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## **Turmoil around littoral states of Indian Ocean: Sea lanes at Risk**

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### **Abstract**

The ocean provides immense opportunities for oil and mineral extraction that can be used to generate revenue by exporting them or they can easily fulfil all the energy needs of the states. Many oil deposits are found near the shores because all the biogenic materials that are either thrown or fall down any how in the sea get transformed into fossil fuels after a certain period of time. The corals and other maritime species that die deep into the sea becomes a source of fossil fuel after thousand or even more years. Indian Ocean which is sandwiched between Atlantic and Pacific is no doubt lifeline for the littoral states and some of the extra-regional states but turmoil around the coasts basically western Indian Ocean has put the Sea Lanes at greater risk that need to be protected. The ongoing rivalry between various groups and east versus west war has made the conditions more critical all around. The article ponders the ways and reasons of Sea Lanes at risk.

**Keywords:** Indian Ocean, Sea Lanes, Unites States of America, Oil Politics, Terrorism

### **Introduction**

The significant littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) contain one-third of the world's population, 25 percent of its landmass and about 40 percent of the world oil and gas reserves. Being locus of the important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) the region is home to most of the world's population, rising powers like China and India. It is situated south to the Asia and eastern side of Africa due to this its coast cherish a large ethnic and religious diversity and diversity brings conflict if it's not balanced.

Menace of terrorism eating world peace and along with time the thirst of blood is increasing, reason is debated by the community of academicians and thinkers. Finally media decide the form of terrorism and causes behind it. The ISIS, Al-Queda, Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Indonesian Mujahidin Council, Taliban, Sipah Sahaba, Hizbul Mujahidin and Lashker-e-Jhangvi etc. are very recognized terror organization worldwide. A blast or gunfire kills innocents in a mob that might anyone. War against Americanization can be fought in many more ways by the people who oppose western values, even many organization are fighting for preservation of their culture peacefully and democratically.

The fight by the extremist group is not one-dimensional now it's multidimensional, beginning from the region and land now it has reached to culture, education, resources, most prominently oil, or many other factors that affect the interest of a particular sect. Scholars debate that terrorism can't be linked to religion, a very true statement but it can be completely linked with a sub-sect of society that is ideologically blind and uneducated. The orthodox fundamentalist never wants society to move towards liberalism because of their inherent interest. Scott Atran studying suicide terrorism at NATO gives mental instability, poverty, and feelings of humiliation basic reasons that force a person to be in terror industry. Lastly crime of a person victimize his family, society and people where some innocents are molested by the security forces unknowingly, it radicalizes them further against the prevailing government. Increase in the number of Jihadists and militancy in Kashmir valley after the death of a Kashmiri youth may be attributed to this cause.

### **War against Americanization**

Muslims has largest population after the Christians in the world. Industrial revolution first came to Christian world and hence they colonized a larger part of the world including India,

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Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and many other Asian and African countries, where they completely looted the local resources, spread Christianity through academics and established churches. They were opposed that time also because the fundamentalist section of society was completely against any kind of cultural contamination, but that time opposite oppressed section did not have weapons to oppose. "Now they have everything to oppose" says the radicalised fundamentalist section. Any form of cultural blending is intolerant as it brings voices against mosques and religion. Christians improved themselves with time but conservative Muslim community could not because of poverty and backwardness in a larger part of West Asia and Africa. The war against Americanization is war against a community which has history of colonization and oppression which is still continue in varied form in different states till now. "The 9/11 attacks were consequence of longer interference of USA in the Arabian oil politics" claim scholars from the Middle East. But economic oppression can't be justified with the suicide bombers and jihadist that kill innocents in a mob. "Lone Wolf" attacks had killed many lives in 2015 in USA, France and many other countries. Firing in a gay club of USA happened just because the person understood it against their values. There had always been cultural conflict throughout the history but its manifestation by the radicalised groups had taken a large number of lives. Whole world is facing array of migration, a curse, from Western Asia which has become a hell for the people living under the threat. Who is responsible? Of course Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). If it is manifestation against westernization then this approach is completely inhuman and desolator. ISIS, Boko- Haram, Al-Qaida, Al-Shabab and many more extremist groups are active in various regions from Asia, Europe to Africa. The Muslims are itself victim of their own people who are hard lined with religion.

One of the chapters of the book "*Jihad in the Arabian Sea*" entitled "War at Sea" well describes the ongoing conspiracies happening in the sea and littoral states, it also explains great powers intervention in the region and its reactionary action in the form of Jihad from the Islamic world. The author raises their concern over the sea piracy, smuggling, human trafficking, drugs and arms shipping. Nights on the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea belong to the speedboats of smugglers and their contraband of drugs, cigarettes, and small arms. Arms are mostly shipped on a large scale from Yemen to Somalia, and some are smuggled back into Yemen to supply local insurgents. There is also human trafficking going the other way: Sudanese, Ethiopians, and Somalis seeking reprieve from poverty and the violence from Horn of the Africa cross the strait at night, looking to reach Yemen. Many of them are captured by the army, and many get killed by the various incidents in the sea (Camille Pecastaing, 2011)<sup>[9]</sup>.

### **Conflict Moving from Littoral States to Indian Ocean**

The conflict was earlier bounded within a region but now it has turned as a global conflict. The conflict between Houthi's and Yemen government seems like tussle of Shia versus Sunni Muslims. Though, both groups are politically influenced, being utilized by neighbouring powerful states as puppets for their interest. Iran and Saudi Arabia are utilizing its internal differences as a political tool for their long term goals. Both give threat of blocking the SLOCs of

Arabian Sea, hence want to control or influence Yemen strategically. The USA is also much involved in this diversity conflict for its energy security. Somalia is a Muslim dominated state but poverty prevailing their is a major factor for their involvement in crimes and piracy. The Islamist extremist forces are very strongly rooted in the remote areas and they operate anti-west missions forcefully. They extremist groups like Al-Shabab and Al-Qaida are facing a phobia of destroying Islamist culture because of Western values and education; due to this, they are fighting their own people who claim to be progressive and supportive of western education. A continuous hatred for other religion and culture is a core reason of the instability of the Somalian, Yemeni and Pakistani extremist population. Though a larger common population want to live peacefully but the armed conflict against alien culture is eating the peace. The rising conflict between the two largest religious groups, Christianity and Islam, might initiate an upheaval in sandwiched Arabian Sea if not handled carefully and peacefully. The unrest has long term effects and Anti-western fronts like ISIS, Al-Shabab and Al-Qaida are dangerously active in Gulf Region and Central Asia that might harm whole humanity. The continuous deployment of Combined Task Forces (CTF), PLA Navy and many other security forces in the Arabian Sea had turned it highly militarized, many littoral countries perceive it harmful and its retaliation may outbreak a war against west due to accumulated hatred inside people here. That might begin from the sea after a time, though smaller attacks happen usually.

Sultanate of Oman is also religiously Islamic dominated country but it is less chaotic than other states of the region. Somalia is part of Horn of Africa that has always been famous for piracy occurring on the coast because the countries situated are highly suffering from poverty and underdevelopment. The shipping route through Aden Gulf, Bab-al Mandeb and the Red Sea makes the country a major player in international resource trade and supply politics but being a poor, unstable and underdeveloped state it's not having the capacity to encash the advantage of strategic location. Like Yemen, it has been facing a civil war that first broke out in 1991 after the failure of Mohamed Barre's government. The civil war that broke out in 1991 continued up to 2012, and in 2012 a stable federal government was formed. Between this period of about 20 years many radical Islamist organization and some terrorist organization operated in the Somalia that made its condition even worse. Al-Shabab is one of such radical groups that still create lots of violence in the state. Except it Islamic Courts Union, Oromo Liberation Front, Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, Ras Comboni Brigades, Jabhatul Islamia and Musakar Anole are the major groups that worked inside Somalia between 2006 and 2009. Presently Al-Qaeda is notoriously active in various anti human and anti-government activities with Al-Shabaab in Horn of Africa. Foreign Mujahedeen, Hizbul Islam, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant are other major insurgent groups that are active in the region. The reason seems nothing but fundamentalism. The various insurgents groups claim that their war is against the western hegemony and cultural infiltration, that at some shorts seems true but adopting armed rebel as a method against any kind of oppression brings only instability, destruction and death. The government established after 2012 is trying to retain possible stability. The all clash or

war is for geopolitical control over the territory. These clashes end any possibility of development and growth over the land area and inside the sea. Though the Somalian coast is having immense opportunities but they need to be grabbed by the government to develop the region. Somalian instability is a curse for Indian Ocean trade and peace and no doubt instability of the state making shores and seas unstable. Sea piracy, human trafficking and arms trafficking are common activities visible in the sea. After a time there might be targeted attacks to the ships and cargoes belonging to Europe and USA.

The conditions along the Arabian Sea coast are worse and uncontrolled because of political intervention of some of the strong hinterland states and some outsiders. Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia have always been involved in the politics of Oman, Yemen and sometimes in Pakistan. Houthi rebels took Yemeni capital Sanaa under their control, and their thirst for territorial control is increasing. A report by Aljazeera published on 4 January 2015 entitled "Yemen Report Highlights Turmoil's Human Cost" reveals the death of around 7000 people in 2014 only that included 1200 civilians. It also disclosed that Shia Houthi fighters have taken control over about 70 percent of army's capabilities (report taken from Abaad Centre for Strategic Studies). The death in 2014 crossed about three times the total deaths in 2011 when the current turmoil began. The extent of instability has made it impossible for Yemen to set a long-term strategy for the sea lane in the Arabian Sea. Since 2011 the war is on, and Yemen seems not moving towards any form of solution. A report disclosed that the US seized an illicit shipment of arms, originated from the state of Iran that was being transferred to Houthi rebels in Yemen. The arms included rocket-propelled grenade launchers and machine guns. The same news report writes that French Navy Destroyer FS Provence, around eight days earlier, seized another shipment of arms that was carrying around 2,000 AK-47s, 64 Dragunov sniper rifle and nine anti-tank missiles. Saudi Arabia and Yemeni government always blame Iran for providing aid to Houthi insurgents. Iran is a Shia dominated country, having around 90 to 95 percent of Shia in its population which is around 40 percent of total world population of Shiites. Because of this Iran supports the rebel activities of Yemen and Houthi insurgents want to rule their land in Yemen. One of the articles published in BBC News writes, the conflict between elected Yemeni government and Houthis as a regional power struggle defacto between the Saudi Arabia (Sunni rule) and Iran (Shia ruling), both share longer borders with Yemen. The Arabian Gulf states back President Hadi and accuse Iran as a provider of financial and military backing to Houthis. Article articulates Houthi takeover of Bab al Mandeb is major fear within Saudi Arabia and Egypt, it would intimidate free oil transit through the Strait. Yemen is strategically very significant because of Bab-al-Mandeb Strait which is connected to the Red Sea and Aden Gulf from where oil ships and cargoes pass heavily. All this rivalry is presented along oceans where interests conflict. These provoke local population after they feel being exploited.

Indo-Pak rivalry is sometimes termed as a Hindu-Muslim rivalry because of the dominance of Hindus in India and Muslims in Pakistan, though the rivalry is more political than social. The both democracies are not mature enough to solve their problems peacefully. They compete and conflict

is continuing since 1947 between Hindu dominance and Muslim dominance or we can say between two cultures. Numerous thinkers write Pakistan as a hub of Islamist extremism which is very dangerous for South Asian Peace. Truly such incidents happened in past within Pakistan where some of the school children's were killed brutally. Malala Yousufzai, a young girl, was attacked by some extremist because she was approaching for Western Education against their values. The anger is deep rooted and no one knows the remedy. The Baloch and Pakhtoons are killed brutally in Balochistan due to their different culture and demand of separate land for them. Now China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has brought has brought China in the Arabian Sea, thus in Indian Ocean, completely and India is very concerned about it. India had agreement with Iran to develop Chabahar Port to counter Chinese CPEC.

### **Great Power Intervention as a Problem**

Indian Ocean (IO) is critical to energy security and food security and global trade. Littoral states, Island and hinterland states exploit the available resources which are showing an accelerating trend with the introduction of ultra-modern technologies. The IO is a stage for the pursuit of global strategic and regional military and security interests. The book "Indian Ocean: A Sea of Uncertainty" writes it as a region where conflict and instability can quickly arise because of religious diversity, internal conflicts, issues of resource and energy security and changing national interest and the imprecise border delineations. The situation is being clear along with time and now an overall wave to keep military or navy in IOR is visible. Excessive Militarization has become a big cause of growing unrest and conflict in the ocean. In this regard the western Indian Ocean is mainly noticeable, major powers of the world seemed very active to keep peace in the western Indian Ocean, therefore, their naval armed forces circumambulate the Arabian Sea and its South. Military deployment is multipurpose, other motives behind this large navy deployment is rare to know. The geopolitics today is trending towards resource geopolitics; real power can be established through resource capture, mainly energy resources and naval expansion. Navies are responsible for proper resource recoupment and power balance, therefore, naval control of Sea Lanes can strengthen the economy and might block rival's energy supply to make them weaker if required. The Islamic world has largest share of oil resource and through the blockade of SLOCs they can any time impact the western interest. So politics of oil capture is also route to terrorism, Muslim world have oil, hence they are entangled in the geopolitics and its anger represents in the form of brutal attacks.

USA, France, Germany, Pakistan, India, China and Australia all have deployed their navies in the Arabian Sea and its linkages. But Chinese strategy of future naval expansion is very purposeful it has displayed its interest in Djibouti through mining operations and agricultural development and training. This Chinese strategic rise or the rise of Chinese influence all over the world, its hold on strategic locations like Djibouti and Gwadar etc. could threaten western powers interest. Djibouti is recently a significant base for the US, French and Japan, main powers operating in the Red Sea and other parts of Arabian Sea near Horn of Africa. Superpowers are present in the Western Indian Ocean to protect their interest separately which has made environment messy and obnoxious. Coastal states are

main sufferers of this mess but they are sustaining bearing everything done by tormentors. Innocent fishermen and many others are killed many times and no one cares. Amidst of continuous tensions and fears the zone has lost its peace. Coastal states are itself involved in this mess, they should think about long term consequences that they might face.

Many times it had been seen that NATO forces and US armed forces operated counter-terrorist missions on land, they stroked drones that killed innocent citizens. Because of these deaths, an anti-west feeling is dominating in the Muslim-dominated states which are continuously represented through protests and sometimes through militant operations. The excessive intervention of external powers in the region is a threat to all the communities and innocent citizens whether it is in Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan or anywhere else, along with internal threats. The internal threats are mainly extremism whether it is Islamism, Hinduism or anything else. The continuous presence of tanks, fleets, vessels and ships along with larger military had polluted the environment of the Indian Ocean. Many fishing spots had been vanished due to it and a large part of biodiversity have been destroyed.

Red Sea connectivity and connections of Persian Gulf are directly linked to the happenings in the Arabian Sea, as they are important sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs), connecting eastern world to western world. Hormuz Strait of the Persian Gulf and Bab-al-Mandeb passage from the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea (Yemen and Socotra) are vital Choke points and critical Part of global energy security because of the transit of a larger volume of oil through their narrow straits. The Persian Gulf area, where 62 percent western world's known oil resources are located, has acquired an immense global strategic interest (Banarjee, 1984). Availability of 56 percent of global oil reserves must be kept in the mind while talking about Arabian Sea or Indian Ocean dynamics, the paradigm of oil politics revolves around it. The Sea trade route carries 40 percent of the global oil supply and noticeable 20 percent LNG to Europe and Asia (Nagmana Zafar 2013) <sup>[13]</sup>.

The sea terrorism is not only limited to western part of the IOR but its effect is clearly visible in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean where South-East Asian Nations like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia etc are located. Terrorism and political violence were the prominent tactics adopted by various groups for the fight against colonial powers in South Asia and South-East Asia but now their targets have changed. Jemaah Islamia linked with Al-Qaeda had been responsible for series of terrorist activities post 9/11, from 2002 Bali bombings and 2003 Marriot Hotel Bombing of Jakarta to bombing of Super Ferry 14 in Southern Philippine (2004) etc. Jakarta had been a continuous target of these attacks that repeated in 2005 and 2009 again, once Australian Embassy was bombed in 2004. Militant and Jihadist sleeper cells are very active that has made the region chaotic. Indonesian Security forces in 2010 discovered a large militant training camp in Aceh that was connected to many Jihadi groups.

Island states are easy to target because they are openly connected to the oceans and easy to infiltrate. Though India is not an island state but it was attacked using sea routes time to time, Mumbai Attacks of 2008 can't be forget which threatened all over the world, taking many innocent lives. The attackers were few Muslim youths, trained in Pakistan and came to India taking a maritime route. South-East

Asian nations are archipelagic in nature and these can be targeted easily if the routes connecting them are not given proper security measures. Indian Ocean connects east and west world through its SLOCs and choke points, Hormuz Strait of the Persian Gulf, Strait of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia, Bab-el-Mandeb passage from the Arabian Sea to Red Sea (Yemen and Socotra), Suez Canal and the Summed Pipeline connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait. If airports can be attacked, why not sea ports, they are easy to attack, attacking a ferry is even easier. "*The Telegraph*"(2015) in an article "*Channel Ferries at Risks from Jihadi Terror attack*" write- Cross-Channel ferries and the Palace of Westminster have been identified as facing an increased risk of terrorist attack in the wake of the atrocities in Paris. It was definitely a perception that could have been true, and Indian Ocean being a larger water body and diverse littoral states needs more attention and security.

### Conclusion

Whole world is facing curse of extremism that was earlier targetting the important cities but if the seas are neglected the consequences may even worse because SLOCs are backbones of trade and economy. Radicalised groups started targeting the sea ferries and corgoes because access to them is comparatively easier. Littoral countries of Indian Ocean are religiously very diverse and most of them are facing curse of extremist terrorism, they have seen many attacks from Pakistan, Bnagladesh, India, Somalia, Turkey to Indonsia. Terrorist are adopting different patterns for attacks, from plane hijacking, blast, suicide bombing to gun firing or lone wolf attacks. Now ferries and sea routes can be new target that can not only terrify people but can impact economy of a nation. Changing ways of war from land to ocean suggest various governments to strengthen maritime boundries as well. SLOCs must be protected through a combine effect, and "sea marshals" shuould be deployed on the corgoes and ferries. Joint petrols and exercises should be done along Malakka Strait, Persian Gulf and Aden Gulf etc. Though maritime terrorist in the form of piracy had been reduced but maritime terrorism from extremism need to be controlled before it flourish all over the Indian Ocean.

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