THE DYNAMICS OF LTTE’S COMMERCIAL MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE

BY VIJAY SAKHUJA

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This paper examines the maritime infrastructure of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—tracing the history of the development of its maritime organisation, strategy and infrastructure. The paper focuses on the salience of sea power as perceived by a violent non-state actor and provides a perspective on how non-state actors employ sea power in asymmetric conflicts.

The paper also highlights the LTTE’s understanding of the sea as an instrument of power in the strategic thinking of its leaders. The paper focuses on the impact of the post 9/11 maritime security regimes, including the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) code and impact of the Flag of Convenience (FOC) registry on the LTTE’s fleet of ships.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

From very humble beginnings, the LTTE’s maritime infrastructure has come a long way and today boasts of a sophisticated network. Its maritime assets and organisation are quite capable and can well compete with the maritime facilities of a small island state. The present-day LTTE commercial maritime infrastructure includes a vast number of merchant ships, a large number of fishing trawlers, high-speed motor launches, and professionally trained crew to steer these vessels. The LTTE may also have some vessels capable of carrying one to two shipping containers.

In the early stages, the LTTE had at its disposal a large fleet of locally made small fishing boats, trawlers and motor launches. These were used to transport domestic cargo such as food grain, building material and other general necessities of daily life. These vessels were also used to ferry LTTE personnel and military hardware, including arms and ammunition. The LTTE had also established a shipping lane from Tamil Nadu in southern India to Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka through the Palk Strait.

The 1983 anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka had a major impact on the Tamil community. Tamil fisheries in Colombo and the Jaffna area began to flee the country and moved towards Tamil Nadu. Consequently, Tamil Nadu emerged as a safe haven for the Tamil refugees and the LTTE. There were strong anti-Sri Lanka feelings among the refugees. A sympathetic state government in Tamil Nadu provided the LTTE with money and land to set up training camps.

Domestic conditions were also favourable to establish a network among the Indian Tamil fishermen who became an important source of strength for the LTTE. The LTTE conducted operations with the assistance of the local fishing community and enjoyed total impunity. The understanding between Indian and Tamil fishermen was such that it resulted in the Sri Lanka government sending a note of concern to the Indian government.

A Sri Lankan report highlighted that Tamil Nadu was the hub of LTTE’s maritime activity. The report unambiguously pointed out that the LTTE’s activities were flourishing with the knowledge of the political establishment of Tamil Nadu.

The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 was a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the LTTE. In February 1991, David was arrested in Madras and was interrogated by the Indian Intelligence Bureau. In his confession statement he disclosed:

“By 1995, Sea Tiger dockyards had manufactured four types of fibreglass craft: the 10kt boatyard and captured some 500 boats. Kilali had emerged as a primary shipping yard of the LTTE and also a vital transshipment point by sea having access to Jaffna. This was quite evident in 1994, when the two land routes, namely the Elephant Pass and Poonernur, which link Jaffna peninsula to the northern province were closed. The Sea Tigers held on to the Kilali sea route (Kilali lagoon) that linked to the Jaffna peninsula. According to a terrorismo expert, Rovan Gunaratna:

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“The LTTE opened its operations towards the late 1990s and in early 2000 in the apprehension that LTTE-owned ships would be monitored. The LTTE began to charter a number of vessels to transport military goods. Although LTTE procurement officers have been active in Africa and in South and Central America, there is very little intelligence of the LTTE procurement and shipping activities in these regions. With arms transport spanning across the globe, LTTE ships cross both the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean.

THE SEA PIGEONS: THE MARITIME WING

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Sea Pigeons’ as follows:

"Except for the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Pal-
Estine Liberation Organisation, the LTTE is the only insurgent
organisation that is known to have at its own disposal a fleet of
deep sea going vessels. The LTTE started building its mari-
time network with the help of a Bombay shipping magnate in
the mid 1980s. Today the fleet numbers at least eleven freight-
ers, all of which are equipped with sophisticated radar and
marsat communications technology. The vessels mostly travel
under Panamanian, Honduran or Liberian flags, …known as
Pan-Ho-Lib….. and are typically owned by various front coun-
tries located in Asia… ninety five per cent of the time the ves-
sels are engaged in commercial goods, for the remaining five
per cent they play a vital role in supplying explosives,
arms, ammunition and other war-related materiel to the LTTE
theatre of war.10

The LTTE fleet of ocean-going merchant ships operates independently of the Sea Ti-
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by a Swedish businessman and is known to operate across the globe. *MV Montana (earlier Star Sapphire)* is a tanker operated by the Montana Star Shipping Limited located in Monrovia in Liberia. *MV City of Liverpool* operates in the Indian Ocean Region between the ports of Male and Tuticorin in South India. *MV Taro I (earlier Vebus)* has since been scrapped.

The LTTE has also engaged in human smuggling operations. One such vessel *MV Road Pink Fox* (registered by LTTE shell company Vida, Thailand) left Phuket for Mosselbaai in South Africa with 163 passengers on 22 July, 1992.23 The ships have also been used to transport leaders and cadres of the LTTE.

The LTTE shipping network has progressed fairly well. Despite setbacks, it has flourished and clearly shows that the LTTE leadership has continued to support it and use it to build its capabilities. According to a Lloyds estimate, the LTTE fleet had 11 vessels, by March 2000, 'most of which are said to be well equipped and capable of trans-continental oceanic sailing.'24 These vessels have engaged in both legal and illegal maritime activities.

**HIJACKED VESSELS**

In order to augment its fleet, the LTTE had also resorted to hijacking of vessels and changed names and physical characteristics. The LTTE is known to have created a phantom shipping fleet that has effectively evaded monitoring and detection.

According to Gunaratna:

Some South-East Asian intelligence agencies believe that the LTTE has hijacked foreign vessels, but the affected governments have failed to present conclusive evidence implicating the LTTE. Since the LTTE has demonstrated quite regularly its mastery of phantom shipping - changing the ship's name and appearance - it is likely that it also engages in maritime crime even outside Sri Lankan waters.25

For instance, *MV S.A. Yong*, a 2,818-ton, Malaysian-flag cargo ship, was reported missing. The ship sailed from Tuticorin, India on May 25, 1999 with a cargo of bagged salt and was due on May 31, 1999 at the Malaysian port of Malacca. The ship, however, disappeared and the fate of the ship's crew of 15 is still unknown. The vessel was apparently hijacked by the LTTE and may be engaged as a phantom vessel. A subsequent report on June 30, 1999 confirmed that the vessel had been hijacked by the LTTE.26

In yet another case, a ship with a cargo of 32,000 mortar shells from Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI) left the Mozambican port of Beira on May 23, 1997 supposedly en-route to Colombo, Sri Lanka. The consignment belonged to the Sri Lankan government. The ship did not reach its destination. ZDI assumed that the Sri Lankan government had sent a ship to collect the munitions, but the company alleged that the consignment was loaded onto a ship called the *Limassol*, which was one of the LTTE freighters and the cargo transferred to the LTTE.27

In some cases, the LTTE has not been so successful. A case in point is the ship that anchored off Cochin port in south India in 1993. The vessel was carrying a consignment of AK-47 rifles from a Russian company for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) of the Government of India. 25 The Captain had informed the port authorities of the cargo and the consignee. The MOD denied having ordered any such consignment. Enquiries revealed that a person, who had visited the company's headquarters in Moscow in June 1992, had been posing as a senior official of the MOD with forged identity papers, had ordered the consignment. He had the payment for the consignment made by a bank remittance from New York. Nobody claimed the consignment and it was confiscated. The Indian authorities strongly suspected the LTTE had ordered the consignment and its plans to effect a mid-sea transfer from the ship to one of its own smaller vessels failed.


**SHIPPING ROUTES**

An attitudinal-long-aimed asymmetrical conflict demands huge and sustained resources. The LTTE has used various ways and protracted means to garner funds for its sustenance. It is a fact that bank robberies and kidnappings are money-spinning means. By far the most lucrative means have been gunrunning and drug trafficking that have fuelled funds for the procurement of arms and fuelling operations. It is quite natural for the LTTE to assume that since it is engaged in arms trade, it is imperative to have access to those areas where lax laws exist, coupled with easy availability of materials like arms and ammunitions, and supportive suppliers.

The LTTE has optimally deployed and engaged in both legitimate and illegal shipping in pursuit of these objectives. The legal trade activity involves transporting general cargo and the illegal activity involves gunrunning, drug smuggling and human smuggling. It has established and sustained contacts in several South-East Asian countries and as far as Japan and North Korea. The LTTE has front companies in these countries that take care of procurement and shipment.27

In its struggle against the Sri Lankan military and for and while against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the LTTE obtained arms supplies from the international market. With its operational bases in southern India closed it could no longer rely on supply routes from Tamil Nadu and hence began to rely on longer logistic supply chains in distant shores. The LTTE always had the threat of interdiction of its supply chains by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard whenever such transportation was through Indian waters. In some situations the LTTE did take risks and transport their arms and ammunition by depending on the remnant supporters in Tamil Nadu. Given the formidable presence of the Indian Navy in the Palk Bay, the LTTE has had to rely on smaller boats and fishing vessels to ship its arms supplies to Jaffna.

In terms of its regional access and source points in the Bay of Bengal–South-East Asia region, Cambodia in South-East Asia has been the main source of weapons for the LTTE. Apart from it, Myanmar and Thailand have been important source of materials for the LTTE operations. The LTTE had established a very sophisticated network of gun. These activities are conducted using its fleet of ships. The gunrunning originate from the Cambodian ports of Sihanoukville and Koh Kong, moving along the coast to Thai ports at the northern end of the Gulf of Thailand such as Sattalap and Rayong and from there by land past Bangklok and south to the ports on Thailand's Andaman Sea coast, most notably Ranong and Phuket.28 The gun trade route passes through the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. The arms are loaded onboard small fishing trawlers and these vessels then transfer the consignment to larger vessels at sea for onward passage to Sri Lanka.

During Operation Pawan, the LTTE gun route was much different and followed a circuitous direction. For instance, *MV Ililuna* (Black Crow) made several voyages transporting arms and ammunition from Thailand/Singapore/Cambodia addicts trading across a circuitous route. For instance, *MV Ililuna* was one such voyage, it carried a consignment of 700 rifles and had entered Chittagong, in Bangladesh. The Indian Navy had waited for it outside Chittagong, much outside the territorial waters of Bangladesh. The crew of the vessel was never identified, thus offering an important base for the LTTE's drug-trafficking network. According to an internal Indian military report, some Achehese in the remote areas of the province are resorting to small-scale 'ganja' cultivation. Acheh rebels are known to engage in gun-running and drug smuggling to further finance their insurgency.

**MODUS OPERANDI FOR TRANSPORT TO SHORE**

The LTTE's arms and ammunition supplies are generally carried onboard larger vessels that operate on the high sea. In order to discharge their cargo, the vessels come close the shore and wait for the arrival of the smaller boats/launches. Gunboats escort these smaller vessels and explosives laden craft, manned by armed Sea Tigers. Thereafter, the launch takes on the cargo and transports it to shore. In the event of detection by the Sri Lankan Navy, these vessels ram into the naval vessels. There have been several such incidents in the past. The sea areas off Mullaitivu are well known for such activity. The areas contiguous to Mullaitivu are known to be the strongholds of the LTTE and they are also the maritime approaches to the island. Besides, Mullaitivu, the Vavuniya coast has also been a safe ‘harbour’ for LTTE to transport its cadres, provisions, military hardware and supplies by boat from the northern coast of Mullaitivu.

**THE RISE OF A NEW NAVY**

In the past, there have been several incidents involving the Sri
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Identification System (AIS) carriage requirements. The ISPS code was adopted in December 2002 to enable detection and develop deterrence against security threats within an international framework. Countries have to comply with the new code by July 2004. The Code establishes roles and responsibilities, enables collection and exchange of security information besides providing a methodology for assessing both ship and port security and ensures that adequate security measures are in place. It requires ships to work with port facilities to gather and assess information, maintain communication protocols, prevent access, prevent introduction of unauthorized weapons, etc. Provide means to raise alarms, vessel and port security plans, and ensure training.

The AIS is meant for the safety of all vessels around the world. The system is capable of providing information about a ship’s ID, position, course, speed over ground, static data and voyage related data to all other ships and shore authorities on common VHF radio channels and to coastal authorities automatically.

The daunting challenge before the LTTE would therefore be how to address and counter these Initiatives in a comprehensive manner, yet not restricting its maritime activity that serves as the umbilical cord of the economy of the LTTE. Besides, the entire military infrastructure of the Tigers, the drug and human smuggling activities are all carried out in the maritime domain using its fleet of ships. There is no doubt that there is a growing concern among the LTTE leadership about the international security requirements that call for greater vigilance and an enhanced scrutiny of the commerce. It is also the international security requirements that call for greater vigilance and an enhanced scrutiny of the commerce. It is also necessary to point out that the LTTE could use the enhanced scrutiny of the commerce to its advantage and neutrally in itself. The enhanced scrutiny of the commerce would allow the LTTE to siphon out some of the commerce that is normally destined for the international market to itself.

It is also difficult to predict the likelihood of use of such weapons but it is widely believed that most terrorist organisations are seeking to possess and acquire the ability to use such weapons to cause mass casualties. Although, development of these kinds of weapons and materials is a significant technical challenge to LTTE, its ability to possess and capability to use cannot be underestimated.

While chemicals can be procured from open markets and are easy to come by, getting large quantities for weapon purposes may be difficult. It is for this reason that only nation states have succeeded in doing so. Similarly, biological agents can be acquired in nature but important aspects of handling and ensuring dispersion are daunting. To date, only nation states have demonstrated the capability to build biological and nuclear weapons.

But the threat is far from rare. In 1995, the Aum Shinrykyo group released a chemical agent in the Tokyo subway and demonstrated the capability to use weapons of mass destruction. Reportedly, the group used highly skilled technicians and spent tens of millions of dollars developing a chemical attack. Similarly, the post-9/11 anthrax scare in the US was linked to the terrorists. According to experts, it suits terrorist requirements of low technology war.

The Aum Shinrykyo incident has been the benchmark of the nature and scope of terrorist resort to use WMD since then. Since then, there has been a global concern over the possibility acquisition and its use by terrorist organisations in a desperate move to achieve their political objectives.

There is growing convergence amongst professional counter-terrorism experts that WMD terrorism has one or more of the following components: Use of or threat to use a WMD, use of or threat to use a weapon of mass disruption such as a computer virus or hacking to cause mass economic disruption, capture of or threat to capture an installation such as a nuclear weapon in order to cause mass panic and use of or threat to use conventional weapons or instruments in an unconventional manner to cause fatal human casualties of 1,000 or more.60

In order to counter the threat of WMD terrorism, the US has propagated the Proliferation Security Initiative. Today there are at least sixty countries that have joined this US led Initiative. The genesis of PSI is in the December 2002 US document, National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction. Under this strategy various ‘counter-proliferation’ strategies have been listed. Among these, interdiction of vehicles for transportation (aircraft, ships and land based transport) are considered as the most important means to counter proliferation thus giving interdiction a prominence over more traditional nonproliferation efforts. As noted, the initiative aims at pre-emptive interdiction, detention, and search of ships suspected of transporting weapons of mass destruction.

The seizure of M V Baltic Sky by Greek commandos in Greek territorial waters and the earlier seizure of M V So San in December 2002 by Spanish forces (carrying North Korean missiles to Yemen) and the seizure of the ship M V BBC China reportedly carrying uranium enrichment equipment bound for Libya are clear manifestations of the PSI. The Baltic Sky owned by Alpha Shipping and registered in the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific was carrying 680 tons of explosives (TNT) and 8,000 detonators for a company Integrated Chemicals and Development, Khartoum, Sudan. The ship’s master and its five-crew members were charged with possessing and transporting explosives. Sudan was quick to respond and announced that the cargo was legitimate and it was against international law to seize such vessels. Incidentally, Sudan is on a US blacklist of nations that support terrorism and is home to terrorist-related activities. It is also believed that Osama bin laden took refuge there.

In December 2002, a Spanish frigate, acting on information from US sources seized So San, a North Korean vessel, about 600 miles off the Horn of Africa in the Indian Ocean. The vessel was transporting fifteen Scud missiles for Yemen. According to Spain’s Defense Ministry, So San sailed under the Cambodian flag, but had no identifying marks on it and therefore a fit case for being a pirate ship. Another interesting case relates to the seizure of the ship BBC China. The vessel was carrying uranium enrichment equipment bound for Libya. Similarly, a nerve-agent precursor destined for North Korea was confiscated in Taiwan.

Although there is no credible evidence that the LTTE is engaged in proliferation of WMDs, it has managed to acquire a desire to acquire WMDs, it has been argued that such intentions cannot be dismissed. According to R. Boman, a noted expert on terrorism, there is a need to identify organisations from which WMD threats could emanate. R. Boman has offered a typology in which different terrorist organisations can be categorized. These are:

- Those which advocate the use of WMD and already have the required capability. No terrorist organisation figures in this category so far.
- Those which advocate or are likely to use WMD, but do not

As yet there have been no attempts at gaining WMDs, nor any attempts to acquire WMDs; but this is not to say that the LTTE is not interested in acquiring WMDs in the future. The LTTE has a well-documented history of using unconventional weapons and it is possible that the LTTE may wish to acquire WMDs in the future.

In the context of the LTTE, it has exhibited its capability to carry out mass destruction much before the 9/11 incidents involving the al Qaeda attack on mainland US. On July 24, 2001 the LTTE attacked the Sri Lankan Air Force Base in Kattankudy, Colombo and destroyed eight military aircraft, three empty Sri Lankan airline liners and a cargo plane. An Antonov cargo plane was also destroyed in the fighting, reportedly by a rocket propelled grenade. The Colombo international airport was closed with no flights taking off or landing. According to R. Boman, the LTTE may have used microlight aircraft, a capability that its cadres in West Europe and Canada had acquired in the 1990s, to facilitate the entry of suicide cadres.

The IMO has now announced a new regime: International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The new rulebook, among other things, requires every ship to sail with a security plan and a security officer. These plans should conform to international standards. The ships will have to inform their port of call at least 96 hours before arrival to allow port security authorities to verify the last port of call, next port of call, cargo manifest and the crew list, including passengers. The agent is required to instruct the ship to send the information electronically. The US, on its part, has taken more stringent initiatives as regards the crew by not allowing the crew to disembark freely; they will now be checked for their antecedents. This is to ensure that vessels do not become a pathway for terrorists to enter the country.

The The running operations originate from the Cambodian ports of Sihanoukville and Koh Kong, moving along the coast to Thai ports at the northern end of the Gulf of Thailand such as Sattahip and Rayong and from there by land past Bangkok and south to the ports on Thailand’s Andaman Sea coast, most notably Ranong and Phuket.
According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), it is virtually impossible to verify the authenticity of the identity documents of seafarers. This is evident by the nature of the activities they are engaged in. The IMB has called for tighter security by authorities issuing certification of competency. There is an increased problem of counterfeit certificates. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), it does not authorize vessel boarding without prior consent and decisions would be made “on a case-by-case basis.” But the Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry believe that Liberia is getting safeguarded at no cost from the US Navy. Likewise, Panama, which registers more ships (13,000 merchant ships) than any nation in the world, signed an agreement on May 12, 2004 with the US to permit search of vessels suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction or weapons technology. Panama and Liberia accredit tremendous advantages by the agreement in terms of status of the registry and more importantly the assurance that the shipping industry that Liberia and Panama are serious maritime nations and not tax havens, that ships under their flag are not being misused. According to John R. Bolton, the US Under Secretary of State, almost 50 per cent of commercial shipping is now subject to search and seizure. There was much more waiting to happen when 10 new members were added on May 1, 2004 to the European Union. Of the 10 new members, only Cyprus, Malta and Latvia have tankers bigger than 10,000 deadweight-ton in their registries and these three nations account for 14.8 million deadweight-tons of capacity, or about 8 per cent of the world tanker fleet.

The international concerns about ‘Flag Of Convenience’ (FOC) registry arise from the possibility of terrorists nesting among crews on ships flying FOC flags. The world’s ‘most wanted terrorist’ Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda operatives are known to own or have chartered at least 20 merchant vessels that are capable of undertaking ocean passage. They are known to use a variety of weapons from propelled grenades, explosive-laden speedboats and even armour piercing weapons.

Besides, the Sea Tigers have also sharpened their capability to attack enemy ships both in harbour and at sea. They are known to use a variety of weapons from knives to improvised explosive devices, submersibles, mini submarines and high-speed boats. LTTE have used rocket-propelled grenades, explosive-laden speedboats and even armour piercing weapons. Although the LTTE has not been officially recognized as a terrorist organization by the UN, the LTTE has been labeled as a terrorist organization by the US and other nations. The LTTE has been involved in various terrorist activities such as running, drug smuggling, transporting illegal cargo or human beings.

CONCLUSION

With the passage of time, the LTTE has built up an impressive maritime infrastructure. It has also sharpened its skills at maritime practices. These involve undertaking ocean trade, coastal sailing and ferrying of materials and cargo to landing points in its area of interest in the face of the Sri Lankan Navy. The networks have kept pace with the changing technologies and have adapted themselves to counter the strategies of maritime forces.

It is quite apparent that the concept of sea power reverberates in the mind of the LTTE leadership, which has a good understanding of undersea power. This is quite evident by the nature of their development of their maritime infrastructure.

As regards the LTTE, its shipping crew consists mostly of its own cadres. There is no authentic data available to determine the strength of the LTTE cadres capable of undertaking open ocean/high sea operations but it would be fair to conclude that they may be at least 125 personnel. They may also not be in possession of legitimate and internationally accepted mariners documentation. Therefore, their credentials as legitimate sailors holding an internationally accepted seafarers document are suspect. It is also possible that the LTTE may be augmenting its fleet operations by hiring crew from the Philippines and Malaysia that are the largest suppliers of merchant ship crew. These states are home to radical groups like the Abu Sayaf and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). There is at least one reported instance that the LTTE had expressed its willingness to place its capability at the disposal of terrorist organisations of other countries. In 1995, a consequence of arms and ammunition donated by the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen ([HUM] then known as Harkat-ul-ul-Aman) from Pakistan was transported to the southern Philippines either for the Abu Sayaf which has since become a founding-member of bin Laden’s International Islamic Front (IFF) or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The new ISPS code is bound to place certain restrictions on the operations of the LTTE but given the network and the easy availability of seafarers, it will still be possible for the LTTE to continue its operations. On June 14, 2003 the LTTE oil tanker Shohin, blew up and sank. In response the Tamil Tiger rebels warned of “grave consequences” and noted that the Sri Lankan Navy had no authority to open fire. The Sri Lankan government has played down the consequences of this sea clash in a bid to dispel fears that the rebels might go back to the ethnic war, which has plagued the country for two decades.

The LTTE Shipping and Flag of Convenienc

The LTTE is known to change the name of its ships very frequently. This is not surprising because international shipping companies are known to change names (name, registration and paint scheme) when engaging in illegal activities. It is a well-known fact that the LTTE has a flotilla of ships that are engaged in maritime trade. For instance, LTTE vessels ship narcotics from Myanmar to Turkey. In order to give legitimacy to their fleet as also to generate revenue, LTTE ships raise more general cargo such as fertilizer, timber, rice, paddy, cement and other dry cargo. Most of these ships are registered in FOC countries known as “pan-boat” i.e. Panama, Honduras and Liberia. The LTTE’s ships are known to host registry from Cyprus, Greece, Malta and New Zealand too. The LTTE’s ships are difficult to keep track of as they keep changing names and registry. Lloyd’s lists 11 merchant ships belonging to some Asian front companies but in fact are managed by the elusive Kuman Pathmanathan (a businessman who is wanted in Colombia for half a million dollars).

In yet another significant development is that the LTTE is the only ship that the US has been able to convince Liberia to support the PSI. It is evident that Liberia, along with Panama is home to the largest shipping registra-

tions. On February 11, 2004 the US and Liberia signed a ship interdiction agreement in support of the PSI. The agreement was meant to send a strong signal to proliferators that Liberia would not allow the use of vessels operating under its flag for the transport or transfer of items of proliferation. The Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry has noted that the agreement with the US to support the PSI is a constructive initiative and would give ship-owners registered in Liberia a sense of comfort against their vessels being boarded/used for transporting weapons of mass destruction.

Under the agreement, the US counter proliferation inspec-
tors would first contact the Liberian Registry to determine whether to board a particular vessel. The Agreement, however, does not authorize vessel boarding without prior consent and decisions would be made “on a case-by-case basis.” But the Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry believe that Liberia is getting safeguarded at no cost from the US Navy. Likewise, Panama, which registers more ships (13,000 merchant ships) than any nation in the world, signed an agreement on May 12, 2004 with the US to permit search of vessels suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction or weapons technology. Panama and Liberia accredit tremendous advantages by the agreement in terms of status of the registry and more importantly the assurance that the shipping industry that Liberia and Panama are serious maritime nations and not tax havens, that ships under their flag are not being misused. According to John R. Bolton, the US Under Secretary of State, almost 50 per cent of commercial shipping is now subject to search and seizure. There was much more waiting to happen when 10 new members were added on May 1, 2004 to the European Union. Of the 10 new members, only Cyprus, Malta and Latvia have tankers bigger than 10,000 deadweight-ton in their registries and these three nations account for 14.8 million deadweight-tons of capacity, or about 8 per cent of the world tanker fleet.

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Although the LTTE has registered as many as 9/11 maritime security matrix be-
ing imposed upon states and maritime community is com-
plicated and somewhat baffling but the task before the LTTE is indeed demanding. The LTTE would be probing for strategies that would ensure the security of its maritime enterprise of its covert operations. It will rely on its network of suppliers, safe havens for its ships and reliable crew for steering its fleet. The requirements of security will therefore be carefully chosen by the LTTE so as not to impede its maritime trade, gun-running, drug and human smuggling. It will build suitable responses to prevent a slowing down of its flow of finances and materials that serve as its umbilical cord.

Finally, it is evident that the LTTE is a major non-state maritime force. It has tremendous capacity and vision with a strategic realisation that the seas are a medium of transport, communication and, more importantly, in helping leverage the political cause for a separate Eelam for the Tamils. The leadership is convinced that maritime infrastructure is crucial and it must also develop a navy capable of defending LTTE’s maritime interests.
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