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Mumbai Massacres Prove Threat of Small Boats to National Security

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Indian officials have ascertained that the terrorists who undertook a killing spree across the city of Mumbai last week arrived in small boats. According to reports, the boats were used to ferry teams of men from offshore freighters to the mainland.

The use of light craft to launch the assault has reenergized discussion about similar threats to the United States. The assault “underscores the importance of what we’re doing at our ports in terms of security,” Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff declared, as reported in the *Federal Times*, “It reminds us that this is an attack vector we have to worry about.”

The small-boat threat needs to be addressed, but rather than focusing on this particular terrorist tactic, Congress and the Administration should invest in improving the overall security of the maritime domain. Efforts should be expanded to improve U.S. situational awareness and law enforcement response rather than fixating on specific attack scenarios involving small boats or other terrorist threats. Additionally, any initiatives taken to specifically address the small-boat threat should address all the nation’s maritime domain priorities.

Nothing New. The fact that terrorists used small boats to carry out the Mumbai massacre should come as no surprise. Globally, terrorists have shown an increasing interest in using small boats to attack military and commercial shipping and maritime facilities. Even America has been a victim of these tactics: In 2000, al-Qaeda operatives detonated a small boat filled with explosives against the hull of

the USS *Cole*, which was refueling in the port of Aden, Yemen.

Contemporary operational practices by transnational terrorist groups include refining proven attack methods, sharing lessons learned, and encouraging others to adopt effective tactics. Thus, the possibility of such attacks in U.S. waters should not be ignored.

The Scope of the Challenge. The small-boat problem is complicated by the magnitude of areas and activities encompassing small-boat activity; the lack of situational awareness by federal, state, and local authorities; and the limited capacity to interdict active threats.

Policing a Vast Domain. Small boats operate on thousands of miles of U.S. coastline, inland waterways, and lakes. Frequent undeclared entries by small boats occur between the U.S. and Canada and between the U.S. and the Bahamas every day. Thousands of boats are bought and sold every year, and many small boats are operated with minimal training or licensing requirements. In many areas, small boats operate in proximity to high-value ships and maritime infrastructure without restriction.

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Situational Awareness. There are few means to effectively monitor small-boat activity. Post-9/11 efforts have focused primarily on large commercial craft and activities in and around major commercial ports.

Interdiction and Response. Local, state, and federal law enforcement have limited capability to detect threats, and standoff detection is usually restricted to meters at best. In addition, they have very limited means to involuntarily stop a craft other than trying to “shoot out” the engine.

Potential Solutions. Security investments should be focused on initiatives that provide the most value for improving overall maritime security. Hard choices need to be made; piecemeal investments in maritime security will add little real security. On the other hand, effective counterterrorism operations that focus broadly on identifying, investigating, and thwarting terrorist activities and plots in the maritime domain offer more value than those that focus narrowly on trying to deny terrorists access to a specific target or delivery means.

Consequently, Congress and the Administration must take a broad, long-term view of the small-boat threat. Any proposed initiatives to improve security should accomplish the following:

- Address economic competitiveness—not just security—with solutions that support both objectives. In particular, the Administration should not impose significant new regulatory restrictions on the operation and licensing of small boats and small-boat operators. Such measures will add little security at significant cost.
- Insist on programs that best enhance the overall security of the maritime domain and contribute to the resiliency of maritime commerce. First and foremost, the government should ensure that maritime commerce is not adversely affected in the event of an incident. The Administration should exercise and refine the plan required by the national maritime security strategy to address issues of business continuity and reconstitution after major disruptions in maritime commerce.
- Invest more heavily in Coast Guard modernization, particularly in programs that improve situ-

ational awareness, law enforcement, and special operations capabilities. Specifically, priority funding should be given to Coast Guard initiatives that expand the capacity of the service’s maritime security teams, develop capabilities for effective non-lethal interdiction of small boats (such as the use of low-powered lasers), extend visibility of craft over the horizon by using unmanned aerial vehicles and other technologies, field new state-of-the-art patrol craft, and increase law enforcement investigation and intelligence means.

- Ensure the right balance of roles, missions, and resources and close cooperation between U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard maritime security missions. The U.S. Navy should focus on providing intelligence support and mine-clearing expertise and capabilities, as well as sharing research and development in countering small-boat threats with the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard should lead in developing a national maritime domain awareness system, expand its capabilities to investigate and interdict potential threats, and work with state and local governments and the private sector to share information and intelligence effectively.
- Respect the principles of federalism and exploit the inherent advantages of a free-enterprise approach to providing the most creative, efficient, and effective solutions. Homeland security grants should be minimal. Instead, the federal government should facilitate the sharing of best practices and allow state and local governments and the private sector the freedom to innovate and adopt measures that are most appropriate for their needs and that would best perform the due diligence necessary to ensure business continuity and disaster recovery.
- Government should also encourage and provide incentives for craft under 500 tons to employ transponder locator and identification technologies. These transponders perform a function similar to what OnStar offers for automobiles. Adopting these technologies would enhance public safety and increase situational awareness, and use of these systems would better enable the Coast Guard and other rescue services to find craft in need of assistance. The widespread use of

transponders would also assist in monitoring maritime traffic.

While the maritime sector is a large and diverse field with unique and daunting threats, the U.S. should develop plans to improve U.S. situational awareness rather than defend against specific threat types. Investing in measures that bolster the U.S. economy and provide the best return for the amount spent are also good approaches for formu-

lating a protection plan against terror attacks launched from small boats.

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