

India-Africa Maritime Cooperation: The Case of Western Indian Ocean

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ABSTRACT

The Western Indian Ocean connects North America, Europe and Asia, and as such is of global strategic importance. Its rich natural resource profile has pushed global players, including India, to view the region with increasing interest in recent years. Although for a long time, much of India's political attention was directed towards its eastern neighbourhood, in recent years, the country has begun giving more attention to maritime security in its west, where the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea meet. Today there is a proactive reorientation and rebalance in India's nautical outlook towards its West, especially with the African Indian Ocean Rim littorals. While India's compulsions for energy security and its dependence on overseas resources has been the biggest pull drawing India closer to the region, this paper calls on India to play a greater role in shaping the maritime security architecture in the Western Indian Ocean.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, India's political attention was directed towards its East, through its 'Look East' policy (later renamed 'Act East'). Yet, most of the Indian diaspora (both NRI and PIO),^a remittances, border conflict (with Pakistan), energy interests (crude oil, petroleum), and inner-core of security lies to the country's west. From an Indian perspective, therefore, as important as securing the east, is its western maritime security, where the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea meet. In recent years, this viewpoint has gained prominence, and today there is a rebalancing towards the West, especially the African Indian Ocean Rim littorals. This is reflected in the 'top priority' status accorded by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the African continent in the country's foreign and economy policy.

Indeed, there has been an unprecedented intensification in India's political engagement with Africa; one indication is the growing number of high-level visits from the two sides. Both India and African countries agree on the need to keep the oceans open and free for the benefit of all nations. This is reflected in India's 'Ten Guiding Principles for India-Africa Engagement', as enunciated by PM Modi during his address to the Ugandan parliament last year.¹

This paper explores the driving factors behind India's increasing maritime security cooperation with African countries in the Western Indian Ocean. The paper highlights the existing challenges to India and Africa's cooperation in the maritime domain, and calls on India to play a greater role in shaping the maritime security architecture in the Western Indian Ocean.

a Non Resident Indian (NRI) is an Indian citizen who is ordinarily residing outside India and holds an Indian passport; People of Indian Origin (PIO) is a person who or whose any of ancestors was an Indian national and who is presently holding another country's citizenship/nationality.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The next section provides a brief profile of the Western Indian Ocean region. It introduces the Western Indian Ocean, highlights the security challenges faced by its littorals, and describes the role played by various organisations operating in the region. The subsequent section analyses the nature of India's broad-based maritime security cooperation approach towards African countries and describes India's bilateral maritime partnership with select African countries in the Western Indian Ocean, highlighting the challenges in the relations. The paper then gives recommendations on what India must prioritise to improve its maritime cooperation with Africa.

Importance of Maritime Domain for India and Africa

A secure maritime environment in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is crucial for both India and African countries for securing national interests and achieving sustained national development. Such security means not only guarding the coastline or territories, but also safeguarding the countries' interests in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs), as well as protecting trade and shipping routes, and sea-lanes of communications (SLOCs).

India has a vast coastline of 7,500 kilometers and an EEZ of two million square kilometers. It occupies a central position in the IOR, straddling the main international shipping lanes. The African continent, for its part, has a vast coastline with 38 of its 54 countries being either coastal or island nations. Africa's maritime environment is globally significant as huge amounts of international shipping activities pass through its seas. Indeed, around 90 percent of the continent's trade is carried out by sea, thereby making the African Maritime Domain (AMD) crucial for commercial, security, environmental, and developmental reasons. For the longest time, however, African countries suffered from

a culture of ‘sea blindness’, i.e. it largely ignored its maritime domain—and had little knowledge of the benefits of its water bodies. It is in the last few years that African countries have started paying more attention to the maritime domain and as a collective entity has come to realise the importance of its maritime security.

With a booming oil and mining industry, Africa has been at the centre of global attention: various global players like India, China, and the European Union, are keen to engage Africa’s waters. However, with an increase in resource extraction activities in the seas, there has been a corresponding rise not only in the volume of sea-traffic but also the rate of maritime crimes. Unfortunately, most African countries lack the capacity to ensure the security of their declared maritime zones. This has resulted in vast illegal capture and exploitation of the continent’s marine resources, which in turn is provoking a clamor for better maritime governance. The high incidence of piracy off the East African coast in Gulf of Aden and in the Niger Delta Region and Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, has brought the issue of African maritime security to the world’s attention.

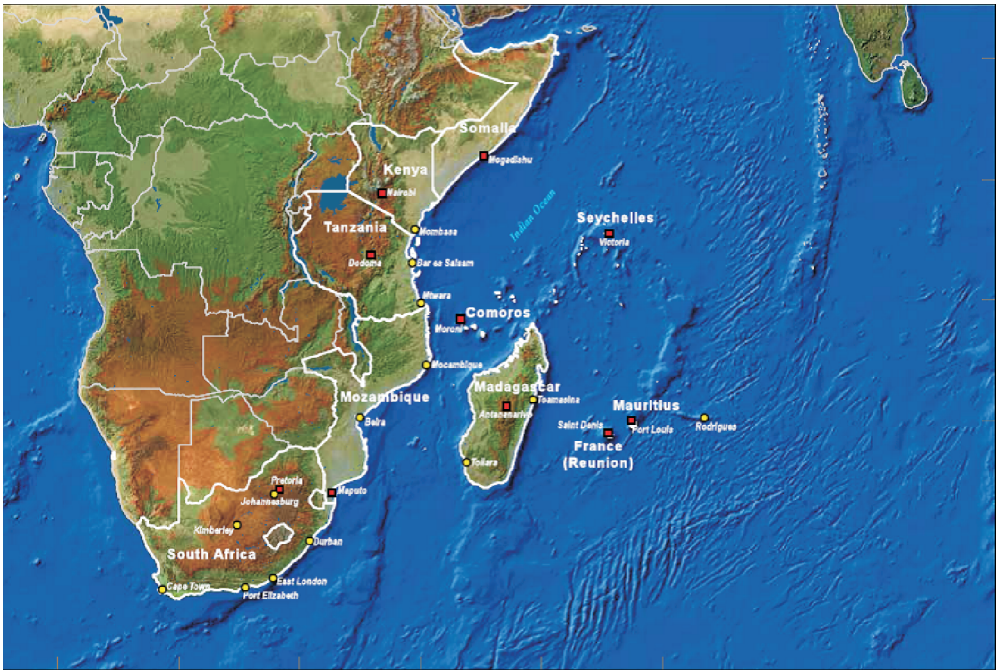
While challenges posed by piracy has brought the attention of global players to African waters, it is necessary to understand why the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region is becoming more vital for maritime partnership between India and the littoral countries of the African Indian Ocean Rim. Is it the region’s geographical proximity to India and its rich natural resource profile, which has caught the attention of global players like China and India?

II. THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN: A PROFILE

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region comprises 10 countries: Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Comoros,

Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, and the French overseas territory of Réunion.² The region is of major global geostrategic significance and remains a space of major geopolitical and naval interaction between states. Significant proportions of global maritime trade pass through the area, including a large share of the world’s crude oil supplies.

Map 1: The Western Indian Ocean



Source: David Obura, et.al. (2017). Reviving the Western Indian Ocean Economy: Actions for a Sustainable Future. World Wide Fund International, Gland: Switzerland

Table 1: Western Indian Ocean (WIO): A Fact Sheet

- The importance of ocean waters to the people of WIO is immense.
- The total natural assets of WIO have been conservatively estimated at US\$ 333.8 billion.
- Fisheries is the largest asset estimated at US\$ 135 billion, or 40 percent of the WIO’s total natural assets.

- The annual Gross Marine Product of WIO (equivalent to a country's GDP) is at least US\$ 20.8 billion.
- Most countries in the region have high population growth rates and coastal development is expected to grow accordingly.
- Over 60 million people inhabit the coastal zone in the WIO region.
- The region is characterised by high biodiversity both in terms of species and ecosystems.
- The main drivers of growth in WIO littorals are the extractive, construction, and service sectors including the tourism industry.

Source: David Obura, et.al. (2017). Reviving the Western Indian Ocean Economy: Actions for a Sustainable Future. World Wide Fund International, Gland: Switzerland², and, Jose Paula. (2015). The Regional State of the Coast Report: Western Indian Ocean. United Nations Environmental Programme-Nairobi Convention, Nairobi: Kenya.⁴

Security Challenges in the WIO

The Western Indian Ocean is facing a diverse range of complex, interconnected security challenges, including both traditional and non-traditional. To be sure, piracy has been on the decline in the region beginning in 2013, primarily due to successful multi-national efforts to patrol East African waters. However, the WIO region remains vulnerable to radical terrorism from outfits like Al-Shabaab, and the activities of Somalian pirates.

The outbreak and escalation of Somali piracy from 2008-2012, off the East coast of Africa and in the Gulf of Aden has shown that maritime insecurities are interconnected and that “the capacity of African states are insufficient to prevent crime at sea and to realise the developmental potential of the maritime economy.”⁵ Somali pirates have been attacking vessels within the maritime boundaries of countries like Kenya,

Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, and further off into the Indian Ocean. These insecurities—whether related to piracy or organised crime, or terrorism—are closely linked to instabilities and state fragility on land, “highlighting not only the liminal nature of challenges, but also their relationship to wider issues of development and insecurity.”⁶

WIO littorals have attempted various experiments in the enforcement of sanctions and counterterrorism operations to arrest the challenges of piracy and criminality at sea. The majority of the Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) functions in the region are not provided by African or regional actors, but rather by international actors and stakeholders.^b

Nature of inter-regional cooperation in WIO region

1. **Programme to Promote Regional Maritime Security (MASE) -**
The MASE Programme was adopted on 7 October 2010 in Mauritius, and is jointly run by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The programme is entirely funded by the EU and is collectively implemented by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). The programme’s primary objective is to strengthen the maritime security capacity of Eastern and Southern Africa and the WIO (ESA-IO) region in order to implement the Regional Strategy and Action Plan against Piracy.

b A few examples of actors and stakeholders in the Western Indian Ocean include: European Union’s Naval Force Atalanta (EUNAVFOR Atalanta) launched in 2008; the multinational naval partnership of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF); the unique counter-piracy cooperation and capacity building coordination conducted by the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS); the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC); the EU-funded Regional Programme to Enhance Maritime Security (MASE) established in 2013; and the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme

2. **Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC)** – The Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden (or the Djibouti Code of Conduct) provides a framework for capacity building in the WIO region in order to counter the threat of piracy. This is the first such code to be operational in the Western Indian Ocean waters. The code was signed on 29 January 2009 and its membership includes 20 of the 21 eligible countries.

3. **Jeddah amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC+)** – A high-level meeting of the signatories to the DCoC held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in January 2017 adopted a revised code of conduct, known as the DCoC+. The amendment recognises the role of the ‘Blue Economy’ including shipping, fisheries, seafaring, and tourism in supporting sustainable economic growth, food security, employment and stability. The revised code builds on the earlier 2009 code and encourages signatory states to cooperate to the fullest possible extent to repress transnational organised crime in the maritime domain, maritime terrorism, and IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing. “A key article of the code includes the intention of participants to develop and implement a national strategy for the development of the maritime sector and a sustainable ‘blue economy’ that generates revenue, employment, and stability.”⁷ The Jeddah meeting was attended by high-level representatives from 17 DCoC signatory states, France (Réunion) and four observer states, as well as observers from EU, UNODC, Interpol, and East African Standby Force (ASF).

4. **Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) 2050** - The 2050 AIMS is the African Union’s (AU) concerted attempt to reclaim the continent’s maritime sector for the development of its own citizens. The strategy aims to foster more wealth creation from Africa’s

oceans, seas, inland waterways by developing a thriving maritime economy and realising the full potential of sea-based activities in an environmentally sustainable manner. Africa's total length of coastline, including its islands, is 26,000 nautical miles. Thirty-eight African countries are either coastal or island nations while 52 of its over 100 port facilities handle containers and various forms of cargo. "While African owned ships account for 1.2 percent of world shipping by number and 0.9 percent by gross tonnage, African ports handle only six percent of worldwide water borne cargo traffic and approximately 3 percent of the worldwide container traffic."⁸ The AU is attempting to implement the 2050 AIMS in conjunction with the relevant AU, national, and international regulatory frameworks and on-going maritime activities in Africa. While the AIMS 2050 is indeed an ambitious plan to enhance maritime viability for a prosperous Africa, it is not an end in itself, but rather a way to nurture Africa's growth. This will require committed and enhanced cooperation and coordination between local communities, member countries, RECs and regional mechanisms, and the broader international community.

There is no doubt that a comprehensive action plan is in place to harness Africa's ocean waters for wealth creation, and that security organisations and maritime governance structures and agencies exist in the WIO region. Thus it behoves maritime neighbours like India and African Indian Ocean rim countries to enhance their cooperation on maritime security initiatives.

Locating India and African littorals in Western Indian Ocean

Both from a geo-strategic and geo-economic point of view, the Western Indian Ocean holds immense value and provides numerous

opportunities for the countries in the region. Indian analysts and policymakers consider it as an imperative for India to exert greater influence in strengthening regional maritime security efforts, and at the same time, for Africa to expect increased commitment from its partner states. Therefore, India's focus on enhancing its maritime cooperation with WIO littorals assumes greater significance due to the region's geo-strategic location and abundant natural resources. Resource-rich East African littorals are increasingly turning towards the Indian Ocean in order to achieve sustainable growth and development.

African countries such as Kenya, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, Mozambique, Comoros, Somalia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Tanzania are members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), which was established in March, 1997. The organisation is now known as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Moreover, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) has brought India closer to several African littoral states of the IOR. The IONS was launched in 2008 and has six African member states: Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Tanzania, and South Africa; Madagascar is an observer state.⁹

India's approach to maritime cooperation with Africa has essentially revolved around its central security concerns in African waters.¹⁰ India has reached out to African states through offers of military aid, capacity building, and training assistance. A proactive re-orientation in India's nautical outlook towards Africa is also reflected in India's 2015 Maritime Strategy document. In the document, India declares that its policy towards the countries in the Western Indian Ocean region has expanded and diversified into a broad-based security approach, one which is supplemented by regular naval visits, sharing of best practices to build capacity through trainings, transfer of naval hardware and logistical support, naval intelligence, joint military exercises and

patrolling of seas, and development of listening stations and posts which are essentially monitoring stations, complete with radars and surveillance gear for monitoring maritime communications.

Such a broad-based maritime security approach towards African countries entails four principle avenues of cooperation:

1. **Training of African naval personnel, defence officers, and civilian personnel engaged in maritime administration in Indian institutes** like Indian Naval Academy and Naval Institute of Educational and Training Institute. In his address during the India Africa Higher Education and Skills Development Summit in New Delhi in August, India's Secretary (East and Southern Africa), Ministry of External Affairs, T.S. Tirumurti pointed out that several current or former presidents, prime ministers and vice presidents have attended trainings or educational institutions in India.¹¹

2. **Conducting Hydrographic Surveys and helping African littoral nations develop basic capabilities in hydrography** - At present, half of the world's coastal states have no hydrographic capability, while only a few states have limited capabilities. However, India has adequate hydrographic capabilities. There is, therefore, immense scope for international cooperation in hydrography, particularly so in Africa, "where 64% of the waters is yet to be surveyed systematically."¹² Indian Survey Ships in the past have conducted hydrographic surveys for five African countries – Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Currently, India has MoUs on Hydrographic cooperation with three African countries: Mauritius (October 2005 to 2020), Tanzania (June 2015 to 2020), and Seychelles (March 2015 to 2020).¹³

- 3. Conducting anti-piracy patrols** - A large percentage of India's trade, including oil and fertilisers, passes through the Gulf of Aden. According to estimates by the Ministry of Shipping, Indian imports through the Gulf of Aden were valued at US\$ 50 billion, and exports at US\$ 60 billion.¹⁴ Therefore, the safety and unhindered continuity of maritime trade, by ships that use this route, is a primary national concern as it directly impacts the economy. The Indian Navy was one of the first countries to commence anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden as early as in October 2008. Since then, Indian ships have been deployed in the region continuously. Indian naval vessels also regularly patrol the Mozambique Channel and have supplied equipment and training, apart from providing maritime security during two summits – the African Union summit in 2003 and the World Economic Forum meeting in 2004 in Maputo, Mozambique. Besides escorting Indian flagged vessels, the Indian Navy have also provided protection to ships of other countries. No ship under Indian escort has so far been hijacked. The Indian Navy's involvement in anti-piracy operations since 2008 has led to greater bilateral interactions with other navies in the region. Complemented by the Indian Navy's 'mission-based-deployment' (MBD) approach, Indian mission-ready ships are prepared round the clock to carry out anti-piracy patrols and provide humanitarian assistance when required.

- 4. Port visits and development of monitoring stations** - In a display of more purposeful maritime diplomacy, Indian naval ships have increased their port visits to Africa's East coast and Indian Ocean island states.¹⁵ These goodwill visits to Africa's Indian Ocean Rim countries and naval exercises with African navies have helped to increase inter-operability and foster greater synergy between Indian Navy and African navies and coast guard. These regular port

visits also demonstrate the Indian Navy's blue water capability to deploy, operate, and sustain a maritime task force well away from home for an extended duration.

Additionally, India is partnering with Indian Ocean Rim countries for the development of monitoring stations. PM Modi's five-day Indian Ocean tour in March 2015, to Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka was an important outreach. During the visits, PM Modi signed MoUs to develop infrastructure on Agalega Island in Mauritius and Assumption Island of Seychelles.¹⁶ These two island nations are of immense strategic importance since two-thirds of the world's energy supplies passes through the region. Agalega is more than 1000 km north of Mauritius and Assumption Island is 600 nautical miles southwest of Seychelles' capital Mahe. These two islands will add to the Indian monitoring station in Madagascar, off the coast of Africa, commissioned in 2007 to monitor activities of foreign navies in the Indian Ocean Region. Although these deals with Mauritius and Seychelles will help to improve India's strategic foothold in the region, both deals have faced protests and opposition by the locals in the region.¹⁷

In recent years, India has adopted an expansive maritime strategy driven by its great-power aspirations and by strategic rivalry with China, which continues to expand its own maritime capabilities as it engages in unilateral actions in the IOR. To counter China's presence, India is seeking to expand its own and IOR littoral countries' naval capabilities and security partnerships, especially with Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros, at, or near the key entry points into the Western Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy is working to secure key maritime 'chokepoints' at the entrances to the Indian Ocean, like Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, and Mozambique Channel.

India's bilateral maritime partnerships with select African countries in WIO

Mozambique – Mozambique has emerged as an important maritime partner for India. The Indian Navy had provided security for the Maputo AU summit in 2003 and during the World Economic Forum meeting in 2004, by patrolling the Mozambique Channel. Three recent high-level visits underline New Delhi and Maputo's re-engagement in maritime and military cooperation. In July 2017, then Indian Chief of Naval Staff Sunil Lanba visited Mozambique and reiterated India's willingness to cooperate in hydrography and explore newer avenues of defence cooperation. Former MoS for External Affairs Gen (Dr.) V K Singh's visit in February 2018 further emphasised on the growing synergy in Indo-Mozambique maritime cooperation.¹⁸

Tackling non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean is one of the Indian Navy's most prominent roles. India's capacity to respond to non-traditional threats was amply demonstrated in the aftermath of 'Cyclone Idai' which hit the port city of Beira in March this year. Four Indian ships were immediately diverted from their course to render assistance and provide dry provisions, epidemic-related medicines, clothes, and ready-to-eat meals.¹⁹ Its operational readiness allowed the Indian Navy to be the first responder during the incident. Indian naval ships on overseas deployment are mandated to carry additional HA/DR kits for such possible events, thereby enabling them to be prepared to undertake relief work. The most recent visit was undertaken by Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh in July 2019, during which India handed over two Indian-made Fast Interceptor Boats (FIBs) to Mozambique, and signed two MoUs on sharing White Shipping Information and cooperation in the field of Hydrography.²⁰

Kenya – India and Kenya are maritime neighbours and have historical maritime trading links. Regular port visits are a vital component of India-Kenya maritime cooperation. During President Uhuru Kenyatta’s two-day visit to New Delhi in January 2017, a host of agreements and MoUs on defence and maritime security were signed, aimed at boosting maritime surveillance, sharing security intelligence and white shipping information, and conducting joint hydrographic surveys.²¹

Both New Delhi and Nairobi have identified maritime security cooperation in the IOR, especially in the Western Indian Ocean, as the critical sector for furthering and strengthening bilateral ties. The Kenyan Navy also participates in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) under which Indian and Kenyan naval professionals share and exchange information to enable a common understanding of regional maritime issues. Regular port visits are also an important dimension of India and Kenya’s maritime cooperation, as seen in the three-day visit of Indian Navy’s First Training Squadron to the port of Mombasa in early October.²²

Tanzania – Tanzania has a small navy and is not sufficiently equipped to deal with the emerging threats. Moreover, with the discovery of large deposits of natural gas off Tanzania’s coast, the government is now wary of the threat to the emerging natural gas infrastructure in the region. India is an important partner for Tanzania in dealing with such threats. During PM Modi’s visit in July 2016, he emphasised closer cooperation in the field of maritime security. India also extended a Line of Credit of \$92 billion for the rehabilitation and improvement of Zanzibar’s water supply system.²³ From an Indian perspective, “cooperation in maritime security and blue economy is extremely vital and mutually beneficial.”²⁴ Therefore, it will be interesting to see how maritime cooperation between India and Tanzania progresses in the coming years, especially in sectors like maritime-port connectivity, blue economy, and marine resource management.

Djibouti – With the coming into force of the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC) in 2009, Djibouti has emerged as a strategic pivot in the fight against Somalia piracy and terrorism in the region. The country is strategically located at the entrance of the Red Sea. India has cultivated close relations with Djibouti, whose port has always been hospitable to Indian naval ships transiting to and from the Mediterranean Sea. Djibouti was also crucial in ‘Operation Raahat’ in April 2015, during which Indian warships rescued over 3,000 stranded citizens from war-torn Yemen. After taking office in October 2017, Indian President Ram Nath Kovind made Djibouti his first destination for a state visit. During the meeting, President Kovind and his counterpart, Ismail Omar Guelleh reiterated the two countries’ desire to cooperate on maritime security issues in the IOR.

Madagascar – New Delhi and Antananarivo share a robust maritime partnership in the IOR. Madagascar’s strategic location in the IOR makes it a vital partner for India. India’s Ministry of Shipping organised the first ever Maritime India Summit in April 2016, with the objective of attracting potential investors in the maritime sector. The event was attended by senior government officials and representatives from Madagascar, along with all the countries in the Western Indian Ocean region.²⁵

Since 2007, India has also had a monitoring station in Northern Madagascar, complete with radar and surveillance gear to intercept maritime communication and protect the important sea lanes of commerce. President Kovind’s visit to Madagascar in March 2018 was a historic first and reinforced the two states’ ties. During the visit, an MoU on Defense Cooperation was signed which emphasised deeper cooperation in areas of mutual interest like maritime security and safety, fight against piracy and IUU fishing, and greater cooperation among Indian and Madagascar’s coast guard’s and naval forces.²⁶

Mauritius – Since 2003, the Indian Navy has regularly patrolled the Mauritian EEZ and also deposes a naval officer to manage the National Coast Guard of Mauritius. As early as in 1974, India gifted Mauritius a seaward defence boat, INS Amar.²⁷ Since then, India has periodically provided Mauritius with “reconnaissance assets including an interceptor patrol boat (2001), three Dornier Do-228 maritime surveillance aircraft (2004 and 2010), a Dhruv helicopter (2009), and three island aircraft engines (2009).²⁸ The Indian-made offshore patrol vessel (OPV) ‘CGS Barracuda’ was commissioned into the National Coast Guard of Mauritius in 2015 during PM Modi’s visit. This OPV was the first custom-built vessel exported by India. India has also helped Mauritius in installing an Automated Identification System and a Coastal Surveillance Radar System, besides carrying out joint hydrographic surveys and patrols with the Mauritian coast guard. During this visit, India also signed a deal with Mauritius to develop facilities in Agalega Island.

In May 2017, Mauritian PM Pravind Jugnauth embarked on a state visit to India, during which an agreement on maritime security was signed and extended \$500mn line of credit to help in implementing Mauritian priority projects.²⁹ Moreover, in August 2017, the Indian built water jet fast patrol vessel ‘CGS Valiant’ was commissioned at Port Louis. This was the third ship supplied by the Indian defence shipyard to be commissioned in the National Coast Guard of Mauritius.³⁰ It is clear that India and Mauritius’ engagement on maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean has intensified in recent years, as seen in President Kovind’s visit to Mauritius in March 2018 during which India extended a Line of Credit of USD 100 million for defence procurement of a Multi-Purpose Offshore Patrol Vessel (MPOPV) and extended an additional grant of USD 5 million.³¹

Seychelles – As maritime neighbours, India and Seychelles are committed to secure their shared oceanic space in order to bring

sustainable development. Seychelles is of immense importance to India owing to its strategic location close to the global lanes of shipping and communication. During PM Modi's 2015 visit, a number of agreements were signed, including: inauguration of Coastal Surveillance Radar Station (CSRS); gifting of a Dornier aircraft; MoU on Hydrography; a protocol on sale of navigational charts/electronic navigational charts; and the agreement on the development of facilities on Assumption island. In 2005, India gifted the Seychelles Coast Guard a fast track vessel INS Tarmugli and in 2009, India dispatched naval ships to patrol and guard the Seychelles EEZ against pirate attacks. India also gifted one Dornier Do-228 aircraft and two Chetak helicopters in 2010,³² and conducts biennial army-to-army exercise called LAMITYE.

The most significant development took place when President Danny Faure visited India in June 2018. India handed over a Dornier Do-228 aircraft and \$100mn line of credit to augment the island nation's defence capability. Both PM Modi and President Faure agreed to work on the stalled Assumption island project, although it still needs to be ratified by the Seychelles parliament.³³ For the deal to move forward, India will need to assuage Seychellois' fears and concerns about breach of sovereignty and harm to the environment. India's credentials as an established democracy, and non-interference in Seychelles' domestic affairs is well-appreciated by the country. Therefore, in the future, if President Faure is able to secure a majority in Seychelles National Assembly, then the Assumption island agreement will likely be submitted, ratified and implemented.

Comoros – In order to develop a collaborative security architecture in the Indian Ocean, the tiny island nation of Union of Comoros is an important partner for India as seen in Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's visit in October 2019. Maritime security is the foremost sector with potential to deepen India and Comoros' partnership. During the visit, the two countries signed an MoU on defence cooperation. India also

gifted USD 2 million for Interceptor Boats and extended a Line of Credit of USD 20 million for the procurement of High Speed Interceptor Boats³⁴ to augment the capabilities of the National Agency of Maritime Affairs (ANAM), which is responsible for promoting Comoros' National Maritime and Port Policy.

III. INDIA'S MARITIME COOPERATION WITH AFRICAN LITTORALS: KEY CHALLENGES

The challenges and limitations confronted by the Indian Navy in its engagement with African countries are twofold: inherent limitations, and the China factor.

1. Internal and Inherent Limitations

1.1 Low capital allocation – While the Indian Navy is now more networked and technology-enabled than it was in the past, it still continues to face budgetary constraints. The allocation to the Navy has reduced from 18 percent of the defence budget in 2012-13, to 13 percent in 2018. Such low levels negatively impact future force planning and capability development. Therefore, according to Indian CNS Admiral Karambir Singh, the need of the hour is to ensure long-term 'assured budgetary support'.³⁵

1.2 Gap between promises and delivery – For the Indian Navy to be recognised as a 'net security provider' in the IOR, it needs to bridge the gap between commitment and implementation. Most IOR littorals lack the necessary capacity to ensure the security of their declared maritime zones and perform their rights and duties. These littorals look towards India to ensure its security. However, India has a poor track record in

converting capital into deliverables or influence. Therefore, India needs to develop a defence diplomacy fund through which the current situation of poor delivery can be altered.

1.3 Poor allocation of resources – When it comes to allocation of resources, there is no concept of prioritisation in the Ministry of Defence. There is also hardly any adequate dialogue between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs.³⁶ While the resource pool is indeed limited, the allocation which Indian Navy receives for foreign assistance has to be prioritised and shared with the relevant executing agencies. India must look to engage in a participative programme between the service provider and the agencies that are the sources of funds. This will go a long way in ensuring the Indian Navy's ability to convert money into influence.

1.4 Weak coordination in the various maritime aspects– Maritime security entails not only hard-security aspects like protecting EEZ, HA/DR operations, asset allocation, or conducting anti-piracy patrols, but also includes issues related to blue economy, climate change, and coastal maritime infrastructure. Coordination and building synergy between the various stakeholders is the most important and challenging task. All agencies concerned should be coalesced under one umbrella agency and work together to sort out the different inter-agency issues. The Indian National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) or a proposed National Maritime Commission (NMC),³⁷ will be the most appropriate organisation to carry out this role.

2. The China challenge - China has made massive inroads in advancing its strategic and economic interests in the IOR, particularly by

gaining access to strategic ports and military bases and deploying illiberal and predatory economic practices. There is a continuous increasing presence of Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, no other navy has grown so rapidly in the last 200 years as the Chinese Navy, which is investing massive sums of money in shipbuilding, developing its military capability, and modernising its forces and command structure. At the Raisina Dialogue 2019, then Indian Chief of Naval Staff Sunil Lanba cautioned about the rise of PLAN in Indian Ocean, which has “added over 80 new ships in the last five years, and at any time deploys six to eight ships in the northern part of the Indian Ocean.”³⁸

China’s quest for Indian Ocean military access and bases to surround India is described as “String of Pearls”, or a network of strategic naval outposts constructed by Beijing to advance its military, strategic, and economic interests in the IOR. This quest is now being realised through China’s 2013 Maritime Silk Infrastructure (MSR) investment programme, yielding potential naval bases via ‘debt trap’ acquisitions.^c As shown by the establishment of a naval base in Djibouti, “China’s strategy is evolving – both in nature and geographical scope.”³⁹ Its heavy dependence on overseas resources and energy supplies, especially oil and natural gas, is playing a crucial role in shaping Chinese strategy and interests in IOR, especially in the Western Indian Ocean region.

Much of India and China’s jostling for influence in the Indian Ocean is concentrated in the Western Indian Ocean waters and its littoral countries. However, in the last 10 years, New Delhi has been left far behind by Beijing’s dramatic push and overtures, spearheaded by cheap

c ‘Debt trap’ is a situation in which one creditor country intentionally extends excessive credit to another debtor country with the alleged intention of extracting economic or political concessions from the debtor country when it becomes unable to honor its debt obligations. When cash-strapped developing countries fails to pay back the loans for multibillion dollar projects, it can result in a loss of strategic assets, loss of sovereignty, and major hurdles to economic development

loans, massive widespread investments in natural resources, and huge infrastructure projects.⁴⁰

There is little doubt that “China is strengthening its ability to protect its interests in the Western Indian Ocean and setting the stage for power projection even further into the Mediterranean and around South Africa.”⁴¹ Although so far, China’s strategy has not raised serious concerns in WIO littoral states, the story is entirely different for India and other players like the US and EU. Beijing’s aggressive search for resources, markets, economy, political, and military influence, as a revisionist power with the intent of making them anti-India, could have serious implications for regional security and stability in the IOR. As a result, India wants to ensure that China does not pursue hegemonic goals in the region.

What more should India do?

Given the broad nature of these aforementioned challenges, there is a lot more that India can do to increase its maritime partnerships with African littorals.

1. **Develop a Pan-African approach** – For the most part, especially beginning in the year 2000 when the menace and threat from piracy caught the attention of Indian leadership, India has remained concerned about its own security concerns in African waters. Indeed, India has tended to look towards African countries only when its own interests (security and energy) have been threatened. Looking towards Africa from the narrow lens of national security may be couched in a misplaced philosophy. India must explore moving beyond such narrow interests and developing a Pan-African approach in accordance with African needs and priorities. However, the Indian government’s meagre expenditure and

allocation to the Navy is unlikely to increase in the immediate future. Therefore, the Indian Navy needs to reprioritise, develop larger commitments, and focus on its core competencies – which is war fighting. The declaration of the Ten Guiding Principles for India Africa Engagement has been a step in the right direction in this regard.

2. **Develop multiple strategies and impose costs on adversarial stance** - To be successful in the emerging competition arising in the Indian Ocean, India needs to be willing to pay the costs and develop multiple strategies in various domains ranging from diplomatic, informational, military, maritime research, blue economy, industrial development, cultural and educational domain, energy, to climate and weather concerns. Developing these multiple strategies should involve not only the navy, military or the Ministry of Defence, but a multitude of other government agencies as in the case of China. Developing friendly, supportive, and accommodative relationships has always driven Indian engagement in the IOR. Since most littorals do not want to be in a position of choosing sides between major players like India and China, at worst, India should accept neutrality. Therefore, India must look to develop multiple strategies that impose costs on adversarial stance against Indian interests.

3. **Greater cooperation on Blue Economy** – The ocean or blue economy holds immense potential for both India and African littorals. The African Union has already declared the ‘Blue’ economy as the “new frontline of Africa’s renaissance.”⁴² Similarly, both the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050) lay emphasis on the development of blue economy for the continent’s growth. PM Modi, during his address at the International Fleet Week in Vishakhapatnam in

February 2016, has referred to oceans as “the lifelines of global prosperity,”⁴³ and the Blue Chakra in Indian National Flag as representing the potential of ‘Blue’ economy. Subsequently, in the 2015 Delhi Declaration, both India and Africa reiterated their desire to collaborate more closely on blue economy.⁴⁴ The African island nations in the WIO are the main proponents of this concept, since most of these countries are heavily dependent on the ocean for livelihood and sustenance. Seychelles has taken a leading role in advancing the concept. Currently, three WIO region countries (Seychelles, Mauritius and South Africa) have initiated their own Blue Economy policies to sustainably manage shared ocean assets. If India is serious about cooperating more on blue economy with African littorals, it must look to apply innovative technology (like Triple ‘A’ – appropriate, affordable, adaptable) in WIO in areas such as water reuse, wastewater recycling, saltwater to freshwater conversion, marine-based renewable energy production, including wave and tidal energy, and management of the health of ocean environment for nutrient-rich food sources.

4. Work to develop a multilateral security architecture for the Western Indian Ocean – Over the years, various maritime security cooperation mechanisms have been developed in the Western Indian Ocean. Few examples include: Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC), and Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC) in Madagascar. However, while these frameworks exist, they remain under-optimised. While some have remained as loose, *ad hoc* form of cooperation, others are heavily dependent on funding from the European Union, or lack the necessary political buy-in.⁴⁵ Therefore, the need of the hour is developing a security architecture for the WIO by strengthening existing frameworks and working together to serve the interests of the region. India, which has long maintained a presence in

Western Indian Ocean, is well-placed to play a greater role and shape the maritime security architecture in the region. India should look to offer greater capacity building assistance, training and skilling of professionals in maritime domain and sharing operational experience to countries in the WIO. The Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) launched in December 2018 has established linkages with 13 international maritime agencies and more than 16 countries,⁴⁶ including various WIO littorals that can play a more prominent role in increasing regional maritime domain awareness. This has been a big step towards achieving the Indian vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and working towards capacity building, coordinating incident responses, sharing submarine safety information, and assisting in keeping the global maritime commons open and accessible for all. As a tool for diplomacy, the IFC-IOR should cooperate closely with regional mechanisms including the Djibouti Code of Conduct network, Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC) in Madagascar and Regional Coordination Operations Center (RCOC) in Seychelles to develop shared standard operating procedures.

IV. CONCLUSION


This paper has explored the emerging nature and trends in India's maritime security partnership with African states in the Western Indian Ocean region. The Western Indian Ocean's global strategic importance as a nexus connecting North America, Europe to Asia and its rich natural resource profile has pushed global players including India to view the region with increasing interest. India's compulsion of energy security and dependence on overseas resources has been the biggest pull drawing India closer to the region.

However, India is cautious about the assertive manner in which China is operating and demonstrating maritime power in the Indian

Ocean—with its financial prowess, industrial and manufacturing capacity, and the manner in which it has carried out financial overtures to IOR littorals. Unfettered great power rivalry is back in India's backyard and is something which it cannot afford to overlook. As PLA-N's ability to maintain and sustain its maritime militia in the Indian Ocean enhances, India's freedom of navigation will get restricted and could soon overcome India's current advantages of geography. Therefore, India must look to increase its own regional engagement by coordinating and working together with its African partners. In this respect, sustaining the momentum will hold the key.

In Prime Minister Modi's first term, India has been vocal and assertive about its engagement with the African continent. As Modi's administration looks to operationalise its commitments in its second term, India is certainly well-poised to effectively partner with African states in the governance of the continent's maritime commons. To do so, both must work together in a sustained manner and demonstrate political will. Given India's close defence and security relations with many African countries and the positive contribution of Indian Peacekeeping Forces to the peace and stability in the continent, India is increasingly being viewed as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. In the face of common challenges like terrorism, coastal security, and climate change, these links are poised to grow further. However, a lot more needs to be done.

India is not officially part of any of the existing regional agencies and institutions responsible for implementing and coordinating maritime activities in the region. Therefore, India must look to hold observer status to the Djibouti Code of Conduct which is operational in Western Indian Ocean waters. The country must also consider placing a defence attaché in one of the island nations like Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles in order to maintain a greater presence in the Western Indian

Ocean and understand the security developments in the region.⁴⁷ The task ahead for India and African littorals in Western Indian Ocean is to identify priority areas of convergences between the Indian Navy's 2015 maritime strategy and Africa's continental approach through AIMS 2050. They must also explore the different regional approaches to maritime security, like the Djibouti and Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and work upon these common areas for their mutual benefit in the Indian Ocean Region. 

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