

Navigating Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Western Indian Ocean Region

Role of India's Defence and Security Cooperation with East African Island States

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The complexity of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) maritime domain in the changing geopolitical environment is forecasting an array of new and non-traditional challenges—incorporating a wide range of maritime crime while simultaneously preparing for mitigating the disasters induced by adverse impacts of climate change. It therefore requires a greater appreciation of the WIO maritime domain than ever before. These challenges need suitable collaborative efforts for an effective mitigation strategy and policy response. In this regard, India has the resources, assets and domain expertise for mapping, characterising, monitoring as well as enforcing good order at sea. India's wider role of being a 'Preferred Security Partner' and 'First Responder' in the region emanates from its maritime policy of SAGAR—Security and Growth for All in the Region—which positions New Delhi in a unique position to create an enabling environment that supports the pursuit of holistic maritime security. For example, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is one such important construct in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which provides a common platform for navies and coast

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guards to interact with one another and to deliberate and resolve issues of mutual concern. In order to ensure collective growth and prosperity, it is imperative to build competence in the maritime domain on a collective basis. Against this backdrop, the article examines the maritime security architecture in the East African Island States (EAIS). It further explores the capacity and capability constraints these island states face to effectively and comprehensively manage the non-traditional security (NTS) in the region. Lastly, the article recommends policy-relevant priority areas of cooperation in defence and security, considering the vastness of the maritime domain which requires optimisation of resources.

Keywords: *India, Africa, Island States, Western Indian Ocean, Non-Traditional Security*

BACKGROUND

In recent years, ‘non-traditional’ security (NTS) threats have expanded considerably in presence, operation, sophistication and consequence—and it now impacts the lives of people at large in the wider Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Region. The realisation that the ‘full potential of a nation’s progress can be realised only when its security is ensured’¹ and national and regional development can only take place in a safe and secure environment, indicates the salience of stable and secure strategic geography. In this regard, the recent surge in the number of transnational organised crime networks (TOCN) ‘trafficking in humans, arms, drugs, minerals and wildlife; illegal unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing; production and trade of counterfeit goods; fraud and extortion; money laundering, terrorism, and cybercrime’,² along with rising climate concerns and pandemics in the WIO³ now pervade the national, regional and global agenda. For India, the WIO is its ‘primary area of interest’,⁴ whereas for the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of East Africa (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles), the WIO is their source of livelihood. Therefore, recognising India’s role in enhancing maritime security in the extended maritime neighbourhood, Shri Rajnath Singh, Minister of Defence, Government of India, stated in March 2023, ‘[a]s maritime neighbours linked by the Indian Ocean, our cooperation in maritime security & hydrography and countering terrorism & extremism will be essential for regional peace and prosperity’⁵ which is a clear reflection of India’s continued focus on African nations to develop capacities and enhance mutual capabilities. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to understand the intersectionality of

maritime security and stability of the region the island states of Africa forecast as these SIDS offer strategic character to the wider WIO region.

The economy, ecology and culture of the SIDS of East Africa in the WIO region are often shaped by the remoteness of their location or insularity. Because of their isolated locations and small size, they often lack the capacity and capability to police and govern the vast maritime zones at their disposal. The TOCN, especially those operating in the wider WIO, find the regions around the SIDS as suitable locations to expand their operational activities due to the lack of proper maritime security capacities. Today, non-state actors and transnational crime syndicates, commercial opportunists, human traffickers, and contaminators can move around relatively inconspicuously around these maritime spaces and without burning a hole in their pockets. The complexity of the maritime domain around these SIDS in the changing geopolitical environment is forecasting an array of new and non-traditional challenges, which requires a greater appreciation of the WIO maritime domain than ever before. These challenges need suitable collaborative efforts for an effective mitigation strategy and policy response.

In this regard, India has the resources, assets and domain expertise for mapping, characterising monitoring as well as enforcing good order at sea. India's wider role of being a 'Preferred Security Partner' and 'First Responder' in the region emanates from its maritime policy of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region),⁶ positions New Delhi to create an enabling environment that supports the pursuit of holistic maritime security. Recent initiatives such as India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD), India–Africa Defence Ministers and Chiefs Conclave (IADMC), and Africa–India Field Training Exercise (AF-INDEX); are a few other examples of collaborative efforts at sea. Therefore, in order to ensure collective growth and prosperity, it is imperative to build competence in the maritime domain on a collective basis. Against this backdrop, this article has examined the maritime security threats in the East African Island States. Further, it has explored India's role in addressing capacity and capability constraints these island states face to effectively and comprehensively manage the NTS in the region. Lastly, the article concludes with an analysis and policy-relevant recommendations. Considering the vastness of the maritime domain, the optimisation of resources is an important imperative for all actors involved.

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES OF WIO

The transnational nature of maritime crimes and natural disasters has a pervasive impact on populations, environments and economies. The insecurities emanating out of these NTS threats have expanded the role and function of the military in the global geopolitical spectrum. The NTS threat is defined as ‘challenges to the survival and well-being of peoples and states that arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, resources scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, people smuggling, drug trafficking and transnational crime’.⁷ The rapid intensification of these transboundary maritime crimes has a huge economic and human cost involved and has significantly intensified in the post-globalised world, raising deep concerns for society and government at large.⁸ Piracy is perhaps the most evident type of maritime crime. However, the trafficking of arms, narcotics, goods, and people by sea and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are the other major maritime crimes concerning SIDS. NTS, like climate change, pandemics, and transnational maritime crimes, adversely affect all the countries in the wider WIO region and hence, it requires a comprehensive, holistic and synchronised response from multiple agencies and sectors.

Climate Change

Climate change is a bigger threat to the SIDS than anywhere else, which is why on 14 April 2019, Danny Faure, the President of the Republic of Seychelles, addressed the world from 124 metres below the ocean’s surface, sending a signal that the adverse impact of climate change can threaten the very existence of SIDS like Seychelles.⁹ SIDS have fragile environments and weak economic structures and are highly prone to some of the most devastating hydro-meteorological and geological disasters.¹⁰ SIDS of the WIO region are particularly at risk of the adverse impact of climate change and natural disasters in all their forms—cyclones, floods, sea-level rise, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanos, etc. A case in point is the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai volcano on 15 January 2022, in Tonga. It showed the world how the eruption triggered tsunami waves of up to 15 mts which struck the west coast of Tongatapu, ‘Eua and Ha’apai and damaged the international and domestic undersea telecommunications network, rendering Tonga disconnected from the world and hampering disaster response.¹¹

Therefore, with their isolated locations and small size, it can take just one of these disasters to claim thousands of lives and livelihoods and also cause significant damage to their economies. All efforts advanced by these states and the global community in their pursuit of sustainable development can be negated by a single damaging natural disaster.¹²

The adverse impact of climate change and global warming will be clearly visible in the SIDS, as they are the most exposed to natural hazards due to their geographical location in an active tropical cyclone basin.¹³ It is anticipated that by the year 2050, the mean annual air temperature in Comoros will rise to an average of 28 degree Celsius and a 4mm/year sea level increase, having severe ramifications on the island's ecology and ecosystem.¹⁴ The 2020 World Risk Report¹⁵ has ranked Comoros as the 19th; Madagascar as the 38th; Mauritius as the 53rd, and Seychelles as the 111th country in terms of highest disaster risk out of 181 countries. The State of Mauritius continues to experience an increase in air temperature by up to 1.39 degree Celsius and concerning the sea level rise, an estimated rate of increase of 5.6 mm per year. The frequency of storms reaching at least tropical cyclone strength has also increased.¹⁶ With its unique location, topography and landscape, Seychelles is often impacted by cyclones, flooding and mudslides. In the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Felleng in January 2013, a Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)-supported damage, loss and needs assessment quantified the damages in excess of US\$ 8.4 million throughout Seychelles.¹⁷ Sea level rise is already affecting Seychelles, such as in May 2007 when very high tides resulted in flooding up to 50 m inland, causing damage to roads and public infrastructure.¹⁸ Sea level change may also increase the salinity of the soil and aquifers, impacting food and water supply. The government of Seychelles reported that due to the adverse impact of climate change, fisheries alone accounted for 45 per cent of the total losses, followed by agriculture and tourism annually.¹⁹

Madagascar's poor economic and development capacity makes it difficult for the country to adapt to a variable and changing climate. From 1980 to 2010, 53 natural hazards—including droughts, earthquakes, epidemics, floods, cyclones, and extreme temperatures—affected Madagascar and caused economic damages of over US\$ 1 billion.²⁰ High poverty rates and lack of functional institutions increase vulnerability to natural and climatic hazards such as floods, droughts, cyclones, extreme temperatures, and sea level rise. In the last 30 years, the SIDS of the WIO region incurred an estimated 2.8 billion US\$ loss due to natural disasters. It is now recognised that adverse impacts of climate change are creating greater 'systemic risk',

triggered by one or more direct risks caused by climate change, which then has cascading effects at economic, social, cultural, ecological and political levels.²¹ Thus environmental degradation, aided by climate change and global warming, is a 'threat multiplier' possessing the potential to displace huge populations residing in the region, as well as contributing to ever-increasing 'environmental refugees'²² in the near future. Climate change induced poverty and inequality are now the defining issues of this century. It also has a domino effect, creating push factors for the distressed and affected population, who easily take to illicit activities and crimes that are often committed on the high seas. The quantum jump in violence and illicit activities at sea in the WIO region can be said to be one of the associated risks of climate change. Therefore, collaborative approaches in exploring and successfully harnessing the experience of different countries that would help in mapping out a way forward towards mitigating and tackling climate disasters along with raising awareness of current geo-security threats and challenges that these disasters pose to the SIDS, is critical for the stability of the wider region.

Maritime Terrorism, Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea

Ever-increasing cases of piracy and armed robbery at sea in and around the coast of littoral and island states of East Africa between 2008 and 2012 brought the region into the global spotlight triggering an increased international response. Terrorism in all its forms, manifesting 'in/ from/ through' the seas, has gained increased traction in the recent global security discourse. The blurring of the line between traditional and non-traditional security threats is a reflection of the fact that seas have been used both as a medium or as a geographical space to wage war/ commit violence in order to send a signal of the intent and motives of these perpetrators. Terror groups are now using unmanned 'explosive boats' and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to attack merchant and naval vessels carrying strategic goods and resources and transiting/operating near or in the wider WIO region. The United States Department of Transportation, Maritime Security Communications with Industry (MSCI), in its advisory, remarked that:

On July 30, 2021, a Liberian-flagged tanker was attacked by an explosive UAV while transiting through international waters in the Arabian Sea, resulting in the death of two crewmembers. The explosive detonation following the UAV impact created an approximately 6-foot diameter hole in the topside of the pilot house and badly damaged the bridge interior.

This attack followed two unsuccessful UAV attacks on the vessel on July 29, both of which impacted the sea near the vessel.²³

Such attacks indicate that 'terrorism at sea' today has become a key challenge for the wider WIO littoral and island states. Kenya, Tanzania, Yemen, Somalia, and Mozambique have been the worst affected by terrorism, and the proximity of the key sea line of communication (SLOC) with these states forecasts a greater threat to the security and stability of the region. Incidents such as the Mumbai terror attack on 26 November 2008, when Pakistan-based terrorists used speedboats to enter the Indian coastal town of Mumbai and carried out coordinated attacks on multiple targets on Indian soil, are one of the deadliest attacks in recent history using the sea as a transit. Similarly, the RDX (Royal Demolition eXplosive) used in the well known 1993 Mumbai blasts also came through the sea. Another incident worth mentioning is when the Islamist militants of al-Shabab (allegiance to the Islamic State [IS] group) attacked the coastal town of Palma in northern Mozambique, which left dozens of people dead, forced thousands to flee their homes and put a massive nearby gas project on hold. The incident showcased how violence 'at', 'from' and 'through' the seas in/near the Mozambique Channel, a critical transit route for global and regional trade and energy flow, can have severe impact on growth and development. Similarly, in June 2018, terror groups targeted ports, facilities and coastal installations and attacked the Libyan oil ports of Ras Lanuf and Es Sider, setting at least one storage tank on fire, following which 16 facilities were closed and evacuated.²⁴ Another example of terrorism at sea is the incident where two suicide bombers affiliated to the Al Qaeda terror group used explosives-laden dinghy (small boat) and rammed into the USS Cole on 12 October 2000, resulting in the death of 17 US service members.²⁵ A similar attack was carried out on the French oil tanker M/V Limburg in October 2002, which killed 16 people and injured many others. The attack also caused a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Aden, threatening the ecology of the region.²⁶

The risk of piracy²⁷ and armed robbery (against ships)²⁸ poses a significant risk to sailors, the shipping industry, and the coastal states that border in or around piracy-prone zones. The incidents of hijacking and theft of cargo have been a common threat to the maritime industry across the wider WIO. These armed groups of criminals are frequently connected to local mafia groups and transnational organised networks dealing in illegal trafficking and/or even terrorism. The massive increase in container traffic transiting through narrow sea lanes and critical choke points such as the Strait of Bab el-Mandab, the

Hormuz Straits, and the Suez Canal, requires the ships to reduce their speed, thereby increasing the risk of pirates intercepting and attacking these vessels carrying essential commodities and oil. This has significantly aided pirates making their act of crime a highly professional and criminal enterprise, especially along the coast of Somalia. This transformation of small crime into a criminal enterprise is a result of their geographical proximity to critical SLOCs along the key choke points and the absence of strong state capacities to police the high seas. The Gulf of Aden, which opens up into the Suez Canal and links the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, is one of the vital maritime routes for global trade, and estimates show that roughly 12 per cent of global trade and 30 per cent of container traffic passes through this region.²⁹

Piracy and armed robbery are tied to many challenges and crises that shift depending on economic and geopolitical circumstances. With the growing number of Indian ships and sailors transiting high seas requires a more robust anti-piracy security architecture. Between 2008 and 2011, 27 incidents of piracy were detected that involved 288 Indian nationals. Between 2014 and 2022, 19 such cases involving 155 Indian crew members were detected globally. Whereas the threat of pirate attacks has significantly reduced in the WIO mostly due to the collaborative international response, the rise in attempts near the Mozambique channel is a cause of concern. The Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) aims to strengthen maritime security in the region and beyond by promoting collaboration through sharing of information for maritime safety and security in view of the region's importance with respect to world trade and security. IFC IOR, in its annual report of 2020,³⁰ 'monitored six incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the East Africa region. Four incidents were off Nacala anchorage, Mozambique, and the remaining two included a suspicious approach along the East Coast of Somalia and a sea theft off Mauritius'. This is a clear indication that the incidents of piracy and armed robbery have significantly reduced in numbers off the coast of Somalia but have not been eradicated and are now finding new maritime geographies with deficit capabilities (to govern the seas) as their next breeding ground. The capability of these perpetrators working in consonance/conjunction with terror outfits to carry out attacks still exists, especially close to the Mozambique channel, which is attracting global attention and investment due to the vast discovery of natural gas reserves in the region.

Maritime insecurity manifested from maritime crimes such as terrorism, piracy and armed robbery at sea has raised serious concern in the strategic

community, not just because of the serious human, financial, economic and political costs to the region but also because of potential geo-strategic implications. Resonating similar concerns, India's Minister for External Affairs, Dr S Jaishankar, while introducing the landmark Maritime Anti-Piracy Bill 2019 – stated, since 'more than 90 per cent of India's trade takes place by sea routes and over 80 per cent of the country's hydrocarbon requirements was sea-borne, security of these routes and lanes of communication is critical... [therefore] Ensuring maritime security is key to safeguarding India's security and economic well-being'.³¹ As at its peak, piracy has increased shipping and insurance expenses, costing an estimated US\$ 10 billion per year to global trade.³² Maritime crimes have flourished in this region due to the weak institutional capacities of the states along the eastern coast of Africa, having high unemployment and poverty, necessitating a more proactive approach from all stakeholders in the region.

Trafficking of Illicit Goods and IUU Fishing

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is among some of the greatest threats to ocean ecology and health. The large-scale commercial overfishing in the WIO is contributing to the collapse or decline of fisheries which are critical to the economic growth, food systems, and ecosystems of numerous littorals and, most specifically, island states of the East coast of Africa. Distant-water fishing vessel fleets of countries like China³³ engage in industrial-scale fishing operations on the high seas, as well as in the EEZs under the jurisdiction of these SIDS, which hugely undermine the economic competitiveness, national security, fishery sustainability, and the livelihoods and human rights of fishing communities. Such over-exploitation of the resources, when coupled with the adverse effects of climate change, will exacerbate the environmental and socio-economic risks for the islanders, making them prone to taking up illicit activities. As per United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organisation, each year, about 26 million tons of fish are caught illegally.³⁴ The estimated loss of revenue to the littoral and island states of East Africa due to IUU fishing of tuna alone is estimated to be US\$ 200–500 million annually. For the SIDS of East Africa in the WIO region, the fisheries sector is economically the most important sector, which generates 9 per cent of the *gross marine product*,³⁵ of which around 87 per cent is from large-scale commercial and industrial fisheries. Out of which, tuna is the most important source of national revenue to these states.³⁶

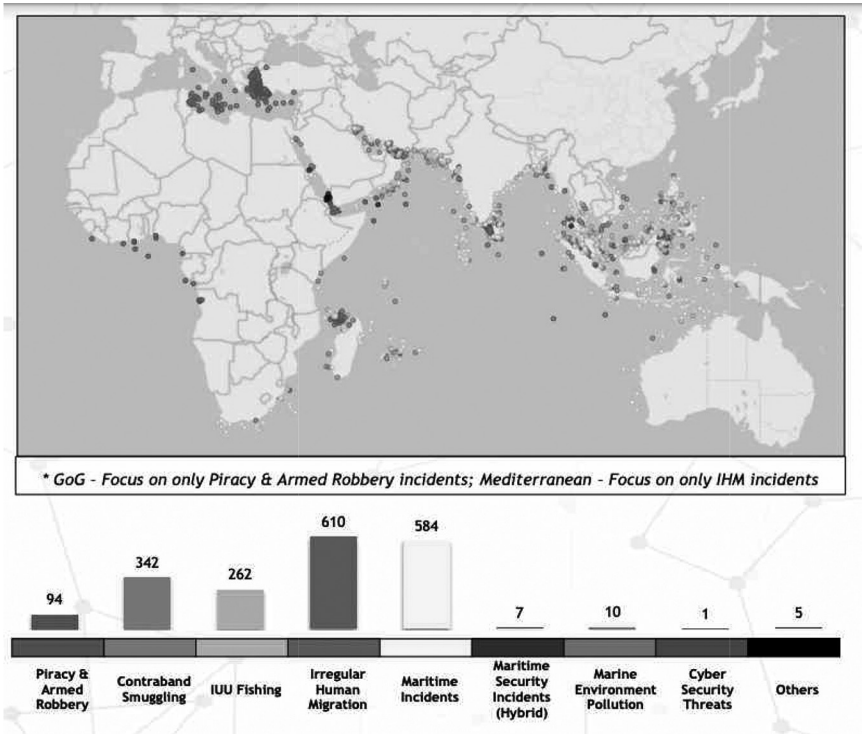


Figure 1 Overview of Maritime Crimes in the WIO

Source: IFC-IOR Half Yearly Report January–June 2022, available at

https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/ifc-ior/IFC_IOR_Half_Yearly_Overview_2022.pdf

More often, IUU fishing is also associated with crimes like the trafficking of drugs, weapons and human beings. However, lack of concrete and credible information on the same is the biggest hindrance for law enforcement agencies who are unable to take any action. Small arms proliferation and drugs smuggling have emerged as the most significant NTS challenges in the WIO region. The issue of small arms and drug trafficking assumes prominence due to the symbiotic relationship of the narco-traders and arms dealers with terror outfits and extremist groups. There exists a deep nexus between terrorist groups and drug traffickers, forecasting severe implications for regional stability.³⁷ The unrestrained trafficking of small arms and drugs is not a new trend, however, it has assumed new dimensions in recent decades,

where these supplies are often used to destabilise economic, political and social health of a country or a region. These illegal acts help in funding of the terror groups, with the phenomenon often termed as narco-terrorism³⁸. The WIO lies on the 'southern route'³⁹ or 'smack track'⁴⁰ which is dubbed as the main drug transit route for transnational narcotics traffickers. The illegal drug trafficking network in the WIO region is dominated by three types of narcotics, namely- heroin/opiates, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), and cannabis, which are primarily produced in Afghanistan.⁴¹ The maritime routes of the southern route encompass a web of smaller trafficking branches across the Indian Ocean departing from the Makran coast in the Arabian Sea, 'to the Zanzibar Island environs and Mozambique; another from the Arabian Sea to India and Sri Lanka, and then on to the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles; and a route from the Arabian Sea directly to Seychelles'.⁴² Other routes that form a part of this 'smack track' include 'crossing the Arabian Sea to Kenya and Tanzania',⁴³ and from the 'Arabian Sea through the Red Sea and towards the Mediterranean'.⁴⁴

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the seizures of drugs in the WIO. In 2018, the southern route contributed to 6 per cent of the global narco trade.⁴⁵ There has been a spike in the seizure of heroin in several littoral and island countries of the WIO along the southern route (excluding Pakistan) from 3 per cent in 2015 to 5 per cent in 2020.⁴⁶ India is one of the major markets for opiates,⁴⁷ with 2.1 per cent (with a significant rise in the last two decades) of the country's population using opioids, including heroin, opium, and its other derivatives.⁴⁸ The massive hauls of heroin seizures (a 40 per cent increase from the sea routes originating in South West Asia)⁴⁹ is a reflection of the growing consumption trend, which has witnessed a 157 per cent increase from the previous year.⁵⁰ In the WIO region, there have been 264 seizures of narcotic substances in the year 2021.⁵¹

The island states of Africa in the WIO region are positioned strategically along the southern route and act as both a transshipment point and destination for many types of narcotics trafficked through the region. The drug trafficking network around the island states of Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius has witnessed an increase in the volume and diversity of illicit drugs being trafficked through these transshipment points. The drug problem in the island states of East Africa in WIO has reached epidemic proportions where the large population are addicted to heroin. For example, 10 per cent of the Seychelles population is using heroin, such that

the government has acknowledged the situation as a 'heroin epidemic'.⁵² Similarly, Mauritius has also been a popular destination for traffickers of traditional drugs such as heroin and cannabis. The total population of those who use drugs between the ages of 18 and 59 years in Mauritius (excluding Rodrigues Island) in 2021 was 7.4 per cent.⁵³ The ENACT Organised Crime Index for Africa ranks Mauritius number 6th in the criminality ranking, whereas it tops in the drug trade in the Southern Africa region, and Madagascar was ranked 4th, Seychelles 7th and Comoros 11th in criminality rankings, respectively.⁵⁴

Poorly policed maritime borders, strategic location and corruption are a few factors that make the island of Madagascar a key transit point for drug trade into continental Africa from Afghanistan and Iran.⁵⁵ Madagascar serves as a major stopover for cocaine on the route from South America to West Africa and, from there, to the Middle East and Asia.⁵⁶ The international cannabis trade uses Madagascar as a source, a destination, and a transit country. It is now one of the leading cannabis seizure destinations in Africa.⁵⁷ The island nation of Comoros is strategically situated between Madagascar and Mozambique in the Mozambican channel in the Indian Ocean on the Southern Route, which puts it in a good position for maritime commerce but also places it right within the heroin and wildlife trafficking route between Africa and Asia.⁵⁸ The amount of heroin seized on this route has more than doubled between 2018 and 2019,⁵⁹ which is a reflection of the fact that the bulk of the population lives in severe poverty, and its weak government institutions make it easier for TNOC syndicates to use the island territories as their operating base for trafficking drugs and arms.⁶⁰

Since conflict broke out in Cabo Delgado, the northern province of Mozambique bordering the Mozambique Channel, in 2017, the nature of weaponry used by the Islamist insurgents have become more sophisticated. Yet the source of these weapons have not been definitively determined. Some analysts have speculated that regional criminal networks have made use of northern Mozambique's historical smuggling routes to traffic weapons to al-Shabaab'.⁶¹ The use of AK-47 Assault rifles and other sophisticated weapons has not only equipped al-Shabaab to withstand counter-insurgency operations by the Mozambique forces but also allowed them to capture and maintain control over the strategic territory of Cabo Delgado, including holding the port town of Mocímboa da Praia for a year, and attack the town of Palma, which is a major hub for oil and gas investment in the wake of

recent discoveries.⁶² The Recent Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s investigation of the potential routes of arms flows to the insurgent group clearly links the maritime dimension of the illicit arms trade. Traffickers of arms and other sophisticated weapons have used the maritime routes from as far as the Gulf of Aden region down to the Mozambique coast via Southern Tanzania in dhows (which are small motorised boats).⁶³ The weak and fragile maritime environment results in many of these countries abets the expansion of the operational activities of these non-state actors in the wider region. Madagascar is one of Africa's arms trafficking hotspots,⁶⁴ whereas Seychelles occupies an important position in the global illegal arms supply chain. The ENACT Organized Crime Index⁶⁵ indicates that shell companies registered in Seychelles have reportedly been involved in facilitating illegal arms trafficking from states as far as North Korea.⁶⁶ Non-state actors and criminal syndicates present in Mauritius are also actively involved in arms trafficking. In 2012, a global arms trafficking network was exposed.⁶⁷

The island states of Africa, located on the strategic juncture of the three arcs (the arc of instability, the arc of growth and opportunity, and the arc of energy),⁶⁸ are most vulnerable to these traditional and non-traditional threats. They require a robust maritime governance infrastructure for a better future. They can leverage their strategic location to engage with India as they are situated in India's 'primary area of maritime interest'. Significant growth in India's overseas economic and trade expansion is increasingly reflected in New Delhi's investments in critical sectors such as, energy, infrastructure, manufacturing and services. The investment in the region is likely to expand further as the Indian Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) already have significant stakes in Area-1 of Rovuma Gas Fields of Mozambique.⁶⁹ Consequently, it is important that New Delhi, based on the relative degree of impact on its maritime interests,⁷⁰ monitors all developments impacting the maritime domain and devises its strategic and operational plans in the areas that have been categorised as New Delhi's 'primary and secondary areas of interest' (see Figure 2). Therefore, a holistic approach to address the capacity and capability deficits of the island states would help in building a sound governance architecture to support a secure and stable region which is also in India's interest.

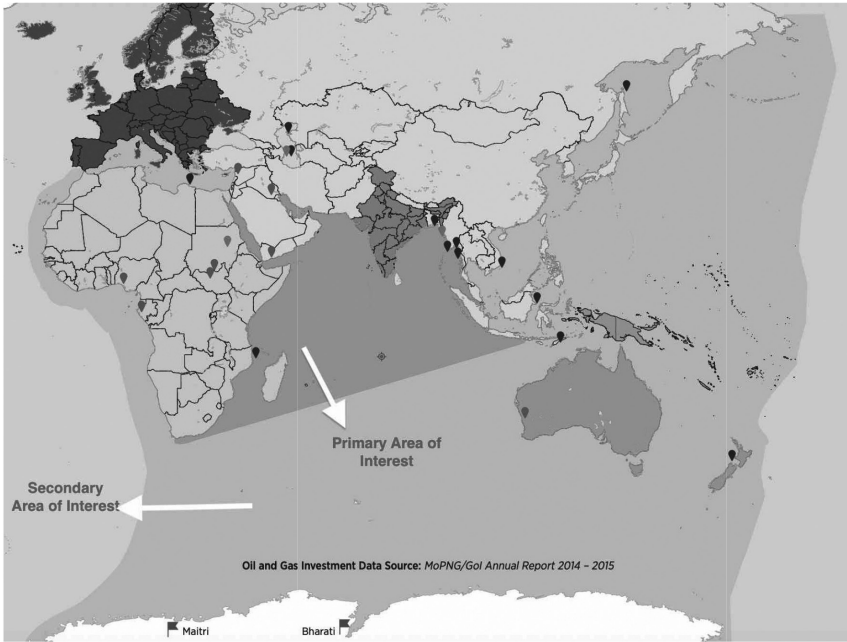


Figure 2 India's Primary and Secondary Areas of Maritime Interest

Source: IMSS-2015, available at https://indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf, accessed on 23 March 2023

INDIA'S DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION WITH SIDS OF EAST AFRICA: BUILDING CAPACITY AND ENHANCING MUTUAL CAPABILITIES

The capacity development and enhancement of mutual capability requirements of the strategic island states of East Africa in the WIO and India, remain dynamic and are primarily based on the immediate and emergent national, regional and global security challenges. The operational response strategies towards the mitigation of the NTS threats require the appreciation of the maritime domain (which in itself is vast, dynamic, and uncertain), necessitating preparation and implementation of prioritised plans to maximise coordinated efforts among nations and their security agencies. With 38 African nations being littoral or island states is an important marker that no area of India–Africa defence cooperation holds more promise than the maritime security cooperation, particularly when viewed through the lens of core and strategic interests of all stakeholders concerned. India is a

‘natural partner of choice’ for many African nations, especially on the eastern seaboard of the African continent, for all matters related to the security and defence of their vast maritime domains.

India’s engagement with Africa dates back several centuries with deep-rooted civilisational and historical linkages. India’s interaction with Africa is guided by the Kampala Principles⁷¹ enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 and is based on a shared vision of prosperity and a universal quest for liberty, dignity, equality and opportunity for all. This can be achieved through strengthening India–Africa cooperation and mutual capabilities in combating terrorism, extremism, piracy and trafficking of illicit goods; keeping the vast oceanic space safe and secure; and supporting domestic and regional efforts towards advancing and keeping the peace. This can only happen when local capacities are developed, and new opportunities for livelihood are created.⁷² However, the steady rise in occurrence, scale and operational area of the NTS threats and with significant cooperation, support and sponsorship from several malevolent state agencies, the lines between traditional and non-traditional threats have become blurred.⁷³ There is a realisation among the strategic community that the dynamic nature of NTS threats which are transboundary in nature and affecting all in the region, cannot be tackled by any one country. They realise that it will require a cooperative approach that is not limited to a security architecture, but also includes political, diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation.

INDIA’S DEFENCE DIPLOMACY IN SIDS

The expansion of TNO networks’ operational scope and activities, along with other NTS threats that the region is witnessing, is a direct threat to the national, regional and global security environment. The fast-emerging security threats to territorial integrity and stability ‘in and from the seas’⁷⁴ in India’s extended maritime neighbourhood pose a significant challenge to all nation-states of the region. With the global geopolitical environment that is undergoing a ‘rebalancing’⁷⁵ and India’s central position in the IOR, astride the main International Shipping Lanes (ISLs), accords it with distinct advantages and places most choke points of the IOR almost equidistant from India. India, therefore, is guided by its maritime policy of SAGAR⁷⁶ (Security and Growth for All in the Region) to advance a comprehensive path of collective security and development that is inclusive and transparent in action and intent, and aims to build capabilities and improve maritime security in the maritime neighbourhood, as well as influence the maritime space and

promote and safeguard the national maritime interests of every friendly foreign country across the IOR.⁷⁷ SAGAR has ‘both distinct and inter-related elements such as deepening economic and security cooperation among the littoral states; enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories; working towards sustainable regional development; Blue Economy and promoting collective action to deal with non-traditional threats like natural disasters, piracy and terrorism’.⁷⁸

The growth of piracy since the year 2008 and the experience of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks has blurred the line between traditional and non-traditional threats in the region, which has led to an increasing mandate for India to provide security and ensure stability in the region. Somali piracy, in particular, exemplified the difficulties that arise when maritime insecurity negatively impacts global sea routes, providing concrete evidence of how instability on land (as in Somalia) can manifest itself as criminality in the maritime domain.⁷⁹ In such a changing geopolitical environment, the protection and preservation of core maritime interests of India have become one of the fundamental drivers of national maritime security strategy. This ‘interests-based approach’⁸⁰ is at the heart of India’s maritime strategy, ‘wherein India recognises (as others in the region also do)—that the geo-economic goals and non-geo-economic goals which the country seeks to achieve in this century are increasingly dependent on the maritime domain’.⁸¹ India’s renewed interest in Africa is attributed to the fact that Africa is critical for India’s energy security, protection of sea lanes of communications, trade and investment opportunities, protecting its diaspora, enlisting diplomatic support for its multilateral positions, and also giving it an upper edge in the competitive dynamics in the Indian Ocean with China and other extra-regional powers.⁸² Thus India’s commonality with the SIDS of East Africa in the WIO region in addressing their capacity and capability deficit to deal with maritime security issues like countering terrorism (in, from and through the seas), piracy, controlling the flow of drugs and other narcotics, gunrunning, sea-jacking, armed robbery at sea; human trafficking, etc., feature as top priorities in India–Africa cooperation spread across several sectors, including defence. The partnership is primarily aimed at capacity-building and enhancement of mutual capabilities in the WIO maritime domain. Therefore, New Delhi’s partnership in defence and security cooperation with the SIDS of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles is intended to narrow the gap in capacity development and capability enhancement through targeted training and assistance, as well as providing these SIDS with the necessary material resources to expand their operation.

Since India's independence, the defence and security cooperation with SIDS of East Africa in WIO has been a testimony to the strategic importance New Delhi imparts to the extended maritime neighbours. India has always acted as a preferred security partner and first responder to any crisis for them in the region. It played and continues to play a crucial role in the field of maritime security of the region. India, from the 1970s onwards, has been actively involved in the region to strengthen the oceanic security framework of the IOR. Interventions like *Operation Lal Dora* in 1983, where Indian soldiers landed in Mauritius in the wake of a coup, still remains a confidential operation with very few details of it divulged thus far; *Operation Flowers were Blooming* in 1986 when Indian Navy prevented a coup in Seychelles;⁸³ in 2005 India gifted INS *Tarmugli*, a fast attack craft to Seychelles coast guard.⁸⁴ India also gifted 'two new *Dronier-228* aircraft and two *Chetak* helicopters for maritime surveillance. In February 2012, India announced the setting up of a Coastal Surveillance Radar System with Automatic Identification System to help identify vessels in the fight against piracy in the region'.⁸⁵ The Indian Army and Seychelles People's Defence Force have been conducting bilateral military exercises LAMITYE aimed at enhancing military cooperation and interoperability between the two countries' militaries.

Indian-Mauritian defence partnership took a constructive shape in the year 1974 when a defence cooperation agreement between the two nations was signed. It was under this agreement that India transferred patrol boats and helicopters to Mauritius, which also included the supply of a patrol vessel in 2010. India also delivered an advanced Light Helicopter in 2009 and a Coastal Radar Surveillance system in April 2011 as a part of a grant. There is also an agreement between the two where India will supply two offshore patrol vehicles (OPV) to the government of Mauritius'.⁸⁶ India has been providing training to the personnel and officers of 'The Helicopter Squadron' and 'the Mauritian National Coast Guard', considered as the 'Mauritian Air Force and Navy', respectively. The Indian Navy counter-piracy operations in the Mozambique channel and in the territorial waters of Mauritius have been a regular affair since the year 2003.⁸⁷ 'India also backs Mauritius' territorial claims to Diego Garcia, which was separated from Mauritian administration in the 1960s'.⁸⁸ 'Mauritian political leaders have publicly indicated on several occasions that India would be permitted to establish naval facilities on Mauritius if it so wished'.⁸⁹ During External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar's visit to the island nation, the two sides signed a free trade agreement (FTA) or CECPA—the first such pact with any African country.⁹⁰ 'India and Mauritius also signed a USD100 million Defence Line of Credit (LoC) to facilitate

the procurement of Indian defence equipment. The two sides also signed an agreement under which a Dornier aircraft and an advanced light helicopter will be given on lease to Mauritius on a gratis basis for two years'.⁹¹

India is also focused on growing strategic relationships with Madagascar and Comoros, which are situated near the strategic Mozambique Channel, the critical transit route (SLOC) used by the shipping industry to transport goods and energy carriers from the Cape of Good Hope. In Madagascar, India activated a listening post in Northern Madagascar in 2007 and also secured birthing rights for the Indian Navy, which is a forward step in the direction of protecting the strategic routes and interests. During Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu's visit in 2019, India extended a US\$ 20 million LOC to Comoros to strengthen bilateral defence and maritime cooperation. Indian Navy gifted two high-speed interceptor craft boats to the National Agency of Maritime Affairs (ANAM), which promotes Comoros's National Maritime and Port Policy. Indian Navy conducts regular goodwill port visits to Moroni. Indian Naval Ship Kesari visited Comoros on 7 January 2022, to extend technical assistance to the Comorian Coast Guard in repairing a grounded patrol vessel P002-M' *kombozi*.⁹² India sent a 14-member medical assistance team in May 2020 to provide food items and Covid-related medicines as part of the Government of India's 'Mission SAGAR'. In Madagascar, during President Ram Nath Kovind's visit in 2018, both countries emphasised on maritime security and signed an MoU on defence cooperation, with a focus on capacity-building and the training of Madagascar's personnel. Indian Navy also conducts regular goodwill port visits to Antsiranana.

A New Era of India–Africa Defence Cooperation

The new era of defence and security cooperation between India and Africa is based on New Delhi's commitment to partners and friendly nations to advance peace through stability, security and mutual growth. With contemporary maritime security challenges necessitating the need for a cooperative and collaborative effort on the basis of 'issue-based convergences',⁹³ it is essential for New Delhi to forge closer ties with countries situated in its extended maritime neighbourhood and beyond. This requires New Delhi to take the onus of improving the maritime security architecture in the region by supporting the development of maritime security capacity and capabilities in the SIDS of East Africa. The focus should be on security sector reforms, institution-building, and development of local force capabilities through education and training, or through advice and assistance in specialised areas such as logistics, counter-terrorism and cyber defence.

While each of these elements require equal attention, developing an effective cooperative response mechanism to address NTS threats is one of the most important pillars for promoting regional security, fostering stability and enhancing the defence capabilities together. The Indo-African defence and security cooperation is based on the cooperative framework of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region), which draws upon the ancient ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The World is One Family),⁹⁴ and resonates with ancient African ethos of 'Ubuntu' (I Am Because You Are). The recognition that 'we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye, but there exists a oneness that is humanity' ('One Earth, One Family, One Future')⁹⁵ aided New Delhi in its vision to initiate the India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) that will create new avenues for strengthening India–Africa holistic defence relations.

Against this backdrop, New Delhi hosted the first-ever India–Africa Defence Ministers Conclave, on 6 February 2020 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, on the sidelines of the Defence Expo (DefExpo). The conclave concluded with the 'Lucknow Declaration', which recognises common security challenges such as terrorism, extremism, piracy and trafficking as major threats to the peace and stability of the region. The inaugural initiative, in consultation with stakeholders, was institutionalised to be held once every two years on the sidelines of DefExpo. The Second edition of IADD was held on 18 October 2022 on the sidelines of the 12th DefExpo in Gandhinagar, Gujarat and focused on adopting strategies for synergising and strengthening defence and security cooperation.⁹⁶ The second edition concluded with the adoption of 'Gandhinagar Declaration',⁹⁷ which aims to enhance cooperation in the field of training and military exercises, increase training slots and deputation tenures of the training teams, empowerment and capability enhancement, building the defence forces of Africa, promote wider participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief are few areas among several others where Indian expertise can come in handy for African defence agencies. IADD is, therefore, a demand-driven initiative tailored to the needs of the African states in order to support their development that is inherently linked to the defence of national and regional environs.

Maritime domain awareness (MDA) is one of the key constituents of effective and efficient maritime security architecture. Towards this end, New Delhi has taken a number of measures to strengthen regional-coastal, offshore and maritime security. These steps include bolstering maritime security agencies' ability to monitor and patrol the wider WIO region, increasing technical surveillance of coastal and offshore areas of the wider

WIO, establishing mechanisms for inter-agency coordination between foreign-friendly nation-states, etc. This is craftily done by regular and strategic 'Mission Based Deployments'⁹⁸ of Indian Navy's ships and aircraft in the IOR and beyond to enhance maritime security. The tactical assets (like maritime reconnaissance patrol aircraft Boeing P-8I and French Navy's Falcon M50)⁹⁹ of the Indian Navy undertake surveillance to enhance MDA and address any contingencies that may arise in the region. In addition, India proactively engages with maritime forces (Navies and coastguards) of friendly foreign countries to enhance cooperation and operational knowledge through 'joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Surveillance, Coordinated Patrols on annual/bi-annual basis along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), Maritime Exercises, etc.'¹⁰⁰

In all this, sharing of information between nations is a critical element of MDA, and in this regard, Indian Ocean Region-Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR), based in Gurugram, and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) based in Seychelles signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in order to further the existing cooperation in the realm of maritime safety and security by enhancing maritime domain awareness, information sharing and expertise development.¹⁰¹ IFC-IOR also hosts International Liaison Officers (ILOs) from partner nations that enable it to monitor, detect and characterise information into actionable intelligence. New Delhi works with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) to enhance the maritime security architecture of the WIO through IFC-IOR's collaboration with regional information centres supported by IOC like the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), the Regional Operations Coordination Centre (RCOC) and the national centres of the seven signatory countries (Comoros, Djibouti, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles). In addition, New Delhi has also helped in setting up a coastal surveillance radar system (CSRS) in two phases across eight National Coast Guard (NCG) stations in Mauritius¹⁰² and six CSRS across five different locations of Seychelles,¹⁰³ aimed at achieving MDA in the EEZs of these island states.

Besides these initiatives, India has also initiated the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX) aimed 'to share best practices between participating nations'¹⁰⁴ and 'defence cooperation amongst the nations to evolve an institutionalised framework in order to enhance collaboration in the fields of joint military training, execution of peacekeeping operations; besides promoting Indian defence industries'.¹⁰⁵ On the sidelines of the recently concluded AFINDEX-2023.¹⁰⁶ the India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave was

also scheduled, which was focused on 'Africa-India Militaries for Regional Unity' (AMRUT). The initiative is a major landmark which is deep-rooted in defence ties between India and African nations, thereby enhancing regional cooperation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The changing geo-security environment of the WIO maritime space has become increasingly complex due to the manifestation of NTS threats in different forms and varying degrees. The sea-blindedness and continental orientation of the regions' littoral and island states have further augmented the insecurities forecasted by these non-state actors. The realisation of the opportunities that emerge out of the ocean has provided a renewed maritime outlook, highlighting the need for a secure and stable maritime domain. Maritime crime in all its forms requires a structured, networked and overlapping response strategy in order to attain holistic maritime security and sustainable development. Defence and development need to be the dyadic response strategy for each stakeholder and guide the agenda for reforms in the maritime sector of the region. Cooperation, collaboration and interoperability are the keys to enhancing the capacity and mutual capability of the states in the wider WIO region. Resilience to and mitigation of the insecurities posed by NTS requires an inclusive and responsive mechanism in the forms of security and defence partnership. India's defence and security cooperation with the SIDS of East Africa in the WIO is, therefore, primarily driven by similar strategic consideration, which aims to develop capacity, and enhance the mutual capability to tackle the new and emerging NTS threats. India's initiatives build upon the long and extensive track record of being the preferred security partner of choice and first responder in the region and beyond. New Delhi's expertise in mentoring agencies that require defence and related security capacity and capability enhancement support is unparalleled and unconditional.

Today, the realisation that oceans and seas are a vital element of national, regional and global progress has necessitated the need for a free, open and rule-based maritime domain. India, with its expertise, interacts more actively with littoral and island states of the WIO region and beyond and employs maritime security engagement as a cornerstone of its foreign policy initiatives. In this context, the Indian Navy, as a principal agency of the Indian government, plays a vital role in strengthening and enhancing maritime security in the region. India's defence and security cooperation with SIDS has shown us

that the provision for cooperation is at the policy as well as at the operational level. However, the possible challenges emanating from domestic politics, the China factor, and different approaches and attitudes in dealing with specific issues are worth considering.

India, therefore, needs to always act as a 'benevolent partner' rather than a 'power', in order to maintain its image as the 'preferred security partner'. India's engagement with the SIDS should be free from the narrative that it is meant to counter China or any other extra-regional or regional powers. New Delhi's narrative should be that of 'support and succour' to SIDS, which is responsive to regional needs. New Delhi should further cement the existing initiatives with multi-faceted partnerships in the defence and security sector by appointing 'Defence Attaches' with independent charge (as currently a number of defence attaches are assigned to a group of countries) to all the African states, especially the SIDS of East Africa in WIO. This will help in more specific need-based defence and security cooperation with these island states of East Africa. In conclusion, the recognition that a secure and stable WIO region is in the interest of both India and the SIDS of East Africa is certain to create conducive conditions for the 'development' and 'defence' of the WIO maritime domain.

NOTES

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