

Commodore Parasurama Naidu Murugesan

Presentation

IFPA-Fletcher Conference

COMMODORE PARASURAMA MURUGESAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. At the outset, I would like to thank the organizers for this opportunity. We all have realized that the maritime security is a global puzzle. We are not sure whether this puzzle is made of 100 pieces or 120 pieces or 150 pieces. But what is important is that all the pieces will have to be put in place, to solve the puzzle. To solve such a complex one, you need to identify certain pivotal pieces, which have very clear contours, around which you can build the adjoining pieces, and progress towards solving the whole puzzle.

My emphasis here will be to state that the Indian navy is one of such pivotal pieces, which has got very clear contours, and would contribute towards solving the global puzzle. So, when I say contours, what are they? They are the roles and missions; capabilities and the past history of performing its tasks. How will these attributes (the contours of Indian Navy) unite the adjoining pieces and contribute to solve the whole puzzle?

Why the Indian navy is doing what it is doing today? It is because of its national interests, specifically, the maritime interests of India. So when I say maritime interests of India, what are they?

India has a vast coastline, more than 7,500 kilometers. On the east, it has got 575 islands, at a distance of 750 nautical miles. On the west, India has got more than thirty islands, at a distance of 150 nautical miles. What does it mean? tremendous challenge in terms of security for the coastline. If you all would have read it, or heard about it, in 1993, there were Mumbai blasts; the Bombay Stock Exchange, many other financial institutions, and economic targets were targeted by the terrorists with bomb blasts. Many lives were lost. And a lot of property was destroyed. It took many months and years to get back to the

original status of operation. On investigation, it came to light, that the RDX explosives, which, was used for the blast, came from the sea route. From that day onwards, on the west coast of India, the Indian navy, the coast guard, many other maritime security agencies, have commenced an operation which is continuing for the last fourteen years, non-stop.

A similar operation is going on for more than twenty years on the east coast, between Sri Lanka and India. A substantial amount of Indian navy's smaller patrol craft are deployed for more than twenty years in patrolling these waters to contain the terrorist activities and illegal movement. These are the challenges posed by the vast coastline. When I said about the islands, those numerous islands, many of them do not have any people living there. The danger is, some of the unscrupulous elements could use such islands for their forward-base activities, and do illegal activities if adequate surveillance is not maintained to know what is going on in those islands; this is a challenging task for the Indian navy.

The next one is the EEZ. We all realize the importance of EEZ. India has more than two million square kilometers of EEZ. This EEZ is going to become 2.5 million square kilometers when the UN delineates it up to the continental shelf, which is going to happen in the next couple of years. Due to the enormous amount of resources contained in the EEZ, we want to know who is exploiting illegally and prevent it. The scarce resources have to be saved for India's use. The task is given to the Indian navy, as well as the coast guard.

Next, India has thirteen major ports through which the trade is taking place, and the trade is growing at the rate of 20 to 25 percent, annually. Just seven or eight years ago, our two-way trade was less than 50 billion dollars. And today it is 350 billion dollars annum. And it is growing at the rate of 20 percent that we have said. So, in the next four or five years, this 350 billion is going to become 700 billion dollars. It is going to double in every five years, or less. So this volume of trade is going to bring in more and more number of ships. The traffic is going to increase close to the coast. In addition to the thirteen major ports, we have 185 minor ports. And big business houses realizing the

opportunity for increased trade; are making investment on these minor ports, and converting them into major ports by investing millions of dollars. It is already happening all over the country. This development is going to further increase the maritime traffic close to our country.

Next maritime interest is the sea-lanes of communication. The sea-lanes of communication are the one that is taking across 97 percent of India's trade. We have hardly any opportunity for the trade across the land, and whatever is carried by air is very minimal. The 97 percent of the country's trade is by oceans, and hence we want these trade lines to be kept open at all times. So, it is one of the important tasks given to the navy. And we have the stake to ensure that the sea-lanes of communications are secure. We develop concepts and train during the peacetime exercises, with the ultimate objective of keeping the sea-lanes of communication open when the time comes.

The energy security is another aspect, which is one of our national interests. This is the way (as shown on the slide) the energy flows from Persian Gulf, and more than one hundred thousand ships transit the Indian Ocean each year, out of which seventy thousand ships pass through Malacca Straits. When we convert it to time, which means, in about every seven to eight minutes, a ship is passing through the Malacca Straits from Indian Ocean. Indian Navy could play an important role in the interrupted flow of their energy required for India as well as the global engine.

On the off-shore oil production, 30 percent of the Indian requirement of oil is produced indigenously, and 90 percent of that is from the sea. So we have a responsibility to make sure that this oil production goes on uninterruptedly.

These were some of the important maritime interests of India. And what are the challenges we face against our national interests, which I just mentioned? In the last two days, you heard from many speakers, highlighting the kind of terrorist activities, illegal crimes which are going on in the Indian Ocean region. So, it is the attack on the U. S. S. Cole, and the Limburg, attack on the cruise liner have happened in this region. The drug

trafficking, gun running such other maritime crime take place in this region. So these are the challenges, which the Indian navy considers, constantly in its day-to-day business, to make sure that we have a plan to implement when the need arises.

I spoke about the capability of the navy as one of the attributes to be a pivotal piece. The Indian navy has about 140 ships; but we are constantly striving to modernize them, and our government has been very conscious about this. The second aircraft carrier bought by us is under refit, should be joining the fleet end of next year. The third indigenous carrier, we have already commenced building in Cochin. It should be ready in five to six years timeline.

Construction of three more destroyers have begun. These are the seven thousand ton destroyer. So these are the Project 17 ships - five thousand ton frigates, three of them are already under construction. They should be joining our fleet next year, onwards. The plans are afoot for seven more of the same class to be built under a joint venture. ASW corvettes and patrol vessels also under consideration; and we are also building six scorpion submarines, the construction already begun in Mumbai. So all these, new assets, are going to replace the older ones which we already have, and make the navy more modern.

When I said, the track record as one of the attributes, the history of Indian navy, which is one of the contours to be a pivotal piece, we are always conscious of cooperation in the region, in our day-to-day operations. At the post-9/11 situation, when the high-value assets of United States had to cross Malacca Straits, there was a cooperation between the Indian navy and U. S. navy for the escort missions. In those six months, we did about twenty-four such escort missions across the Malacca Straits.

As Admiral Doran has highlighted, the tsunami was the most important experience which we had in terms of cooperation between the U. S. navy and the Indian navy. Just to show you a few slides: this was the extent of damage which we had in India itself. On that day, we had a loss of twenty-five thousand lives, and more than forty thousand people were

affected. These are the kinds of destruction that we had in our own ports. When all these were going on at home, we mobilized our navy, and ships were sent to neighboring countries, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia. Thirty ships, forty helicopters, eight fixed-wing aircraft, and more than 7,000 people were mobilized in that first 24 hours, to move away from Indian ports and proceed towards the affected areas to provide relief. These are some of the photographs that we took from Sri Lanka, when we went there. These are the two ships, which went to Indonesia. We also joined the USNS Mercy in her mission, which was held last year, one year after the tsunami's impact. We sent some doctors and medical personnel. They sailed onboard Mercy, and provided treatment to the people in various SE Asian countries.

So, as Admiral Doran said, bi-lateral exercise is an important tool, which we always realized; to train together and make the standard operating procedures to respond effectively when the need comes. And we are training with the U. S. navy and other major navies, which operate in this region constantly at regular intervals.

In addition, we have a regional forum, where we invite the regional navies to come, once a year, and then a similar conference like this, interact professionally and socially, and carry out an exercise, so that we know, by face, who are the counterparts, so that we can talk to them informally, formally, and then respond when there is a need.

So I would like to conclude by showing one last slide, because we all agree that the economic center of gravity has shifted from Europe to Asia, and hence the importance of the Indian Ocean has become that much more important, so this quote is very apt.

Thank you very much.