



Sharing Information

Regional cooperation and communication in South Asia.

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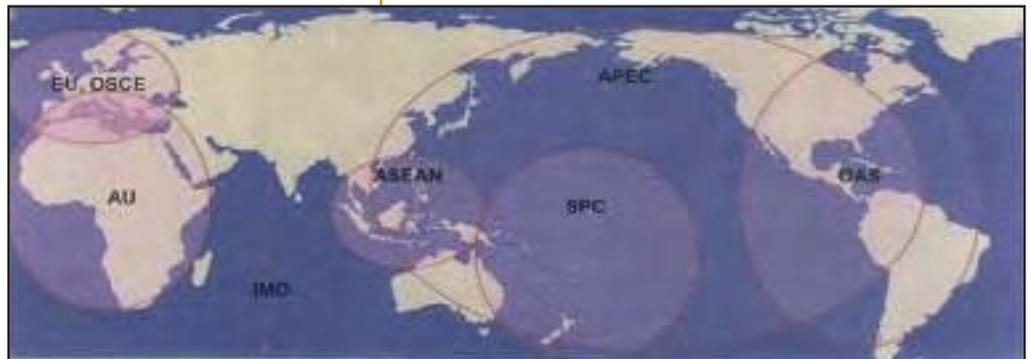
It has become cliché to refer to the events of September 11, 2001, as a turning point in our world; however, that does not hide the truth of the statement. Among many other things, the analyses of September 11 identified limited communication, organizational stovepipes, and inter-organizational power struggles as critical road blocks. According to the 9/11 Commission, "The biggest impediment to all-source analysis—to a greater likelihood of connecting the dots—is the human or systemic resistance to sharing information."¹

While the 9/11 Commission final report refers mainly to the law enforcement and intelligence communities, its applicability is far more ubiquitous. The maritime sector (specifically the transportation sector) is one of the areas where communication and cross-organizational information sharing was lacking. Moreover, the global nature of the maritime transportation sector and the interconnected web of world markets are excellent examples of where collaboration is critical. Practically speaking, global communication and collaboration are not easy to manage, but regional successes are easy to find.

Cooperative Effort: A Key to Success

In the case of piracy, the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery

Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) is a strong example of the success of a regional forum and organized means to share information. Established in 2004, ReCAAP established a collaborative network among 16 South East and East Asian nations to report piracy events and share information, including mutual-aid-like agreements for response. According to ReCAAP's 2007 annual report, "There has been a significant improvement in the piracy and armed robbery situation in Asia, with



U.S. Coast Guard graphic depicting regional organizations throughout the world.

the largest yearly decrease in the number of reported incidents taking place in 2007. The decline in the number of reported incidents was most evident in the port of Chittagong, Bangladesh, and the area around the Makassar Strait, Indonesia."² This illustrates the power of unified effort on a regional basis.

In the case of maritime and port security, a number of organizations throughout the world assist member states and provide regional forums to share port security information and build mutual capacity. As an example, in the Americas, the Organization of American

States has a Secretariat of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism that maintains a port security program.³ The European Union has a robust communications and rule making infrastructure for port security. The African Union, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Association of South East Asian Nations, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community assist their member states with port security capacity building and provide a collaborative forum to share information and develop regional solutions to mutual issues. Additionally, each of these organizations, to one degree or another, maintain a security committee or secretariat. In the case of South Asia and the Central Indian Ocean, no such port security-oriented organization existed—until now. Consequently, there was no practical way to affect cross-border cooperation and communication regarding regional maritime and port security issues.

South Asia Region Port Security Cooperative: The Idea

A wise man once said, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” In the case of the South Asia Region Port Security Cooperative (SARPSCO), this was, indeed, true. On October 13, 2006, the Sri Lanka Navy thwarted an attack by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on the Port of Galle in southern Sri Lanka. During a conversation with the USCG international port security liaison officer (IPSLO) assigned to Sri Lanka, the Port of Galle port facility security officer (PFSO) expressed his

desire to share lessons learned from the attack with PFSOs throughout the region. Moreover, he shared his frustration at the lack of a regional mechanism through which this information could be promulgated.

The desire of the PFSO from Galle to share his experiences was the genesis of what became known as SARPSCO. From this kernel, LCDR Richard Kavanaugh, the IPSLO for Sri Lanka and other countries in South Asia, began to engage the Coast Guard and other nations regarding the idea. To that end, the concept of a public/private partnership for the creation of a regional

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Why U.S. Coast Guard Far East Activities Participation?

The primary goal of SARPSCO was to develop a forum and establish a mechanism for communicating maritime transportation security information and best practices among designated authorities, PFSOs, industry leaders, and maritime law enforcement agencies within the South Asian region. This goal is in alignment with the Commandant’s vision as discussed in the USCG Strategy for Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship.¹

Additionally, this goal meets two strategic objectives as outlined in the Coast Guard’s International Strategic Plan,² in particular:

1. Promote Coast Guard engagement with foreign nations that are strategic to United States and Coast Guard interests; use the resources of partner nations as force multipliers in support of Coast Guard core missions.
2. Work to establish and implement international maritime safety, security, environmental, and operating standards through leadership and participation in international forums.

Through this particular effort, the Coast Guard worked collaboratively with the designated authorities³ in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Oman, Mauritius, Madagascar, and Comoros, who all face significant maritime security challenges. It also served to build a stronger partnership within the South Asian/Central Indian Ocean region, facilitating regional force multipliers and support. Finally, the dialogue helped to promote interest in a more uniform implementation of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code throughout the region.

Fortuitously, the U.S. Coast Guard Far East Activities-based international port security liaison officer for this particular region was well equipped to leverage pre-existing partnerships in an effort to make the idea succeed. Far East Activities (FEACT) provided organizational, administrative, logistical, and leadership support throughout two years of planning and final, successful execution of a SARPSCO conference. Ultimately, the Coast Guard served as a facilitating agency for the development of the regional forum and not as a member of any cooperative.

Endnotes:

1. “The Coast Guard will assist the international maritime community in improving the collective governance of the global commons, as well as assist other coastal and port states in improving governance over their own territorial waters. This will involve collaboratively building regimes, awareness, and operational capabilities that strengthen coastal states and the international maritime community.” United States Coast Guard, Strategy for Maritime Safety, Security, and Stewardship, Washington, DC, 2007.
2. The U.S. Coast Guard’s International Strategic Plan is available at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-ci/affairs/policy/strategic_plan.htm.
3. A SOLAS Chapter XI-2 designated authority means the organization(s) or the administration(s) identified, within contracting governments, as responsible for ensuring the implementation of the provisions of this chapter pertaining to the port facility security and ship/port interface, from the point of view of the port facility.





Why South Asia/Central Indian Ocean?

While alignment with the Coast Guard's international engagement and capacity-building goals is important and necessary for the Coast Guard's support of SARPSCO, it is not the only reason to be involved in the region. From a national perspective, and, by extension, a Coast Guard one, it is difficult to overstate the economic and strategic importance of the South Asia/Central Indian Ocean region.

First, for clarity, it might help to define the geographic area under consideration. Including the nations of India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, the region encompasses four time zones and more than 10 million square miles of ocean, depending on where one draws the boundaries. In comparison, the larger Indian Ocean covers more than 60 million square miles of ocean, and extends to the 60th parallel.

The region is home to vast quantities of terrestrial and marine resources. Moreover, it includes one of the largest and fastest-growing economies in the world—India. As an economy, India has experienced a decade of GDP growth above seven percent, with 9.2 percent growth in 2007. Exports from India total

more than \$150 billion annually, with 17 percent shipped to the United States. Export products from India include petroleum products, textile goods, gems and jewelry, engineering goods, chemicals, and leather.¹

So, while India is the largest and most vivid example, many other thriving economies exist in the region that are part of the global trade network. Other important exports in the region include fish, shellfish, gems, ore, sand, and gravel. The tourism industry is also an important part of the region's eco-

nomically. In fact, some nation's economies are fully dependent on the health and growth of tourism.

A direct connection between the economic and strategic importance of the region is crude oil and natural gas. Not only does the region produce immense quantities of oil and gas, it also provides major sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. In particular, these routes carry traffic heavily laden with petroleum and petroleum products from the oil fields of the Persian Gulf and Indonesia. Coupled with the fact that the major maritime accesses to the region include such notable

chokepoints as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Lombok Strait, the strategic importance of the region is critical. Finally, the region experiences high occurrences of piracy, armed robbery, poaching, and trafficking in people, drugs, and weapons.

As an example of the regional and national concern over the strategic import of the region, consider the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The aforementioned sea lanes pass within 12 nautical miles of the southern tip of Sri Lanka, near the port of Galle. Moreover, Sri Lanka is also home to one of the most

active terrorist groups in the world. Coupled with the economic value of the cargo carried along the routes and the criticality of the Port of Colombo to the Sri Lankan and regional economies, it does not require too much imagination to see how destructive even a relatively minor incident could be to the region.

Endnote:

¹ From the CIA World Factbook, available at <https://www.cia.gov/>.



organization was developed in cooperation with U.S. embassies and regional governments. Through the formalization of the partnership, the government of the Republic of Maldives took the lead in developing the cooperative and offered to host the initial conference.

An Idea Becomes Reality

While a discussion of the actual planning and execution of the SARPSCO conference is not critical to understanding its successes as an agent for regional collaboration, it is helpful to put the event in context. The conference was the culmination of a U.S. Coast Guard effort to support and facilitate the development of a port and maritime security-oriented organization in South Asia through organizational, administrative, logistical, and leadership support.

In conjunction with the Coast Guard, the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Maldives agreed to serve as the project manager and inaugural host for a SARPSCO conference. Entitled "Partnering for a Safer Sea," the conference was held in May 2008 at the Sun Island Resort and Spa, Republic of Maldives. The conference was funded by the ministry; however, the Coast Guard provided an additional \$30,000 to support the conference and provide for associated costs.

Coast Guard participation included two FEACT international port security liaison officers, LCDR Richard Kavanaugh and me. Representation also included RADM Craig Bone (Coast Guard District Eleven) as an opening ceremony keynote speaker, as well as CAPT John Bingaman (Coast Guard PACAREA Prevention) and CAPT Gerald Swanson (FEACT) as conference observers.

Conference delegates represented nine nations and myriad security partners including Interpol, the International Maritime Organization, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Conference flow provided for a mix of lecture-style presentations, panel discussions, networking opportunities, and discussion sessions. The discussion sessions were facilitated conversations regarding the future of SARPSCO. Finally, the Coast Guard issued press releases to the major news outlets, including regional Associated Press and Reuters offices.

Successes and Outcomes

By all accounts, the conference was a resounding success and ended with a unanimously approved confer-

ence agreement citing the importance of such a forum and the desire to bring the delegates/stakeholders together for a future event. In fact, several of the attending delegates publicly agreed to host a future conference. Perhaps most profoundly, the delegate from Mauritius received permission to hold the SARPSCO conference for 2009.

Besides the success embodied in the agreement, the conference opened up numerous opportunities for further Coast Guard outreach to nations in the regions. For example, the Republic of Maldives is interested in capacity building with respect to oil and hazardous materials response and domestic small passenger vessel safety. Additionally, Sri Lanka recently created a separate Department of Coast Guard and will be working to establish the new service's legislative basis. Each of these opportunities presents the United States and the nations of the region additional avenues to work together to meet the collective needs.

What's Next?

We are confident the success of the first SARPSCO event will not be short-lived. It is vitally important that we work with the nations of the region to collaboratively deal with problems of mutual concern. The Coast Guard's foray into the world of international engagement and security-related capacity building efforts, such as this conference, provide awesome opportunities to showcase the Coast Guard, its missions, and its expertise. Activities Far East looks forward to working with Mauritius and the other nations of the region to further support their efforts to improve port security in the central Indian Ocean region. Activities Far East will be developing engagement plans based on the conference and its outcomes. The future is bright.

About the author:

LCDR Scott Stoermer has served in the U.S. Coast Guard for 12 years and is currently assigned to Activities Far East as an international port security liaison officer. Specifically responsible for port security liaison with Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Burma, LCDR Stoermer has traveled extensively throughout Asia-Pacific.

Endnotes:

- ¹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9-11 Commission), "9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (official edition) Including the Executive Summary," Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 2004.
- ² www.recaap.org.
- ³ Information regarding the Organization of American States is available at www.cicte.oas.org/rev/en/programs/port.asp.

