NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS IN THE BAY OF BENGAL: WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT, BROTHER!

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Abstract

In the discourse of international politics, the primary thrust is placed upon state actors' survival. In this understanding, generally threats are seen as exogenous in origin. Time has changed but seldom the statist question of survival has not, which has placed major emphasis on identifying and responding mostly to external security threats or generally known as traditional security threats. In this article, I point to how gradually this typical outlook to define security has undergone a shift and non-traditional threats (NTS) gradually emerged as significant issues that states must not ignore anymore. The Bay of Bengal region, which is gradually coming under the focus of international politics in the 21st Century, is also experiencing a number of non-traditional threats that need to be recognized and resolved through transnational cooperation. This article carefully identifies the principal threats that affects the Bay of Bengal region and the measures to be undertaken to create cooperative measures to address the issues.

Keywords: Non-Traditional Security, Bay of Bengal, International Politics

Introduction

"Our climate emergency and Covid-19 are global threats.
Both were predictable, and we could have – should have
done much more to minimize the risks. But now that they are upon us,
the best way to respond, surely, is through concerted international action"

– Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Republic of Bangladesh[1]

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[1] Sheikh Hasina, "A third of my country was just underwater. The world must act on climate", The Guardian, September 22, 2020, Available at:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2020/sep/22/climate-change-action-bangladesh-paris-agreemen, accessed on October 17, 2020.

"The need for international solidarity and multilateral cooperation is more conspicuous than ever…"

Berit Reiss-Andersen, the chairwoman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, announcing the Nobel Peace Prize to the World Food Program[2]

The world is unmistakably divided by the walls of sovereignty. From 1648, the Westphalian understanding dominated state's exclusive control within its territorial border. Literally however, one cannot build a wall and separate countries from each other. It is the common air, climate, biodiversity that we continue to share amongst each other as they do not need man-made passports to cross over borders. When the U.S. President Donald Trump first declared his adamant position on constructing a border wall with Mexico, little did he has any idea regarding the impact that it would have on monarch butterflies. A number of environmental conservationists raised alarms how such a border wall would emerge as 'death sentences' to this particular species as well as other wildlife.[3] This, however, had very little impact on the political decision of the U.S. administration as they went ahead with their decision to build the wall. This raises the question—as 'sovereignty' empowers a state its internal affairs, how its external implications can be dealt with? Who is going to take responsibility of the coastal nations suffering acutely from sea level rise as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh writes in The Guardian? Who is in charge of deciding the potential threats that may emerge due to internal decision making of a country? In recognition of such thinking, the World Food Programme (WFP) was awarded Nobel Peace Prize today that works with states to address the challenges of world hunger. While one might argue that this is what the WFP is supposed to do, but the

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[2] "Nobel Peace Prize Is Awarded To World Food Programme", October 9, 2020, Available at: https://www.wxxinews.org/post/nobel-peace-prize-awarded-world-food-programme, accessed on October 16, 2020.

[3] Leon Cederlind , "Border wall would disrupt monarch butterfly migration, threaten wildlife habitat", The Independent, February 16, 2018, Available at :https://theindependent.com/opinion/letters/border-wall-would-disrupt-monarch-butterly-migration-threaten-wildlife-habitat/article_d5d1b630-12a7-11e8-9ac0-5fb39781f803.html, accessed on October 11, 2020; Phillips Samuel Gilbert , "'Death sentence': butterfly sanctuary to be bulldozed for Trump's border wall", The Guardian, December 13, 2018, Available at https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/13/butterfly-sanctuary-border-wall-mission-texas, accessed on October 11, 2020.

Norwegian Nobel Committee in its deliberation pointed out that multilateralism is being challenged in a manner now that we have not seen before. To highlight the need for cooperation among state actors, WFP's work is recognized:

> The World Food Programme plays a key role in multilateral cooperation on making food security an instrument of peace, and has made a strong contribution towards mobilising UN Member States to combat the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict.[4]

The Bay of Bengal, the largest Bay of the world, hosts Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and parts of Sumatra of Indonesia. In terms of population, strategic location the concave and u-shaped nature of the Bay that makes it vulnerable to natural disasters frequently—the Bay draws significant attention to policymakers and scholars alike.[5] As the tripartite conflict over boundary delimitation among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar has been addressed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) earlier in this decade, a number of Great Powers have turned their gaze towards the littoral states and their possibility of acting as a hub of trade and business. Simultaneously, the rise of China and a possible clash of interests between China and India in the maritime domain of the Indian Ocean broadly and Bay of Bengal in particular has not escaped scrutiny of scholars and policymakers.[6] However, the region is also rife with a number of non-traditional security (NTS) threats that need effective cooperation among the member states as well as international bodies. Often, these NTS threats receive lesser significance compared to the strategic competition among Great Powers.

The central focus of this article is to articulate the NTS threats of the Bay of Bengal region. While a number of scholars have also worked on this particular aspect, this article aims to understand NTS threats in the Bay of Bengal in their

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[4] "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2020". NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB, 2020, Available at: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2020/press-release/, accessed on October 16, 2020.

[5] David Brewster, "The Rise of the Bengal Tigers: The Growing Strategic Importance of the Bay of Bengal", Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2 April-June, 2015, pp. 81-104.

[6] Rashed Zaman and Lailufar Yasmin, "The rise of China and India: An inevitable confrontation at the Indian Ocean?",in B. Md. Monoar Kabir (Ed.), Sino-South Asian relations: Continuity and change, 2014, pp. 110–135. Chittagong, Bangladesh: University of Chittagong; Koh Swee Lean Collin,"China-India Rivalry at Sea: Capability, trends and challenges", Asian Security, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2019.1539820; Mohan Malik, "China and India: Maritime Maneuvers and Geopolitical Shifts in the Indo-Pacific", Rising Powers Quarterly, Volume 3, Issue 2 (The "Indo-Pacific" - Regional Dynamics in the 21st Century's New Geopolitical Center of Gravity), August, 2018, pp. 67-81.

contemporary context as well as to point to challenges of cooperation. I argue that although non-traditional security issues/threats that may seem not posing direct existential threats like a war would have the potential of annihilation of a community and a state—nonetheless, in an ever-interdependent world, how can we lend a blind eye to such issues? The Coronavirus Pandemic has highlighted, more than ever, two aspects of this—NTS threats has the potential to disrupt our lives and that we need a cooperative framework that would recognize the involvement of all state actors as such a threat has a transboundary effect. In the first section, I discuss the changing discourse of security and what makes the present world bound to multilateralism and inexplicably bound with complex interdependence. In such a condition, states can no longer be oblivious to each other's problems rather need to involve themselves in cooperative frameworks for a collective survival. In the next section, I provide a brief outline of the Bay of Bengal region. In the third substantive section, I discuss the non-traditional security threats that are prominent in this region. The next section points out the obstacles of cooperation and possible solutions to those. The article concludes with a mixture of idealist and realist assumptions—multilateral cooperation benefits whom?

The Changing Dynamics of Security from Traditional to Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Threats

State system has emerged with the idea of anarchy—absence of supreme authority in the international system—and therefore, external inviolability is considered as legal rights of states. States, therefore, according to realist logic, are on their own to ensure their survival. It is the structure of anarchy, as Kenneth Waltz elaborated his argument in 1979 that pushes states to take decision to maximize their chances of survival.[7] On the other hand, liberals argue it is precisely because of the absence of supranational authority, cooperation would yield in absolute gain and therefore a rule-based system would benefit all the actors. While liberal scholars argue that 'war is unprofitable' and the free trade would provide incentives to avoid wars, it has not always proven true. The two World Wars of the 20th Century have proved that cooperation needs to be structured and create areas of common benefit.

The idea of state security, however, remained military-centric and in the domain of high politics in the study of International Relations (IR). The practice solidified with the onset of the Superpower rivalry after the end of the Second

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[7] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Theory of International Politics", Illinois: Waveland Press, 1979.

World War. The story that unfolded was one of fear and instability, especially in Europe where periodic warnings to citizens in different countries were issued to remain prepare in the case of a nuclear war.[8] The stage when the Superpowers achieved technological advancement to signal each other of mutually assured destruction (MAD), direct wars between Superpowers were averted. However, the broader scope of international politics was involved in zero-sum game of the Superpowers in different continents. The looming environmental crisis first caught attention in the book published by Rachel Carson, The Silent Spring (1962),[9] the warnings of population crisis that led scholars to invoke 'the lifeboat ethic' (1977)[10] - all these were still at the margin of security studies. Although the United Nations (UN) took into account of such issues of low politics and held a number of conferences on human environment and gender, the decade of 1970s with the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion to Afghanistan brought the significance of high politics back on the table again.

It was truly from the decade of 1980s that a number of scholars such as Richard Ullman, Barry Buzan, Amitav Acharya, Ole Wæver posed a serious challenge to the idea of 'military-centric' concept of security. Thus, 'security' gradually came to be reinterpreted in terms of its basic referent point as to 'whose' security is being discussed. In other words, the concept of security is contextual and contingent upon the agent and the particular issue at hand. This brings Wæver's theory of securitization at the forefront of identifying how security is a construction through speech acts, where resources are mobilized by policymakers to achieve a particular goal.[11] While Security Studies went through these particular waves of challenges to 'what security entails' in the early 1990s, the question of human security assumed prominence, first proposed and popularized by Mahbub-ul-Huq.[12] Although in the earlier decade Barry Buzan identified five

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[8] Ian Kershaw, the Global Age: Europe 1950-2017, Viking: UK, 2018, pp. 22-37.

[9] Eliza Griswold, "How 'Silent Spring' Ignited the Environmental Movement", The New York Times Magazine, September 21, 2012, Available at:
https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/magazine/how-silent-spring-ignited-the-environmental-movement.html, accessed 0n October 16, 2020.

[10] Petter Næss, "Live and let die: the tragedy of Hardin's social Darwinism", Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning, 6:1, 2004, 19-34.

[11] Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization", in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed), On Security, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 46–86.

[12] Des Gasper, "'Pioneering the Human Development Revolution': Analysing the Trajectory of Mahbub ul Haq-A Review Essay", Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 12(3), August 2011, 433-456.

particular categories of security—military, political, economic, environmental, and social—in his famous articulation Mahbub-ul-Huq expanded the idea from the referent's point of view.[13] While this enlarges the scope of security studies to an unprecedented level, one cannot deny that in an age of complex interdependence, threat to human beings at one corner of the world, can compromise the security of all. Richard Falk and other liberal scholars identified that in an age globalization, it is no longer 'simple' interdependence that define the pattern of relationship rather often the origin and breadth of an issue remains quite unseen and under explained. This pluralist thought gradually expanded to a 'complex interdependence'. Thus, the Coronavirus Pandemic has shown the level of connectivity the world has entered into that compromises our 'security' very much in a physical sense all over the world. Any number of military arsenal and preparedness cannot be useful to fight against a virus. Similarly, it is only through the collective efforts and compliance of a set of guidelines that the world can be open for business again. The significance of NTS threats has never assumed such a state. One needs to understand on the underlying nature of NTS threats in an age of globalization—threats originate locally and statist in nature but the response must be both national and international—or in other words, a view of security must entail in its entirety in a comprehensive manner.[14] That is, it must be primarily a state's responsibility and by doing so, it must have an international or global application as well. It is only prudent that keeping this context in mind, we discuss the NTS threats in the context of the Bay of Bengal region.

The Bay of Bengal Region: Geographic and Strategic Orientation

The Bay of Bengal with the shifting gaze of the world towards the Indian Ocean is considered as a region to be reckoned with in the present century.[15] The rise of China—a much cited phenomenon today is seen as a challenge to the rule-based international system that dominated the postwar international politics. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, no one country could amass such economic resources as China has to dominate and even control international trade,

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[13] Barry Buzan, "People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations", Sussex, Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, 1983.

[14] Chris Rahman, "Concepts of Maritime Security: A strategic perspective on alternative visions for good order and security at sea, with policy implications for New Zealand", Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Wellington, Discussion Paper 07/09, 2009, Available at: http://www.vuw.ac.nz/css/, accessed on October 17, 2020.

[15] Jayati Bhattacharya, "The Sea of Changes: Shifting Trajectories across the Bay of Bengal", Asian Politics & Policy, Volume 9, Number 2, 2017, pp. 245–267.

investment and business. China's President Xi Jinping's signature project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has effectively rebirthed the Eurasian geographic space and arguably the Silk Route as well.[16] This has often made scholars to argue that the Indian Ocean is once again at the centrality of international affairs. While Robert Kaplan argues "a map of the Indian Ocean exposes the contours of power politics in the twenty-first century", David Boucher points out that the Indian Ocean is 'neglected no longer'.[17] The strategic rivalry of BRI vs. the QUAD—a strategic alliance among the US, Japan, Australia and India—dominates the hard security issues in South Asia, although the viability of the former has often been questioned. The increasing reluctance of the US to share global responsibilities, the departure of Shinzo Abe, the chief architect of the QUAD, from Japan's leadership, the asymmetric resource comparison as well as commitment of the leaders between the two, among others are identified as the comparison between the BRI and QUAD should not be a wise step.[18] Although the US, in its first Indo-Pacific Strategy paper[19] has argued that it only aims at seeing a rule-based international system, scholars have not hesitated identifying a strategic rivalry

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[16] Bruno Maçães, The dawn of Eurasia: On the trail of the new world order, New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2018; Peter Frankopan, The Silk Roads: A New History of the World, New York: Penguin Random House, 2015.

[17] Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 88, No. 2, March/April, 2009, p. 18; Christian Bouchard & William Crumplin, "Neglected no longer: the Indian Ocean at the forefront of world geopolitics and global geostrategy", Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 6:1, 26-51, 2010 DOI: 10.1080/19480881.2010.489668.

[18] Zhiqun Zhu, "Can the Quad Counter China's Belt and Road Initiative?", The Diplomat, March 14, 2018, Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/can-the-quad-counter-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/, accessed on November 1, 2020; Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges", SWP Research Paper 9, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July, 2020, Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2020RP09_IndoPacific.pdf, accessed on November 1, 2020.

[19] United States of America, Department of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region", June 1, 2019, Available at: https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF, accessed on November 1, 2020.

looming in the Indian Ocean.[20] At the backyard of China, where it shares border with four South Asian countries, South Asia bears strategic significance to its grandiose Chinese economic plan.

China already has made its steady presence in the Bay of Bengal—not only through investments in building ports in Myanmar and Sri Lanka and large investments in Bangladesh and Maldives, but also by being a steady extra regional player in the region. Initially though these were considered as steady building of China's String of Pearls strategy, gradually, that was contended by scholars too. Similarly, while there has been a number of scholarly analysis on China's 'Debt Diplomacy', another stream of analysis also seriously challenged such a discourse. The strategic cogitations in South Asia, however, cannot but take into account of not only the involvement of China but also other extra regional players such as the US, Japan, Russia, among others. In fact, a number of studies also put Bangladesh at the center of great power rivalry due to Bangladesh's centrality at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal since 2014. It is during the period of Covid Pandemic that the issue of Bangladesh's closer relationship with China caught the eyes of many observers, while the graduation of Bangladesh-China bilateral relations to a 'strategic partnership' since 2016 has escaped notice of the many.[21] However, as the focus of this paper is to discuss the NTS threats in the Bay of Bengal region, I draw attention to that in the following section. One word of caution in relation to this would be the overlapping discussion on the threats in the region that also broadly origin and cover the entire Indian Ocean region as well.

Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Bay of Bengal

The discourse of security took a long time to expand. The discussion on the first section traces its gradual transformation to include a number of issues that were not initially thought to be a part of the discussion in security discourse. The

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[20] Camilla TennaNørupSørensen , "U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific: Security and Defense Policy Implications for Denmark", DIIS POLICY BRIEF, DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies, April 27,2020, Available at:
https://www.diis.dk/en/research/us-china-strategic-rivalry-in-the-indo-pacific, accessed on November 1, 2020; Kai He and Mingjiang Li, "Understanding the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US–China strategic competition, regional actors, and beyond", International Affairs, Volume 96, Issue 1, January, 2020, Pages 1–7.

[21] Christopher Finnigan, "Bangladesh-China relations have metamorphosed into a strategic partnership", LSE South Asia Center, June 20, 2019, Available at:
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2019/06/20/bangladesh-china-relations-have-metamorphosed-into-a-strategic-partnership/, accessed on November 1, 2020.

ideas relating to transboundary effects of an issue was often ignored, if not totally overlooked. As the world gradually battered from climate change to hunger issues, the idea that we are connected together started to unfold. The decreasing efficacy of the state system was starkly pointed out with the terrorist attacks in America in 2001 that revealed that the traditional security threats and threats to survival of a state can be challenged by non-state actors too. There can be a number of ways globalization of technology, crimes, among others have potentials to contribute to this.[22] Thus, threats emerging from globalization started to be acknowledged by a number of scholars. Although experts in security studies rather complain that such an inclusion over broaden the scope of security and thus shifts the focus, Stephen Walt, for example—it is true that the area of NTS threats that opens up a Pandora's Box.[23] The intricate relationship between globalization of crime, transboundary connections and implications for state security are bounded in a manner that we have seen before the current era of globalization unfolded. Moises Naim articulated on the five wars of globalization in the Fourth Annual Grotius Lecture, which was also published in the Foreign Affairs in 2009—illegal trade in drugs, arms, intellectual property, people and money.[24] Naim's articulation was often seen as drawing attention to the dark side of globalization, it was also criticized for the way these issues were approached—if these were wars or threats.[25]

Moving towards this direction, NTS threats in the Bay of Bengal in particular and in the India Ocean region in general are intertwined. A number of issues such as maritime terrorism and piracy maritime terrorism and piracy, environmental threats, the big trinity of transnational organized crime (TOC)—people, drugs and arms, and the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing—all fall within the scope of this discussion. In the next several subsections, I discuss the recent trends in these threats in the Bay of Bengal region.

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[22] Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, Understanding Globalization, London: Sage, 2003; Dennis Conway and Nik Heynen (eds.), Globalization's Contradictions: Geographies of discipline, destruction and transformation, New York: Routledge, 2006; Bryan S. Turner (ed), The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies, New York: Routledge, 2010.

[23] Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies", International Studies Quarterly 35 (2): 1991, 211–39; Nicholas D. Anderson, "Re-redefining" International Security: Bringing the Intent Back In", The Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies, Volume 4, 2012.

[24] MoisésNaim , "Five Wars of Globalization", Foreign Policy, November 3, 2009, Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/03/five-wars-of-globalization/, accessed on October 13, 2020.

[25] Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker, "Five Wars of Globalization: Comment on the Grotius Lecture by MoisésNaím", American University International Law Review, Vol 18, Issue 1, 2002, Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/235401778.pdf>, accessed on October 13, 2020.

Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Bay of Bengal: Maritime Terrorism and Piracy

It is difficult and legally challenging to define concepts of terrorism and piracy in the maritime domain. Terrorism is a politically contested concept on territorial landmass and has gone through shifts in its meaning and applications, so has been the case in the maritime domain. Jane's Intelligence Review defines maritime terrorism as "the deliberate exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change, in the maritime domain".[26] RAND in its study uses a broad definition used by the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific Working Group on Maritime Terrorism, which is as follows:

> Maritime terrorism refers to the undertaking of terrorist acts and activities (1) within the maritime environment, (2) using or against vessels or fixed platforms at sea or in port, or against any one of their passengers or personnel, (3) against coastal facilities or settlements, including tourist resorts, port areas and port towns or cities.[27]

In the case of maritime piracy, similarly, the concept is difficult to define from a legal point of view, while UNCLOS calls it "Crimes against Humanity". It was the Convention on the Suppression of Unlawful Activities against the Safety of Maritime Navigation filled the gap in defining maritime piracy. The International Maritime Bureau has defined maritime piracy as "any act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with intent to commit theft or any other crime and with intent or capability to use force in furtherance of act".[28] With regard to maritime terrorism and piracy, scholars have argued if there exists a nexus between the maritime terrorism and piracy. However, researches have not yet found so.

The first case of modern maritime terrorism in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) is identified as the hijacking of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro, in October 1985.[29] In the Bay of Bengal, it has been reported that the Liberation

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[26] Alok Bansal, "Maritime Threat Perceptions: Non-State Actors in the Indian Ocean Region", Maritime Affairs, Vol. 6 No. 1 Summer, 2010, p. 12.

[27] Peter Chalk , "The Maritime Dimension of International Security: Terrorism, Piracy, and Challenges for the United States", RAND, 2008, p. 3.

[28] Pragya Pandey, "Emerging Maritime Security Environment in the Indian Ocean Region: Challenges and Responses", Paper presented in Panel: The Impact of Asia and the Pacific on World Politics: International Relations and Challenges in Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes: RC18.347 in 23rd World Congress of Political Science, 2014, Available at http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_34577.pdf, accessed on October 17, 2020.

[29] Chris Trelawny, "IMO maritime security policy Background paper", International Maritime Organization, 2013. Available at: http://www.security.gr/imo-maritime-security-policy-background-paper-chris-trelawny/, accessed on October 16, 2020.

Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) used the sea routes to carry out terrorism.[30] In other cases however, Al Qaeda used the Gulf of Eden and the Persian Gulf while the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) used the Arabian Sea to carry out terrorist activities.[31]

The cases of piracy in the IOR is reported as early as in twelfth century. In modern times, the chokepoints of the Malacca Strait, Bab el-Mandeb and the Hormuz Strait can be easily targeted. With the efforts of the multinational task forces, maritime piracy came under control in the piracy hotspots of the IOR primarily in the Horn of Africa, although new regions in the South East Asia has emerged. In the Bay of Bengal, the cases of maritime terrorism, however, have not been high compared to the cases in the IOR. Often it has been argued that pirates rein free and widely in the Bay of Bengal region, but local studies show that they are often driven by sheer poverty and these are cases of petty thefts. Bangladesh, in particular, has been able to address these with the US assistance and donation of two ships to Bangladesh Navy.[32]

Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Bay of Bengal: Transnational Organized Crimes (TOC)

One of the interesting expansion of crimes in the era of globalization has been the rise in transnational organized crimes (TOC). Maritime routes are lucrative for arms smuggling, drug and human trafficking because of the volume of transfer and lesser check points that can be carried out through sea routes. The Stimson Center published a comprehensive report in 2012 outlining the origin, routes and destination countries of maritime trafficking in the IOR, which I provide below:[33]

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[30] The Economic Times, "Bay of Bengal being used by terrorists to smuggle arms: Lanka", November 13, 2008, Available at:
https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/bay-of-bengal-being-used-by-terror ists-to-smuggle-arms-lanka/articleshow/3708869.cms, accessed on October 15, 2020.

[31] Alok Bansal, "Maritime Threat Perceptions: Non-State Actors in the Indian Ocean Region", Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India, 6:1, 2010, 10-27, DOI: 10.1080/09733159.2010.508227.

[32] U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh, "U.S. Coast Guard Transferred Cutter Rush to the Bangladesh Navy as the BNS SomudraAvijan", May 7, 2015, Available at:
https://bd.usembassy.gov/u-s-coast-guard-transferred-cutter-rush-to-the-bangladesh-navy-as-the-bn s-somudra-avijan/, accessed on October 15, 2020.

[33] Rupert Herbert-Burns, "Countering Piracy, Trafficking, and Terrorism: Ensuring Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean", The Henry L. Stimson Center, New York, September 26, 2012, Available at:
https://www.stimson.org/2012/countering-piracy-trafficking-and-terrorism-ensuring-maritime-secur ity-indian-ocean/, accessed on October 17, 2020.

	Narcotics			Small arms & light Weapons	Human
	Opiates	ATS	Cannabis		
Key source countries	Afghanistan, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand & Vietnam	Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Myanmar, South Africa & Thailand	Afghanistan, India, Philippines, South Africa & Sri Lanka	Ethiopia, India, Iran, Iraq, Mozambique, Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand & Yemen	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand & Yemen
Potential points of sea export/ departure	Pakistan (Karachi, Bangladesh Gwadar, Port MBQ); Iran (Bandar Abbas, Charbahar & Jask)	Bangladesh, (Chittagong); India (Mumbai, Chennai), Indonesia (Jakarta); Iran (Bandar Abbas, Charbahar, Jask); South Africa	Pakistan (Karachi, Gwadar, Port MBQ); Iran (Bandar Abbas, Charbahar & Jask)	Iran (Bandar Abbas, Charbahar & Jask); Yemen (Hodeidah & Aden)	Djibouti, Somalia (Bosasso & Berbera); Eritrea (Massawa & Aseb); and, Sudan (Port Sudan)
Primary sea transportation routes	Malacca - Bab el Mandeb & Suez Malacca - Durban & Cape Aghulas Persian Gulf – Sri Lanka/Malacca Persian Gulf - Suez	Malacca - Bab el Mandeb & Suez Malacca - Durban & Cape Aghulas Persian Gulf – Sri Lanka/Malacca Persian Gulf – Suez Singapore – SE China/Taiwan/Japan Western Australia - Sunda Strait	Malacca - Bab el Mandeb & Suez Malacca - Durban & Cape Aghulas Persian Gulf – Sri Lanka/Malacca Persian Gulf – Suez Singapore – SE China/Taiwan/Japan Western Australia - Sunda Strait	Malacca - Bab el Mandeb & Suez Malacca - Durban & Cape Aghulas Persian Gulf – Sri Lanka/Malacca Persian Gulf – Suez Singapore – SE China/Taiwan/Japan Western Australia - Sunda Strait	Malacca - Bab el Mandeb & Suez Malacca - Durban & Cape Aghulas Persian Gulf – Sri Lanka/Malacca Persian Gulf – Suez Singapore – SE China/Taiwan/Japan Western Australia - Sunda Strait
Destination regions/ countries/ ports	Major European ports		Major European ports	Somalia (Kismayo, Mogadishu, Haradhere & Bossaso); Yemen (Hodeidah & Aden); Eritrea (Massawa & Aseb); Sudan (Port Sudan) & Gaza, Lebanon and Syria (via Suez)	Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE & Yemen

Figure 1: Maritime Trafficking in Indian Ocean Region

In this connection, we need to recognize that some of these channels have been closed due to the active operations of law-enforcement agencies of respective countries. Despite that, I added the outline to highlight the issues and how they were interconnected.

Drug smuggling routes of Pakistan's 'Golden Crescent' and Myanmar's 'Golden Triangle' that use the Bay of Bengal maritime routes remain a threat for Bangladesh. A number of reports emerged on human trafficking in the Bay of Bengal and 'boat people' especially earlier this decade.[34] In fact, 2015 was identified as the year of 'boat crisis' in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Islands.[35] While the international media highlighted this primarily as a crisis

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[34] Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, "Human Traffickers in Bay of Bengal Cast Sights on Bangladesh", The Wall Street Journal, October 28, 2014, Available at:

https://www.wsj.com/articles/human-traffickers-in-bay-of-bengal-cast-sights-on-bangladesh-14145 36642, accessed on October 16, 2020.

[35] UNHCR , "Joint statement by UNHCR, IOM and UNODC on protection at sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea", May 6, 2020, Available at:

https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/5/5eb15b804/joint-statement-unhcr-iom-unodc-protection-s ea-bay-bengal-andaman-sea.html, accessed on October 16, 2020.

emanating from Bangladesh, it has been argued that this was also a part of 'international politics' as the people fled were mainly Rohingya population who were lured for a better life in Thailand and Malaysia.[36] The issue of stranded Rohingyas in the Bay of Bengal and the IOR emerged as a humanitarian crisis in 2020 as well. The lingering Rohingya crisis initiated by Myanmar that saw Rohingyas crossing borders and entering into Bangladesh since August 2017 has led to the repetition of the boat crisis amidst the pandemic.

Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Bay of Bengal: Environmental Threats and Depleting Marine Resources

Asia's 40% people live close to the coastline. That makes them vulnerable to a number of environmental threats such as sea level rise, rising level of salinity and climate change.[37] Sea level rise in particular might pose existential threats to the Maldives at large and Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as well. Maldives, an island nation with 1192 islands of which 197 are inhibited islands, is experiencing a rise in sea level at a rate of 0.03–0.06 inches (0.8–1.6 millimeters) per year since the 1950s, as the Union of Concerned Scientists reports.[38] The country seeks the Climate Fund on an emergency basis as 80% of its land is only one meter above the sea level.[39] The island nation is also pursuing to relocate its 300,000 people to Australia to preserve its way of life. At the same time, BBC reports that the Maldives has also taken up a project of geo-engineering on a new island named Hulhumalé and calls it as "City of Hope".[40]

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[36] Mubashar Hasan, "The international politics of Bangladeshi 'boat people'", East Asia Forum, 2015, Available at:
https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/09/12/the-international-politics-of-bangladeshi-boat-people/, accessed on October 16, 2020; Mubashar Hasan, "Bangladeshi 'Boat People': Context, Drivers and Policy Implications", South Asia Research, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728018814632.

[37] Brahma Chellaney,"Indian Ocean maritime security: energy, environmental and climate challenges", Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 6:2, 2010, 155-168, DOI: 10.1080/19480881.2010.536662.

[38] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Climate Hot Map: Republic of Maldives", 2011, Available at: https://www.climatehotmap.org/global-warming-locations/republic-of-maldives.html, accessed on October 17, 2020.

[39] Reuters, "We can't wait: Maldives seek funds as sea levels rise", 2020, Available at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1614751/business-economy, accessed on October 17, 2020.

[40] Norman Miller, "A new island of hope rising from the Indian Ocean", BBC.com, 2020, Available at: http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20200909-a-new-island-of-hope-rising-from-the-indian-ocean, accessed on October 17, 2020.

Bangladesh is also a climate-vulnerable country in the Bay of Bengal region. Two-thirds of the country is only 5 meters above the sea level rise. The latest projection says that if there is 50 cm rise by 2050, 11% of the land might be under water. In fact, a latest research predicts that the level of sea level rise could be twice more rapid than previous researches predicted, where the "coastal people will be the main victim of the consequences. Rise of saline water, internal migration and destruction of Sundarbans are the result of such changes in sea level".[41] The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina wrote to the international community that we do not have time to ponder but it is time to action as "One third of my country has just been under water".[42] She also reminded the multifaceted implications of environmental threats which leads to not only sea level rise but also flood and other natural disasters. In this connection, one need not forget that the Bay of Bengal is a cyclone-prone region. Dhaka has emerged as a 'Disaster Capital' of the world in terms of showing tremendous resilience as well as inventing indigenous capacity to deal with disasters. The climate change leading to changing pattern of waterfall contributing to either drought or floods in the region is having a long terms impact on the livelihood of the people that has created potentials to bilateral conflicts in the region.[43]

Ocean pollution and depleting marine resources is another area of concern and potential conflicts in the region.[44] While coastal fish resources are being depleted in an enormous rate due to overfishing and unsustainable fishing,[45] it has also led rise to conflict over fishing into another state's maritime zone, e.g.

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[41] The Business Standard, "Sea levels in Bangladesh could rise twice as much as predicted", January 7, 2020, Available at:
https://tbsnews.net/environment/sea-level-estimated-rise-twice-much-predicted, accessed on October 17, 2020.

[42] Sheikh Hasina (2020), Ibid.

[43] Simi Mehta & Vikash Kumar, "Perils of climate change in the Bay of Bengal: India–Bangladesh in perspective", Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 2019, DOI: 10.1080/19480881.2019.1649512.

[44] Towhida Rashid, Sirajul Hoque, Sharmin Akter , "Pollution in the Bay of Bengal: Impact on Marine Ecosystem", Open Journal of Marine Science, 5, 2015, pp. 55-63.

[45] Amitav Ghosh and Aaron Savio Lobo, "Bay of Bengal: depleted fish stocks and huge dead zone signal tipping point", The Guardian, January 31, 2017, Available at:
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/31/bay-bengal-depleted-fish-stocks-pollution-climate-change-migration, accessed on October 17, 2020.

Myanmar's fishing boats being caught in Bangladesh's maritime waters. Not only that, the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal lack not only deep sea ports but also deep sea fishing capability.[46] For instance, while Bangladesh can legally catch fishes up to 660 kilometers into the Bay of Bengal its reach is only till 60 kilometers.[47] Here lies the strength of the region, which other maritime regions lack. If deep sea fishing capabilities can be developed, these can be potential sources of financial gains for the countries of the region, where deep sea resources are depleting in an alarming rate in other regions.

Cooperative Mechanisms in the Bay of Bengal

Ocean resources are governed by the principle of mare liberum (free seas for everyone) as it is one of the four global commons.[48] The NTS threats require cooperation of all for they transcend political boundary but they are interwoven in the manner states deal with and address them internally. A number of such challenges would be—symmetry in asymmetry—that is the differences in administrative systems, governance mechanisms, security outlook, among other things. Another area that is often overlooked while addressing and resolving NTS threats is the role of non-state actors and their abilities to reach out to communities and find out state of affairs that state actors may not be able to do that. Certainly, non-state actors like terrorists and pirates jeopardize the security of the Bay of Bengal region; and similarly, non-state actors can work in obtaining and disseminating information regarding the coastal areas by reaching out to the locals. This is locals talking about their issues that urban-centered governance system may not be able to penetrate and identify.

Regional arrangements under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) are actively involved in addressing issues that directly emerge and impact upon the NTS threats in the Bay of Bengal Region. However, the national interest and priorities often work in the way of developing

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[46] Md Sajib Hossain and Nahin Mahfuz Seam, "Realising the untapped potential of marine fisheries resources of Bangladesh", The Business Standard, September 28, 2020, Available at: https://tbsnews.net/thoughts/realising-untapped-potential-marine-fisheries-resources-bangladesh-138610, accessed on November 1, 2020.

[47] The Daily Star, "Deep-sea resources largely untapped", December 10, 2017.

[48] Captain Deepak Singhal, "Cooperative Mechanisms to Address Non-Traditional Maritime Security Threats in the Indian Ocean Region", Naval War College Journal, 2015, pp. 151-161.

regional or even bilateral initiatives to confront such challenges. There are a few other initiatives such as the Colombo Declaration, the Galle Dialogue and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) that convenes relevant stakeholders and particularly deals with strategic and NTS challenges of the region. While we are dealing with complex interdependence and threats emanating from non-traditional areas, we need to recognize that we are not only talking about 'security' but also 'defense' and 'safety' of the people and the state alike. This certainly raises new question such as "who the state is for?" therefore, we need imagination as well as a blend of the both preventive and responsive measures. A prudent policy must involve a 'whole-of-government' approach at the national level and coordination with neighbors at the international level.

Concluding Observations: We are all in the same boat, Brother!

The aim of this article is to raise awareness of the NTS threats and the need for cooperation among state actors. The article revisits the changing concepts of security and emphasizes that the definition of security is contextual and contingent upon the actor that is defining it. Similarly, it stresses upon how military-centric ideas of security has shifted to non-military areas, the Coronavirus Pandemic is a lucid example of that. In the Bay of Bengal region, a number of such noon-traditional threats exist but often despite being recognized they are not paid enough attention. We often forget that we are all travelling in one boat—called the Earth. Like the boat metaphor, if one passenger digs a hole in his cabin, that affects the security of all in the boat—that is, personal choice, that is irrational but legal, can hardly help us sustain in the same boat. The article, therefore, started off citing two quotes—one of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the other of the Nobel Committee. It ends reminding how the both highlighted the need for cooperation and to act on mitigating global crises through multilateralism.

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