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Subject :

Maritime terrorist threats are no longer scenarios put forth by international think tanks and early warning centers. And, contrary to the arguments that there is a low likelihood of terrorist organizations launching attacks against maritime traffic - as compared to threats posed by conventional piracy - maritime terrorist attacks have intensified recently. These terrorist attacks are aimed at destroying ships, taking control of seaports and traffic through strategic straits and waterways. This was driven by a qualitative leap in the armament, organizational structure, combat capabilities and strategies of terrorist cells, the nature of operations carried out by these cells in an attempt to replace the state, establish jihadist statelets across the borders of existing states and set up integrated military systems that even emulate regular armies in some aspects. This resulted in a trend to launch terrorist attacks independently from conventional maritime piracy, and consequently triggered debate over the manifestations of maritime terrorism which surged recently in the Middle East in particular. The debates also questioned the effectiveness of anti-maritime terrorism policies embraced by countries to counter the unprecedented shifts in maritime activities of terrorist organizations. **FIRST:** How did maritime terrorist operations develop? The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) defines maritime terrorism as "the undertaking of terrorist acts and activities within the maritime environment, using or against vessels or fixed platforms (including oil production and refineries) at sea or in port, or against any one of their passengers or personnel, against coastal facilities or settlements, including tourist resorts, port areas and port towns or cities" for political ends. This differentiates between maritime terrorism and piracy. That is, pirates' activities are mainly economically-driven, as pirate gangs seek to make material gains through capturing vessels and selling their cargo, holding crew members hostage to extort ransom money for their release, while terrorist organizations focus their acts on inflicting maximum human and material loss on all parts of the maritime sector with the aim of damaging security and stability. This definition, however, fails to recognize the changing dynamics in the nature of terrorist activities and the existence of patterns of overlapping between the activities of terrorist organizations, organized crime gangs and piracy as these organizations perpetrate acts to maximize their financial resources needed for recruiting more human resources and acquiring non-conventional weapons that enhance their military capabilities. Because of its worldwide scale, maritime terrorism stands in contrast with maritime piracy which is highly concentrated in, and limited to areas surrounding strategic shipping waterways, such as the coast of Somalia and the Strait of Malacca, and in the areas close to the coastal lines where piracy gangs are based. Maritime terrorist activities, do not have certain scales, except that they have links with terrorist cells around the world. In this context, maritime terrorism cannot be described as a new product of terrorist activities. Rather, it is an expansion of the tools and scale of these activities. The first maritime terrorist attack date back to 3 January 2000 when a cell of Al-Qaeda attempted an attack on the U.S. Navy destroyer (USS The Sullivans), as it refueled in the gulf of Aden, with a boat full of explosives. However, the attackers' boat was so overladen that it sank before the attack could be carried out. The second such attempt at a U.S. Navy vessel was successful when on 12 October 2000, two suicide bombers in a boat loaded with explosives attacked USS Cole in the Yemeni port of Aden. 17 American sailors were killed, and 39 were injured. The attack caused US\$250 million in damage to the warship taking 14 months to repair. A series of Al-Qaeda attacks around the Gulf of Aden followed. The French oil supertanker, the Limburg, was rammed by an explosives-laden dinghy on 6 October 2002 in a suicide attack. Approximately 90,000 barrels of oil leaked into the Gulf of Aden, and one crew member was killed and 12 other crew members were injured in the attack. The North Arabian Gulf was also the scene of other similar attacks. On 24 April 2004 an attack on Iraq's Khor Al Amaya Oil Terminal, near Basra, killed two US Navy sailors and one US Coast Guardsman, forcing temporary closure of the installation and costing nearly US\$40 million in losses. On 19 August 2005, the USS Ashland and the USS Kearsarge were targeted by three Katyusha rockets while in port in Aqaba, Jordan. The vessels were not hit, but one Jordanian soldier was killed and another was wounded after two rockets hit nearby docks. The third rocket landed on a taxi near the Eilat airport in Israel but did not explode. But there were also unsuccessful terrorist attacks. In June 2002, a group of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operatives suspected of plotting raids on British and American ships and tankers passing through the Strait of Gibraltar were arrested by the Moroccan government. In July 2009, Egyptian authorities arrested a cell of 25 operatives (24 Egyptians and one Palestinian) suspected of planning attacks on vessels in the Suez Canal. Sri Lanka's coastline is yet another hotspot of maritime terrorism. The Sea Tigers, the naval wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or the Tamil Tigers) attacked ferries carrying civilians on 23 October 2000, killing 250 people and injuring 300 others. The organization also attacked the oil tanker, M.V. Silk Pride in October 2001 off the northern tip of Sri Lanka. **SECOND:** New forms of maritime terrorism Terrorist maritime activities were on the rise recently in the region and worldwide threatening free global maritime traffic after the intensity of maritime piracy decreased worldwide. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), global maritime piracy fell to its lowest level in eight years with 245 incidents in 2014, compared to 410 piracy incidents in 2009 and 445 in 2010. According to Risk Map Report 2015 issued by Control Risks, the relative drop in global piracy was associated with a remarkable rise in maritime terrorist activities. This upward trend took several forms the most important of which are as follows: 1. Attacking naval forces: Some terrorist organizations have become capable of mounting effective attacks against military patrol vessels. In 12 November 2014, one of Egypt's navy vessels came under terrorist attack in the Mediterranean,

leaving five servicemen injured and eight others missing at sea. The attack took place off the coast of Damiatta province in the country's north east. The Egyptian military navy and air force were called in to deal with the 32 assailants, destroy their four boats and arrest all of them. Navy forces also seized a commercial Russian-flagged ship in the northern mouth of the Suez Canal. The crew members of the ship and a number of Egyptian navy servicemen were interrogated about their potential links with the attack. In the same context, in early September 2014, the newly-formed Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) attacked a Pakistani navy dockyard in Karachi — the organization's first strike since its existence was made public a month earlier. The attackers were former Pakistan Navy officers-turned-jihadists who succeeded in hijacking a missile frigate at a Karachi naval base in a bid to use it to stage an attack on US and Indian navy patrol vessels in the Indian Ocean. The attackers who included former rouge Naval official Awais Jhokrani, attempted to take control of PNS Zulfiqar, a Pakistani navy frigate, in the attack which was described by Indian Navy Chief, Admiral RK Dhowan, as a serious and unprecedented development in the military capabilities of the terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan.

2. Taking control of ports: Jihadist organizations have been launching attempts to seize seaports to control maritime traffic. Despite the fact that in October 2014 the African Union troops together with Somali troops took control of Barawe, a Somali port town used by al-Shabaab group, the terrorist group was able to retake Kuday, a key Island in the country's southern region after killing around 25 Somali soldiers in a surprising attack before mid-November 2014. The attack forced Somalia's troops to pull out from the island, which was the most important port that the terrorist group lost following Kenya's military intervention to back Somali government forces. Similarly, in Libya, fierce fighting went on between the extremist Fajr Libya militia controlling the capital Tripoli and the Libyan National Army to seize the port of Tripoli in November 2014. In 14 December 2014, and as fighting raged on, Libya's National Oil Corporation declared force majeure over the country's largest oil ports of Sidra and Ras Lanuf in the east where Fajr Libya targeted oil terminals. The same happened in March 2014, where fighting raged on over the country's Brega oil port, in addition to Sidra and Ras Lanuf, when terrorist groups seized oil storage facilities and started to export 700,000 barrels of crude per day independently from the state's institutions.

3. Maritime piracy: Al-Shabaab militant group in Somalia followed in ISIL's footsteps as in relying on self-financing because of a shrinking flow of funds from Al-Qaeda and the tightening of security control on the cross-border flow of funds. A report in the New York Times revealed that the militant group succeeded in bolstering its financial independence from Al-Qaeda by carrying out piracy operations, hijackings and exporting charcoal to make around US\$100 million a year in self-funding. Similarly, a report issued in mid-October 2014 by the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group, which oversees compliance with U.N. sanctions on the two countries, noted that illegal charcoal exports in the past year were worth at least US\$250 million, as Al Shabab increased shipments in collaboration with tribes in southern Somali. The UN Security Council's group said it counted 161 vessels exporting charcoal from Somalia's southern ports of Kismayu and Barawe between June 2013 and May 2014. The renewed activity of Al Shabab will likely exacerbate threats posed to maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Furthermore, the World Bank's report, "The Pirates of Somalia: Ending the Threat; Rebuilding a Nation", released in 2013, shows that Somali piracy between 2007-2013 held at least 145 vessels, hijacked as many as 3,741 crew members. The report concluded that trading partners for which the shortest shipping route goes through the Arabian Sea saw a drop of 7.4 percent in the value of their yearly trade," when compared to partners that used other routes. It also noted that the average annual ransom payment to pirates stood at US\$53 million. Somali piracy also cost the global economy roughly US\$18 billion a year in increased trade costs.

4. Targeting shipping routes: Terrorist organizations are in possession of non-conventional weapon systems that enable them to launch attacks to disrupt traffic at strategic straits and waterways. On 7 February 2015, Egypt's military thwarted a terrorist attack on the Suez Canal. The Second Field Army uncovered two rockets which were prepared to be launched in the direction of the Suez Canal. A month earlier, on 10 January, a terrorist cell was arrested for planning to launch attacks on the Suez Canal. Similar attempts to disrupt shipping traffic in the Strait of Malacca in Indonesia were made by terrorist groups. The group planned to blast a giant commercial ship as it transits through the narrow waterway to cause unprecedented losses to the global economy.

THIRD: Measures to counter threats

The aforementioned developments in the activities of terrorist organizations drove Middle East countries to review their security measures to bolster their maritime security. This was demonstrated by statements made by Foreign Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, at the opening of Counter-Piracy Conference in Dubai on 28 October 2014, where he warned of new threats, saying that groups like ISIS develop ties to criminal networks and arms networks, in a bid to expand its operations into the sea and threaten vital channels such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. The most important demonstration of the increasing international interest in combating maritime terrorism was reflected in the intensive visits to Casablanca in September 2014 by NATO ships assigned to Standing NATO Maritime Group TWO (SNMG2) to conduct naval exercises for as part of Operation Active Endeavour under which NATO ships are patrolling the Mediterranean and monitoring shipping to help deter, defend, disrupt and protect against terrorist activity. The navies of Italy, Belgium, Turkey, Spain, Germany, Greece and UK are involved in the counter-terrorism operation. On October 2013, the Saudi Eastern Province Border Guard announced the formation of a new protection force to protect vital marine-based facilities including oil fields and oil rigs and critical marine installations in the province which sits atop the country's largest oil fields. The new force is made up of three units for "marine protection, coastal protection and portable units". The new force was trained to prevent terrorists from infiltrating into these critical installations. The Directorate then announced that elite officers and personnel with field and administrative experience were trained inside and outside the Kingdom by international experts and the Maritime Border Guard Institute. In the same context, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit on 10 December 2014, in Doha, Qatar, approved the formation of a joint GCC naval taskforce. The announcement coincided with the Offshore Patrol Vessels Middle East which was held on 8 December bringing together representatives of defense companies from Spain, Italy, Germany and the U.S, as well as representatives of NATO members and GCC countries. The event was focused on showcasing the latest counter-piracy and anti-terrorism equipment and weapon systems for enhancing maritime security in the Middle East. Intra-Arab joint military exercises came in the same context. These include a joint military exercise, code named Zayed-1, held in March 2014 in the UAE's Western Region by the UAE and Egyptian air forces, navies and special forces; Exercise Eagle Salute in June 2014, which was a joint training involving forces from the United States, UAE and Egypt; the Khalifa-1 joint exercise held in June 2014 by the UAE and Egyptian naval forces; and Alexandroupolis-14, a joint naval exercise held in December 2014 in the Mediterranean Sea by the Egyptian and Greek navies.

Conclusion

In general, it is safe to say that increasing precautions being taken to counter the threats posed by maritime terrorism should take into account the shifts in the strategic baselines of terrorist organizations. These include the fact that the activities of these organizations are no longer limited to attacks against maritime traffic, attempts to seize ports and oil terminals, maritime piracy and illegal trading in oil and commodities with the aim of

enhancing their financial resources. This is associated with the ability of these organizations to acquire military capabilities and weapons to target maritime traffic and facilities without having to rely on conventional suicide attacks and explosives-laden boats. Rather, they now possess short-range missiles in cities controlled by these organizations in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Finally, the targets of terrorist organizations are no longer indiscriminately chosen. Rather they are selective targets which include the disruption of maritime traffic in the world's most vital waterways such as the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Malacca, and in the countries with coastlines on the Indian Ocean.