

Paradigm of Coastal Security

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The security of the coastline in India was in existence in the rudimentary form before the 1993 Mumbai blasts, wherein, it was established that the explosives used were smuggled through the sea route. It was then that the need for a Coastal Security mechanism emerged. The impetus for an institutionalised framework was accorded by the Group of Ministers Recommendations after the Kargil War. However, the coastal security construct, framework and mechanism took a paradigm shift after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. Almost after a decade of implementation of measures, have we transformed our coastal security system? The article will dwell upon the challenges and actions initiated by the Indian Coast Guard in coordination and cooperation with all stakeholders towards achieving the desired level of security.

Oceans are vast, covering 363 million square kilometres, equivalent to approximately 72% of the Earth's surface. More than 600 million people, equal to around 10% of the world's population, live in coastal areas that are 10 meters above the sea level, and nearly 2.4 billion people, about 40 % of the world's population, live within 100 km of the coast. In the Indian context, three out of four metro cities are located on the coast. About 14.2% of the population in India lives in coastal districts. Around 95% of India's trade by volume and 68% by value is conducted through these waters, with priority being accorded to port-led development plans in recent years.

The offshore development areas are critical for securing India's energy needs, and we have one of the largest fishing fleets globally. In sum, oceans are the lifeline of global prosperity and pertinent for our fortune too. India, with a coastline of 7516 km along the mainland and island territories, occupies a significant position in the maritime economics of the world trade overseeing the busiest of the international shipping lanes. There are nine Coastal States, four Union Territories and 1295 islands spread along the coast of India, including the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the east and Lakshadweep Islands in the west. The coastal areas host major commercial cities, and significant strategic and vital installations of Defence, Atomic Energy, Petroleum, and private ventures besides 12 major ports and more than 239 non-major ports, thus increasing the coastline's vulnerability.

To gauge the enormity of Area of Responsibility (AoR) and the challenges therein, we need to have an antithetical view of the nation facing the Indian Ocean. The geostrategic location of the Indian peninsula poses typical oceanic challenges owing to proximity to major international shipping lanes, inimical



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neighborhood-sponsored cross-border terrorism, transnational maritime crimes like narcotics and weapon trafficking, human trafficking etc., and dense fishing traffic around the Indian cape. More than 1,00,000 ships are estimated to transit close to our shores annually. With the focus on promoting the blue economy, port-led development plans, growth in coastal shipping, trade protocol routes, cruise tourism, and the Sagarmala project, oceanic traffic is expected to increase further. These may translate into an increased likelihood of maritime incidents and challenges in the proximity of the Indian Coast.

The use of sea route by terrorists during the attacks of 26/11 highlighted the vulnerabilities of our coastline and its security. As the ocean itself is a bounty of nature, the sphere of activities in the nautical environment is vast. Thus, several agencies, which include Indian Coast Guard, Indian Navy, Coastal Security Police, Customs, Fisheries, Port Authorities, Intelligence Agencies, and other Central and State Departments, are the stakeholders in ocean governance.

The multi-agency concept mandates cooperation, coordination, and institutionalised domain control of the respective agency to achieve foolproof security by optimum utilisation of limited resources. Thus, came the concept of a tiered mechanism for surveillance in-depth, wherein the Indian Coast Guard is additionally responsible for coastal security in territorial waters, including areas to be patrolled by Coastal Police, and the Director General Indian Coast Guard is designated as Commander Coastal Command with responsibility for overall coordination between Central and State agencies in all matters relating to Coastal Security.

For effective coordination amongst all stakeholders involved in coastal security, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Coastal Security were promulgated by the Indian Coast Guard in consultation with all stakeholders. To ensure a high degree of preparedness for responding to an immediate threat and to streamline the response to more significant threat perception, Coastal Security Exercise 'Sagar Kavach' is conducted bi-annually for each coastal state. Additionally, the Government of India initiated a focus on the infrastructure and assets of the Indian Coast Guard and all concerned agencies to enhance their capabilities for surveillance and patrol at sea. More than 200 Coastal Police Stations along with patrol boats have been established in the coastal States, including Island territories, for surveillance of shallow waters. Further, measures such as coastal mapping, strengthening of security at non-major ports, setting up of State Maritime

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Boards by coastal States, and biometric identity cards for fishermen have also been implemented. These initiatives have been coordinated by ICG for over a decade and have given desirable results.

The integration of technology with surveillance methodology has been achieved by establishing Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) for seaward electronic surveillance up to 25 NM from the coast under which 46

remote radar stations have been established, and 38 Radar Stations, 04 Mobile Surveillance Systems and 13 Radar Stations under VTMS connectivity are being established for providing near gap-free surveillance.

Joint Coastal Patrol (JCP) by Indian Coast Guard and Coastal Police has been instituted across all coastal States and Union Territories wherein the Coastal Police Personnel are embarked onboard Coast Guard ships, and deployment is undertaken in coordination with electronic surveillance measures for optimum exploitation of resources. The surveillance of 1382 islands is maintained during routine sorties by Indian Coast Guard ships and aircraft.

The apex level monitoring and review of the implementation of measures for enhancing the effectiveness of the Coastal Security Framework are done by the National Committee on Strengthening of Maritime and Coastal Security against threats from the sea (NCSMCS), Multi-



Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) under NSA. The improved information sharing along with better inter-agency coordination and synergy is the hallmark of the revised mechanism. The security agencies are solemn and alert in responding to any maritime security incidents. The persistent and systematic efforts and resolve in getting all other agencies to work in a coordinated manner through the regular conduct of state-wise, inter-agency coastal security exercises 'Sagar Kavach', has been instrumental in this.

Whilst the measures have been implemented and the mechanism established, the question again emerges as to 'Have we done enough to prevent an intrusion and secure our coastline'? The answer lies in measures initiated for surveillance in the depth of oceans as the threat to the coastline emanates

in deeper waters much beyond the coastline. The ocean is hence, to be quantified in terms of volume rather than length of coastline.

To secure 7516.60 km of coastline, which is equivalent to 1/3rd of land borders, 2.01 million square km of Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is equal to approximately 61% of the landmass of India, is to be

Coastal security is the maintenance of "Law and Order" close to the coast, and a subset of ocean governance for maintaining good order at sea. Coastal security as seen can be summarised into effective law enforcement measures implemented at sea duly coordinated by the Indian Coast Guard, which, over the years, has grown into a force to reckon with and earned the appellation as 'Sentinels of Seas', executing the role of maritime law enforcement, ocean peacekeeping, anti-smuggling, Maritime Search and Rescue.

maintained under constant surveillance by ships, aircraft, and electronic surveillance measures. On average, 45-50 Indian Coast Guard ships and 10-12 aircraft are deployed daily for surveillance of EEZ of India. The Indian Coast Guard ships and aircraft provide the essential deterrence and ensure the security of maritime zones of India, thereby protecting the national maritime interests in such zones.

The critical issues as challenges for coastal security and, in turn, safety for vessels ranging from small country craft to Ultra Large Crude carriers are primarily embedded in the legal regime of United Nations Conventions for Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS) and its adoption under various other applicable national acts and the rules thereof. Secondly, in the execution of the authority by various stakeholders, responsible for coastal security, the creation of a proper

follow-up system towards the accountability as a regular update of actions. Finally, the implementation support along with efficient communication.

The multi-stakeholder concept which emerged post 26/11 for coastal security steered through Chief Secretaries of the respective coastal states and supervised by the MHA, GoI through Border Management Division under the monitoring of the Cabinet Secretary through NCSMCS provides an optimal approach to ensure time-bound implementation of all tasks and a high level of coordination among numerous stakeholders.

The Coastal Security Construct of the present day has successfully built synergy and coordination, which in the current security environment is very much required and must be continued. In one line, coastal security is the maintenance of "Law and Order" close to the coast, and a subset of ocean governance for maintaining good order at sea.

Coastal security as seen can be summarised into effective law enforcement measures implemented at sea 24X7X365 duly coordinated by the Indian Coast Guard, which, over the years, has grown into a force to reckon with and earned the appellation as 'Sentinels of Seas', executing the role of maritime law enforcement, ocean peacekeeping, anti-smuggling, Maritime Search and Rescue and many other tasks, to be rightly called as the 'Saviours'. Over the past four decades, the service has evolved as a multi-mission formidable force performing diverse and concurrent operations to protect the maritime interests of our Nation. □

