

COOPERATIVE MARITIME ENGAGEMENT - EXERCISE AMAN 2009 FACILITATING US CHINESE INTERACTION

Commander B. K. Verma*

Whilst the relevance of the ocean was never debated, the development in maritime threat environment in the recent years has gripped the world community. Progressively, as countries sought to secure land borders with credible enforcements, the concept of 'freedom of the seas' emerged as the alternate viable media for progressing illegal activities such as drugs, arms trafficking etc. While piracy emerged as a nuisance across the shipping convergence areas, the successful misadventures of the audacious Somalian pirates in the Gulf of Aden have literally brought the trade, transiting through Suez, to its knees. Operating from non-descript boats, these pirates took full advantage in targeting the merchant ships, comparatively easy targets, easily facilitated of defunct local government jurisdiction and control.

With the India Ocean continuing to remain of vital interest to the world community, it isn't surprising that security issues continue to emerge in this zone. To address these threats, including local concerns, as also staking claim and recognition in the emerging global maritime order, a number of littoral nations have put forth maritime initiatives in the past few years. There were earlier attempts to put in motion initiatives to address issues in the Indian Ocean, such as the Sri Lankan effort which culminated in the institution of Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Cooperation (IOMAC) Network¹ under the UNEP umbrella in late 1980s. In recent times a number of countries have put in place initiatives, primarily at regional but even at global level, in form of naval engagements (bilateral as well as multilateral), seminars, and exhibitions as also establishing forums for continual deliberations.

India too launched a major initiative IONS 2008² in the form of a two-day biannual seminar. The seminar, held in Delhi on 18-19 Feb 2008, was attended by about thirty one countries of the Indian Ocean littorals. Navy to navy co-operation initiatives have been taking place in the IOR in the past. For a number of years the Indian Navy had been holding bilateral Navy to Navy engagements with various countries on a progressive basis. UAE has been hosting an IDEX³ exhibition (purely commercial defence exhibition) since 1993, whilst Singapore has put forth the IMDEX⁴- an exhibition with a conference on the sidelines dealing with a relevant maritime security theme.

AMAN – Multilateral Exercises and Seminar

An initiative from Pakistan set in motion the AMAN multilateral exercise by conducting the inaugural exercise in Mar 2007 along with a Seminar in conjunction with National Center of Maritime Policy Research (NCMPR), Pakistan. NCMPR was established in Jan 07 by Bahria University to provide a platform for think tank researchers to work on maritime matters and recommend strategies and measure to develop maritime sector through dissemination of knowledge to all stake holders. The Center serves as a focal point for advice on maritime affairs to all relevant stakeholders including government and other organizations.⁵ The US joined seven other countries in providing personnel and assets to conduct shore-based training and discussions, as well as at-sea interoperability training. Fourteen ships from Bangladesh, China, France, Italy, Malaysia, UK and US participated in the week-long, multi-lateral naval exercise that commenced on 06 Mar 07, designed to enhance multi-lateral inter-operability with regional and extra-regional navies as they carry out Maritime Security Operations (MSO).⁶

Concurrently with AMAN 2007, NCMPR organized the first International Maritime Conference (IMC) on “Maritime Threats and Opportunities in the 21st Century- A Global Perspective on Indian Ocean” from 04 to 06 Mar 07⁷ The three day event was attended by eminent National and International Scholars on Maritime affairs. The conference addressed issues that directly impact areas of economy, environment, security, education and technology within the sphere maritime.⁸ The Second International Maritime Conference was organized by NCMPR from 25-27 March, 2008 pertained to ‘Sustainable Economic Exploitation of Ocean Resources: Technological and Educational Needs and Solution’.

AMAN 2009

In continuation of the initiative of AMAN 2007, AMAN 2009 was conducted from 05 to 14 Mar 09. The exercise saw participation by the delegates of thirty eight countries (with twenty seven as observers), while the warships of nine countries and Special Forces from five nations, including the Pakistan Navy, participated. There were eight ships from the Pakistan Navy’s participating in the exercises, along with thirteen warships from Australia, Bangladesh, China, France, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, United States, and United Kingdom took part.⁹ The exercises and drills included anti-terror operations, avoiding mines, shooting floating objects, search and rescue, night encounter exercise, and cross deck landings by helicopter. The exercises also included replenishment at sea, formation display of helicopters and fly past by Pakistan Navy’s Fokker, Atlantic, P3C Orion and Mirage aircraft.

The Third Annual IMC 2009 was organized in tandem with the Second Biennial International Maritime Colloquium 'AMAN 09'¹⁰, in line with the earlier practice. The conference, held at NCMPR Karachi from 05 to 07 Mar 09, dwelled on "Traditional and Non-Traditional Threats, Force Postures and Extra Regional Interests: Implications for Arabian Sea and the Gulf Littorals". It evaluated their impact on the security and stability of the littoral countries.

Analyzing AMAN 2009

With militant sanctuaries in the tribal areas gradually establishing itself across the north-west, putting in place their own system of justice and revenue collection, there are several insurgencies underway in Pakistan. Further through early 2009, the nation has witnessed dramatic events, including the 'Long March' protests by political leaders, legislators and activists, backed by the former Prime Minister, Mr Nawaz Sharif. These threatened to throw the nation in state of anarchy, causing wide international consternation. AMAN 2009 was conducted against the backdrop of these circumstances of political uncertainties and increasing terror threats.

At the same time, an important factor about Pakistan has been its participation in the Coalition Maritime Campaign Plan; the maritime component of the Global War on Terror (GWOt). This US led Maritime Operation, is being conducted in support of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). It is a maritime operation aimed at interrupting the flow of personnel and material that may support international terrorist organizations and is being conducted in the international waters of the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. MSO helps to set the conditions for security and stability in the maritime environment and complementing the counter-terrorism and security efforts of regional nations. These operations deny international terrorists use of the maritime environment as a venue for attack or to transport personnel, weapons or other material. Pakistan is an integral member of the Combined Maritime Forces, headquartered in Bahrain, and has commanded Combined Task Force 150 twice, most recently Nov 07-Feb 08. They are also seen as an important regional partner in the overall game plan of US in their 'Global War on Terror (GWOt)'.

Exercise AMAN was designed to develop and improve response tactics, techniques, and procedures with focus on Global War on Terrorism. It is based on offensive and defensive operations to protect sea lines of communication and port infrastructure of a country against asymmetric threat. The main objectives of the multi national exercise are to:

- (a) Improve inter-operability and tactical proficiency.
- (b) Conduct defense of port infrastructure including anchorage against an asymmetric threat.

- (c) Practice anti surface warfare and air operations.
- (d) Develop common tactics against asymmetric air, surface, and mine threats.
- (e) Integration of Maritime Patrol Aircrafts and Fighters into various GWoT related exercises.
- (f) Conduct of mine counter measure operations.

AMAN 2007

14 Countries

06-12 Mar 07

Active participants – 07

Bangladesh, China, France, Italy, Malaysia, UK and US

(the underlined countries did not participate in AMAN 2009)

Observers - 21

Australia, Bahrain, Burma, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, the UAE, Ukraine, and Kenya

(the underlined countries did not participate in AMAN 2009)

AMAN 2009

38 Countries
(as claimed, not validated)

05 to 14 Mar 09

Active participants – 11

Bangladesh, China, France, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, UK, and US

(the underlined countries were new active participants in AMAN 2009)

Observers - 24

Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Egypt, Gambia, Germany, Indonesia, Jordan, Libya, Maldives, New Zealand, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, Vietnam, Azarbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kenya

(the underlined countries were new observers in AMAN 2009)

A comparison of the participation at the two AMAN exercises, tabulated above, reveals that the participants are either nations that are in sync with the US game plan of GWoT such as UK, France, Italy or the ones that share close relations with Pakistan such as China, Bangladesh, Kuwait etc. Exercise AMAN may be thus seen entirely as an extension of the MSO activities. Pakistan Navy attaches significant pride and prestige in being the only navy of the region to form part of the coalition maritime campaign plan in the vital sea lanes of North Arabian Sea by carrying out effective surveillance and interdiction operations in assigned area of responsibility. It also regards its nomination twice for the command of the Task Force 150 as a major milestone. Pakistan Navy views AMAN as a step further in its counter terrorism operations.

It is apparent that Pakistan continues to be of interest to US in its GWOt, and thus sees itself engaged with the AMAN. The conduct of AMAN, should be viewed within that perspective, without attaching any other significance. Interestingly only India and Sri Lanka remain out of the engagements on issues of concern within the Arabian Sea. Whilst Sri Lanka participated in the inaugural exercise, the country's internal strife as also inadequate naval assets may have kept it out of AMAN 2009. Whilst suggesting Indian Navy's participation in any bilateral or multilateral engagements with Pakistan may be preposterous, to say the least, in the given circumstances, there may be merit to engage in the IMC, conducted by NCMPR, at the appropriate Track II level.

Interestingly, what emerges is the fact that the exercise provided a unique opportunity and forum to western countries for carrying out joint operations with the Chinese naval ships. During exercise AMAN 2009, Chinese destroyer 'Guangzhou' embarked observers from participating countries and carried out close operation manoeuvres including cross deck helicopter operations. This opportunity of exercising with the PLA Navy ship would be enough for the US to ensure continuance of the AMAN series of exercise. China asserted that its naval ship and Special Forces participated in the AMAN 09 exercise only to show its goodwill for peace and its responsibility to maintain world peace and stability as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.¹¹ It also stressed that it was in adherence to its policy of peaceful development wherein the Chinese Navy wished to broaden exchanges and cooperation with other navies.



A Chinese navy military helicopter is ready to land on a British warship during the AMAN 09 military exercises at the Arabia Sea off the southern Pakistani port of Karachi, on Mar. 9, 2009.



PLA Naval Ship engaging in helicopter operations with US warship in background during Aman 2009 exercises during the AMAN 09 military exercises at the Arabia Sea off the southern

The US viewed the exercise as ‘opportunity for U.S. and international forces to work together and train across the spectrum of naval disciplines’¹². The US Navy was quoted as saying that, ‘AMAN 2009 will improve the interoperability and tactical proficiency between coalition nations and enhance their navies' effectiveness in supporting maritime security objectives.’¹³

It is equally interesting to recognise this US and PLA Navy interaction in AMAN 2009, in the light of the incident in South China Sea involving US Naval ship *Impeccable*, that occurred at the same time. Pentagon claimed that five Chinese ships shadowed and manoeuvred dangerously close to the USNS about 120 km south of China's Hainan Island on 10 Mar 09. The incident took place eight days after the US and China agreed to resume exchanges of military officers for information sharing after China in Oct 08 froze some contract to protest arms sales to Taiwan.¹⁴ The USNS *Impeccable* is one of the five Ocean Surveillance Ships that are part of the twenty five ships in the Military Sealift Command's Special Mission Ships Program. China has for long expressed displeasure with US surveillance operations in waters it considers its ‘Economic Exclusion Zone’ and has had its ships and planes ‘buzz’ US naval vessels in such areas in the past. Hainan Island is the base for PLA Navy’s new nuclear ballistic missile submarines as well as attack submarines in underground submarine pens. Submarines operating from Hainan Island provide capability to interdict the critical sea lines of communications from the Straits of Malacca. US claimed that the ship was not within Chinese territorial waters (12 mile limit), but within the ‘Exclusive Economic Zone’ (EEZ). Under the UNCLOS, waters beyond territorial waters are free for transit and non-economic use by all nations. It must, however, be remembered that whilst China is a signatory to the UNCLOS conventions, the US has not ratified the same. Further the claims made by Chinese on certain island and territories within the South China Seas are also not recognized by the world community.



The military Sealift Command ocean surveillance ship USNS *Impeccable* directly supports the Navy by using both passive and active low frequency sonar arrays to detect and track undersea threats.

The 281.5-foot *Impeccable*, an oceanographic surveillance ship, gathers underwater acoustic data using sonar. It may be recalled that in the past similar sighting of US and UK oceanographic

survey ships, such as USS Bowditch in 2004, in the Indian MZI was objected to by the Indian Government.¹⁵ The difference between maritime and military survey as well as surveillance is an issue that has not yet been settled under UNCLOS. Can countries engage in military exercises and manoeuvres, including the firing of weapons, in the EEZ of another country? Are military intelligence-gathering activities and military hydrographic surveys distinct from marine scientific research and thus not restricted by the provisions of the UNCLOS. These and many other issues would need to be sorted out as we now increasingly see that the concept of the Cooperative Maritime Engagement is here to stay.

* Cdr BK Verma, is a Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. He has been working specifically on Ocean Management Issues for the last three years, and is currently working on a Coastal Security Issues. The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Maritime Foundation or the Indian Navy. The Author may be reached at bkverma@maritimeindia.org.

¹ The Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Cooperation (IOMAC) (Hiran W. Jayewardene) <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu15oe/uu15oe0n.htm> (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

² The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, <http://indiannavy.nic.in/ion.htm> (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

³ History, Abu Dhabi International Defence Exhibition, <http://www.idexuae.ae> (assessed on 18 Mar 09)

⁴ IMDEX Asia, the only dedicated international maritime defence show serving the Asia-Pacific region. This biennial defence exhibition offers a one-stop opportunity to keep abreast of the latest maritime defence technologies, platform designs and technology developments. The Event comprise four inter-related events - [Exhibition](#), [Conference](#), [VIP Delegations Programme](#) and [Visiting Warships](#) , <http://www.imdexasia.com/index.php> (assessed on 18 Mar 09)

⁵ <http://www.ncmpr.org.pk/> (assessed on 18 Mar 09)

⁶ AMAN 2007 had five phases. See AMAN 2007: Nations United Against Maritime Terrorism, http://forum.apan-info.net/2007-3rd_quarter/aman/1.html (assessed on 17 Mar 09) Special Press summary of the activities of AMAN 2007 can be perused at http://www1.apan-info.net/Portals/45/VIC_Products/2007/03_/070314-SPS-AMAN07.doc (assessed on 18 Mar 09)

⁷ Maritime Threats And Opportunities In The 21st Century: A Global Perspective On Indian Ocean, <http://www.ncmpr.org.pk/1stimc.html> (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

⁸ Sustainable Economic Exploitation of Ocean Resources: Technological & Educational Needs and Solutions, <http://www.ncmpr.org.pk/2ndimc08.html> (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

⁹ Capt. Rick Williams, U.S. 5th Fleet Maritime Operations Center director <http://www.ncmpr.org.pk/3RDIMC09.html> (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Senior Captain Mei Wen and Commander Li Ping of China's Navy "Guangzhou" destroyer told Xinhua

¹² The US Navy, Coast Guard Ships Participate in Exercise Aman 2009 http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=43263 (assessed on 17 Mar 09)

¹³ ibid

¹⁴US grants contract for missiles, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2008/08/28/2003421629> . USS Impeccable, <http://timworstall.typepad.com/timworstall/2009/03/usns-impeccable.html> (assessed on 02 Apr 09)

¹⁵ Question 2245, asked at Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, the August 25, 2004/Bhadrapada 3, 1926 (Saka), <http://www.rajyasabha.gov.in/dailyques/202/uq25082004.PDF> (assessed on 26 Mar 09)

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