

The Royal Thai Navy's Policy on Anti-Piracy as a Part of Naval Diplomacy

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The prime mission of all the world's navies is not to fight wars but to prevent them. During peacetime naval forces are prepared to be exploited in three inseparable roles which cover all military operation spectrum ranges. These roles are military role, constabulary role, and diplomatic role. The latter role is increasingly important because of complex interdependence among countries in the global community under globalization nowadays. As globalization is the increased interconnectedness of all peoples and goods on the surface of the earth, seafarers and merchant ships are more vulnerable to be attacked by piracy particularly in a narrow strait. The attack may result in the loss of life, physical harm or hostage-taking of seafarers, and financial losses to ship-owners and traders. Hence, it needs to be suppressed by sincere and serious cooperation of all coastal states as it is the framework provided by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) particularly in its article 100 which requests all states to cooperate to the fullest possible extent in the suppression of piracy on the high seas or in any other place outside the jurisdiction of any state. For the anti-piracy operation, it can be categorized as a sort of constabulary role. However, it can be categorized as a sort of diplomatic role when it is conducted in coordination with friendly naval forces for the sake of mutual interest as well as of global community. The Royal Thai Navy (RTN) has continuously engaged with the global community as it is an instrument of the country's foreign policy. Consequently, the RTN uses the anti-piracy operation as a part of naval diplomacy to build confidence with neighboring states and to gain prestige from the global community. This article will discuss about the value of naval diplomacy, key advantages of naval forces as diplomatic instruments, and the RTN policy on anti-piracy.

The Value of Naval Diplomacy

Naval diplomacy is the use of naval forces to create a powerful incentive to a target state for one's own national interests. It is applicable to whole range of peacetime naval operations. At the one end of the scale would be gestures of friendship and support implied by goodwill visits to ports of the target state or routine joint exercises with the naval forces of that state. At the other end of the scale it might be gestures of threatening or conveying a message that the use of force

is inevitable if the target state does not undo what it has done or cancel what it is going to do. However, the naval forces to be used must be credible in both quality and quantity to ensure that it can influence or change the target state's behavior effectively. According to the British Maritime Doctrine, naval diplomacy can be conducted in four ways namely; presence, symbolic use, coercion, and prevention.

Naval presence can be seen in many different forms. It can be a routine navigation of naval forces to demonstrate a permanent national interest in some important areas. In addition, it can be a periodic deployment of naval forces to demonstrate a friendship or support readiness. Moreover, it can be an emergency deployment to demonstrate a political gesture of dissatisfaction. Symbolic use, another way of conducting naval diplomacy, is simply naval picture-building. It is the deployment of naval forces to demonstrate their capability and prestige. Hence, capital ships equipped with powerful firepower together with cutting edge technology and highly discipline crews are indispensable for naval picture-building. The demonstration is usually done by participating in joint exercises, humanitarian missions, peace operations, and piracy suppression. Success of such demonstration would finally gain international prestige and respect from the target state. The next way of conducting naval diplomacy is coercion. It deals with the target state's action that is taking or has taken place and tries to change that state's behavior by fear of one's own naval forces. Moreover, coercion by naval forces can be either defensive or offensive in nature. On the one hand, defensive coercion may be an attempt to force the target state to stop or undo an encroachment viewed as threatening to one's own national interests. On the other hand, offensive coercion may be an attempt to blackmail the target state to give up something considered as one's own vital national interest. Finally, prevention is the deployment of naval forces to build and gain confidence from the target state. Thus, it is not conducted by threatening naval forces but using naval forces to send clear messages of reassurance and transparency in order to prevent misunderstanding or further conflict.

Key Advantages of Naval Forces as Diplomatic Instruments

Naval forces have key advantages which cannot be found in other military services. They possess platforms that can achieve the whole range of peacetime naval operations as discussing earlier. The most suitable platforms for naval diplomacy are surface warships. They have many obvious advantages over maritime aircraft or submarines in the diplomatic role. Firstly, surface warships are very flexible because there are many different types of them. Individually, they are very versatile because they are equipped for a variety of operational tasks. The same surface

warships can send supporting messages or demonstrate supporting gestures to a friendly state and at the same time they can send threatening messages or demonstrate negative gestures to a target state. Secondly, surface warships are controllable as they are less provocative than other military platforms. The presence of foreign surface warships in one's own exclusive economic zone is not as sensitive as the presence of tanks or combat aircraft in one's own border. Additionally, a confrontation at sea is less prone to accidental escalation because the use of weapons is strictly limited by a rule of engagement during peacetime. Thirdly, surface warships have strategic mobility as they can access or withdraw to or from any coastal state more easily than other military platforms because of their freedom of navigation together with the right of innocent passage. In addition, strategic mobility includes lift capability that can resolve huge logistic difficulty of shifting from one place to another. Thus, surface warships are the best military platforms for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief despite they are much slower than military aircraft. Also surface warships are frequently seen at a trouble spot of many coastal states. Lastly, surface warships have projection ability because they carry strong firepower, maritime aircraft, as well as landing craft and troops. Such ability makes a balance of power to a target state's land forces as it can threaten that state by naval bombardment, air strike, or amphibious assault. Therefore, surface warships have many basic advantages which make them highly suitable instruments for naval diplomacy.

The Royal Thai Navy's Policy on Anti-Piracy

The Royal Thai Navy (RTN) has a clear policy on suppression of piracy. According to the international maritime law, it is a responsibility of every coastal state to suppress the piracy within its territorial water as well as in the high seas as being mentioned earlier. Thailand has legislated an act, namely the Prevention and Suppression of Pirating Behaviors Act 1991, to give a fully legal authority to the RTN on such operations since 1991. According to the Act the pirating behaviors include seizing, destroying, detaining, and plundering of private ships or vessels by using arms and unauthorized forces in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of any coastal state and high seas. However, the rule of engagement to enforce the law is still ambiguous as it is allowed to use a weapon when it is necessary only. Moreover, the jurisdiction of the court to punish the pirating behaviors in the EEZ of another coastal states and high seas is also ambiguous as Thailand has just ratified its membership of the 1982 UNCLOS on 15th May 2011 which enters into force on 14th June 2011. In any case, Thailand has always cooperated with the global community to prevent and suppress the piracy since the beginning to show the gesture of its good member.

The remarkable Thailand's contribution to prevent and suppress piracy is composed of the joint patrols in the Straits of Malacca and the deployment of warships to the Gulf of Aden in order to protect merchant ships and trawlers from piracy. The multi-national cooperation in the Straits of Malacca starts in 2004 when the 3 countries in the region, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore increased efforts to patrol the strait in an attempt to curb piracy. While Singapore wants international support in this effort, Indonesia and Malaysia are opposed to foreign intervention. As geographical location of Thailand forms the northern entrance of the strait, the RTN wants to join the joint patrol earlier. Thailand's intention was welcome overwhelmingly by Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but the Thai government hesitated because of budget constraint. The RTN took 2 years to convince the government to give a green light with additional budget to join 4-nation joint patrol in the Straits of Malacca. Thailand signed an agreement with the three countries on 18th September 2008 to conduct the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP) starting from 2009. It is comprised of the Malacca Strait Sea Patrol (MSSP), the "Eyes-in-the-Sky" (EiS), and the Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG). The MSSP is conducted limitedly within the sector which belongs to each country's territorial water. The EiS is conducted on the airplane of any host country along the strait but the crew must be composed of staffs from all 4 countries to ensure that there will be no act of spying. Since the MSP began, the number of piracy incidents in the strait has declined sharply. The RTN is provided the additional budget of around 122,000 US dollars annually to conduct the operation.

In deployment of warships to tackle Somali pirates, Thailand made a decision slower than its neighbors such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore which dispatched their warships to the Gulf of Aden around 2008 to 2009. Again, the RTN was ready to navigate earlier but it had to wait for the policy and additional budget from the government. Finally, Thailand dispatched its 2 warships to the Gulf of Aden for the first time during the last 3 months of 2010. The task unit composed of 1 Supply ship and 1 Offshore Patrol Vessel with around 350 sailors and 20 special warfare troops consuming a budget of 9 million US Dollars. In 2011, Thailand dispatched the similar task unit to the Gulf of Aden again for a 5-month mission during July to November which could protect 830 merchant ships and trawlers from piracy. In 2012, the RTN took the first command of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMP) which consisted of multinational naval staffs included Thai naval staffs embarked aboard the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Fort Victoria (A387). The CMP operates over the Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) established by the United States Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain in 2009 as it is more convenient to get a

logistic supply during the operation. Its mandate and legitimacy is given according to the 1982 UNCLOS as well as the UN Security Council Resolution 1838 calling for nations with vessels in the area to apply military force to suppress the acts of piracy.

Conclusion

Interconnectedness of all peoples and goods on the surface of the earth has increased significantly under globalization of global community. It makes seafarers and merchant ships in a narrow strait more vulnerable to be attacked by piracy. The attack may result in heavy physical and economic losses thus it needs to be urgently suppressed. As naval forces of any coastal state are prepared to be exploited in three inseparable roles namely military role, constabulary role, and diplomatic role; all the world's navies are capable and prepared for anti-piracy operation. According to the value of naval diplomacy, the Royal Thai Navy uses the anti-piracy operation as a part of it, symbolic use, to build confidence with neighboring states and to gain prestige from the global community. As a result, Thailand will always cooperate and support the global community to prevent and suppress the piracy in the future. However, the RTN needs clear policy from the government on the rule of engagement and the jurisdiction on the high seas in order to conduct such operation with more decisive effectiveness.