

PARTICIPATION OF PN IN INTERNATIONAL MARITIME EXERCISE 2022

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The uninterrupted flow of world trade through Indian Ocean, and its major arteries, Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, Arabian sea, Red Sea and Malacca Straits need no emphasis because vessels carrying 75% of the world's maritime trade and 50% of daily global oil consumption traverse through Sea Line of Communication (SLOCs) from this region. This area is also significant because of flow of world trade through its seven choke points. Amongst these most critical being Strait of Hormuz which has no alternate route, Bab el Mandeb, Suez Canal, and Malacca Strait. The disruption of any of these waterways has overwhelming effects on the prices of oil and the food security of the world particularly strait of Hormuz. The non-traditional forces threatening maritime security through acts of piracy, maritime terrorism, maritime smuggling, disaster and calamity, or maritime pollution are now non-government groups clearly defined as small scale pirates, or multinational criminal organizations. Current world events reflect that threats to maritime security have consistently become much more organized and systematic. The responsibilities of naval forces specially to counter non-conventional threats have increased manifold. It merits cooperation of the regional and extra regional navies. Pakistan Navy (PN) considering importance of freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce, conducts International Maritime Exercise "Aman" (peace) biennially in which a large number of major navies of the world participate. It also joins the International Maritime Exercises as the opportunity occurs with main objectives being security of SLOCs and enhance professionalism. The last multinational Exercise "Aman- 21" was conducted by PN in Feb 2021 in which reps and ships of 45 countries including China, Japan, Russian Federation, UK, and USA having otherwise diverse objectives participated. The US Navy is conducting a biannual International Maritime Exercise 2022 (IMX-22) and Cutlass Express 2022 from 31 January of 18 days duration. The commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), is the Exercise Commander whereas a PN commodore, holding command of CTF 150 is the deputy commander and a commodore of Royal Navy of UK is vice commander. The PN units are also participating in this mega event. According to Operational Commander, the exercise is a unique opportunity to increase the capabilities and interoperability of the US Navy in the region, while strengthening maritime ties with nations in the region. International naval forces participating in IMX/CE 2022 are divided into four geographical combined task forces led by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Kenya, and Oman. Training will also focus on improving capabilities in command and control, sea control, maritime security operations, and mine countermeasures. A fifth combined Task Force X has been established for conducting training focused on unmanned systems and artificial intelligence integration. The exercise includes 9,000 personnel and up to 50 ships from more than 60 countries and international organizations operating across the Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and off the east coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. Almost all the leading extra regional navies including USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada, Netherlands are participating. Amongst the Muslim countries in addition to PN are of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, UAE and Yemen. Israel Navy has

joined exercise this year, but its operations are in the Red sea and Gulf of Aqba with the regional navies of that area. There is no possibility of interaction of personnel and units of PN with the vessel operating in the Red Sea. It is pertinent to mention that PN is participating in IMX conducted by US NAVCENT since 2012. There has been gradual increase in scope and number of participants. Joining of Israel navy in this mega multinational event has no effect on the stance of Pakistan about Palestine and any type of cooperation with Israel. The IMX/CE 2022 is not only the largest multinational naval exercise in the Middle East but also the largest unmanned exercise in the world with more than 80 unmanned systems from ten nations. The exercise will allow participating forces to test unmanned systems and artificial intelligence in different training scenarios and ultimately apply the lessons learnt to future real-world operations.

PN has been participating in the Combined Maritime forces (CMF) since 2004. This demonstrates Pakistan's commitment to peace, contribution towards regional maritime security and enhance interoperability between regional and extra regional navies, predominantly against asymmetric threats. This has also provided opportunities to PN to advance Pakistan's foreign policy objective of peace and stability in the region. In this mega multinational exercise IMX-22, PN senior officer's involvement in the planning process and execution is considered a rewarding event. Moreover, operation of PN units with the modern and regional navies has provided opportunity to boost PN professionalism and interoperability.

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