



Maritime Blindness

by

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19 February 2013

This article was originally prepared for *Cutting the Bow Wave*, the magazine of The Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Centre of Excellence, 2013 edition.

The U.S. Navy describes the importance of their operational environment through the "70-80-90 paradigm": that 70 per cent of the world's surface is covered by water, 80 per cent of the world's population lives within 100 miles (160 km) of the coastline and 90 per cent of the world's commerce travels on the ocean.

But as valuable as our oceans are, as both an essential source of food and a critical transportation "highway" for almost everything we import, the consuming public, and by extension their governments, are generally oblivious to their dependence on the oceans. Consumers, importers and manufacturers are unconcerned that the international shipping industry carries 90 per cent of the world's goods.

The maritime 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 whatever we want will be on a store shelf or arrive at our front door when we want it, without being mindful of how it arrives has become known as *maritime blindness*. It also describes the general ignorance about maritime strategic and security issues associated the ocean commons.

A million mariners navigate 50,000 merchant ships that are registered in more than 150 nations. Between five and six million sea containers are in transit at any given time, according to New Zealand's Vero Marine Insurance.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982 guarantees freedom of the seas, including freedom of navigation, overflight, fishing and freedom of scientific research.

This constitutes *de facto* authority for nations 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 willing cooperation of the world's news 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 lists a series of *hot button issues* arising from our growing reliance on maritime trade and commerce:

Human smuggling and trafficking

There are uncountable numbers of unscrupulous predators who take advantage of the disadvantaged and the dispossessed for human smuggling and trafficking, and the sexual servitude of women and children for a share of the tens of billions of dollars. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has found that 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 estimates that 1,000 lose their lives each year. But the International Catholic Migration Commission puts the number at double, 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 carrying petrochemical resources to user nations need to be protected from any mishap along the way. Nigeria's experience of losing \$7 billion to oil theft from maritime drilling platforms is a case study in the vulnerability of these facilities. And only last year, Iran, announced it was prepared to 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 requirement "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, "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 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 OCSW) 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 of 1648, there are hundreds of 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. They shot 69-year old retired American businessman Leon Klinghoffer to death 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.

In their report, "Maritime Terrorism: Risk and Liability" RAND Corporation analysts Michael D. Greenberg, Peter Chalk, Henry H. Willis, Ivan Khilko and David S. Ortiz caution that the greatest risks involving container shipping evolve from fears of radiological or nuclear weapons, or the extended disruption of operations at a port. Cruise ship and passenger ferry vulnerabilities, they continue, involve on-board bombs, such as the 27 February 2004 bombing of SuperFerry 14 off the Philippine coast that destroyed the ship and killed 116 people and, the arrest, two years later, of three suspected Moro Islamic Liberation Front members attempting to carry improvised bombs aboard SuperFerry 3, docked in Parang town in Maguindanao.

And added to this list are:

- The global illegal drug trade in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually;
- Illegal migration of tens of millions seeking improved circumstances for them and their families;
- Maritime piracy that is no longer exclusively Somali. Dr. Manoj Gupta, with the Australian Defence Science and Technology Organisation, recognizes piracy as a major global concern. 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.

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 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 time. 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 our gas pumps.

The new industrial and manufacturing models have created new oceanic trade corridors making the Indian Ocean, with its 33 nations 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, 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 noted that , "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.

This is a lesson Canada painfully learned during the Second World War's Battle of the Atlantic with the loss of 2,000 members of the RCN, 1,600 Canadian and Newfoundland Merchant Navy seamen, 752 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force. We can only pray that we are not required to relearn it.

Modern weapons may exact a higher price for the unprepared.