Study #2003-1/02

THE INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST
THREAT TO MARITIME
TRANSPORTATION
THE INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST THREAT TO MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Executive Summary

Ports present environments for terrorists because of their size, access to land and water, proximity to metropolitan areas and key transport nodes, and importance for international commerce. The tremendous flow of goods transiting through them make it easy to smuggle people, drugs, weapons and other illicit material. Terrorists could therefore target maritime infrastructures or use them in support of their operations.

Attacks against marine targets are attractive because the latter represent key symbols of Western military and economic hegemony (e.g., power projection and the perceived commercial exploitation of the Arabian Sea world).

Al Qaeda has threatened the use of violence anywhere in the world against the United States and its allies, including Canada, specifically, on 12 November 2002, Boudreau issued a public statement which specifically targeted Canada for the first time because of its support for the US. The statement contained a clear warning that civilians will be targeted and attacked in the foreseeable future. That targeting indicates potential threats to Canadian interests nationally and internationally.

Canadian commercial maritime interests can be affected by a broad range of terrorist activities at home, abroad or at sea.
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1. Introduction

The maritime transport sector is designed to be accessible, yet concentrates on passengers and freight flows in ways that can create vulnerabilities for terrorists to exploit. Although only about 20 out of the 5,000 ports worldwide handle the bulk of goods moved internationally, it remains a large sector. With respect to maritime trade, there are several million containers, 7,000 container ships and 5000 container ports worldwide facing a diverse array of threats.

2. The maritime sector is also directly attacked from time to time. Ships have been destroyed and hijacked, as in the cases of the Achille Lauro and the SS Bremen, in the latter case the hijacker killed passengers. Piracy, theft and murder at sea, however, were not frequent. The vulnerability of passengers and vessels to acts of terrorism is nevertheless a significant concern for the international community with the.records of the Achille Lauro was 1985, which followed the highly visible terrorist attack against the \textit{Lexicon} in 1992. This Study examines the international terrorist threat to maritime transportation.

II. Threats to Maritime Transportation

A. Pre-9/11 Situation

3. There have been very few notable maritime terrorism incidents prior to the 1990s. Piracy, theft and murder at sea, however, were frequent. The vulnerability of passengers and vessels to acts of terrorism is a significant concern for the international community with the records of the Achille Lauro was 1985, which followed the highly visible terrorist attack against the \textit{Lexicon} in 1992. This Study examines the international terrorist threat to maritime transportation.

4. These concerns were indeed justified, but geographically limited in scope. By the early 1990s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) Sea Tigers had the capabilities to conduct coordinated land/sea...
attacks on major Sri Lankan naval bases and seize civilian cargo at sea.

Box 1. Significant terrorist attacks against maritime transportation

- On 17 August 1997, Earl Louis Mountbatten of Burma, a highly decorated British military officer and second cousin of Queen Elizabeth, was killed by the Irish Republican Army when his fishing boat, the Shadow V, exploded.

- On 7 October 1983, four Palestinian Liberation Front terrorists seized the Achille Lauro Italian cruise liner in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, taking more than 700 hostages. One US passenger was murdered and the terrorists were allowed safe haven in return for the hostages' freedom. Some of the terrorists were later arrested in Italy when the plane carrying them was forced to land by US fighter aircraft.

- On 22 February 1998, the LTTE attacked a Sri Lankan naval landing craft carrying more than 50 soldiers. Later that year, the LTTE hijacked the MS Wahine, a Panamanian-registered bulk carrier off St. Lucia, killing 53 and wounding 17 crew members.

- On 25 February 2000, Our Lady of Medjugorje was attacked by terrorists near Oznani in the Philippines. Forty people were killed and 50 wounded.

- On 12 October 2000, the USS Cole was blown up by terrorists carrying explosives in a small dingy in Aden, Yemen. Seventeen US Navy sailors were killed and 39 wounded in the attack directed by Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda attack against the USS Cole in October 2000 proved deadly, if unsophisticated. It had followed the declaration made by Osama Bin Laden's World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders in August 1998, in which threats were made against US and Israeli interests, including the intent to disrupt civil aviation and maritime transport.

6. Terrorists, however, not only target ships with the aim of killing their occupants or destroying their contents; they also use them in support of their operations. Small boats and immobile containers on large commercial ships can hide weapons or hazardous materials (including tactical nuclear weapons and illegal fissile material) that can be used by terrorists once they have reached their intended destinations.

B. Post-9/11 Situation

7. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, considerable attention has been devoted by security authorities to measures aimed at preventing such attacks against the maritime sector by Al Qaeda.

A French tanker, the MV Limburg, was severely damaged by an explosion off the coast of Yemen on 6 October 2002.

Footnote: Court testimony indicates that freighters owned by Osama Bin Laden were used to ship the materials necessary for the 1998 terrorist attacks against the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The shipment was picked up by Al Qaeda operatives at the port of Mombasa, Kenya.
10. On 6 October 2002, the MV Limburg, a French-flagged oil tanker carrying 350,000 gallons of crude oil, was attacked eight nautical miles off the coast of the Yemeni port city of Al-Mukalla by a small boat laden with explosives. The attack, which killed one sailor and injured eight, was considered a terrorist action and attributed to AQIS after three propaganda statements ascribed to Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri referring to the attacks in Yemen were aired. On 14 October, the Islamic Army of Aden had claimed that the intended target of the attack was a US frigate.
13. Since 11 September 2001, Al Qaeda threats have caused various national authorities to issue general warnings to the maritime sector. Other terrorist organizations have also continued their maritime terrorist activities. Maritime terrorism incidents and threats noted since 11 September are detailed in Box 2.

Box 2. Maritime Terrorism-related Incidents and Threats Since 11 September 2001
(as reported by the US Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence at http://seapics.anu.edu.au/MISCwars/)

- On 17 January 2003, the Israeli Navy destroyed an explosive-laden raft found floating off the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas claimed that one of its members was killed in the explosion of the raft, which was probably being used to smuggle explosives into Gaza.

- On 13 December 2002, a mystery ship reportedly controlled by the LTTE was spotted 100 km east of Mullaitivu, Sri Lanka, and may have offered asylum to small boats before the crew noticed they were being watched by Indian authorities and began dumping items overboard.

- On 21 November 2002, an Israeli Navy gunboat was damaged by the explosion of a fishing boat it was attempting to clear from waters off Gaza. The Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigade claimed responsibility, saying that two suicide bombers were on the fishing boat.

- In mid-November, British, French and Dutch authorities were on high alert because of unusually specific threats focusing on attempts of a truck packed with explosives to board a roll-on/roll-off ferry. The ferry was not uncommonly the target of an attack and could have been intended as a means of transportation.

- On 1 November 2002, the Sri Lankan Navy intercepted a dinghy carrying six LTTE members. They were armed and had communications equipment on board.

- On 6 October 2002, the M'Linburg, a French-flagged oil tanker carrying 230,000 gallons of crude oil, was attacked eight miles off the coast of the Yemeni port city of Al-Mukallah by a small boat laden with explosives. The attack, which killed one sailor and injured eight, was considered a terrorist act and attributed to Al Qaeda after three propaganda statements signed to Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri referring to the attack in Yemen were aired. A week after the attack, the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) issued threat advisories warning of possible attacks against US corporate interests. The
International Maritime Bureau (IMB) did likewise, but warned of possible terrorist threats to oil tankers and LNG (liquefied natural gas) carriers sailing Middle Eastern, Persian Gulf and Indonesian waters.
In September 2001, the US Navy released an advisory bulletin warning that Al Qaeda was planning attacks against oil tankers transiting the Arabian Gulf and Horn of Africa areas. Although unconfirmed and lacking specific details on timing and location, the threat was expanded immediately because it substantiated previous indications of Al Qaeda’s intent to attack commercial shipping.

On 26 July 2001, MARAD issued an advisory warning of increased threat possibilities to American ships operating in or near the waters of Eritrea, Yemen, Somalia, Indonesia and the Strait of Malacca. There was no specific information on the possible threats.

On 25 June 2002, a terrorist from the November 17 Greek organization was arrested after the bomb he was carrying exploded and injured him. His target was the Princess office of Hellenic Flying Dolphin ferries. According to media sources, the Greek police had warned from November 17 members that the attempted bombing would have been the first in a series of attacks targeting Greek ferries, cruise ships and tourist sites.

On 2 May 2002, German authorities warned that terrorists were planning suicide missions against cruise ships and cross-channel ferries serving France, Great Britain and Germany. They noted, however, that there were considerable doubts as to the validity of the threats.

On 1 May 2002, a LTTE boat allegedly carrying 17 boxes of mortars and six boxes of rocket-propelled grenades was sunk by the Sri Lankan navy.

On 25 September 2001, two merchant vessels were caught in the crossfire between the Sri Lankan Navy and eight LTTE boats.

On 11 September 2001, Al Qaeda had planned to attack a US warship with a freighter packed with explosives, according to a senior Al Qaeda member arrested in 2002. The plan was reportedly abandoned because Al Qaeda believed the plotters were under surveillance.

III. Canadian Implications

14. Ports play a major role in international trade flows. The international nature of Canadian trade makes our ports, which accommodate 82 percent of our trade, an important feature of our economy as well. Canadian commercial maritime interests, therefore, can be affected by a broad range of terrorist activities at home, abroad or at sea.
15. Al Qa'ida is a continuing source of concern. It has threatened the use of violence “anywhere in the world” against the United States and its allies, including Canada. On 12 November 2002, Bin Laden issued a public statement which specifically targeted Canada for the first time for its support of the US. The statement contained a clear warning that civilians will be targeted and attacked in the foreseeable future. This continues to indicate that there are potential threats to Canadian interests.

Box 3. Recent Canadian Incident

Ammad Farid Rizk, an Egyptian-born Canadian citizen, was arrested on 18 October 2001 after Italian police discovered him stowed away in a container on a ship bound for Canada. When discovered, Rizk was in possession of a Canadian passport, a return airline ticket from Montreal to Egypt, a computer, a satellite telephone, two mobile phones, cameras, maps and a security pass for a Thai airport, as well as a certificate indicating he was an aircraft mechanic.
16. Ports present environments for terrorists because of their access to land and water, proximity to metropolitan areas and key transport nodes, and importance for international commerce. The tremendous flow of goods going through them make it easy to smuggle people, drugs, weapons and other illicit materials. Terrorists could therefore target maritime infrastructures or use them in support of their operations.

17. As pirates have shown consistently for years, it is easy to take a ship over. 8

18. Attacks against marine targets are attractive because the latter represent key symbols of Western military and economic hegemony (i.e., power projection and the perceived commercial exploitation of the Arab/Islamic world).

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