided or managed, hence coping methods must rely on collaborative regional and international approaches. Experts believe that while hard security difficulties in the territorial waters are a well-known concern, policymakers have a difficult time conceptualising non-traditional, transnational, and human security issues that span the globe and institutional and policy stovepipes. India's technology cooperation in the marine area may also be applied to non-traditional security problems. Non-traditional threats are the primary concerns of most littoral and small states in the IOR, which are located near crucial chokepoints and strategic access routes.

Maritime Terrorism and Piracy

Terrorists, rebels, and pirates find unregulated or less controlled marine environments to be suitable theatres of activity and modes of movement. For more than a decade, the Indian Ocean seas adjacent to Somalia have been a hotbed of such activity, with pirates hijacking ships and Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab groups conducting profitable enterprises and performing deadly attacks at sea between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The two challenges have elicited a wide range of responses, underscoring the lack of unified regional and global organisations with the mission and capacity to deal with them. Both maritime terrorism and maritime piracy pose a threat to the international shipping network in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, marine terrorism can be directed towards land-based objectives. The Mumbai attacks of '26/11' in 2008 are the prominent example of this.

According to data from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), there were 2,331 documented occurrences of uncontrolled transit or illegal trafficking of nuclear and other hazardous material between 1993 and 2012.[3] The usage of smaller boats isn't included in any of these events. Due to the limited capabilities to check small ships for WMD, a former US Coast Guard commandant stated that small vessels could be more fatal than shipping containers for smuggling nuclear materials, and thus, small vessels raise the probability of getting used by terrorists to carry such threatening stuff. The Straits of Malacca, which pass through one-third of global marine traffic and half of the world's oil cargoes, is tempting target for terrorists

[1] Upadhyaya, S. (2011). *Combating Piracy in the Indian Ocean.* Manas Publications, New Delhi. p. 20
[2] Emmers, R. (2006). Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Dilemmas in Securitization (M. Caballero-Anthony, Ed.) (1st ed.). Routledge, London. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315247878.
[3] International Atomic Energy Agency. Nuclear Security Achievements 2002-2012. Vienna, Austria. May 2013.

and pirates near the IOR's eastern end. Through this maritime corridor, an endless stream of tankers, cargo ships, tugs, fishing boats, ferries, and cruiseliners travels between small islets, narrowing to as low as one and a half nautical miles at one point.

Pirates have attacked fisherman in the shallow seas of the Sunderbans, which straddle India and Bangladesh to the northwest. Attacks and incidents have been reported throughout the Sunderbans, Kendudweep, and the whole delta area, which are particularly vulnerable. Most of the pirates are from Bangladesh but they have support from Indian side also. In addition, Indian security forces have detained numerous Bangladeshi infiltrators carrying rifles, ammunition, and explosives in this region. Due to the difficulty of maintaining continual vigilance in the terrain, they are able to access the Indian side of the Sunderbans, which would also provide them with better profits. In addition, pirate organisations receive backing from Indian criminal gangs operating in the region. While Indian smugglers and their operatives frequently assist Bangladeshi pirates by identifying possible escape routes, the pirates, in turn, offer Indian gangs with safe haven in Bangladesh when Indian security authorities pursue them. It all comes down to a policy of "you do some favor for me, I'll do the same for you." As a result, any radioactive substances, nuclear weapons, or components carried across this area, particularly via tiny vessels, would be difficult to detect. The region's peace and security will be jeopardised until the clandestine connection between Bangladeshi pirates and Indian crime syndicates is severed, because this will deny logistic assistance to many Bangladeshi terror agents active within Indian territory.[4]

There has been a little but detectable increase in high-profile terrorist assaults at sea in recent years. A rising belief that piracy and terrorism might form a nexus is complicating the maritime security picture. It is sometimes asserted that pirates are driven by personal benefit via financial benefit, while terrorists are driven by political purposes and try to influence governments by the threat of bloodshed on the high seas. Maritime terrorism is defined by the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) as “any illegal act directed against ships, their passengers, cargo or crew, or against sea ports with the intent of directly or indirectly influencing a government or group of individuals”[5] Limited coastal surveillance, insufficient port security, and the overwhelming reliance of trade on transit via chokepoints are all important factors that have exacerbated the threat of piracy. Terrorists can move, conceal, and attack in ways that are impossible to do on land because of these gaps and limitations.

Terrorists may use maritime terrorism to fund their onshore activities, according to experts. Though their main objective has always been political, experts believe that terrorists may use it to finance their onshore activities. Terrorists and pirates may have a common interest in attacking ships at sea in this way. Terrorists and pirates are not totally self-sufficient, and they both require assistance to attain their aims and objectives. It's possible that pirates and terrorists may work together and help each other with money, weapons, and logistics. Terrorists lack the expertise and experience needed to carry out maritime assaults, since unlike land-based operations with immobile targets, ships at sea move constantly. As a result, pirates give them with the necessary information. Pirates, on the other hand, would profit financially from terrorists in exchange for their services. Terrorists might also give pirates with the weapons and materials they need to carry out assaults, as well as assisting pirates in securing a safe route to land. As a result, any link between the two should be taken seriously. Terrorism and piracy are both high-risk undertakings, and any link developed between the offenders increases the danger tremendously.

Organised Crimes

Marine security is a broad phrase derived from the maritime environment's structural existence, which poses a variety of interconnected co-operative security requirements from both State and non-State players. Human trafficking, gun smuggling, and drug smuggling are all examples of organised crime at sea that are becoming more linked to global patterns of conflict. International criminal organizations, unethical dealers, and non-state actors can easily trade unlawfully or furnish combatants with highly advanced weaponry by using the sea. In regions like the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, where conflicts and insurgencies are common, gun traffickers have a ready market.

The US trafficking victims protection reauthorisation act defines trafficking as the “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”[6] Human trafficking is a global criminal industry that targets people of various genders, ages, socioeconomic classes, and nationalities. It is the world's second-largest criminal industry. Human trafficking is a global and regional problem that requires urgent attention. Despite increased awareness, victim assistance, and a rising database proving the issue, the crisis continues, and it is hard to estimate how many people are affected. Males and females, young and old, from all walks of life are enslaved by human traffickers, who subject them to psychological, emotional, and physical torture for periods ranging from a few days to years.

Over the last decade, the issue of illegal migration by sea has been more linked to organised criminal groups, which now control the vast majority of human smuggling and trafficking. People-traffickers and smugglers make large profits while risking comparatively short prison sentences when compared to drug dealers, which is one of the main reasons for the abrupt increase. The way vulnerability is conceptualised has ramifications for how research, policy, and programming approaches it. Vulnerability is a crucial component of both the dynamics of human trafficking and the consequences of climate change, and there are parallels in how climate change vulnerability and human trafficking are perceived. In all domains, a range of unique methodologies, interpretations, and ideologies

[4] Das, Pushpita. (2013). Coastal Security: The Indian Experience. IDSA Monograph Series. No. 22. p. 29.

[5] Hamilton, K.(2010). The Piracy and Terrorism Nexus: Real or Imagined. Proceedings of the 1st Australian Counter Terrorism Conference. Retrieved from https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1002&context=act (Accessed on May 08, 2021). pp. 24-30.

[6] https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter78&edition=prelim

shape conceptualizations of the causes and aspects of vulnerability, but they tend to downplay the dynamic, contextual, and socio-structural components of vulnerability.

Two separate conceptualisations of vulnerability have arisen in the context of climate change discourse: outcome vulnerability and contextual vulnerability. The scientific paradigm that perceives vulnerability as a linear process and direct consequence of climate change impacts on exposed biophysical or social entities informs outcome vulnerability, which is moderated by adaptive capacity. This perspective separates the biophysical and social domains and emphasises the former. Contextual vulnerability, on the other hand, is influenced by a human security framework that takes into account how multiscalar socioeconomic, diplomatic, and economic processes and mechanisms, as well as unequal power relations, facilitate the possibilities, assets, and capabilities needed to cope with and make adjustments to climate extreme pressure. This method takes into account the many forms and repercussions of vulnerabilities that exist within and across groups and areas.[7]

Despite growing recognition that climate change's consequences are social economic influenced and unequally divided up, with the world's poorest and marginalised humans, regions, and nations carrying a disapropriate burden of climate change-related risks, security flaws, and expenses, outcome security vulnerabilities concepts and their consequent testing equipment fixes continue to control climate change research and global collaboration. An analysis of the contextual elements that underpin vulnerability is likewise notably absent from the prevalent trafficking narrative. Human trafficking is dependent on the combination of push and pull forces, which inspire or compel people to leave their homes in pursuit of better opportunities, and demand for exploitation.[8] In India, human trafficking is viewed as primarily an issue of sexual exploitation, with women and children regarded as fundamentally weak and helpless people in need of security and relief. In the case of climate change, some scholars and researchers have used narrow assessments of gender and vulnerability to abstractly place female, particularly poor people from the Global South, as basically and universally vulnerable to the forces of climate change in an attempt to bring greater attention to gender in debates.

Conclusion

Piracy, terrorism, the safety of mercantile sea commerce, proliferation, strait security, and environmental preservation are all major challenges that demand skillful management. All of this necessitates close attention to ensure that India and other parties in the Indian Ocean region develop initiatives to guarantee a peaceful environment. India must address the weaknesses of its marine safety infrastructure, which have been painfully exposed in a number of recent incidents, if it is to fulfil its role as the "net security provider in the Indian Ocean" and its aspirations as a global maritime power.

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