

THE SAD STATE OF MARITIME BLINDNESS

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The consuming public, and by extension their governments, are generally oblivious to the degree to which they depend on the oceans as a major transportation superhighway, a source of food and energy and strategic resource. Consumers and manufacturers are unconcerned that 90 per cent of the world's trade is conducted by the international shipping industry. The oceanic transportation industry has transformed the industrialized world into a "just-in-time" manufacturing zone, in which "our warehouses now float," as Canada's Rear-Admiral David Gardam, commander of the Royal Canadian Navy's Atlantic Fleet, observed.

The public's blasé expectation that what we want will be available when we want it without being mindful of how it arrives at the table, store shelf or the assembly shop floor has been loosely called maritime blindness. It also describes the lack of awareness about strategic and security issues associated with international use of the ocean commons.

About one million mariners are employed in 50,000 merchant ships registered in more than 150 nations. New Zealand's Vero Marine Insurance estimates that between five and six million sea containers are in transit at any given time.

Freedom of the seas is guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, which comprises, *inter alia*, freedom of navigation, overflight, fishing and freedom of scientific research.

This constitutes *de facto* authorization for nations to exercise these freedoms, to use the ocean commons for commerce, trade, fishing, transportation and recreation. But navies, coast guards and law enforcement agencies that enforce these provisions, do so invisibly. Only occasionally and with the cooperation of the media can the public learn of our reliance on the world's oceans. The Interagency Round Table of International Shipping Associations cautions that with any significant disruption to maritime commerce, "Half the world would starve and the other half would freeze."

What are the issues that consumers, manufacturers and governments are missing?

Canadian public policy analyst Tim Lynch enumerates a series of *hot buttons* that emanate from our growing reliance on maritime trade and commerce:

Human smuggling and trafficking

With illegal profits from US \$7 to 12 billion per year from human smuggling and trafficking and \$32 billion from the sexual servi-

tude of women and children, there are many unscrupulous predators who take advantage of the disadvantaged for personal profit. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), while maritime smuggling of migrants is a small proportion of the total number of migrants smuggled worldwide, it accounts for the highest number of deaths among smuggled migrants.

UNODC notes that an estimated 1,000 lose their lives each year. The International Catholic Migration Commission puts the number higher, reporting that 2,000 people lost their lives in the first months of 2011, including 61 people who died of dehydration and starvation on board a boat in the Mediterranean Sea.

Energy security

Maritime oil drilling operations and bulk carriers that carry petrochemical resources to user nations need to be protected to ensure that they arrive and not suffer any mishap along the way. Another aspect of energy security is Nigeria's experience, losing \$7 billion to oil theft from maritime drilling platforms. And recently there was another threat emanating from Iran, saying if it had to, it could block the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz — a

waterway that borders that country and connects to the Persian Gulf and channels almost 20 percent of the world's oil.

In January 2012, Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs issued a briefing paper, Maritime Choke Points and the Global Energy System, in which it warned that "the global energy system is vulnerable to disruption at key maritime choke points such as the Straits of Malacca, Bab Al-Mandab, the Suez Canal, the Turkish Straits and the Strait of Hormuz." The international community, it warned, must establish and maintain legal and political measures to ensure the security of these choke points and that this "ultimately rests . . . on the willingness and capacity of interested members of the international community to enforce it if necessary."

Port security

Eighty per cent of global trade passes through the world's 4,000 ports, making them the potential targets for illegal activity and terrorism.

Royal Navy Commodore Steve Chick explained to this writer, "When you see the significant volume of trade, you see some of these container vessels, gas carriers and car carriers that are plying their way backwards and forwards between our countries, it is very easy

regions under dispute. Portions of the Arctic are being subjected to claims by the United States, Russia, Norway, Denmark and Canada; and, we are facing the possibility of conflict over the claims to the small island archipelago which Japan calls Senkaku and China calls Diaoyu.

Included in the many other territorial claims with a maritime association that could spark conflict are: Mauritius and Seychelles claim to the Chagos Islands; Spain and Morocco both claim Perejil Island, which led to an armed incident between the two countries in 2002; and Somalia and Yemen claim the Socotran Archipelago.

Maritime terrorism

Terrorism has a maritime component with a legacy that goes back to October 7, 1985, when four Palestinian Liberation Front members hijacked the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* off the Egyptian coast. Singling out 69-year old retired American businessman Leon Klinghoffer, they shot him and threw his body overboard.

An article in the respected journal, *The Economist* (11 October 2002) disclosed that an Egyptian, suspected of being an al-Qaeda terrorist, was discovered hiding in a sea container in the Italian port of Gioia Tauro. Had he not been discovered, his voyage would have taken him to Halifax, NS.

Two terrorists believed to be responsible for the bombing of the USS Cole masterminded the 7 October 2002 bombing of the French supertanker *Limburg*. The bombing came the day before the first anniversary of the U.S.-led war against the Taliban and the al-Qaeda terror network in Afghanistan.

The 27 February 2004 bombing of SuperFerry 14 off the Philippine coast destroyed the ship and killed 116 people, including 15 children. Two years later, Philippine authorities arrested three suspected Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members attempting to carry improvised bombs aboard SuperFerry 3, docked in Parang town in Maguindanao.

And added to this list are:

Drug smuggling

A United Nations report estimated the global illegal drug trade at US\$321.6 billion in 2003, against a global GDP of US\$36 trillion. Since the 1980s, maritime traffickers of cocaine, who transport over 80 percent of the cocaine for the United States market, have been remarkably and successfully innovative at evading detection. The private aircraft of the 1980s were replaced by "go-fast" boats in late 1990s that could carry approximately 2,000 kilograms of cocaine. High speed fiberglass boats traveling up to 130 kilometres per hour were faster than the vessels of enforcement authorities. At about \$25,000, the boats were cheaper and more easily disposed than airplanes.

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to conceal something. That's why we need robust port security facilities and cargo loaded in a more secure manner." Cmdre Chick's remarks were made prior to NATO's Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Centre of Excellence (CJOS COE) and the Centre of Excellence for Operations in Confined and Shallow Waters (COE CSW) Maritime Security Conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia last June.

The highly respected magazine, *The Economist*, warned in 2002 that any container aboard any carrier ship could deliver "an instrument of death."

Territorial claims

Despite the general belief that all land has been allocated to the various nations since the Treaty of Westphalia, there are hundreds of re-





A boarding team from the Royal Thai Navy's HTMS Similan investigates a skiff suspected of being involved in an attempted pirate attack on Liberian-flagged merchant vessel MV Hellepont Protector in the Gulf of Aden Oct. 28, 2010. Hellepont Protector evaded the skiff. (Combined Maritime Forces photo/Released)

Illegal migration

The arrival in Vancouver of 76 Sri Lankan Tamil men aboard *The Ocean Lady* in October 2009 underscored the extent to which impoverished people will go to improve their lives, and the extent to which unscrupulous people will exploit them for profit. There are estimates of between five million and fifteen million illegal residents in the United States; illegal migrants have landed on both of Canada's coasts, and the potential to land illegal migrants in Canada's warming north is increasing.

There are at least 50,000 illegal workers estimated to be in Australia, but a 2010 Australian Government report suggested it could be as many as 100,000. Thousands of illegal African migrants make the trek across the Mediter-

anean Ocean to Italy. However, the target of choice for illegal migration is the United States, viewed worldwide as the most desirable destination for people seeking to improve their circumstances.

In 2011, while there were 160 incidents of piracy off the Somali coast, there were 13 in the South China Sea, 33 in Benin, 37 in the Gulf of Aden, 46 in Indonesia 16 in Malaysia and 39 in the Red Sea, totalling eleven more than were in Somali waters.

Catherine Dauvergne of the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Law sets the worldwide number of 'illegals' at a minimum of 20 million. As the financial and employment situations continue to worsen for many of migrants' target nations, the receptions they

Maritime piracy

receive can be expected to be increasingly hostile and laws regarding illegal residents more hardened.

Events off the Somali coast have raised the profile of piracy and attracted the world's attention. But the problem isn't exclusively Somali. There have been reports of piracy in the Caribbean as well. Dr. Manoj Gupta, a retired Indian Navy submarine commander with 22 years of naval service and currently a member of the Australian Defence Science and Technology Organisation, recognizes piracy as a major concern. He warns that Somalia-based piracy has grown from its birthplace in the littoral waters off Haradeere to the waters of the United Arab Republic to the north, northern Mozambique to the south and eastward to India's Gujarat peninsula.

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New Trade Customers

In a speech at the East-West Center, Washington, D.C., Michael Wesley, former Executive Director of Australia's Lowy Institute for International Policy, explained that while the east Asia's trade with North America grew by 3¼ times between 1998 and 2008, its trade with south east, south and West Asia grew by

6¼ times over the same. This pan-Asian trend is accelerating; while Indo-Pacific trade grew by 240% in the 1990s, it grew by 280% in the decades that followed.

The growth of industry in India and China is creating increased competition and accelerating price wars for resources, witnessed by the sharp increases at the gas pump.

The new industrial and manufacturing models have created new oceanic trade corridors making the Indian Ocean, with its 33 na-

tions and its maritime choke points — straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok — increasingly critical gateways for energy, manufactured goods and produce between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

The Strait of Hormuz is another narrow entranceway, with the United Arab Republic's peninsula jutting between the Iranian headlands. This makes the strait particularly vulnerable to political polemics between Iran and customers for the oil leaving the Persian Gulf.

Post-modern hyper-globalization has elevated the Indian Ocean from being merely a series of shipping arteries to an important centre for the flow of materials and the development of investment relationships among the Pacific Rim nations as well as the north Atlantic Rim.

Communicating maritime blindness

In effect, consumer and corporate sectors are as oblivious to the maritime sector as they are to the automotive sector and the agricultural sectors, until they are made aware of the importance of those commodities by principals within those communities, or by the absence of the very commodities they want and need.

By virtue of their blue-water operational jurisdictions, navies have always been away from the public eye and distant from the public consciousness, earning the moniker "Silent Service". The Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), a non-profit, non-partisan think tank, describes U.S. efforts to address this "blindspot" in the public knowledge of the importance of the global ocean commons, by conducting a series of Fleet Weeks across the country to educate Americans, by "bringing exposure to the sea services even in those corners of the country far from a sea."

The 16th century Dutch Renaissance humanist, Desiderius Erasmus opined, "Concealed talent brings no reputation." The world's "Silent Services" need to develop and implement programs to educate their citizens about the importance of the seas as marine super-highways, and the roles and missions of their navies and coast guards in protecting the interests of their nations on the ocean commons and in littoral waters. ■

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