

TERROPIRACY: A Topic for BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Institute for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation)

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South and South East Asia face a probability of profit motivated pirates committing acts of terror and politically driven terrorists resorting to piracy. Unlike terrorism that emanates from South/South West Asia and piracy that originates from South East Asia, terropiracy is a probability linking South and South East Asia as a contiguous unit of operation. With the Durand Line as the epicenter of global terrorism, the Taliban on both sides of it see no barrier separating the South from South West Asia. For the pirates in and around the Straits of Malacca, the peninsular confluence between South and South East Asia is but a choke point to disrupt the supply chain of global trade. Over 90% of global trade is conducted by sea with Singapore as the world's busiest port and its largest container trans-shipment hub for a network of 250 shipping lines connecting it to 600 ports in 123 countries.

The Taliban, under attack for nine years by over 110,000 US led troops, and the pirates being pushed out of business from the Straits of Malacca with joint naval operations by at least twenty countries stand to gain by swapping their tools of combat and tricks of trade. The Taliban have light weapons to spare that pirates find handy to carry in their easily maneuverable sea borne operations with light vessels. The pirates are skilled in diverting or boarding ships with cargo that may include materials for Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's). The Taliban find these IED's easier to assemble, harder to detect and causing more panic in the public at large when exploded in surprise attacks than the collateral civilian fall out of an open combat with conventional light weapons.

The Afghan-Pak theatre is a virtual warehouse for bargain deals on light weapons with some going for a penny to a dollar. Tens of thousands of assault rifles, AK 47's, hand grenades and other handheld weapons were amassed during the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. And since the 2001 US led military action many more weapons were added to this open armory: stolen weapons; weapons mistaken for exploded; weapons resold by small business contractors in the surplus industry; and weapons simply unaccounted for. A 2009 report of the US General Accounting Office estimated that over one third of the 242,000 light weapons donated by the US government to the Afghan forces were unaccounted for and might have ended up with the Taliban. The Pentagon expects its military forces to demolish, down grade as scrap, or sell the surplus to contractors who commit to destroy them. But among the nearly 400 contractors for the US weapons surplus in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some admit that they commonly find useful or new items among those discarded as scrap. Of the 30 rifle magazines removed recently from the dead insurgents, for example, more than half contained cartridges, or rounds identical to those used by some of the troops in the International Security Forces (ISAF).

The Afghan-Pak theatre is also a flea market for scrap metal: one of the handy materials for a crude assembly of IED's along with ammonium nitrate and radio-active waste. With a 400% increase in their use to become the number one cause of death for the ISAF troops in 2010, IED's were the focus of the Joint Multinational Training Command in Germany in May 2010. Dirty bombs made with radioactive and other toxic chemical and biological substances are now seen as a deadlier IED in the making than the roadside bombs used by the Taliban with landmines, ammonium nitrate and metallic connectors from artillery shells. Earlier this year, the ISAF located a vehicle carrying more than 900 kilograms of ammonium nitrate in the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar: enough to make 2000 kg's of explosive material. More than 12,000 rounds of ammunition are fired in a day in Afghanistan by the British troops

alone according to the *Telegraph* of London. Some, if not many, of it would still have shelf after-life for future use.

About twenty million consignments of radioactive materials in all container sizes are routinely transported worldwide each year under stringent international regulations by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Dangerous Goods Code developed by the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) that is independent of the material's intended application and the end use. Consequently, there are no reported accidents in which a container with highly radioactive material was breached or leaked. That record does not preclude a probability of theft from loosely guarded or rummaging through negligently discarded radioactive medical waste. Liquid chloride, a common substance in medical use, for example, could be used for producing life-threatening clouds of gas with deadlier fall out than the shrapnel blast and fire effect of other IED's. Bosnian Serb officials acknowledge the theft of medical waste from the basement of a hospital in Banja Luka. Italian authorities are investigating whether Ndrangheta, an Italian mafia paid a Somali clan to get rid of 600 drums of toxic and radioactive waste from Italy, Switzerland, France, Germany, and the USA. Hospital waste was among these reported shipments to Somalia that were meant to be blown up or sent down the Calabrian Sea but might not have been totally destroyed. The possibility of it being traded by the Somali pirates for IED use through contraband traders in the Indian peninsula seemed all too real in March this year as the Directorate General of Shipping in Mumbai banned small mechanized vessels called dhows from sailing south and west of Oman and the Maldives. Part of a centuries- old tradition of open trading between India's port state of Gujarat and the African east coast off the Arabian Peninsula, some dhows are now suspected of clandestine trading in drugs and weapons with the pirates in Kismayu in Somalia.

Chittagong port in Bangladesh, Anambas/Natuna/Mangkai islands area in Indonesia, the Malacca Straits, Tioman/Pulau Aur/South China Sea areas confluence around Malaysia; the Singapore Straits are included as high-risk locations in the 2010 piracy alert of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB). Indonesian authorities see the entire South and South East Asian region as vulnerable to piracy attacks by politically motivated Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka: GAM: GAM) seeking independence for a gas and oil-rich region in Sumatra. Some Asian intelligence agencies reported links between GAM and Al Qaeda as the latter considered shifting its base from Afghanistan to Aceh and launch a naval offensive against its target vessels by ramming, blowing-up, air striking or torpedoing them with underwater suicide bombers aboard small, swift dinghies. Without any reported links to Al Qaeda, such dinghies were used in successful recent attacks on tankers and smaller vessels, according to the Shipping Association of Singapore.

As soft targets of terroiracy, the concerned governments in South and South East Asia need credible assurances that the arms and ammunition brought into the Afghan-Pak theatre by the ISAF do not fall into the "wrong hands" either as tools of combat or as items to swap materials for making IED's. A key challenge is to find a forum to raise the issue. A joint initiative by the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) would confront two familiar hurdles:

- a. Ongoing rivalry in maritime multilateralism by three categories of littoral countries: providers of port facilities like Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore; extra-regional users heavily dependent on the Straits of Malacca like China and Japan; and maritime powers in the Asia-Pacific sea lanes like Australia, New Zealand, Russia, United Kingdom and United States.

- b. Longstanding geopolitical debate over separating South and South East Asia from the wider arc of the Indian Ocean with 41 littoral, 11 landlocked and 12 island states. The arc accounts for 42% of the world's 350 unresolved, simmering or ongoing conflicts in various forms.

Recent conferences among the erstwhile and ongoing adversaries in the Indian Ocean are cautious that new initiatives would be more successful if limited first to the Bay of Bengal and/or the Arabian Sea. This makes room for placing terroiracy as a topic for BIMSTEC with India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Thailand as its members. The competing claims of Bangladesh, India and Myanmar over their coastlines were virtually “shelved” as BIMSTEC agreed in 2009 to work simultaneously on a regional convention for counter-terror cooperation and a pact on collaboration against international organized crime that includes piracy according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna. This is an opportune opening to put terroiracy as a cross cutting item on its existing agenda of terrorism and piracy by the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Three specific issues for action are proposed below:

- i. A common position on licensing the production and permitting the sale of ammonium nitrate to keep this substance from falling into the hands of terrorists and pirates for making IED's. South and South East Asia produce close to 40% of the global supply of ammonium nitrate with direct application for fertilizers in agriculture and other uses such as refrigeration, pulp making, textile treatment, woodwork and household cleaners.
- ii. A closer look at the IAEA's regulations and IMO's Dangerous Goods Code on radioactive materials to close any loopholes for applicability to the storage and disposal of medical waste by the hospitals using radioactive materials for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. The European Union has expressed initial interest in securing radioactive materials against access by terrorists and criminals.
- iii. A joint proposal for the forthcoming UN Conference on an Arms Trade Treaty in 2012 for a global standard on inventory taking of the weapons brought into and taken out of an area of insurgency by an external power directly engaged in the counterinsurgency operations. Such a proposal could address a lacuna in the UN's Program of Action on Illicit Arms Traffic and UN experience in disarmament demobilization and reintegration of former combatants into civil society.