

Role of Emerging Navies and Maritime Security Forces in Collective Prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region (Maldivian Perspective)

1- Overview

The Indian Ocean has been expressed by the ink of many in recent years as one of the most volatile body of water in the globe. Covering well over a fifth of the earth's ocean bodies, it has over 37 nations with 57 island bodies spanning into three major continents with over 66,000km² of coastline. Indian Ocean remains the gateway of energy transport to Europe and East Asia, while cargo moves to and fro channeling the West with Africa and the East. The major gateways into the Indian Ocean includes the Strait of Malacca, Lombok Strait, Cape of Good Hope, Suez Canal (via Bab-el Mandeb) and the Strait of Hormuz. The recent economic trends have expanded the traditional trade routes and concentrated the maritime transportation network in the ocean.

The littoral states in the Indian Ocean play a vital role in securing and maintaining the safety of the ocean's activities. As such, with a population growth over two billion, the well-being of the ocean is core to these states. These states of the Indian Ocean are dependent on the security of food, commerce, energy and environment enjoyed from these waters. In recent years various challenges have impacted on the safety and security of these nations. Both living and non-living resources have been at the risk of exploitation due to the economic and population boom.

The 21st century dawned to the peak of a number of conflicts and instability among and within some nations bordering the ocean. Various non-traditional threats such as illegal migration, lack of food security, drugs trafficking, lack of crucial resources, health issues, climate related issues and other transnational crimes thrived. All these security related assessments were considered by maritime strategists due to the geo-strategic importance of these waters. As the threat of maritime piracy subsided in the Malacca Straits, its threat exploded over the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden during the beginning of the millennia, bringing a new shift towards securing the maritime transport. The most challenging attribute to the new threats was experienced by the small littoral states of the ocean.

Most of the small littoral states lacked the resources, experience and hence the capacity to cope with the new emerging threats. Once, having less than no role to play in the security of the greater Indian Ocean, responsibility began to shift gradually onto the hands of small littoral states. This also affected the evolution of their maritime security forces in particular. One of these nations, the Maldives, laid down layers of maritime security measures which ranged from kinetic through to non-kinetic means. Emphasis was placed upon a new maritime security centered cooperation with dominant Navies in the Indian Ocean.

2- Role of the Maritime Security Force at the National Level

The primary role of every maritime security force at the national level is to preserve the territorial integrity, maintain a secure and safe environment for mariners for economic prosperity and stability. However, there are multiple challenges for the maritime security force to achieve their objectives. Hence, new approaches are required in order to enhance and achieve their desired goals.

Therefore in order to facilitate the maritime security force to carry out these goals following systems and measures are vital.

Inter-agency Cooperation:

Inter-dependence and inter-operability among potential agencies is a crucial means to ensure the effective use of resources. For countries such as the Maldives, the presence of other law enforcement bodies initially created an uncomfortable environment on dependency and interoperability in the maritime domain. Lack of inter-agency information sharing and operational inter-dependence lead to a noticeable void on effective maritime law enforcement. Hence, a collective and integrated approach was pursued, in order to have a resultant affect at the strategic and policy level. These included joint exercises, operations, training and information sharing. Over-lapping legislative mandates are being resolved through MoUs and other legal means. For a small nation in a volatile water body, the collective use of national law enforcement resources is the most cost-effective and operationally viable approach for crime prevention and safety response.

Reforming the Legislature:

In order to effectively exercise authority in the area of jurisdiction by a maritime force, the necessary legal instruments need to be in place. These legislative means for effective law enforcement would ensure timely decisions for commanders at sea. In the past, small nations were only confined to the proximity of the shores, conducting localized constabulary roles. However, in recent times, with an increase in illicit activities in the Indian Ocean, these small nations had to revise their contingencies to the new threats. These new threats, primarily maritime piracy, extended both the area of operation and associated risks. The new legislative tools need to be in line with international best practices, the Law of the Sea Convention '82 and democratic values with human rights at its forefront. Hence, new legislatures were drawn up by most littoral states to cope with the void. In early 2013, the Maldives also submitted an 'Anti-Piracy Bill' into the Parliament giving authority to its maritime security forces to arrest, seize and convict pirates found in the high seas.

Enhancing the Resources:

Small states need to move out, think holistically outside the box in order to approach their challenges. As such under the Maldives Defence Concept and the Defence Policy, the MNDF Coast Guard focuses on a multilateral approach to enhance its resources. In my view, the most important resources for a maritime security force is its manpower and its law enforcement assets. Continuous and periodical reform and revision of the training curriculum of the maritime force would increase the skill and tactical awareness of its personnel in dealing with emerging threats. Moreover, the financial restraint of small nations such as the Maldives, has given way for it to approach and use non-traditional mechanisms for law enforcement at sea.

Establishment of VHF listening posts, AIS stations (US Govt.) and Radar stations (Indian Navy) covering the archipelago has been at the forefront of these methodologies. Although some of the aforementioned units are still pending installation and implementation, those that are up and running have been a vital success. The President of Maldives has also recently announced initiatives for the use of UAVs and acquisition of more surface units for its Coast Guard by 2018.

Creating Awareness:

Enhancing awareness among the government and the people can assist the nation to overcome maritime-blindness and assist the maritime forces in acquiring information and pursuing critically needed resources or even legal authority. Awareness can also vary from those created to accommodate critically needed information or methods to secure the populace from any rising maritime threats. Small nations have limited allocations of its fiscal budget for the maritime security forces. Hence, creating strategic awareness can be crucial to advocate on behalf of the forces in order to sustain a peaceful maritime environment.

3- Role of the Maritime Force at the Regional Level

Joint Operations and Trainings:

No one emerging maritime security force has the capability to sustain the security of their jurisdictional waters on its own. Furthermore, there are waters that doesn't fall under the jurisdiction of any nation, creating ungoverned spaces for maritime crimes to thrive. Hence, the need for nations to combine forces to monitor and secure these ungoverned spaces has been an effective mechanism. Joint operations conducted using vessels of an established Navy with a ship-rider from the maritime force of the host nation has mutually benefitted both forces.

Maldives, although without an official ship-riders agreement, embarks its officers onboard Indian Naval vessels and aircrafts periodically conducting surface and aerial reconnaissance patrols of its EEZ. It also conducts exercise 'DOSTI' every other year with the Indian Coast Guard, enhancing skills and knowledge on inter-operability. This bilateral Indo-Maldives joint exercise has graduated as a trilateral exercise from 2012 when Sri Lanka joined its eleventh serial.

The MNDF Coast Guard also conducts joint exercise 'Flash Metal' with the US Navy, in order to enhance the tactical and planning capability in the maritime arena. These includes tactics of small boat operations, VBSS (visit, board, search and seizure) operations and tactical planning operations. This series of exercises has developed the tactical boarding capabilities of the

boarding teams onboard the Coast Guard vessels, building their self-efficacy to engage in such missions.

Furthermore a trilateral agreement was signed among the Maldives, India and Sri Lanka in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 07th August 2013. Named as the ‘Trilateral Cooperation on Maritime Security’, the contents of the paper includes enhancement of the current joint operations and training among the three nations. Though the agreement is still in its infant stage, most of the contents have been addressed before and are being currently exercised by the three nations. The Maldives and Sri Lanka has also stepped up to conduct joint trainings between the Sri Lankan Navy and MNDF Coast Guard on special operations conducted at sea.

Sharing of Information:

Information sharing among maritime forces have never been this effective since the model of ReCAAP was established by the South Eastern states to curb the piracy in the Strait of Malacca. Formation of the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC) states in January 2009, adopted the ReCAAP model to repress piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Western Indian Ocean via effective information sharing. Although information sharing is one vital pillar of the Code, it was the most effective means for creating maritime domain awareness for most small states.

The DCoC’s model for information sharing functions by using three information fusion centers. These includes ISC Mombasa, ISC Dar el Salaam and the Regional Information Sharing Center (ReMISC) in San’a. Even though this mechanism only focuses on the threat of piracy and armed robbery in the region, many nations are using this as a tool to effectively acquire valuable information to safe guard their jurisdictional waters and secure the shipping routes.

In order to accommodate for the necessary tools for maritime intelligence gathering, many nations have also acquired various other tools for relaying and gathering information. These include plugging into various international bodies established in the region to fight maritime crimes. They include the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (the UNODC) and Interpol. Other methodologies are also being followed, such as exchanging unclassified AiS, LRIT or data from other similar sensors installed for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance among states.

Capacity Building:

In order to develop the human resources of these maritime forces, personnel are either deputed or assigned to training facilities or maritime operational units of well-established Navies to gain both knowledge and experience. Upon return, these trained personnel share their knowledge and experiences in its developing maritime security forces as it fits best for the nation. This not only assists the receiving nation to supplement their forces, it also enables a pathway for the host nation to engage in joint operations without much procedural restrictions.

Acquisition of maritime surface units, its operational sustenance and periodical maintenance is an expensive process. The expenses increase if the units are to cater for extended distances and expanded missions. Hence, assistance have been provided, and are being provided by established Navies and other nations with similar interests in the region. As such, in 2006, the Maldives was gifted with the Indian Navy FPC, INS Tillanchang to patrol the vast water body of the country. This was also supplemented with a Dhruv make helicopter for Search and Rescue and coastal patrols in 2010.

In 2012, the US government transferred small assault crafts to the Maldives National Defence Force to enforce and safeguard its maritime domain. These boats included fourteen 07m RHIBs and further eighteen 4.7m boats which were of vital use in maritime combat operations. Currently, a US trained crew are conducting trainings and operating these vessels to enforce and engage in high risk maritime operations.

Emerging maritime security forces have made a transition from their past state of maritime immobility through assistance provided by the nations sharing mutual interests in the region. This assisted expansion of the maritime forces and the increased capacity is making way for an effective enforcement model by enhancing their operability and increasing their reachability.

4- Threats and Challenges

- Growing threat of Transnational Crimes:

Most abundant transnational maritime threats in the region includes piracy, human-trafficking, drug-smuggling and gun-running. These crimes have and still are spilling and crossing over

into the invisible maritime borders regardless of the efficiency of the nations. Small nations such as the Maldives have faced a new dimension of transnational crimes, affecting the economy and security as a whole. Although drug-smuggling routes have been known to cross the Maldives for many years, crimes such as gun running are not exclusively known to target the nation.

The Maldives has experienced an influx of skiffs floating into its waters since December 1, 2009. Today there are 40 suspected Somali nationals in Maldives waiting to be extradited back. The Maldives have also felt the shift in piracy operations within its EEZ. In May and November of 2010 two merchant ships experienced the presence of pirates within the Maldivian EEZ, where one was attacked and the other chased. On March 26, 2012 a Bolivian flagged bulk-carrier, MV Eglantine was hijacked just inside the EEZ. To date no Maldivian vessels has been approached suspiciously nor has been affected by piracy directly.

The systematic enforcement, embarking of armed guards onboard merchant vessels and revision of the legal framework of the nations supplemented by the potential stability harmonizing Somalia has had an effect on the downward curve for piracy activities in the Western Indian Ocean. Although the census should be accounted cautiously, positive signs of repressed piracy activities are being sustained.

There are scares on the use of retired pirates in various other maritime criminal activities such as drug-smuggling, human trafficking and providing security for illegal fishing vessels in Somali waters according to a report released by the U.N. Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea in July 2013. Unless addressed and rehabilitated, these could breed new maritime threats in the region for the coming years.

Although the Maldives haven't experienced a terror attack at sea, it has critical infrastructures and other vulnerable resources that are potentially valuable targets for terrorists. Worldwide, maritime terrorism is fairly rare, but devastation is known to bring quite an impact. The Maldives is visited by quite a number of foreign pleasure crafts and passenger liners every month. The lack of enforcement resources is a severe limitation when providing security to safeguard the perimeters of the visiting pleasure vessels. It must be appreciated that being a nation dependent on tourism, the country cannot afford an incident of this nature.

– **Narco-trafficking:**

It's estimated today that nearly one in a hundred adults in the Maldives struggles with substance abuse. A recent UNODC figure shows that drug users in the country stands at over seven thousand. Joint operations are being conducted by the MNDF Coast Guard, the Maldives Customs Service and the Maldives Police Service to curb and control the influx of narcotics into the Maldives.

In 2006 a well packed stash of 1.6 tons of narcotics were discovered on an underwater lagoon near Male'. The street value of the haul was predicted at a street value in 2006 of 260 million dollars. This discovery led to the conclusion that, although Maldives may not be a major market for drugs, it may be used as a transit point by drug-smugglers. It also highlighted the lack of considerable knowledge and intelligence on fighting the crime. Today, continuous rummages are conducted by law enforcement agencies onboard arriving vessels in an effort to limit this illicit trade.

– **Climate Change and Natural Disasters:**

Global warming continues to raise the sea level at an alarming rate annually. The Maldives is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, as its highest point above sea is only 2.4 meters. Global warming leads to a number of issues, such as flash waves and erosions. To a maritime nation such as the Maldives, scrambling the maritime security forces in time of maritime related disasters is a routine requirement.

Beach erosions and tidal waves have affected the country from the early eighties. Today upto 37% of islands are recorded for regular flooding, while 90% of the islands have been recorded with such incidents within the last six years. The temperature variations due to the El Nino effect during the late 90's has also resulted in the destruction of coral reefs; a chain that has had quite an impact on the bait-fish and the general fish stock in the country.

The effect of El-Nino also damaged the house reefs protecting the islands, making these islands more vulnerable to wave surges, flooding and monsoon fluctuations. This has damaged the agricultural grounds and other vegetative life on the islands, affecting the livelihood of its population. These changes to the environment have challenged the economic growth affecting tourism and the fish stock. All these affects the security and stability of the

country. Such similar repercussions may act upon coastal regions in other states adjoining the Indian Ocean.

Maldives was devastated by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. When the tsunami waves hit the shores of the Maldives, its aftermath was devastating. In comparison with other countries, few in the Maldives lost their lives and went missing; though the damage to infrastructure was immense. All but 9 islands were affected while 13 islands had to be completely evacuated. The disaster took a downturn on the economy of the nation. The tourist arrivals declined 40% the following year, hitting hard on the already wounded economy. Following the disaster, the relief operation identified the need for capable units to cater for the need.

MNDF acquired a 42m and a 37m FAC to accommodate for such responses and to increase its reachability over the vast water body. Furthermore, the MNDF Coast Guard initiated and continues to provide maritime incident response training to resort staff, building skills for them to engage in effective initial response before the rescue or relief arrives.

– **Economic Vulnerability:**

Every state is affected by the economic fluctuations around the globe. The most vulnerable states are those that are financially dependent or least developed. According to IMF and World Bank, Maldives lost 65-70% of its GDP due to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. The Maldives has never recovered fully from the tsunami. It was also hit hard by the 2007-08 global financial crisis, further slowing down the national economy and increasing the national debt.

Furthermore, since 70% of the foreign income flow into the Maldivian economy depends on the tourism sector; the number of tourists also decreased due to the global financial crisis. While tsunami decapitated 24 out of the then existing 87 resorts; the wave of financial crisis made things worse. This affected the operational sustainability and the capacity building plans of the maritime security forces, introducing severe budget cuts and measures to limit resources.

The financial burden on the nation affects the security forces, emasculating the autonomous functionality and operational sustainability. The Maldives has a water body of over 800,000km² extending from its internal waters to its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and a Search and Rescue Region extending even further. It has also submitted to claim an area of

over 165,000km² as its Extended Continental Shelf in July 26, 2010. These vast bodies of water cannot be enforced without proper resources or strategic financial allocations. Any economically viable activity in these areas can only be secured with a resourceful and professional maritime enforcement capability.

– **Threat from Marine Pollution:**

Although no incidents of disaster scale pollution at sea is recorded in the Maldives, the threat from such an incident is quite imminent. It is estimated that more than 80% of the World's seaborne transport of oil pass through the Indian Ocean, feeding growing economies and the industrialized globe. The Maldives spans as the like of a vertically laid 600Nm sieve in the middle of the Ocean, splitting the Ocean's East and West. This geographical make of the nation lets the concentration of the Ocean's trade routes to pass either through, over or below the Maldives.

Since the Maldives is composed of over 1190 islands reachable only by maritime means, an incident of pollution hitting the shores of any one island could affect the communities with a devastating outcome. Being coral islands, the country has the 7th largest reef body in the world, a growth coverage of 8900km². These coral reefs are very vulnerable to changes in the availability of sunlight, the chemical compositions and the temperature of the sea. Hence any oil spill or slick will affect the health of the coral reefs. This living body is crucial for the well-being of the tourism industry, fishing industry and the islands' safety.

Global climate change and other man-made pollutants are being blamed for a number of phenomena in the maritime ecosystem of the Maldives. In recent years a number of dead fish washed onto the beaches of some islands. Some of these are blamed on alien species such as foreign algae. These ecological changes are affecting the natural species and species naturally dwelling in the coastal areas of the Maldives affecting the already dwindling fisheries sector.

The Maldives currently has 343 tourist installations including 105 resort islands dispersed throughout the country. A spill to any one of these islands can cripple the vulnerable tourism industry based on the extent of the spill and to the efficiency of response and relief operations. Hence, sound mechanisms for prevention and sufficient procedures for response and relief should be in place and exercised. Currently the Maldives doesn't have a national Marine Pollution Response Plan, though stakeholder agencies have come to gather to put together

such a plan for the near future. The August 2013 trilateral agreement between Indian, Maldives and Sri Lanka addresses the cooperation on pollution response at a regional level.

– **Maritime Blindness:**

Maritime blindness or sea blindness can be referred to any intentional or unintentional refusal to understand the threats from the maritime domain or the vitality of the maritime domain. These issues can create problems both from the strategic governing level to the level of the lay citizen. The consequence of this may effect resource and financial allocation at the governing or law making body to the maritime security or enforcement forces. Another purview is the limitations of crucial information flow from the general population.

The solution for maritime blindness is effective awareness. The public needs to be aware of the functionality and the threats neutralized by the maritime security forces. The future structure, maritime induction and composition of the maritime security force depends on the difference of opinion between the general public, the politicians and the security forces. The force needs to acquire the ability to function as a flexible force, which can be maintained with a sufficiently allocated budget. This needs to be achieved with a strategic plan to build consciousness on the growing neo-threats in the maritime domain.

Most of the emerging forces are also mandated with many constabulary roles in the maritime arena. These policing roles require an effective partnership between the maritime force and the general public. The success of such public relation strategies also require the force's active engagement in neutralizing maritime threats and challenges. The means of delivering these information to the public and the political domain requires a continuous, positive and systematic liaison with the public media.

The Maldives, being a maritime nation, has passed on a good understanding of the roles of its maritime security force. The MNDF Coast Guard conducts awareness programs for the general public and remote sea-faring communities to engage them in a positive attitude towards the maritime force. It is also actively engaged in formulating maritime related regulations, strategic plans and national level projects in affiliation with other government organizations. These arrangements have promising effects on curbing maritime blindness in the Maldives.

5- Way Forward

Forums:

Through the challenges, the MNDF Coast Guard, which is the primary maritime security force in the Maldives have taken part in various forums regionally and internationally to build self-efficacy and enhance its role in the global maritime arena. One such is being a signatory of the Djibouti Code of Conduct to repress piracy and armed robbery in the Western Indian Ocean. Maldives was one of the first nations to sign this agreement. It is also a member of the India Ocean Naval Symposium, which includes the promotion and understanding of mutual maritime issues among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean.

Sensors:

Being a small island nation with limited resources, secondary means of acquiring maritime surveillance information capability is pursued and welcomed by the Maldives. Initiated in 2009, with the assistance of the Indian Navy, the Maldives has been installing a chain of 10 radars (with AIS). To supplement these radars, with the help of the US government, in 2012, Maldives also installed AIS stations in 7 strategic locations. All these sensors are monitored 24/7 by the MNDF Coast Guard.

Furthermore, Maldives identified a gap in its maritime communication system, being out of date with the current international requirements. Hence, the government initiated a plan to establish upto 30 VHF-DSC listening stations throughout the country by the end of 2014. This include plans to upgrade the current maritime communication system in the local vessels in alignment with that of IMO guidelines. It is expected that all vessels registered and operated in the Maldives from the year 2015 will be equipped with VHF-DSC with locally allocated MMSI numbers.

Joint Cooperation:

The MNDF Coast Guard has also been conducting joint patrols, by air and at sea, with the Indian Navy since 2009 to increase mutual situational awareness of the Ocean and strengthen interoperability of the two forces. Furthermore, exercise and training are being conducted with visiting ships and mobile training teams of friendly nations. One of the most significant joint exercise is the India, Maldives and Sri Lankan Coast Guard Tri-lateral Joint Exercise 'DOSTI'. Since 1991 until 2012, this exercise has been a bi-lateral exercise conducted between Maldives and India; and is the longest running joint military exercise in the Maldives.

Furthermore, 'Trilateral Cooperation on Maritime Security' mutual agreement to enhance maritime security and safety between the MNDF Coast Guard, the Indian Navy and the Sri Lankan Navy was signed in August 7, 2013. The contents of the project include sharing of information and collaborating the use of unclassified information acquired from established coastal sensors, joint training on search and rescue, port security, enhancement on marine pollution response and collaboration on joint training and exercises.

A joint seminar was also conducted with Pakistan Navy with the slogan of Indian Ocean Dynamics from 15-17 October 2012 in the Maldives. The focus of the seminar was on the changing threat dynamics of the Indian Ocean, enhancing the security of the energy and commerce security passing through the waters and legal aspects of the maritime arena. This being the first ever such interaction with the Pakistan Navy at this scale with the Coast Guard, similar seminars are to continue bilaterally in the future.

One of the three pillars of the Maldives Defence Policy is to foster close relationship among friendly international forces and to seek their assistance when in need. The foreign policy of non-alignment and non-interference goes hand in hand with the current defence policy for establishing mutual cooperation mechanisms.

Establishing an MRCC:

The Maldives has had a functioning Search and Rescue Operation Center since the formation of MNDF Coast Guard. On 26 July 2012, the Coast Guard upgraded its Search and Rescue

Operations hub as the country's Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) with subordinate sub-stations located in other parts of the country. This MRCC is also currently the Maritime Information Sharing fusion center of the Coast Guard and acts as the bridge between other maritime information sharing centers.

6- Conclusion

The enforcement void in the Indian Ocean region can only be addressed through the effective functioning of the maritime security forces of all the littoral states. No one nation can fulfill the burden of securing the Indian Ocean water body. Responsibility lies with all nation states, big or small. It is the differing roles that needs to be defined and supplemented based on the capabilities of each Navy or maritime security force. Furthermore, the need for more collaborative mechanisms and cooperation among nations cannot be overemphasized.

The effect of one failed littoral state in the Indian Ocean will be felt in every corner of the maritime globe. Today, almost half the world's armed conflicts are concentrated in this region while emerging powers diplomatically and economically duel for dominance in this strategic Ocean. The projection of naval power may adversely affect the criminal activities in the making. Though, effective means and sensible strategic visions are needed to come to terms with the growing needs of emerging maritime forces to sharpen their swords and equally represent the Indian Ocean region in curbing threats. It is my conclusion from a small and limited maritime security force such as the Maldives, that small voids can be filled through partnership and collaboration, both locally and internationally.

Captain Ahmed Mujuthaba M. / Maldives