



View Point

Indian Navy's Anti Piracy Operations

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A significant percentage of India's trade including oil and fertilizers passes the Gulf of Aden. The Ministry of Shipping has estimated that Indian imports and exports through the Gulf of Aden is about US \$50 billion and US \$60 billion respectively. Therefore the safety of maritime trade through this route is of primary concern as it directly impacts on the Indian economy. Moreover India's large sea-fearing community who are embarked onboard both Indian and foreign flagged vessels, accounts for 6% of the world's sea-fearers.

In order to protect Indian ships and Indians employed in sea fearing duties, Indian Navy commenced anti piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden commencing from October 2008. A total of 1104 ships (139 Indian flagged and 965 foreign flagged from 50 different countries) have been escorted by Indian Navy ships through the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC). The Indian Navy has undertaken various initiatives to strengthen its anti piracy efforts. Merchant ships are currently escorted along the entire length of (IRTC), that has been promulgated for use by all merchant vessels.

The Cabinet Committee on Security met in March 2011 and considered proposals with regard to anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and off the Coast of Somalia. It approved a series of measures to address the legal, administrative and operational aspects of combating piracy. It recommended formulating suitable

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for coordinating Indian Navy's activities in the Gulf of Aden with the navies of friendly foreign countries.

India has also entered into multilateral initiatives to help fighting the menace of piracy. At a briefing during Milan naval exercise in January 2012. An Indian Navy officer noted that India, China and Japan have "evolved a mechanism under which it will be ensured that there is enough gap between the India, Chinese and the Japanese convoys". This will ensure escorting a greater number of ships in a day. The coordination exercise among the three navies was held under the 'Shared Awareness And Deconfliction (SHADE)' grouping established in December 2008 for sharing "best practices", and activities of nations involved in counter-piracy operations in the region.

Another example of joint naval anti piracy operations involves India and the European Union (EU), who have joined hands for launching joint operations in the Indian Ocean. EU has deployed four warships and supporting military ships and aircrafts of EU member-countries and is engaged with the Indian Navy in developing synergy in the region.

India has also started looking up to other countries for effective defense cooperation in this respect. During his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, defense minister AK Anthony highlighted the need for defense cooperation between two countries. Both countries agreed to establish a Joint Committee in order to chalk out a roadmap for bolstering bilateral defense cooperation. India has also joined hands with Sri Lanka and Maldives to keep the seas around them free of piracy. India can effectively set up a structured co-operative mechanism involving the navies of Singapore, China, South Korea and Japan. Likewise, India has recently announced that it will initiate a 'maritime dialogue' with China

Responding to the piracy menace in the contiguous waters, India has a prominent policy of engagement in the region. The Indian defense minister assured that, "the Indian Navy has been mandated to be a net security provider to the island nations in the Indian Ocean Region. We would like to assure our maritime neighbors about our unstinted support for their security and economic prosperity," India has

provided defense aid to Mauritius, Seychelles and Maldives to build capacity to address nontraditional security threats such as terrorism and piracy.

The International Maritime Bureau, Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC), has stated that the Indian Navy's action against the Somalia pirates off the Gulf of Aden has resulted in the seas on the Indian side being declared a safe area for merchant ships and thus many ships have started taking the route in waters off the Indian coast.

As regards legal dimension of piracy is concerned, so far it has been dealt under the provisions of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the century-old Admiralty law which have proved incompatible to the growing scope of this threat. To handle pirates effectively under Indian laws, a maritime bill is on the anvil to help maritime agencies, granting more powers to the Navy and the Coast Guard to deal with the sea brigands. The bill seeks to define piracy, the people who can be termed as pirates, the courts of law which would prosecute pirates and the quantum of punishment to be given to the apprehended sea brigands.

In a broader strategic construct it appears that countries are cooperating over security concerns contrary to their erstwhile competitive engagement in the region and India playing a major role in ensuring the safety of shipping.

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5 March 2012