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STRIVING FOR TERROR-FREE SEA: ANALYZING TRENDS IN MARITIME TERRORISM

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Abstract

The increase in transcontinental sea commerce, over the past few decades, is attributed to globalization. However, the vulnerabilities in the adaptation of coordinated security procedures to secure maritime trade and tourism and unregulated spaces in global maritime cooperation, have concurrently allowed the maritime domain to be used for illicit activities; including terrorism by violent non-state actors (VNSAs), organized pirates, and robbers, and transnational crime syndicates for economic gains, trade disruptions, political motives of authoritarian or violent regimes, or simply as a threat to warn ships from entering waters occupied by terrorists. Terror attacks are expected mainly in coastal/brown waters rather than high seas, because of limited resources available to terrorists and lack of their marine-related skills. Coastal areas, narrow straits, and restricted waters are more lucrative areas for maritime terrorism, contraband smuggling (CS), and illegal human migration (IHM). Considering the visible causes of this menace, this paper analyses the trends in maritime terrorism, which give a more quantitative insight to study the sea futuristically, and the present global security capabilities for its protection.

Keywords

Sea, Maritime, Terrorism, Trend, Global Security



1. Introduction

Throughout history, the sea has remained vital for the survival of mankind, and its significance is likely to increase in the future. The exploitation of the sea by human beings is reaching its peak which

is directly proportional to the rapidly increasing demands of an ever-growing population. Over 150 countries are coastal states, and this community is now turning to the sea for harnessing energy through offshore oil and gas infrastructure and for

minerals that it carries. Although terrorism is a major threat being faced by the world today, this is unfortunate that an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism does not exist. Terrorism has been looked upon differently by different people according to their values and aspirations, and their aims and objectives. Apart from the fact that defining terrorism remained a problem, the world maritime community has realized the vulnerabilities associated with the maritime domain and insisted on the importance of maritime security against the threats posed by different terror groups. The maritime environment has been suffering from various illegal activities; each with varying motives and objectives, such as piracy, human and drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, hijacking, and, in many cases, terror groups or pirates attack and attempt to bring chaos.

2. Literature Review

Curran *et al.* (2020) focus on the maritime activities leads by various terror groups; most of which are born in Africa. They emphasize that what is happening out at sea cannot be ignored and turning a blind eye to these events will be costly as it will have shattering economic, social, and even cultural impacts. Criminal and terror groups are easily distinguishable from one another; as the latter has many devastating effects; which, not only, can be shocking for a country or a community but also can last longer than usual crimes. The violent non-state actors (VNSAs), in the maritime domain, are active since the known history of sea-based voyages. However, global oceans are more insecure now than they were in the past. The report significantly covers 43

VNSAs, based on the nature of threats that they can pose to their respective governments and beyond. Curran (2019) adopts a more progressive approach while she discusses how human security can be compromised by terror groups that use the maritime domain for their dreadful activities. Unsafe oceans cause high levels of vulnerability as terrorists can use security loopholes and inefficient safety protocols in their favor. The power and authority of a state should include and be extended to the oceanic outskirts so that maritime affairs get the same attention as the other inland activities. “Global counterterrorism strategies must cease to delineate between acts of organized violence on the sea and on land. The complexity of global terrorism demands a more comprehensive approach” (p. 1). Curran discusses ‘sea blindness’ and furnishes her arguments with specific examples to elaborate on the fact that the sea is not getting the due attention it deserves. Schneider (2020) builds her scholarly article on the nature and trends of terrorism in the maritime domain. She intends to elaborate on the fact that the terrorist threat by sea is real and what can be a possible nature of that reality if it must be delineated. She uses empirical methods to analyze statistics which are mostly descriptive and relies on the data released by Global Terrorism Database (GTD), World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS), and Research and Development Corporation (RAND). She analyzes security procedures and response levels in the context of “region and actor”. Schneider deems it necessary that a thorough evaluation must be conducted to understand how terrorists adapt to avoid, challenge

or threaten the existing security procedures; so that a coherent mechanism is developed based on ‘why and how global oceans and maritime activities can be made safer.

2.1. Objectives

Transportation through the sea is almost 160 times cheaper than land and air thus to harness most of the benefits out of it, marine shipping and port infrastructure are continuously expanding. On the other hand, different strategies are developed and employed to safeguard the maritime domain from possible terror threats. Hence, the terrorists also change their strategies for seeking loopholes and pores to seep through to successfully mitigate their notorious measures. So, the objective of this study is to assess the scale of current worldwide maritime terrorism, conduct an analysis of this threat, discuss actions to counter this menace, and based on this, assess the trends of terrorism in the maritime domain.

3. Methodology

Considering the range of the topic, the study was focused on the actions taken by terrorists to deter maritime domain and the nature of their modus operandi. Under various reasons, primary sources are given less importance, and matters regarding the data collection were inclined to the available secondary sources. Hence, a mixed-method was used with a deductive approach. Research covering foreign and local literature was explored for discussion and analysis to solve the given problem, and the elements supporting the idea were highlighted. Conclusion in this regard was based on the supported figures and presented facts.

4. Tackling the Types of Terror Incursions and Trends in Maritime Terrorism

A few ships are so closely linked to such a state that an attack on one would be an attack on the flag. Warships and a limited number of cruise ships are such examples i.e., USS Cole, Superferry 14, and MV Limburg. “Common types of maritime terrorism involve Maritime Improvised Explosive Devices (MIEDs) and small boat attacks. MIEDs can range from a ship-rigged to explode in the dock to a container packed with WMDs (weapons of mass destruction)” (Meghan Curran, 2020). Terrorists act in ways that give them great opportunities to maintain physical as well as psychological threats to the audience. Cruise ships, for instance, not only carry several passengers but also invigorating prospects of a terror attack, which can be initiated by a seizure for heavy ransom or just by attacking and eliminating the target to take lives and cause a great deal of emotional disorder on a much wider scale. By attacking a single oil tanker, terrorists can generate mega news coverage but, by doing this alone, they cannot achieve a target of economic degradation. So, on land targets, such as a whole oil refinery, seems to be more relevant, convenient, and vulnerable to terrorism as its destruction carries greater economic impact. However, the terror philosophy behind setting an oil tanker on fire usually depends upon the area in which it happens; as there are certain vicinities where oil tankers are fired upon due to militancy and not because of piracy; the Gulf of Aden is one such example; for instance, a suicide attack on MV

Limburg (Murphy, 2007), later known as the Maritime Jewel (MarineTraffic, 2018), was carried out by members of a militant group and an estimated 90,000 barrels of crude oil was leaked (BBC, 2014). There is a significant increase in armed robbery and piracy, and several incidents, 195 in total in 2020, have been reported; and these “figures are broken down as 161 vessels boarded, 20 attempted attacks, 11 vessels fired upon and three vessels hijacked” (IMB, 2020). For instance, focal points for actual and attempted attacks, on passing, underway, berthed, and anchored ships, have been the Singapore Straits, Indonesia, Benin, and Nigeria; and out of all, about 50 percent of such attacks have happened in the four countries mentioned above (IMB, 2020). Hijacking and crew kidnapping cases have been on the rise in 2020 and the Gulf of Guinea tops with 95 percent of such cases. The IMB Piracy Reporting Center (PRC) has recorded the highest number of crew

kidnappings in the previous year. There were approximately 22 such incidents in which 130 members were taken, hostage. In 2019, this number was at 121 in 17 separate incidents. This shows that pirates are resourceful, and their activities are very well organized. All these incidents have occurred within 60 NM to 200 NM from the coasts; which shows a substantial increase in the capabilities of pirates; and that the kidnapping is trending. For troubled oceanic peripheries, it is strongly advised that all vessels remain away from the coasts, at least at 250 NM, unless they transit for cargo operations or anchorage. During 2020, most of the ships attacked were either anchored (53 percent) or they were steaming (40 percent) (IMB, 2020). It gives a peripheral idea about the tactical freeness of terror groups while they raid offshore targets by sea as well as the inadequacy of the port security.

Table 1. Status of Ships During Actual Attack, January 2020–December 2020

Anchored	Berthed	Steaming	
86	12	66	Total = 164

Source: Data retrieved from ICC Commercial Crime Service, “Status of ships during actual attacks, January–December 2020”, CCS: <https://icc-ccs.org/>.

And, in almost all the cases, it is witnessed that the vessels attacked have also been boarded, as shown in figure 1.

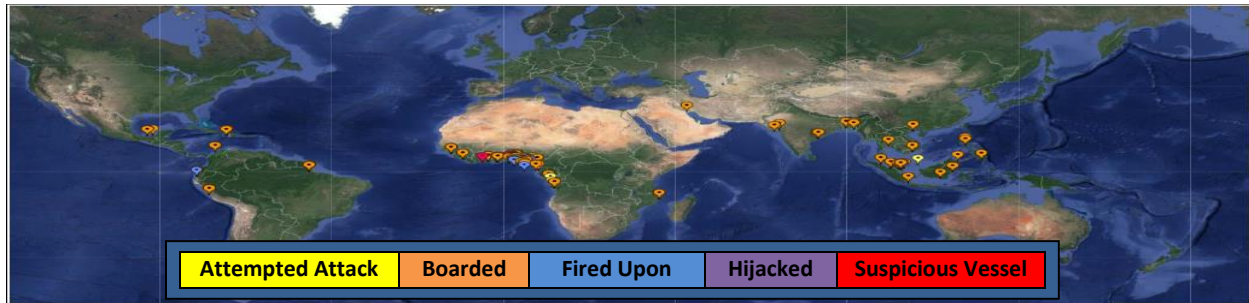


Figure 1: IMB Piracy Report – January to December 2020

It is important to note that terror incursions are planned on land; where the terror groups have definitive footprints to gather information, go into discourse, and plan to carry out their operations in the maritime domain. Essentially, and first, to keep terror groups from fulfilling their vicious desires out at sea, they should be targeted on land. However, given the complex nature of intel gathering and sharing to counter-terrorism or the informants working for ‘intelligence gathering’, a counter-terrorism operation, sometimes, may not be appropriate; and, many times, may not be logical. So, the focus is kept mostly to topple terror plots instead of cutting the head of the snake; though, such strategies require precision in strategic, tactical, and positional commands and actions. In many cases, terror insurgencies are thwarted based on intelligence sharing and, in some cases, terror plots help security agencies to gather more accurate data to identify terror regimes, the nature of their actions, and threats. Since the early 1990s, illegal oil bunkering has been among the favorite areas of interest of indigenous and politically motivated armed groups. “The movement of both oil and fuel on the water is so commonplace that few would even recognize illicit activity committed in front of them in broad daylight. A general lack of

surveillance, shortfalls in interdiction capacity, limited legal expertise, and pervasive sea blindness mean that many states fail to notice, much less address, the criminal activity occurring in their maritime domains” (Ralby & Soud, 2018). Niger Delta has always been a hub of illegal oil bunkering and is still the leading site for such activities. These are mostly illicit groups operating in an area of about 70,000 square kilometers. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta “MEND represents a loose coalition of armed groups responsible for oil bunkering in the Delta region. Using subterranean extraction processes, the group often siphons fuel into waiting speedboats. The products are then sold to international cartels, or on the thriving local black market” (Curran, 2019). “Every day, oil companies in Nigeria lose between 300,000 and 400,000 barrels of oil to illegal theft. Theft accounts for roughly 15 percent of Nigeria’s 2.4 million barrels per day produced which costs the government roughly \$1.7 billion a month. In comparison, only 5,000 to 10,000 barrels are stolen per day in Mexico, which produces a comparable amount of oil” (Mangan, 2015). From 2010, levels of piracy were declining until an oil tanker was hijacked by Somali pirates in 2017; although total attempted attacks in 2017

were even lower than in 2016. The year 2016, in this regard, appeared to be the most peaceful (as compared to previous years), and only around 200 piracy attacks were reported, which become the lowest in two decades (Brandon Prins, 2014); and kept on declining until it increased significantly in 2018. “A total of 106 very serious casualties were

reported in 2018, which corresponded to an increase of 68% in comparison with 2017, while the total number decreased back to 63 in 2019. A similar evolution regarding the number of ships lost was noted: after a peak in 2018, a decrease in 2019 was recorded, with 21 ships lost” (EMSA, 2020).

Table 2: Actual/Attempted Attacks January 2016–December 2020

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
191 ↘	180 ↘	201 ↗	162 ↘	195 ↗

Legend: Rising ↗ | Declining ↘

Source: Data retrieved from ICC Commercial Crime Service, “Locations of ACTUAL and ATTEMPTED attacks, January–December: 2016–2020”, CCS: <https://icc-ccs.org/>.

There are mainly two types of armed groups operating around the world that usually threaten passing ships from the areas which are either in their control or they claim to control.

Groups that are politically motivated and are at war with either the government or other illicit actors, and amid tense environment, usually attack vessels that pass through their areas of control or interest, assuming the target belongs to their enemies or may help their enemies. Their primary motivation for attacking or sabotaging ships is not piracy or robbery but the conflict itself increases suspicion and amounts motivation for hostile actions.

Other groups include those operating at sea for the primary purpose of piracy, robbery, illicit actions, or politically or militarily motivated to attack vessels, rob them, kidnap crew or just fire or burn down vessels to create threat and fear, and to give an economic blow to a certain country.

However, quantitative data includes both types when the primary purpose of producing such data is to answer the basic question of how ships are attacked rather than why ships are attacked. In 2020, hostilities in the maritime domain are significantly increasing and many areas are not only prone to such attacks but are also under constant threat for global trade and tourism.

Table 3: Armed Robbery/Piracy Prone Areas in Southeast Asia and Indian Sub-Continent

Country	Attack/Action Type	Status
Bangladesh	Anchored ships are normally targeted by heavily armed robbers	↘
Indonesia	Vessels are mostly attacked during the night by armed robbers/pirates	↗+
Malaysia	Anchorage/underway vessels are attacked mostly	↘
Philippines	Barges/tugs/ yachts/fishing vessels/ merchant ships are attacked for robbing/kidnapping/ransom	↗+
Singapore Straits	Passing/underway/anchored ships are attacked mostly at night	↗+
Malacca Straits	Passing vessels are attacked	↘
South China Sea	Small product tankers hijacking	↘

Legend: Incidents increasing ↗ | Move with caution ↘ | High-Security risk ↗+ | Very high-Security risk ↗++

Source: Data adapted/retrieved from ICC Commercial Crime Service, “Piracy & Armed Robbery Prone Areas and Warnings”, CCS: <https://icc-ccs.org/>.

Table 4: Armed Robbery/Piracy Prone Areas in Africa and the Red Sea

Country	Attack/Action Type	Status
Angola	Armed robbery	↘
Benin	Violent armed robberies/kidnapping/small ships & oil tankers hijacking	↗+
Cameroon	Crew kidnapping	↗
Equatorial Guinea	Hijacking/boarding with criminal intent	↗
Ghana	Armed robberies	↘
Gulf of Guinea	Armed robberies, kidnapping, hijacking, fired upon	↗++
Ivory Coast	Armed robberies	↘
Nigeria	Violent attacks/armed robberies/crew kidnapping/hijacking/stealing of oil, gas, and precious cargo. Heavily armed groups attack passing/anchored vessels	↗++
Togo	Crew kidnapping for ransom/armed robberies/oil & gas cargo stealing	↗+
Red Sea / Gulf of Aden / Somalia / Arabian Sea / Indian Ocean	Pirates armed with automatic/heavy weapons fire on passing vessels	↘
Vessels transiting in / off Yemen	Close to war-torn areas and high probability of an attack by armed robbers, militant groups, and VNSAs	↗++
Vessels transiting in the Gulf of Aden	Passing vessels are fired upon by armed illicit NSAs	↗+

Legend: Incidents increasing ↗ | Move with caution ↘ | High-Security risk ↗+ | Very high-Security risk ↗++

Source: Data adapted/retrieved from ICC Commercial Crime Service, “Piracy & Armed Robbery Prone Areas and Warnings”, CCS: <https://icc-ccs.org/>.

Table 5: Armed Robbery/Piracy Prone Areas in South and Central America and the Caribbean Waters

Country	Attack/Action Type	Status
Brazil	Armed robbery/piracy	↗
Ecuador	Robbers usually armed with automatic weapons fire on passing vessels	↗
Mexico	Piracy/robbery related incidents reported	↘
Peru	Piracy/robbery related incidents	↗
Venezuela	Piracy/robbery related incidents	↘

Legend: Incidents increasing ↗ | Move with caution ↘ | High-Security risk ↗+ | Very high-Security risk ↗++

Source: Data adapted/retrieved from ICC Commercial Crime Service, “Piracy & Armed Robbery Prone Areas and Warnings”, CCS: <https://icc-ccs.org/>.

Meanwhile, it is essential to address the problematic dynamics of illegal human migration by applying the resources required to reinforce and manage fruitful and constructive responses. The law enforcement agencies must continue assisting, apprehending, and locating illegal migrants and those involved in human trafficking and smuggling. In 2017, Counter-trafficking Data Collaboration (CTDC) was launched in which international actors were actively involved for the cause of stopping illicit traffickers from exploiting human beings and smuggle them using the maritime domain especially. CTDC data shows that women are a major target of traffickers. Every year, women trafficked make a big total, i.e., more than 50 percent of all individuals trafficked (IOM, 2020).

5. Global Efforts for Secure and Stable Seas

The global community has been taking several initiatives to protect oceans from threats of maritime terrorism. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Container Security Initiative (CSI), Customs-Trade Partnership against Terrorism (C-TPAT), Combined Task Force 150

(CTF 150), and the maritime component of Global War on Terror (GWOT) known as Coalition Maritime Campaign Plan (CMCP), are among such examples. Many of these initiatives were taken or perceived by the administration of the 43rd US President George W. Bush. “The Bush Administration’s National Strategy for Maritime Security states that the infrastructure and systems that span the maritime domain ... have increasingly become both targets of and potential conveyances for dangerous and illicit activities” (Parfomak, 2007). The US cooperative strategy for 21st-century sea power also emerged aiming to deter threat to the US away from its borders and securing energy lifelines at sea through the coalition of states. The objectives of the US strategy, however, may be connected to mainly ‘self-interest’ policies but they are certainly reflecting the fact that joint security efforts are needed for a stable peace. In this regard, there is also the International Shipping and Port Facility Safety Code (ISPS Code), which came into effect on 01 July 2004, requires all countries to engage in maritime commerce to set up minimum standards of security at their port facilities and to

certify and document all vessels sailing under their flag. Also, and importantly, there are Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), and Regional Maritime Security Patrols (RMSP). RMSI was a security proposal designed by Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander of the US Pacific Command, to safeguard the strategic waterway of the Malacca Straits. It was meant to empower member nations with timely warnings and information and enable them to fight against maritime security threats (Parameswaran, 2016) whereas, RMSP is an initiative of the Pakistan Navy, which is related to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), primarily. Keeping in view the growing need for safer seas, Pakistan Navy fulfills its obligations responsibly while it fully understands that the modern world is interlinked as well as interdependent, especially against terrorism. Recently, the seventh edition of maritime exercises ‘Aman’, was opened at the Pakistan Navy Dockyard, and forty-five maritime nations

participated (Hasan, 2021). However, all the Global maritime strategies are based on the following objectives:

- To control major choke points of the world so that global trade can be kept safe and continuous.
- To curb the acts of piracy, weapons proliferation, and human smuggling.
- To deter the movement of illicit non-state actors (INSAs), violent non-state actors (VNSAs), pirates, and armed robbers.
- To gather updated information on piracy and maritime terrorism-related issues and develop new/enhance existing strategies for safer seas.
- To strengthen global naval coalitions and increase capacity to deter violent elements/factions in troubled areas.

The nature of their maritime security policies usually revolves around below mentioned dimensions:

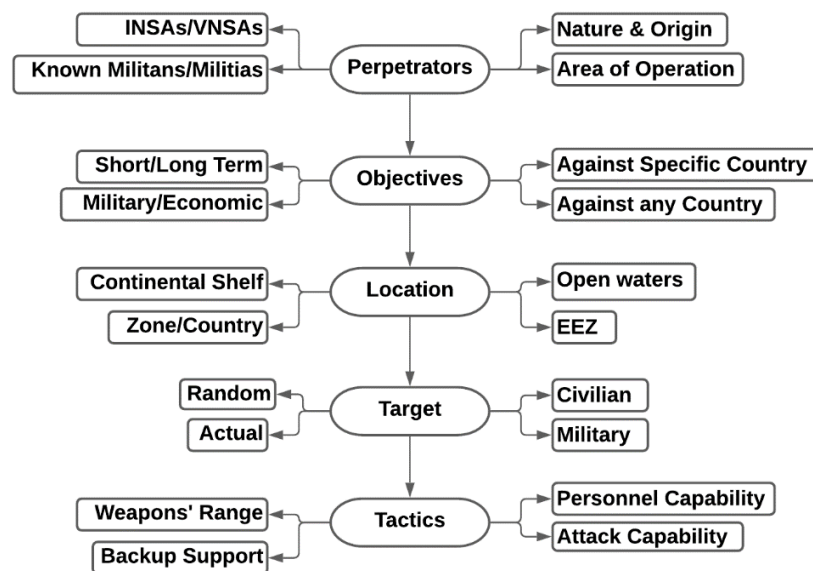


Figure 2: Dimensions of security policy against maritime terrorism

Nevertheless, it is essential to determine how individual nations or joint/coalition forces prioritize their activities amid an unlimited number of threat/attack scenarios.

6. Conclusion

Maritime terrorism is a reality and almost all global nations are affected by this menace. However, as compared to 2018, less terror incursion in the maritime domain in 2020 indicate that the maritime domain can be made safer by increasing global coalition and security. In such a case, the maritime domain will not remain an attractive ground for terrorists to operate. Although a single incident can be catastrophic, most of the illicit and violent groups do not bear the skills required to effectively operate at sea. Terrorists intend to inculcate fear among masses to achieve their political or military objectives by securing media circulation on a wider scale, which they may not obtain by carrying out smaller attacks in the maritime domain. So, their interest amounts towards activities that are more feasible operational, and viable economically, such as illegal oil bunkering, drug trafficking, and weapons smuggling. Thus, the maritime domain is not as attractive as a 'direct target', rather it is increasingly being used as a feasible route to obtain a target. So, growing trends show that sabotaging a ship may not be practical. The more attractive option in this regard, as the analyzed quantitative data shows, would be to kidnap the crew for heavy ransom. To counter this, efforts of the global community should be more diverse, coherent, and modern, i.e., involving both soft and hard measures. In the recent initiative of the

Pakistan Navy, for instance, the Aman Exercises as part of the Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP), forty-five nations pledged to collaborate and increase connectivity to secure the Indian Ocean region. They not only understand the value of strengthening security by military presence and response but also by promoting soft measures. It is important to understand that employing angry youth for acts other than hardcore terrorism, may be easy and much attractive, so, politically, efforts to cater to basic needs for ordinary citizens must be enhanced to keep them from joining terrorists and insurgents besides adopting hardcore security procedures. Also, the regulations that are adopted by the UN, and its allied agencies, to address the threat of maritime terrorism, and to deal with all kinds of Theft, Robbery, and Piracy at Sea (TRAPS) require more clarification so that they are not used by terrorists for the sake of deriving alternate definitions to fool the lawmakers or to motivate and employ people.

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