

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

SEA POWER

SOUNDINGS



Issue 15, 2020

Problems and prospects of maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region: a case study of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

By Commander Ranendra Singh Sawan

Commander Sawan from the Indian Navy attended the Sea Power Centre of Australia's Visiting Navy Fellow (VNF) from Feb-Apr 2020.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

SEA POWER

SOUNDINGS



Issue 15, 2020

© Commonwealth of Australia 2020

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print, and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice and imagery metadata) for your personal, non-commercial use, or use within your organisation. This material cannot be used to imply an endorsement from, or an association with, the Department of Defence. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved.





CHAPTER 1

States that adjoin this ocean are differentiated by their varying political ideologies, by the God they pray to, by the language they converse in, by their history and their race.¹

Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has variously been labelled as ‘insecure and instable’,² ‘a region that does not inspire confidence in the potential for peaceful governance’,³ ‘a disaggregated region notable for its lack of homogeneity’⁴ and ‘a troubled and unstable region, apparently without any real unity, common identity or collective goal’.⁵ cursory scrutiny of contemporary literature on maritime security in the Indian Ocean tends to reinforce the perception of the IOR as a region riddled with state on state friction, internal chaos within states and the vulnerability of large sections of its population to several non-traditional threats such as natural disasters, food and water shortages, poverty, epidemic, piracy, terrorism and transnational organised crime. This assessment, unfortunately, is true to a large extent. In 2011, a total of 142 political conflicts were recorded in the IOR, representing more than a third of the 388 conflicts worldwide, including 12 of the world’s 20 wars, as well as an additional eight limited wars.⁶ The displacement of Rohingyas from the Rakhine province in Myanmar in 2017 and the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia in September 2018 illustrate the gravity of non-traditional security challenges in the region.

Yet, the Indian Ocean has gained prominence as a focus of strategic policy for nations,⁷ its centrality in the sustenance of economic activity for its littoral states⁸ and as a zone of competition among major powers.⁹ Moreover, the Indian Ocean Region has also been characterised by the presence of extra-regional powers since the beginning of the colonial period in Asia and East Africa. This extra-regional influence has continued in contemporaneous geopolitical context – albeit with different actors and in different ways – primarily due to the vested interests of these actors, but also because the region lacks a robust regional security mechanism. This absence of a regional security mechanism, especially in the maritime domain, has resulted in the proliferation of a range of threats and challenges to maritime security. Consequently, extra-regional powers have mobilised efforts to address the regional maritime security challenges of which the ongoing multi-national effort in counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia is a well-known example.¹⁰ Although the IOR does have some cooperative mechanisms for promoting maritime security, their effectiveness addressing the maritime security challenges is widely debated and often doubted.

Relevant literature on maritime security cooperation in the IOR

The subject of maritime security in the Indian Ocean, and now the Indo-Pacific, is quite expansive with themes ranging from power-plays by the Great Powers during the Cold War to the rise of new regional powers. The dimensions of maritime security – both from the conventional as well as non-conventional perspectives – have also been addressed more than



adequately. Some of the existing works, relevant to this study are mentioned in succeeding paragraphs.

In *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China, India and the United States*, perspectives on key issues such as traditional and non-traditional challenges, multilateral mechanisms and cooperative measures have been obtained from experts, practitioners and policymakers.¹¹ In *The 'Indo' in the 'Indo-Pacific' – An Indian View*,¹² Ghosh and Kumar make a holistic assessment of maritime security challenges in the IOR, while noting that 'IONS has yet to develop the range of interoperability templates required to overcome the various threats and challenges found in the regional maritime arena'¹³. A recent report by the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi titled *Indo Pacific Report 2019*¹⁴ contains a conceptualisation of both IONS and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) at the 'Executive Level' of the emerging Indo-Pacific architecture.¹⁵ This report also contains a chapter on the non-traditional security issues in the Indo-Pacific and calls for a twin approach – at the sub-regional and the trans-regional levels – while having a clear focus on 'small hotspots' to address these issues.¹⁶ In a thesis submitted to the University of Wollongong, Shishir Upadhyaya focuses on the current maritime security environment in the IOR as well as the impediments in maritime security cooperation. He has also developed a framework for the analysis of maritime security cooperation, which is relevant to this study.¹⁷ In an article published in 2011, Lee Corder examined various possible models for regional cooperation in the IOR (such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)) and also posits that 'in the absence of something akin to the Track 1 ARF, perhaps supported by the Track 2 Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)—to work security, strategy, and policy issues at head-of government, senior-minister, senior-official, and academic levels—IONS is likely to facilitate only minor and relatively low-level, navy-to-navy cooperation.'¹⁸ Corder's thesis (2015) on Indian Ocean maritime security contains a detailed examination of regional maritime governance and security structures and, in passing, describes IONS progress as 'glacial' and the support from regional navies 'patchy'.¹⁹

The research problem

It is evident that although many references to IONS are found in existing literature, there has been little effort in evaluating its efficacy as a regional maritime cooperative organisation. IONS, upon its inauguration on 14 February 2008, was hailed as a 'historic event for the countries of the Indian Ocean Region'²⁰ and as a 'uniquely consultative and cooperative initiative that holds so much promise for the future that it already transcends narrow national moorings and the earlier thinking on security.....IONS is a robust sign of a paradigm shift from competitive security to cooperative security within the maritime domain.'²¹ At the same time, some experts had adopted a more cautious stance and raised some of the issues that would need to be addressed if IONS were to succeed.²² Indeed, while IONS can boast of being the only IOR organisation dedicated to promoting maritime security, one struggles to find examples where this organisation has contributed to strengthening maritime security and respond



to real-life security challenges such as piracy or natural disasters. Therefore, this paper aims to assess the effectiveness of IONS as a regional cooperative mechanism for maritime security.

The scope and structure of the paper

This paper will contextualise threats to regional maritime security in the IOR, including the non-traditional and sub-conventional spectrum. The paper will thereafter examine existing regional maritime cooperation mechanisms in the IOR to assess their effectiveness in addressing the common maritime security challenges faced by the littoral nations of the Indian Ocean. Although the focus of this paper continues to be at broad and general level of strategic maritime security cooperation, the paper will offer a specific case study analysis of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to evaluate its contribution in strengthening cooperative maritime security and make recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of IONS.

Noting the scanty data which is available in the open-source, this paper relies heavily on the open-source opinions of subject matter experts as well as practitioners in the field of maritime security. The paper is purely qualitative, bridging a crucial gap between maritime security theory and practice. The study reviews the practical aspects of maritime security cooperation without venturing into the domain of political policy.

This paper is divided into six chapters as follows:-

- (a) **Introduction:** This section provides the rationale and justification for undertaking the study. It includes a statement of the problem and an overview of the existing body of work in the field of maritime security cooperation.
- (b) **Maritime Security Challenges in the IOR:** In this section, the existing maritime security challenges, with a primary focus on non-traditional threats to maritime security, are summarised.
- (c) **Maritime Security Cooperation in the IOR:** The problems of maritime security cooperation are discussed in this section. An overview of the existing cooperative mechanisms on maritime security in the IOR has also been provided.
- (d) **Evaluation of IONS:** The broad organisation of IONS, its charter and an in-depth examination of work done by IONS constitutes the bulk of this section. The strengths and weaknesses of IONS, as well as possible measures to overcome the shortcomings, are also discussed.
- (e) **Recommendations and Way Ahead:** This section will enumerate the key recommendations arising out of this study. The paper concludes with an overall assessment of IONS and a prognosis of its potential role in strengthening maritime security in the IOR.
- (f) **Conclusion.**



CHAPTER 2

Maritime security challenges in the IOR

The IOR is demonstrably maritime. The national interests of its states range from the need to ensure the unfettered flow of maritime trade to support burgeoning, or emerging and struggling, economies to the need for effective management of the Indian Ocean's vast 'maritime commons,' both national jurisdictions and high seas.²³

The IOR faces multiple security challenges across the entire spectrum of threats, ranging from traditional (conventional state-on-state conflicts) to non-traditional (threats emanating from non-state actors or those sponsored by states without the active involvement of states). Many of these threats manifest under the rubric of maritime security challenges. The Indian Maritime Doctrine calls the IOR a 'hotbed of international crime'²⁴ while simultaneously highlighting the other threats related to maritime terrorism, natural disasters, and territorial disputes between states. Cordesman *et al* have carried out a strategic net assessment of the IOR and have highlighted a full range of major strategic issues and risks in the IOR that range from instability in the Persian Gulf to the fragile relationship between India and Pakistan.²⁵ However, these are issues that do not readily lend themselves to regional cooperation – primarily because either they are disputes of a bilateral nature or issues in which the positions assumed by state parties are deeply entrenched in a historical and cultural context. Therefore, this paper will focus on 'low end' threats which primarily lie in the non-traditional zone. These are 'low-hanging fruit—while they sit at the 'soft' end of the spectrum of security cooperation, they can be very useful ways to develop personal relationships and inter-operability and provide an opportunity to generate significant goodwill'.²⁶

It might be useful to clarify that non-traditional threats are not exactly 'low-hanging fruit' as some prefer to call them. While they do not typify warfighting aspects and reside primarily at the lower end of the spectrum of threats, they can be highly resistant to resolution and therefore many of them constitute what Sam Bateman calls 'wicked problems'.²⁷ However, they are more likely to engender cooperation than are issues related to traditional threats such as territorial disputes and power struggles.

Another issue is that there is a difference in the manner in which the IOR nations perceive maritime security. Admiral Marsetio has identified eight maritime challenges that Indonesia faces in the region, namely, the competition for natural resources and sea-borne trade, territorial disputes, the safety of navigation, marine environment, Transnational Organised Crime (TOC), natural disasters, energy security, and food security.²⁸ More recently, Vice Admiral Muhammad Ali also stressed upon the need 'to deter and combat 'actual threats', namely, terror, separatism, endemic disease and natural disasters'.²⁹ For India, the more important challenges are coastal security, maritime terrorism, piracy and protection of seaborne trade in addition to the traditional security challenges as a result of naval build up in the IOR.³⁰ From an Australian perspective, protection of seaborne trade, protection of offshore oil and gas installations, terrorism,



transnational crime, climate change and non-geographic threats such as cyber and space crimes appear to be more relevant.³¹ While some nations want to include non-traditional threats in their definition of maritime security, some do not want to do so.³² Also, archipelagic and small island countries will have issues such as climate change and Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) fishing higher on their list of priorities.

Non-traditional maritime security challenges in the IOR

According to Kumar and Ghosh, many of the threats in the IOR are rooted in inadequate enforcement capabilities, which in turn is detrimental to Good Order at Sea and leads to rising maritime crime and violence.³³ They point out to the intensifying political conflict in Yemen, the ‘rooting in’ of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as Al Qaeda in the Western IOR and to the problems of human trafficking, drug smuggling and ethnic strife in the Eastern IOR while observing the lack of a region-wide capability to prevent IUU fishing or to counter the growing maritime capabilities of terrorist groups.³⁴

Admittedly, it is not difficult to grasp the range and depth of security challenges that bedevil the IOR. Several reports and assessments prepared by global organisations as well as national agencies continue to draw attention to these threats and challenges.

(a) **Drug Trafficking and narco-terrorism:** The Indian Ocean, offers a point of convergence to the narcotic trade from both the ‘Golden Triangle’ in Myanmar and the ‘Golden Crescent’ in Afghanistan. The Indian Ocean has emerged as an important transit route for the dispatch of large consignments of narcotics.³⁵ Most of the poppy cultivation in the region takes place in the areas that encircle the Indian Ocean. Terrorist groups operate with transnational criminal organisations, drug cartels and warlords. Drug money is used to procure weapons, arms and ammunition and to support terrorist activities and insurgencies. The transshipment of these tools of terror, which are used to support terrorist activities and insurgencies, often takes place in the waters of the Indian Ocean.³⁶ A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points out that the Indian Ocean remains a conduit for outbound transit of heroin from Central Asia and the inbound trafficking of cocaine from South America.³⁷

(b) **Maritime Terrorism:** Maritime terrorism, a term which implies perpetration of terrorism at sea or from the sea, is another serious threat that is prominent in the Indian Ocean Region. Seven of the top ten nations which have suffered the most terror attacks in 2017 were in the IOR.³⁸

(c) **Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration:** In the context of human trafficking, the UNODC notes that only nine per cent of human trafficking takes place across regions, with 33 per cent victims trafficked within the same region or sub-region (in this context the IOR) and 58 per cent victims within national boundaries.³⁹ The report further notes that the Indian Ocean is the main conduit for trafficking of persons, especially those



outbound from South Asia and East Asia.⁴⁰ According to another estimate, human trafficking is most prevalent in Asia with about 250,000 people from South East Asia and about 150,000 from South Asia.⁴¹

(d) Natural Disasters: A UN report on disasters in the Asia-Pacific notes that in 2018, almost half of the 281 natural disaster events worldwide occurred in the Asia-Pacific region, including 8 out of the 10 deadliest.⁴² In the same year, Indonesia accounted for nearly half the casualties worldwide while India recorded the largest proportion of people affected by natural disasters.⁴³ The majority of these disasters occur in the hinterland with little role for navies in providing relief. However, although the number of disasters in the coastal zones is fewer, their scale is enormous, as demonstrated by cyclones Idai⁴⁴ and Fani⁴⁵ in 2019, the series of earthquakes and tsunamis that affected Indonesia a year earlier,⁴⁶ and cyclone Ockhi in 2017.⁴⁷

(e) Maritime Piracy: Piracy and Armed Robbery in the Somali Basin, which had shown an increase from 2005 onwards, has reduced in recent years.⁴⁸ This has largely been the result of sustained anti-piracy operations by powerful coalitions formed by extra-regional navies and global initiatives by the shipping industry.⁴⁹ A report published in the *International Journal of Security and its Application* concludes that in recent years the global piracy attacks have reduced; however, there are significant risks to merchant ships from pirates.⁵⁰ The monthly reports and updates published by the Information Fusion Centre-IOR (IFC-IOR), India and the IFC, Singapore highlight the continued risks to maritime security posed by piracy and armed robbery.⁵¹

(f) Humanitarian Crises: The IOR has also experienced several humanitarian crises in recent times. These include refugees, 'stateless' people and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). According to a UN report, the total number of forcibly displaced people in the world at the end of 2018 was 70.8 million. There were 26 million refugees, of which more than two-thirds came from just five countries – the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia – four of which are IOR littoral and hinterland states.⁵² It is also a matter of concern that five of the top ten host countries for refugees are also in the IOR,⁵³ which complicates their security calculus. In addition to the refugees, there are a larger number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the region. Five of the top ten countries with IDPs are in the IOR and this is another significant concern for the Indian Ocean.⁵⁴

(g) IUU Fishing: IUU fishing is a major concern for IOR nations, especially those whose economy has greater dependencies on fisheries and related sectors. It represents an estimated 15 to 30 per cent of the global catch, with South and South East Asia facing the highest incidence of IUU fishing,⁵⁵ although the problem is also more pronounced off Australia's northwest coast.⁵⁶ According to the IUU Fishing Index Report 2019, countries in Asia (region) and the Indian Ocean (ocean basin) are the worst performers, implying that their vulnerability to IUU fishing as well as their management and response



mechanisms are the poorest among all regions and ocean basins.⁵⁷ The IFC Singapore monthly update illustrates the increasing trend in IUU fishing incidents for the years 2018-19.⁵⁸

(h) Threat from Non-State Actors: There is also an increasing threat from non-state actors in the Indian Ocean. The recent attacks on a Saudi oil tanker and a Saudi naval frigate by Houthi militia demonstrate this threat.⁵⁹

(j) Gun-Running: Gunrunning or illicit trafficking of firearms is a major problem globally and in the IOR. This is also closely linked with trafficking in people and drugs as well as with terrorism.

(k) Climate Change: Lee Cordner points out that the combined impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, and ocean resource exploitation will profoundly affect the lives of millions in a region (IOR) where many states have little capability to manage or respond to them.⁶⁰

The enormity of the challenges to maritime security posed by the plethora of non-traditional threats is evident in the IOR. Of greater concern is the upward trend (except for piracy) in the incidence of these threats as well as their repercussions and the costs of reparations. In the next section, the extant mechanisms for maritime cooperation in dealing with these threats will be examined.



CHAPTER 3

Maritime security cooperation in the IOR

*Navies are inherently international and collaborative – the seas remain the great global commons and because, as I have said, the international trading system is inherently global, we have a fundamental responsibility to contribute to its safe and effective operation.*⁶¹

Assessment of Regional Cooperation in the IOR

The story of maritime security cooperation in the IOR is, ironically, the story of its absence. It has been absent since the ascendancy of European maritime powers in the region, during the colonial period and even as late as in the latter half of the Twentieth Century. To be sure, even in the recent past, whenever crises have emerged in the region, the regional navies haven't been able to address those challenges. For example, piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia has largely been contained through the collective and cooperative effort of extra-regional powers, with little initiative among the regional navies.⁶² Even in the case of recurrent natural disasters – the IOR is the locus of seventy per cent of the world's natural disasters⁶³ – the collective regional response has been muted.

The IOR is remarkable for its lack of regional coordination, habits of cooperation or a sense of regional identity.⁶⁴ There is hardly any regional security architecture and maritime cooperation is largely focussed at a sub-regional level, which is in itself weak. According to Cordner, '“o flourish, collective and cooperative security needs a common perception of threat, a common “enemy” and none has existed in the IOR until recently’.⁶⁵ There are important exceptions though. For example, this assessment excludes the impressive record of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its related forums and mechanisms. Although ASEAN is not truly an IOR organisation since some of its members do not reside in the region, it is perhaps the most prominent, powerful and effective organisation in the IOR.

Vice Admiral MacDougall was perhaps prescient when he noted (in 1995) that 'given the size of the Indian Ocean and the political, economic and cultural diversity of its littoral states, the foreseeable future is unlikely to bring speedy developments in maritime cooperation'.⁶⁶ C. Uday Bhaskar also notes that 'the IOR does not lend itself to cohesion due to the disparate political and economic profile of the littorals'.⁶⁷ He goes on to add that the principal constraints in the management of maritime challenges in the region are: the disparate composition of individual states, low political trust, the historical narrative about territoriality and a deep-seated insecurity and mistrust about the other.⁶⁸

The lack of regionalism⁶⁹ also raises some important questions, which could be addressed through separate studies. Firstly, if the IOR has not yet evolved into a cohesive regional entity whose constituents have common traits (religion, language, ethnicity, history, culture etc.), express common interests and face common threats and are willing to cooperate as well, then



what are the merits of attempting to forge pan-IOR maritime security cooperation mechanisms. If there are no common interests or threats, then what might be the objectives of such regional mechanisms?

Problems in maritime security cooperation in the IOR

Defining Maritime Security: To begin with, it is problematic to arrive at a common understanding of maritime security. Most IOR nations have diverse, and often conflicting, maritime interests; their geographical limitations vis-à-vis their political and economic aspirations impose constraints on their understanding of maritime security. For example, nations with large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) but the inadequate capability for surveillance and control would normally place IUU fishing higher on their list of priorities. On the other hand, nations which have relatively small maritime zones but large fishing fleets would be uncomfortable in including IUU fishing within the ambit of maritime security.⁷⁰

It is important to state the context in which the term ‘maritime security cooperation’ has been used in this paper because it potentially encompasses relations which range from alliances bound by treaties to informal collaborations. In this paper, the term ‘maritime security cooperation’ refers to ‘collaboration’⁷¹ which may include explicit or implicit informal arrangements between states under the ambit of defence cooperation and may manifest as navy-to-navy staff talks, multinational exercises, ship visits and exchanges of visits by senior officials. The drivers for maritime security cooperation are: Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), training, capacity building, benchmarking of operational standards, building interoperability, coalition building etc.⁷²

Diversity: Broadly speaking, the IOR is too diverse to be defined under a single regional concept. Cordesman *et al* have grappled with this problem of diversity in their strategic net assessment report. They write that the IOR is so diverse that even describing its sub-regions is a challenge because ‘every aspect of culture, religion, security situation ...can change by crossing a single border’.⁷³ They rightly point out that ‘real regional cooperation Is at best diplomatic fiction’.⁷⁴ It is this diversity that, in the first place, adversely impacts mutual trust and cooperation. That the diversity often manifests as animosity does not help the situation either.

Political Differences: Although the efforts to build maritime cooperation in the IOR began as early as the 1980s, these came to naught due to various reasons such as political differences, lack of common interests and simply because of the perception that the cost of cooperation wasn’t worth it.⁷⁵ The IOR, in large measure owing to its chequered history, is deeply entrenched in political, religious, ethnic and ideological conflict – ranging from the Persian Gulf to South and South East Asia.

Lack of Common Interests: Lee Corder writes that there is ‘unlikely to be a single defining moment that will galvanize action’ among the IOR littoral states to cooperate and notes that ‘late and ineffectual reaction is the most realistic and likely scenario’.⁷⁶ This concern reverberates



among many experts who note that the presence of various sub-regional structures in the IOR such as Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) etc. have different priorities and different membership which reflect the sub-regional priorities⁷⁷ and which, in turn, ‘has an operationally inhibitory effect in the IOR’.⁷⁸

Wide Geographical Expanse: Many experts argue that the wide dispersion of littoral states across the IOR vis-à-vis proximity of nations in other regions is a challenge to effective maritime cooperation.⁷⁹ Not only is the huge geographic expanse of IOR a challenge in communication, but it also presents the problem of disparate strategic outlooks to accommodate a ‘one size fits all’ approach to regional security architecture.⁸⁰ Rory Medcalf also writes that the [Indo-Pacific] region is too big, and its littoral states and extra-regional stakeholders are too disparate and numerous to be expected to achieve timely and practical multilateral solutions to a host of problems ranging from piracy to strategic mistrust.⁸¹

Lack of Resources and Capacity: Many regional states cannot protect their maritime interests, let alone contribute to regional efforts.⁸² This deficiency is even more pronounced because of large scale socio-economic problems such as poverty, illiteracy, poor health and sanitation and unemployment. Almost half of the IOR states have ‘Medium’ to ‘Low’ Human Development Indices (HDI) which implies that for these states, it will be more important to devote their resources towards poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, health and education.⁸³ This limitation is compounded by the effects of natural disasters and humanitarian crises which have been brought out earlier in this paper.

Role of Regional and Extra-Regional Powers: The IOR, until very recently and even now, did not have strong littoral powers which could influence regional affairs although countries like Australia, India, Indonesia, Iran, South Africa and Saudi Arabia do exert varying degrees of influence in the region. As a result, the IOR has been influenced largely by extra-regional powers which have significant maritime interests in the region. This is at times perceived as interference and is not welcome by some IOR nations.⁸⁴ At the same time, many experts stress the need to not only recognise the interests and accommodate the involvement of extra-regional powers,⁸⁵ but they also maintain that their role is crucial in maintaining regional stability and security. For example, they write that ‘External powers must be involved in IOR security if arrangements are to be meaningful and have a chance of being effective’;⁸⁶ and that ‘...not involving extra-regional countries that have major interest and stakes in the region may prove to be a major stumbling block’.⁸⁷ As far as extra-regional powers are concerned, they continue to view the IOR as a region of significant interest and intend to remain focussed on regional affairs⁸⁸ while littoral states would continue to emphasise the preponderance of national sovereignty in the international order.⁸⁹ Some experts have suggested ‘the creation of ‘middle power coalitions’: informal arrangements where regional players cooperate on strategic issues, working in self-selecting groups that do not include China or the United States.’⁹⁰



Plainly, on one hand there are genuine concerns about maritime security and stability in the region among the IOR littorals which potentially provide the foundation for building cooperation. Simultaneously, on the other hand, there are over-riding individual interests which tend to blunt cooperative initiatives. Columban Lebas has summarised this contradiction succinctly⁹¹:-

‘Undermined by a sort of fatal propensity for fragmentation, this area seems to waver between a common interest for stability and prosperity, and centrifugal forces that easily counter these positive intentions.’

An overview of existing regional organisations and mechanisms for maritime cooperation

Several authors have written about existing groups and mechanisms in the IOR aimed at facilitating maritime cooperation.⁹² These include the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), IONS, SAARC, GCC, SADC, East African Community (EAC), and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). For this paper, only IORA and IONS are considered as pan-IOR organisations.

Interestingly, experts have made a clear distinction between Asian or East Asian organisations (mainly the ASEAN and its related organisations, ARF, EAS, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus), ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and Expanded AMF (EAMF)) and those of the Indian Ocean. This distinction has, quite surprisingly, reinforced the notion of Asia as a distinct entity from the IOR, even though large number of IOR littorals are indeed Asian. Most assessments of the existing mechanisms for maritime cooperation also clearly rate East Asia much higher than the IOR, citing the cohesive and consistent approach to maritime security issues among its nations, led by ASEAN. Some scholars have argued that ASEAN is now poised for a greater role in the wider Indo-Pacific and point to ASEAN’s potential for collaboration with IORA and IONS.⁹³

The relative lack of cooperation among IOR nations on maritime security issues and its possible causes have been brought out in this section. These causes also permeate down to the operational level at which the IONS is situated as the only cooperative and consultative forum among IOR nations. Much of the problems of cooperation that have been highlighted earlier in this paper also adversely impede the effective functioning IONS. This idea will be assessed in the next section.



CHAPTER 4

Maritime cooperation at the operational level – an evaluation of IONS

Our era demands this above all else. It demands a new spirit of committed multilateralism, a multilateralism suited to the challenges of the Twenty-First Century. A new multilateralism focused on results.⁹⁴

Introduction

IONS is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation amongst navies of the littoral states of the IOR by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues. It endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals resulting in common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.⁹⁵ IONS aims to achieve mutually beneficial maritime security outcomes through enhanced cooperation among regional navies. Specifically, IONS aims to achieve a **shared understanding of maritime security issues** among the Indian Ocean littoral navies, **strengthen their capability** to address these challenges, **establish a variety of multilateral maritime cooperative mechanisms** and to **develop interoperability for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**. These objectives, written in the IONS Charter⁹⁶, are the parameters against which the effectiveness of IONS must be evaluated.

In this section, the activities and events conducted under the aegis of IONS will be summarised and specific issues relating to the deficiencies of IONS will be highlighted. More importantly, the views of academic experts and naval practitioners which were obtained as part of this research will also be presented in the context of IONS as well as in the broader context of strategic outlook on maritime security in the Indian Ocean. This section will conclude with recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of IONS.

Organisation and membership of IONS

IONS Chair: The IONS chair is selected by the members through mutual consultation. The chair is selected sequentially from geographic sub-regions – South Asia, West Asia, East Africa and South East Asia and Australia – and is rotated every two years.⁹⁷ To date, the IONS chair has rotated between India (2008-9), United Arab Emirates (2010-11), South Africa (2012-13), Australia (2014-15), Bangladesh (2016-17) and Iran (2018-19), which is the current chair. The next chair will be France for the period 2020-21.

IONS Working Groups: To streamline and organise the distribution of tasks for various member navies, three IONS Working Groups (IWGs) have been created. These are:⁹⁸

- (a) Maritime Security IONS Working Group (MARSEC IWG).
- (b) Information Sharing and Interoperability Working Group (IS & I IWG).



(c) HADR Working Group

Membership: Currently, IONS has 24 members and 8 observers.⁹⁹ The rules for membership and admission as observers are given in the IONS Charter of Business. Interestingly, not all IOR littorals are members of IONS. The 13 nations which are not members of IOR are: Bahrain, Comoros, Somalia, Yemen, Israel, Sudan, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Madagascar and Djibouti.

Format of the IONS: The symposiums are held biannually and incorporate a conclave of the Chiefs-of-Navy. In each intervening year between successive symposiums, an IONS Preparatory Workshop (IPW) is normally held, with representation by respective staff officers at an appropriate level. The deliberations during IPW are aimed at discussing the theme of the next symposium or seminar and drafting the agenda for the next meeting of the Conclave of Chiefs.¹⁰⁰

Summary of important events and activities by IONS

A summary of the important events and activities that have been conducted under the auspices of IONS are tabulated in **Figure 1**.

Year	Event(s)		
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar and Conclave 14-16 February, India • Plenary sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Overview of IOR maritime scenario;</i> ○ <i>Contemporary maritime challenges;</i> ○ <i>Synergy through maritime cooperative approaches;</i> ○ <i>Commonalities in maritime challenges and options for a cooperative maritime security structure.</i> 		
2009	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Workshop 21-23 May, Sri Lanka • Practical cooperative mechanisms for technical support within the IOR, with following sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Formulation of standards of interoperability and technical cooperation;</i> ○ <i>Understanding procedures and maintenance methods being followed in IOR countries;</i> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory Workshop 01-03 October, Kenya • Discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>HADR;</i> ○ <i>Observers;</i> ○ <i>Charter of Business;</i> ○ <i>Agenda for 2010.</i> </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Workshop 21-23 May, Sri Lanka • Practical cooperative mechanisms for technical support within the IOR, with following sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Formulation of standards of interoperability and technical cooperation;</i> ○ <i>Understanding procedures and maintenance methods being followed in IOR countries;</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory Workshop 01-03 October, Kenya • Discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>HADR;</i> ○ <i>Observers;</i> ○ <i>Charter of Business;</i> ○ <i>Agenda for 2010.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Workshop 21-23 May, Sri Lanka • Practical cooperative mechanisms for technical support within the IOR, with following sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Formulation of standards of interoperability and technical cooperation;</i> ○ <i>Understanding procedures and maintenance methods being followed in IOR countries;</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory Workshop 01-03 October, Kenya • Discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>HADR;</i> ○ <i>Observers;</i> ○ <i>Charter of Business;</i> ○ <i>Agenda for 2010.</i> 		



Year	Event(s)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Leveraging logistic support within IOR for ships on deployment;</i> ○ <i>Harnessing IT towards shorter refits;</i> ○ <i>Privatisation of refit/ repair infrastructure;</i> ○ <i>Optimisation of technical manpower on-board ships with emerging technologies.</i> 	
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seminar and Conclave 10-12 May, UAE ● Plenary sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Reinforcement of regional stability and establishment of good order at sea;</i> ○ <i>Cooperative efforts to enhance maritime security;</i> ○ <i>Experience and challenges of regional capacity enhancement and capability building;</i> ○ <i>Combating piracy and maritime crime.</i> ● Workshops on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Threats, risks and vulnerabilities</i> ○ <i>Leading to a new, common maritime security strategy</i> ○ <i>Regional medical and humanitarian maritime missions</i> ○ <i>New technologies to the service of interoperability in the fields of surveillance and information exchange</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Operational Workshop 11-12 October, Bangladesh: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>HADR Operational Logistics: Importance of mobilisation by the IOR navies to conduct HADR in the affected countries</i>
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preparatory Workshop 18-19 October, Indonesia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Discussions on Charter of Business and Agenda for 2012</i> ● Operational Workshop 18-19 October, Indonesia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Counter-Piracy Concepts: Fostering Strategic Partnerships in Managing Maritime Security</i> 	
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Operational Workshop 10-13 April, Sri Lanka 	



Year	Event(s)				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Importance of coordinating and sharing resources for efficient maritime operations in IOR</i> 				
<p>2013</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Operational Workshop 11-13 September, India ● Panel Discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Role of emerging navies and maritime security forces in collective prosperity in the IOR;</i> ○ <i>Challenges and opportunities for cooperation among IOR navies;</i> ○ <i>Essential interfaces required for strengthening naval cooperation, interoperability and confidence-building initiatives amongst IONS maritime forces.</i> ● Preparatory Workshop 11-13 September, India ● Discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Charter of Business;</i> ○ <i>Presentation of papers on IONS deliverables.</i> 				
<p>2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seminar and Conclave 10-12 May, Australia ● Protecting the ability to trade in the Indian Ocean maritime economy, with the following session topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Importance of the Indian Ocean;</i> ○ <i>Importance of the maritime economy;</i> ○ <i>Challenges;</i> ○ <i>Industry responses;</i> ○ <i>Naval responses;</i> ○ <i>A role for IONS – Collaborative capacity building.</i> <p style="text-align: center;">IONS CHARTER OF BUSINESS CAME INTO EFFECT</p>				
<p>2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conclave Sea Power Conference, Australia <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 50%;">HADR Working Group, India</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Counter-Piracy Working Group, South Africa</td> </tr> </table>		HADR Working Group, India		Counter-Piracy Working Group, South Africa
	HADR Working Group, India				
	Counter-Piracy Working Group, South Africa				
<p>2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seminar and Conclave 10-13 January, Bangladesh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Fostering partnership in IOR: Charting course for maritime cooperative engagement;</i> ○ <i>The geostrategic and economic outlook of IOR;</i> ○ <i>Maritime security in IOR;</i> ○ <i>HADR;</i> ○ <i>Cooperation and collaboration;</i> ○ <i>Future outlook.</i> 				
<p>2017</p>	<p>IMMSAREX by Bangladesh Navy 26-29 November</p>				



Year	Event(s)
2018	10th Anniversary Celebrations 13-14 November, India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seminar Theme: <i>IONS as a catalyst for SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region);</i> ○ Tall Ship Sailing Event.
2019	Preparatory Workshop 14-15 October, Oman HADR Working Group 27-28 September, India

Figure 1: Table Depicting Important Events Conducted by IONS¹⁰¹

It can be seen from **Figure 1** that over the years IONS has endeavoured to galvanise cooperation in the areas of common concern in maritime security among its member nations. The procedure of preparation of agenda, tasking and reporting back to the chair is also more or less institutionalised. For example, in the IONS Preparatory Workshop at Oman in October 2019, the Iranian Navy (as the current chair of IONS) gave a detailed account of the activities during its tenure including the Maritime Security Working Group meeting and preparation of its guidelines, compiling IONS Tactical Publication and holding IONS Maritime Exercise 2020 briefing session. The RAN and the IN representatives, as chairs of the IS&I IWG and the HADR Working Group respectively, also presented reports about their activities.¹⁰²

IONS Multilateral Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise (IMMSAREX): IMMSAREX, conducted at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh from 27 to 29 November 2017, is one of the important events conducted under the IONS banner.¹⁰³ 41 warships, including 33 from the Bangladesh Navy (which was hosting the event), participated in this first-ever IONS-led exercise. The two-day sea exercises involved assistance to a merchant ship on fire, search and rescue of a fishing vessel, and search for an aircraft reported missing at sea.¹⁰⁴ However, there has been mixed feedback from those who participated in IMMSAREX-17. According to some, the IMMSAREX-17 was a 'pretty basic level exercise, where the Bangladesh Navy personnel did most of the stuff and members of the other navies were only spectators'.¹⁰⁵ So, overall, there were few meaningful interactions or lessons learnt.

IONS Guidelines for HADR: The IONS Working Group on HADR has prepared guidelines for HADR operations.¹⁰⁶ The document aims at providing guidelines for developing a speedy, responsive, coordinated and effective HADR for IONS members, and if required, also serves the purpose of providing a common understanding of HADR operations.¹⁰⁷ However, it lacks objectivity, belabouring aspects of mere theoretical nature and often stating the obvious or what may not be relevant. For example, the document envisages the establishment of a permanent Coordination Centre which would be responsible for the coordination of HADR effort between the affected navy, the assisting navies and the IONS secretariat,¹⁰⁸ a proposition which is even more far-fetched than is the idea of a permanent IONS secretariat. The guidelines also envisage an IONS force and an overall Multinational Force (MNF) coordinator,¹⁰⁹ which though



imaginative, is unrealistic because disaster relief efforts by most navies would not be forthcoming at a pre-arranged time or destination.

Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES): IONS members have mutually agreed upon the CUES prepared by the WPNS and this document has been posted on the IONS website.¹¹⁰ Although the document has been adopted *in toto* by IONS, it is understandable that IONS members would have deliberated upon the utility of CUES (in the WPNS version) to IOR navies. One obvious advantage for the navies which overlap IONS and WPNS is that they now have a common CUES document to abide by.¹¹¹ It will also be interesting to observe how many IONS navies which still use allied signal codes or their improvised versions will adapt to CUES in practice.

IONS Open Essay Competition: The IONS Open Essay Competition has traditionally been conducted under the auspices of the IONS chair. This is a significant annual event which promotes professional debate and academic rigour among the member navies on topics of contemporary relevance.

Ionsphere – The IONS Journal: The IONS journal, aptly titled ‘Ionsphere’, was published for four consecutive years between 2013 and 2016¹¹² and has been discontinued since.

IONS Website: The IONS website is hosted at www.ions.global and is accessible on the internet. The website has positive aspects such as unrestricted access as well as a new section on COVID-19 in which certain innovations relating to medical equipment have been shared by the Indian Navy.¹¹³ However, in general, the website contains a lot of dated information and has greater scope for improvement.

IONS report card

Since its inception in 2008, IONS has matured as a stable regional maritime cooperation forum, focused on security. It has evolved on broadly similar lines as the WPNS and has a somewhat institutionalised mechanism of functioning. This is perhaps one of the reasons that officers from the RAN and the IN, who have been engaged with IONS, have expressed satisfaction over the performance of IONS over the years.¹¹⁴ However, this is not the definitive view and to be sure, some senior officers have been candid in expressing their views on the speed at which IONS progresses its agenda. Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, for instance, cautions that if IONS continues to progress at the glacial speed it has done so far, it runs the risk of slipping into irrelevance.¹¹⁵ Vice Admiral Tim Barrett concurs with this view and adds that although there were certain expectations when IONS was founded, it has not fully delivered wholly as expected.¹¹⁶

Some civilian experts on maritime security also believe that IONS has performed well as a platform for informal interaction. David Brewster, for instance, thinks of IONS as perhaps the most effective pan-IOR forums.¹¹⁷ Sam Bateman agrees that within its limitations, IONS has achieved its stated purpose.¹¹⁸ Scholars also argue that IONS should not be expected to deliver



what it wasn't designed for; which means that its primary purpose remains as a consultative forum – a talkfest of sorts – in which it has succeeded.

Yet, this paper examines the performance of IONS based on the objectives which have been outlined in its Charter of Business and have been brought out earlier. Surely, setting a mammoth multilateral organisation in motion for the mere purpose of getting together to talk once every two years is not an economical use of the regional navies' time and resources. And the logical next step after 'talk' should be 'action'. In any case, one must ask the following questions (each linked to an objective of IONS charter) to make an objective assessment of IONS:

- (a) In what ways have the IONS fostered a **shared understanding of maritime security issues** among the IOR navies?
- (b) How has the IONS **strengthened the capability of IOR navies** to address maritime security challenges?
- (c) What **multilateral maritime cooperative mechanisms** have been established by IONS?
- (d) To what extent has IONS succeeded in **developing interoperability for HADR**?

When the products delivered by IONS are evaluated in the context of IONS' objectives, it is evident that much more needs to be done. On the other hand, one might argue that it is a case of the glass being half-full instead of half-empty and therefore IONS has achieved many of its objectives. Such perspectives, though optimistic, tend to reinforce the *status quo* and might counter efforts to revive or revitalise the organisation. Indeed, some scholars have also argued that it is better to have something than nothing at all, which again does not help much as it leads to compromise between actions and results.

In the preceding paragraphs, the work done by IONS – IMMSAREX-17, HADR guidelines, adoption of CUES, the conduct of regular seminars, workshops and conclaves *et cetera* – have been elaborated upon. More importantly, IONS has fostered the spirit of maritime cooperation as witnessed during IMMSAREX-17 when the IN participated with four ships and one Boeing P8-I maritime patrol aircraft and the Chinese Navy sent the guided-missile frigate *Yuncheng*.¹¹⁹ This prompted a comment about IONS' relevance in managing security issues in the region because it was at the height of the Doklam crisis¹²⁰ that both India and China came together under the aegis of IONS.¹²¹

In a related context, Rear Admiral Pervaiz Asghar of the Pakistan Navy writes that 'IONS has become a robust interactive forum for generating greater mutual understanding to the ultimate benefit of the region and for brainstorming solutions to maritime issues of common interest.'¹²² Recognizing the benefits of IONS for regional navies, he writes:



*'In the formative years of the IONS, Pakistan was needlessly swimming against the tide by non-participation, or at best-limited participation, till the historic 2014 IONS breakthrough by its Naval Chief, which broke the logjam and enabled the country to become a part of the mainstream discourse. Pakistan's active participation, with the hosting of the preparatory workshop and a working group meeting in September of 2015 and the forthcoming working group meeting on Information and Interoperability in July this year will hopefully prove to be beneficial for the country as well as add to the vitality of this dynamic forum.'*¹²³

Perhaps many of IONS' achievements lie in the intangible and abstract realm – the goodwill and bonhomie that it has generated among naval professionals, the sheer symbolism of a cohesive regional identity, shaping narrow individual perspectives to look at common security objectives and instilling a sense of cooperation among regional navies. But again, to date, there has been little evidence of regional cooperation inspired by IONS despite several opportunities for cooperation presenting themselves. For instance, Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan writes that the anti-piracy missions 'were an excellent opportunity for national maritime security agencies — even while operating essentially alone — to have done so under a nominal IONS-umbrella'.¹²⁴ Therefore, it would be useful to look at the reasons that inhibit mutual trust and cooperation among regional navies.

Problems of IONS

Many of the problems, described earlier in this paper, which adversely impacts regional cooperation also bear upon IONS adversely. As brought out previously, most of these are rooted in regional history, ideological, religious and cultural differences, territorial disputes and lack of resources and capability.

A Group too large and too diverse. In 2013, Rory Medcalf wrote that the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC, now IORA) was 'an all-in body as unwieldy as its title'.¹²⁵ He was right: the experience with IONS has been similar. It is not only the numbers but also the diversity in the region that makes a cohesive and consistent approach difficult.

Lack of 'Political Top Cover'.¹²⁶ One of the often noted shortcomings of IONS is that it does not include the 'policy' component of regional navies. This is because most navies have a bureaucratic interface with the national leadership (representing the 'policy' component) through which they receive directions and strategic guidance as well as approvals for seemingly mundane events as port visits in foreign waters and even informal interaction with other navies. This aspect results in limiting the room for manoeuvre during events such as IONS workshops where certain future commitments might be required or concurrence required to be given to a proposal mooted for collective good. In this context, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs points out that because of this lack of political backing, many navies are wary of negotiating 'on the spot'. Therefore, experts note that 'although IONS is a vital facilitator of navy-to-navy engagements, it



does not encompass the political dimensions of regional security nor the wider dimensions of national security as perceived by regional states'.¹²⁷ Upadhyaya writes that 'a key difference between East Asian multilateral institutions and those of the Indian Ocean region is the lack of direct higher-level political leadership in the latter case'.¹²⁸ Yet some maintain that IONS is a purely naval forum and does not need involvement from the government.¹²⁹

Loosely Aggregated Organisational Foundation: Strategists and policymakers have grappled with the problem of gaining traction on issues of common concern in large, diverse, loosely fashioned multilateral groups, of which IONS is an example. Unlike organisations where alliance discipline and treaty obligations override other considerations and where the threat of a common enemy or a common socio-ethnic-cultural thread glues the members together (for example, NATO and ASEAN), IONS does not have a binding nature and its members, have little in common. Even organisations such as the WPNS have greater momentum and sense of direction because of the leadership provided by a few 'heavyweight' members. WPNS also has the political top cover that is notionally provided through the ARF and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).¹³⁰ Therefore, IONS continues to suffer from its diffuse and nebulous organisational character and has consequently languished virtually in a state of institutional torpor.

Absence of a Permanent Secretariat: The problem of IONS' diffuse character is exacerbated by the fact that it does not maintain a permanent secretariat; the secretariat rotates with the chair. In fact, for some experts, the rotational chair and secretariat results in the forum suffering from *ad hocism*.¹³¹ The personality of the chair indeed has a significant impact on how IONS shapes and pursues its agenda. Further, there is bound to be a 'transmission-loss' something akin to the loss of electric power when it is transmitted over large distances – when not only the administration and agenda but also the sense of zeal and drive are handed over from one navy to another. In this context, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs believes in the notion of stewardship for the chairs instead of merely presiding over the proceedings. He shares how the RAN engaged with the South African Navy (the preceding chair) almost 6-8 months before assuming chair in 2014. He is also of the view that this is about as good as it will get and that support for a permanent secretariat might never be forthcoming.¹³² Another view is shared by officers who are engaged with IONS processes. They opine that a rotational secretariat allows smaller navies to host, conduct and administer international symposiums. Additionally, a navy holding the permanent secretariat may be perceived as unilaterally driving the symposium agenda.

Limited Membership: Not all IOR littoral navies are represented in IONS. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury notes that at its inauguration, IONS had 35 Members, of which 11 countries later withdrew.¹³³ Although this is in itself not an issue of concern (not all countries of Western Pacific are represented in the WPNS), a wider subscription would perhaps lend greater acceptability and credibility to IONS. Another intriguing aspect is the lack of common members between IORA and IONS. **Figure 2** lists the IOR countries which are members of IORA or IONS or both. On this issue, it is important to note that because IONS is a voluntary initiative, it



is up to the non-member navies to join the forum. Many IONS chairs in the past have reportedly sent out letters of invitation to non-members; however, the latter chose otherwise.¹³⁴

<u>Country</u>	<u>IORA</u>	<u>IONS</u>
Australia		
Bahrain		
Bangladesh		
Comoros		
Djibouti		
Egypt		
Eritrea		
France		
India		
Indonesia		
Iran		
Iraq		
Israel		
Jordan		
Kenya		
Kuwait		
Madagascar		
Malaysia		
Maldives		
Mauritius		
Mozambique		
Myanmar		
Oman		
Pakistan		
Qatar		
Saudi Arabia		
Seychelles		
Singapore		
Somalia		
South Africa		
Sri Lanka		
Sudan		
Tanzania		
Thailand		
Timor Leste		
United Arab Emirates		
United Kingdom		



<u>Country</u>	<u>IORA</u>	<u>IONS</u>
Yemen		

Figure 2: List of IOR Littoral Countries which are Members of IORA and IONS¹³⁵

The Consensus Conundrum: According to the IONS Charter, ‘Decisions on all matters and issues will be decided through a process of consensus-building amongst all Members’,¹³⁶ where the term ‘consensus’ means ‘no opposition’. It is not hard to imagine that the differences in opinion are bound to arise due to the diverse, and even conflicting, interests among member states. Obviously, in such a scenario, decision-making suffers because the opposition by any one member can scuttle the entire process.¹³⁷ The corollary to this conundrum is that any further increase in the number of members will only hamper the already encumbered decision-making process.

Lack of Resources: Most IONS member states are developing nations and many of these lack resources for building adequate maritime capability for themselves. To illustrate this point, consider the fact that although IONS member states constitute about 32 per cent of the world’s population, they account for only 19.5 per cent of the world’s GDP.¹³⁸ Furthermore, almost half of the IONS states have ‘Medium’ to ‘Low’ Human Development Indices which implies that for these states, it will be more important to devote their resources towards poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, health and education than on military capability.¹³⁹ Therefore, there is a constant pressure on members to prune military expenditure resulting in a reluctance to even pay for things as mundane as travel bills for attending IONS seminars and workshops, let alone sending ships or delegations for exercises.¹⁴⁰

Maritime Military Capability. The maritime military (navy or coast guard, as applicable) capability of most IONS member states is limited when seen with respect to their coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In most cases, the EEZ area under a country’s maritime jurisdiction is large and the corresponding number of assets that the country possesses is small. For example, small island nations such as Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles have large EEZs in their jurisdiction. However, these states do not possess the required maritime forces for surveillance of such vast areas. On the other hand, even though large countries like Australia, Indonesia and India have robust naval and maritime constabulary forces, their resources would also perhaps be stretched due to the large sea areas under their jurisdiction. Therefore, in addition to the problem of resource crunch brought out in the preceding paragraph, the lack of maritime military capability among its members also adversely impacts the effectiveness of IONS.

A ‘Talk Fest’. Several experts have noted, and some with not an undeserving sense of frustration, that the IONS has largely remained a ‘talk shop’.¹⁴¹ Yet others aver that the primary function of IONS is that it is a talking platform for the IOR navies. Where else, they ask, might the chiefs of the Indian Navy and Pakistan Navy come together for professional interaction?¹⁴²



Or, for that matter the chiefs of the RAN, the Iranian Navy, and the Royal Saudi Naval Forces? Undoubtedly, the value of informal interaction, especially among the top leadership of the region's navies, cannot be underestimated. However, one must also revert to the origins of IONS and ask whether that was its sole purpose.

Practical Aspects of the transaction of business in IONS.¹⁴³ In addition to the external issues that impact IONS, there are some other aspects related to the functioning of IONS which hamper the effectiveness of IONS. These are brought out below:

- (a) **Consistency and Focus:** One of the practical impediments of IONS is that most often the staff representing the navies are turned around too quickly; for many it is a one-time appearance and they are not seen in consecutive meetings. A related issue is that many delegates are sometimes nominated from ships or operational headquarters and they have neither the background knowledge (of IONS agenda) nor the inclination to contribute meaningfully in the forum.
- (b) **Level of Staff Engagement:** Another aspect is that the level of staff engagement is not uniform across member navies. While in some navies the entire correspondence of IONS is dealt with by the concerned desk, normally at the level of Commander or Lieutenant Commander, in other navies Commodores and Rear Admirals sometimes are directly involved in routine IONS matters because IONS is engagement with 'foreign navies'. This does not always result in efficient communication.
- (c) **Protocol:** In many navies, there is a strict protocol which might not allow the IONS desk officers to communicate directly, but requiring them to route through specified channels of correspondence and communication. This includes rules regarding with whom it is that officers might communicate. Excessive formality hampers the frequency of communication and also introduces a stiffness and lack of fluency, which may not always be desirable.
- (d) **Communication:** Besides the issues of the protocol in communication, there are other problems too. For example, many navies do not prefer working over emails; as a matter of fact, some nodal officers in IONS do not even have official email designations and use unofficial services like 'Gmail' and 'yahoo' for official correspondence.

Lessons from the WPNS experience

Although the WPNS was initially conceived in 1988 as a confidence-building measure in the penultimate stages of the Cold War, it has now evolved into a robust organisation with IONS ostensibly having been modelled on the former. Between the two organisations, they have ten common members and observers – Australia, China, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh and India. However, IONS and WPNS do have some



differences such as many members of IONS are small and underdeveloped countries that lack the resources to participate fully in forum activities and the fact that the WPNS is restricted only to the navies (or defence forces).¹⁴⁴

Like IONS, WPNS has had its share of similar problems. In this context, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs agrees that although the cooperation in WPNS is excellent, it is still not without its challenges.¹⁴⁵ For example, the WPNS members too have diverse perceptions and they interpret maritime security according to their understanding. Many member navies are playing rather passive roles, resulting in a small core of navies driving WPNS.¹⁴⁶

Like IONS, WPNS also 'drifted to some extent during the 1990s and early 2000s'¹⁴⁷ and has regularly faced problems of funding.¹⁴⁸ According to Rear Admiral Shrikhande, the issues within IONS are essentially analogous to the ones experienced by WPNS; there are some lessons, but the limitations cannot be wished away.¹⁴⁹

Yet, IONS could gain much from the WPNS experience. For instance, WPNS has made good progress on training and experience sharing, which is conducted through personnel exchanges, attendance at overseas Staff Colleges, study visits and tours (including visits by naval units), and senior officer visits. The forum has also identified Mine Counter Measures (MCM) and Diving as focus areas and the WPNS members have participated in exercises related to these disciplines.¹⁵⁰ At the working level, their staff channels of communication and procedures are more evolved and efficient and they can make better progress than IONS.¹⁵¹ The WPNS is also successful because most of its member navies are capable as well as confident. They are reasonably at ease with each other and most have the resources to participate fully in WPNS activities.¹⁵² How WPNS has succeeded in galvanising its members towards cohesive action has prompted Vice Admiral Ray Griggs to suggest that IONS could consider adopting a combination of the WPNS and ADMM Plus model, an idea he reportedly mooted for the first time in 2014.¹⁵³ However, as it has been demonstrated earlier in this Chapter, although IONS did adopt a few concepts such as the creation of Working Groups and even the conduct of the IMMSAREX in 2017, these measures have as yet proven insufficient to propel IONS decisively on the trajectory to achieve its objectives.



CHAPTER 5

Recommendations and the way ahead

Some strategic considerations

The Case Against Multilateralism: In October last year, India's Minister for External Affairs spoke about globalisation coming under attack with an increasingly nationalistic approach to international relations, which in turn was weakening multilateral structures.¹⁵⁴ The minister said that 'more transactional ethos will promote ad hoc groupings of disparate nations who have a shared interest on a particular issue' and referred to 'coalitions of convenience on global issues like counter-terrorism, piracy, maritime security, non-proliferation or even climate change'. He also mentioned the proliferation of 'frenemies' - allies who publicly turn on each other or competitors who are compelled to make common cause on issues.¹⁵⁵ In the context of IOR, this could not be truer. Echoing this view, Rory Medcalf writes that 'unilateralism is not an option, but neither is inclusive multilateralism a realistic solution to Indo-Pacific's security challenges',¹⁵⁶ thus stressing upon the need for more pragmatic solutions.

In a region which has been described as 'largely disaggregated' and 'notable for lack of homogeneity',¹⁵⁷ one scholar suggests that 'the heterogeneity of the region demands ... flexible cooperation of sub-regional organisations that can coordinate with each other in the general institutional environment of the Indian Ocean.'¹⁵⁸ Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead of the RAN also recommends strengthening the sub-regional groups within the IOR stating that 'looking at the conundrum of regional maritime security through a reductionist lens and by uniting IONS states into small, manageable and homogenous components, may offer a pathway for successful naval cooperation'.¹⁵⁹ Medcalf suggests that 'self-selecting minilaterals'¹⁶⁰ – flexible coalitions of middle-powers – might just be the way ahead to progress maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and by that extension, in the IOR. James Goldrick also writes about the need to find additional alternatives to existing formal alliances which will be effective enough to allow nations to cooperate in practical ways when the situation demands.¹⁶¹

On the other hand, there also exists a view that any further division or break-up within IONS would make coordination even more challenging because of additional communication channels that would be opened. This view emanates from professionals who are actively engaged in IONS activities and according to them, even the existing sub-groups (the Working Groups) become unmanageable at times.

The IOR and the Indo-Pacific: Maritime professionals, experts and policymakers grapple with the idea of IOR regionalism. Yet, while IOR regionalism has few takers, the idea of the "Indo-Pacific" is being championed with vigour... Might it be another occasion of the IOR identity falling victim to great power competition? If the IOR nations are indeed sincere in building regional cooperation, they must focus their energies closer home as much, if not more, as they focus on the Indo-Pacific.



IONS in the Indo-Pacific: In the larger construct of the "Indo-Pacific", the position of IONS is yet unclear although one scholar has suggested a possible role for IONS in the Indo-Pacific architecture, in which IONS is envisioned at the 'Executive Level' (see **Figure 3**).¹⁶² This role is unclear because 'functional issues at the Executive Level are presently uncertain, and yet to be firmed up'.¹⁶³ However, it is clear that in this conceptual model focused on China,¹⁶⁴ IONS is seen merely as one component in a larger mechanism, which in turn relegates the primary purpose of IONS for cooperation on non-traditional security challenges to a lower priority. Therefore, while IONS might have a role in the security matrix of the Indo-Pacific, its focus must remain on the IOR and the several maritime security challenges that trouble this region.

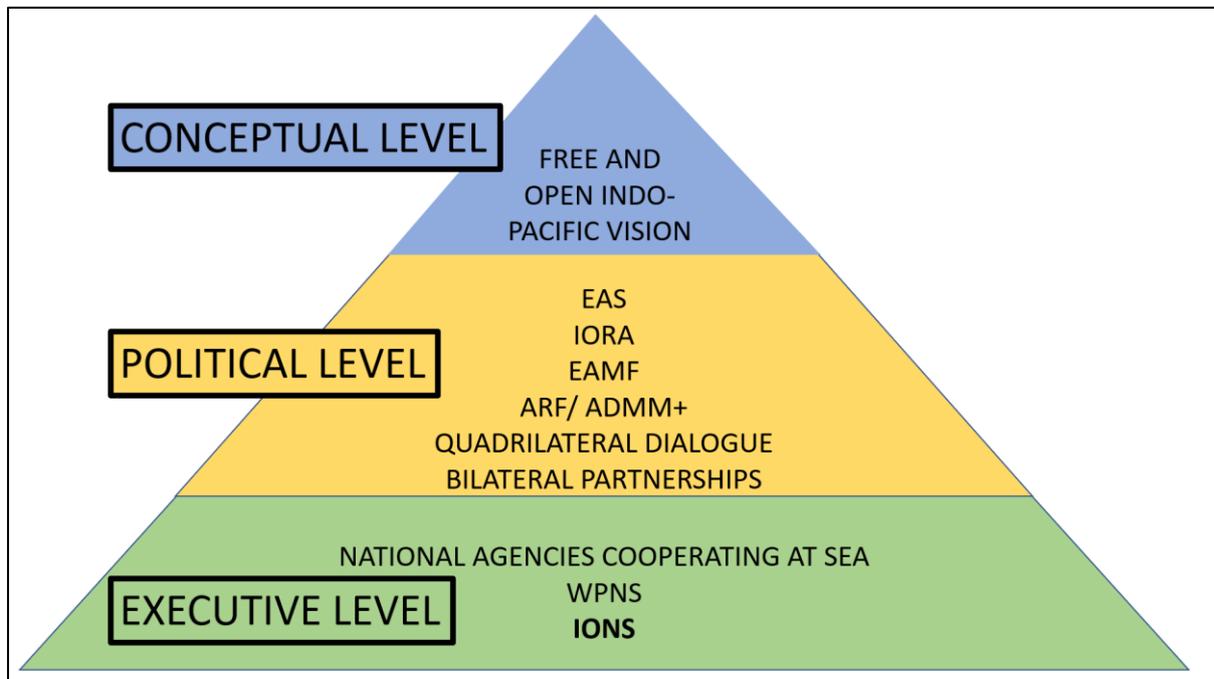


Figure 3: The Emerging Indo-Pacific Architecture (Notional)¹⁶⁵

Convergence between IORA and IONS: There is a general agreement that IORA and IONS are the only two pan-IOR organisations that focus on maritime security. According to Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence) of the Indian Navy, while IORA is the D, I and E in Indian Ocean's DIME (**D**iplomatic, **I**nformational, **M**ilitary, **E**conomic) construct, IONS can add the 'M', thus complementing IORA.¹⁶⁶ IORA has time and again reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening maritime security and has also acknowledged the role of IONS.

Lack of Coordination between IORA and IONS: Although Sam Bateman believes that to an extent, IONS is already within the framework of IORA,¹⁶⁷ Roy-Chaudhury points to the



‘underwhelming roles’ played by these organisations due to the ‘astounding lack of cooperation’ between the two in strengthening maritime security.¹⁶⁸ Despite its 2013 Perth Communiqué calling for ‘IORA’s work [to] align with and complement possible IONS initiatives’¹⁶⁹ and the 2014 Perth Communiqué affirming IORA’s commitment to work ‘collaboratively with the IONS’,¹⁷⁰ IORA has largely charted an independent course in fulfilling its objective of maritime security and safety. Not only has IORA proceeded with the Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security sans consultation with IONS, but it also proposes to set up a new Working Group on Disaster Risk Management, and the publication of the first edition of a booklet of ‘IORA Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief’.¹⁷¹

Problems in IORA and IONS Convergence: Although there is a large scope for coordination between IORA and IONS, this seemingly obvious measure has eluded a practical approach for a long time and there are several reasons for it. One of the reasons is perhaps that although the IORA has committed to coordinate and align its activities with IONS in the past, the former’s focus areas range from women’s empowerment, tourism and culture to maritime safety and security while the latter focuses only on maritime security. Secondly, IORA being a more ‘weighted’ organisation (it has a council of ministers from the member countries and a permanent secretariat), is expected to lead the coordination effort, which has unfortunately not yet taken off. Thirdly, even within IONS, there is a sense of caution in involving IONS with IORA because it might result in loss of autonomy for IONS and its efficacy as an informal dialogue forum.¹⁷² Fourthly, their dissimilar membership is also an impediment for convergence between the two organisations.¹⁷³ Accordingly, while *prima facie* cooperation and coordination between IORA and IONS makes eminent sense, there is a need for a more detailed examination of the mechanisms and areas of such cooperation.

Role of Major Regional Powers: To rejuvenate maritime cooperation in the region, the larger members of the IONS will have to share a greater burden. As Joseph Nye has noted, small countries have little incentive to pay for global public goods such as political stability, global financial stability, or freedom of the seas. Because their small contributions make little difference to whether they benefit or not, it is rational for them to ride for free.¹⁷⁴ For this very reason, the larger powers must lead and provide global public goods.

Role of Other Maritime Agencies:– A Whole of Maritime Department Apr.: Many of the non-traditional challenges that pose a threat to the maritime security regime of the Indian Ocean lie in the jurisdiction of multiple maritime agencies. For example, in case of India, aspects such as SAR and marine pollution control are within the purview of the Indian Coast Guard while issues such as smuggling, IUU fishing, human trafficking and coastal security transcend the domains of the Department of Revenue Intelligence, Marine Police, Customs, Coast Guard, Indian Navy and many more other agencies. This jurisdictional overlap poses several challenges even among national agencies, as has been India’s experience in implementation of the Coastal Security Scheme.¹⁷⁵ In the regional context, the issues of coordination are bound to become more complicated. Therefore, it is apparent that regional navies (and other lead maritime agencies, where there is no navy) alone are incapable of addressing the wide range of security challenges



in the IOR, and IONS must review and refine its approach towards these challenges. More importantly, there will be a need to devise a set of *modi vivendi*, especially one that facilitates a common platform for navies and coast guards.

The Increasing Role of Coast Guards in the Regional Maritime Safety: In recent years, due to the proliferation of transnational crime at sea and other illegal activities, there has been an increase in expectations from maritime constabulary agencies such as the coast guard, border force, and marine police. Sam Bateman has argued that maritime safety cooperation should be ‘de-securitised’ and the regional coast guards should be involved in cooperation on maritime safety.¹⁷⁶ While this perspective attempts to de-emphasise the constabulary role of navies, it also enhances the role of coast guards in regional maritime security. David Brewster has also suggested ‘a quad of coast guards which can focus on maritime law enforcement without carrying the political baggage that accompanies cooperation among navies.’¹⁷⁷ Therefore, it is becoming increasingly imperative that any cooperative endeavour in the maritime domain must include the coast guards.

Recommended measures for enhancing the effectiveness of IONS

A Network of Maritime Cooperation: Having matured as the only pan-IOR maritime cooperation platform, it is now time for IONS to establish its network of maritime cooperation, which fundamentally implies making new connections with other existing organisations. An indicative list would include the following:

- (a) **Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM):** The HACGAM was inaugurated in 2004 and meets annually. The HACGAM met last year in Sri Lanka and the host for this year is Australia.¹⁷⁸ It has 21 members out of which 11 are also IONS members. Because of the common objectives of promoting maritime security – specifically aspects of SAR, prevention of illegal activities and countering piracy and armed robbery at sea – IONS and HACGAM have much to gain through networking.
- (b) **WPNS.** Several experts have envisaged a ‘handshake’ between IONS and WPNS¹⁷⁹ and have opined that it would be beneficial for IONS to learn from the WPNS experience, although Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead cautions that ‘while there may be some merit in replicating the WPNS, the history of that construct is quite different from IONS.’¹⁸⁰
- (c) **IORA’s Working Group on Maritime Security and Safety (WGMSS).** IONS need to establish a dialogue with the WGMSS of IORA and work cooperatively on issues of common concern. Some of these are Maritime Domain Awareness and HADR.¹⁸¹
- (d) **Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).** A 2017 report that examined ASEAN’s maritime links with the IOR recommends that ASEAN should seek to play a role in preserving and enhancing regular IOR maritime security dialogues and



targeted capacity-building assistance programmes.¹⁸² IONS nations have adequate representation in ASEAN (five out of ten members), ARF (13 out of 27) and ADMM Plus and EAS (9 out of 18) which means that there is a fair degree of convergence among these organisations. Interestingly, eight out of ten ASEAN countries are also members of the WPNS, thus creating a potential bridge of sorts to facilitate cooperation and sharing of experience between the WPNS and IONS.

Multilateral Exercise: The significance of conducting combined exercises and drills as part of maritime cooperation cannot be overemphasised. Such exercises not only result in greater interoperability between member navies, but they also demonstrate the willingness of member navies to cooperate and cement the bonds of regional cooperation. They are therefore considered important indicators of the level of cooperation within the group. IONS also needs to graduate to sea exercises and some suggestions to achieve are given below.

(a) **IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX):** The precedent set by Bangladesh in its conduct of the IMMSAREX in 2017 should be continued by IONS. The lessons learnt from IMMSAREX-17 could be validated in the next edition, which could also be an apt opportunity to involve HACGAM representation. In addition to IMMSAREX, the proposal by Iran (IONS Chair for 2018-19) to conduct an IMEX on an anti-piracy theme this year was also noteworthy and such theme-based exercises could also be considered by IONS. Disaster Relief is a relevant theme for all IOR littorals and this could be adopted on priority.

(b) **Leveraging Existing Multilateral Exercises to IONS' Advantage:** There is a need to examine ways in which the lessons learnt and experience gained in existing multilateral exercises that are being conducted by some IONS members could be shared with all IONS members. These include exercises such as MILAN (India), KAKADU (Australia), AMAN (Pakistan) and KOMODO (Indonesia). Initially, the participating navies could share the important lessons learnt in IONS gatherings and subsequently, other members could also be invited for these exercises, subject to the willingness by host navies and feasibility of participation.

(c) **Table Top Exercise (TTX)/ Command Post Exercise (CPX):** Table Top Exercises provide an easy alternative to sea exercises because they simplify the logistic and resource constraint to a great extent and, at a minimum, TTX/CPX should be a biannual IONS feature.

Minilaterals: A strong case has been made out in favour of small groups of willing and capable countries – the so-called minilaterals – to act collectively on issues of common concern. Although several minilateral arrangements already exist in the IOR, there is a case for *ad hoc* grouping of member states who act together in fulfilment of an objective and then report back to IONS. For example, the navies which respond to a natural disaster in the region could subsequently carry out a briefing to the IONS members about their activities and lessons drawn from their experience. This would be similar to the previously suggested reporting of multilateral



exercises by some member navies. A further improvement of this arrangement could be such multilaterals voluntarily acting under the IONS banner. However, for this to succeed, IONS should develop SOPs on promoting bilateral/ tri-lateral/ mini-lateral talks within the organisation as well as on reporting procedures of activities that are carried out beyond the purview of IONS.

Canvassing for Wider Membership: As highlighted earlier in this paper, 14 IOR littoral states are not members of IONS.¹⁸³ Many experts opine that the absence of these nations from IONS is irrelevant because these are perhaps perceived as potentially ineffective partners with neither the capability nor the will to make a meaningful contribution.¹⁸⁴ However, others feel that wider participation in IONS would not only enhance its reputation as the true representative of IOR navies but would also engage these important nations within the IONS framework. Indeed, in the current geopolitical scenario, it is the smaller players that are of greater significance; one only needs to consider the significance of the Chagos Archipelago which gives legitimacy to two great world powers and also serves their strategic interests. At a minimum, therefore, IONS must get Comoros, Madagascar, Somalia and Yemen (who are already members of the IORA) on-board while engaging constructively with other non-members.

New Areas of Convergence and Cooperation: IONS has already identified three enduring areas of cooperation – Maritime Security, HADR, and Information Sharing and Interoperability - on which it also has three Working Groups. However, there are other significant areas of cooperation that can be included in IONS. These are discussed below:

- (a) **Training.** There is an obvious need for capacity enhancement among IONS members and training is an important part of the same. Many IONS members – Australia, Bangladesh, France, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the UK – are actively engaged in extending their training facilities to other friendly nations, including IONS members. Much of the training that happens among IONS nations can simply be re-badged under the IONS umbrella – a change only in name but with a much greater impact through signalling.¹⁸⁵
- (b) **Hydrography.** Hydrography is one of the areas with good potential for maritime cooperation because most IOR littorals do not have adequate surveying capability and because cooperation in hydrography is ‘easy to do’. Raja Menon and Mac Dougall make a strong case for hydrographic cooperation in the IOR.¹⁸⁶
- (c) **Ship Repair and Shipbuilding.** Larger IONS navies have routinely assisted their smaller counterparts in ship maintenance and even shipbuilding through bilateral arrangements. This could be one of the areas of cooperation wherein the ‘Builder Navy’ demonstrates its shipyard capabilities to a wider audience, based on which subsequent bilateral talks could follow.
- (d) **Coastal and Offshore Security.** Coastal and Offshore security, which encompasses both traditional and non-traditional threats, is perhaps the highest priority



for all littoral navies and is as important as the security of trade. This area requires a regional approach because of the fluid nature of threats that move across maritime zones. Countries such as India, which have a well-established coastal security mechanism could share their experiences in setting up of coastal surveillance stations (radar and AIS), Vessel and Air Traffic Management Systems (VATMS) for Offshore Development Areas (ODAs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which they follow in these aspects.

(e) **Environmental Security.** Environmental security encompasses a wide range of issues from natural disaster and climate change to the disruptive effects of human activity and the sustainability of marine life. According to David Brewster, this a significant and yet unexplored area for maritime cooperation by IONS.¹⁸⁷ In a report co-authored by him, Dr Brewster has recommended the establishment of an Indian Ocean Environmental Security Forum under the aegis of IORA.¹⁸⁸ The HADR Working Group of IONS could take up a study on this subject.

(f) **Oceanography and Meteorology.** Oceanography and meteorology are subjects of importance in the maritime domain and these provide excellent opportunities for cooperation among IONS members. For example, the recently concluded study on 'Unconventional Tracks of Tropical Cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean' might be of relevance to the IOR littoral and island nations.¹⁸⁹ This initiative by the Indian Navy – the report has been hosted on the website administered by the Indian navy – can be taken forward under the aegis of IONS for the benefit of all its members. Australian academic experts have also pointed out that there is scope for Australian leadership in fostering marine scientific research in the IOR, especially in the eastern part of the ocean.¹⁹⁰

(g) **Systems and Software.** Although the entire range of products under this subject may not be within the proprietorship of navies, there is an advantage to be accrued in jointly discussing various software or systems (and even SOPs) that the IONS members use for port security, logistics database management, MDA, VTMS and VATMS.

(h) **IONS Track 2 or an IONS Think-tank.** The need for a Track 2 forum has been emphasised by many experts.¹⁹¹ Although several Track 2 forums exist in the region – IONS, incidentally, is itself a very successful talk shop – there is a need to involve the academia and retired professionals in the IONS processes. This can be done in many ways, one of which is to invite distinguished personalities to IONS conclaves. Another would be to commission an IONS Think-tank. This could be done as an adjunct to any of the organisations such as India's National Maritime Foundation (NMF). Cordner suggests that a possible foundation for such an entity if appropriately supported and resourced, would be the Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG),¹⁹² which is also affiliated with IORA.

(i) **Submarine Rescue Exercise.** Over a dozen IOR nations operate submarines, and all except Egypt and Israel are members of IONS. Yet not all nations possess reliable and



robust submarine rescue capabilities, which underscores the need for IONS to lead cooperation on this critical capability. Also, as Vice Admiral Ray Griggs has remarked:¹⁹³

‘As the number of submarines increases across the region we need to work on strengthening the existing submarine water space management arrangements that are in place particularly where new submarine actors are involved. Building some confidence in this area would be useful but will, of course, take time given the additional sensitivities that national ownership of submarines bring.’

Strengthening the Current IONS Initiatives: Some of the measures which IONS could adopt to improve upon its existing activities are as follows:-

(a) **Information Sharing and Interoperability IONS Working Group (IS&I IWG).** The IS&I IWG could take up new projects such as:

(i) Exploring the mechanisms which can facilitate collation of information which flows from IFC-IOR, India and IFC, Singapore. Both these hubs release good quality reports and updates on the maritime security situation in the IOR. However, there is a need to synergise the functioning of these two organisations in the manner in which they gather information and publish their reports. Since both India and Singapore are its members, IONS could play a constructive role in enhancing information sharing within its members.

(ii) An equivalent of the Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOAO) as proposed by Jonathan Mead.¹⁹⁴ This will initially need a proof of concept by the IS&I Working Group. If found feasible, it might then be steered by the MARSEC Working Group...

(iii) Explore the feasibility for development of a pan-Indian Ocean maritime domain information sharing grid involving all regional states and Indian Ocean stakeholders, as proposed by one scholar.¹⁹⁵ This proposal envisages fusion of information from various sources within the IOR such as IFC, India, IFC, Singapore, ReCAAP-ISC, International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB-PRC) in Malaysia, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) as well as other centres that have been established in Madagascar, Tanzania, and Yemen.

(b) **HADR Working Group.** According to David Brewster, ‘Disaster management and peacekeeping are low-hanging fruit—while they sit at the ‘soft’ end of the spectrum of security cooperation, they can be very useful ways to develop personal relationships and inter-operability and provide an opportunity to generate significant goodwill.’¹⁹⁶



Accordingly, the HADR Working Group has greater potential to promote IONS objectives and some of the ways in which this could be done are as follows:

(i) Revision of IONS Guidelines on HADR. It has been brought out earlier in the paper that the current document on IONS Guidelines on HADR is unlikely to serve its purpose. Apart from being highly imaginative in coining terms like the 'IONS force' and 'overall Multinational Force (MNF) coordinator', it belabours several aspects that are either too obvious or irrelevant. Even the details about the capabilities of ships that could be used for HADR are incomplete and do not include the capabilities of large navies such as France, South Africa, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Therefore, there is a need to revise this document with a more practical perspective and could also include the following suggested details:

- (aa) Procedures for obtaining clearances for naval ships and aircraft to enter the affected country, the essential information in respect of the unit visiting the affected nation which they will be required to be submitted (preferably a generic proforma should be decided amongst members), points of contact for coordinating HADR operations in each navy etc.
- (ab) Complete details of HADR capabilities of member navies.
- (ac) Lessons from recent HADR operations in the region (for example, in response to cyclone Idai). These should include details of problems faced by assisting ships and aircraft, the time required to unload relief material etc.

(ii) The HADR Working Group could examine the two binding inter-governmental agreements and one non-binding agreement which exist between most of the IOR nations and thereafter the HADR Guidelines for IONS need to align to these agreements as far as possible, failing which the guidelines will always be superseded by the binding agreements. The details of existing agreements are:

- (aa) SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters. This agreement has provisions for a prompt response to requesting parties, formulation of SOPs, organisation of mock drills and inviting parties to test the effectiveness of disaster response, the designation of entry points for supplies and expertise from assisting parties, exemptions to assisting parties from taxation, customs etc. and financial arrangements.¹⁹⁷
- (ab) ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). AADMER provides a mechanism for reducing the loss of life and social, economic and environmental assets, and for



responding to emergencies through concerted national efforts and intensified regional and international co-operation. Through its Standard Operating Procedure for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP), the AADMER enables the ASEAN Member States to mobilise and deploy resources for emergency response.¹⁹⁸

(ac) France, Australia and New Zealand (FRANZ) Arrangement. This is one of the successful models, signed in 1992, to assist the Pacific island nations during natural disasters.¹⁹⁹ Some experts have recommended that the FRANZ could serve as a model for an IORHADR agreement and the Working Group could consider this proposal.²⁰⁰

(c) **MARSEC Working Group.** The MARSEC Working Group could initiate work on the following areas:-

- (i) Conceptualising the table-top exercise and sea exercise themes and mechanisms.
- (ii) Compilation of a document containing lessons learnt from IONS exercises, beginning with IMMSAREX and subsequently including multilateral exercises whose details can be shared with IONS plenary.
- (iii) As a prelude to graduating to exercises like the WPNS (such as MCMEX and DIVEX) commence work on common procedures and theoretical studies on mine countermeasures and clearance or salvage diving.
- (iv) Consider and coordinate issues like military and naval doctrine, naval procedures and training, and technological compatibility (protocols, information technology connectivity and logistics).

Immediate and short-term measures.

(a) **Change the Consensus Rule:** The consensus rule embedded in the IONS charter has been considered counterproductive by many as it does not permit decision making at a reasonable pace. Having already experienced the pros and cons of a consensual approach, IONS could now look at a majoritarian approach and adopt this as an agenda item for the near term.

(b) **IONS Website:** Since it lacks a bricks-and-mortar secretariat, IONS needs to invest in a robust, reliable and resourceful website. In the past, IONS chairs have established their IONS websites with country-specific domains. The present IONS website www.ions.global is a welcome step in the right direction. Although at present the



website has unrestricted access, eventually it would need to have a ‘members-only’ access to email and chat facility as well as access to exercise programmes and schedule of events. Some of the suggestions to improve the IONS’ web presence are as follows:

- (i) **Updates.** The website should be updated regularly. Usually, one member will exercise the administrative rights and therefore, it becomes difficult for other members to post updates on the website. This impediment must be overcome and all members should be able to post their updates on the website. One way could be to enable each member to update its own country-specific link. The respective Working Group chairs could be given rights to update the Working Group activities.
 - (ii) ***Ionsphere* and IONS Newsletter.** The missing editions of *Ionsphere*, if any, should be made available on the website. IONS could also start a newsletter which would carry important updates and information.
 - (iii) **Contact Information.** The contact information is outdated and needs to be updated regularly.
 - (iv) **Email and Chat.** IONS could create a dedicated email and chat facility among its members, which would also provide restricted access to the members’ area.
 - (v) **Resources to be Made Available.** On a progressive basis, the IONS website should be transformed into a repository of information such as year-wise details of IONS activities including the record of discussions, presentations and briefings as well as the entries received for IONS Open Essay competition. Additional data such as lessons learnt from IONS exercises can also be posted on the website.
 - (vi) **Language.** If required, the website could be made multilingual.
- (c) **IONS Ensign.** Jonathan Mead had proposed an IONS ensign which could be displayed at IONS-led events.²⁰¹ This is a worthy suggestion that costs nothing but will do much to boost the sense of collective pride among the IONS members.

Role of larger navies in driving IONS.

All regional navies are resource-stressed and no single navy in the region can lead and sustain IONS. Yet, because of the presence of a large number of smaller nations, it is incumbent on all well-established maritime powers in the region to collectively shoulder the responsibility of supporting IONS. Unfortunately, however, as Cordner has observed, ‘India.....Australia, South Africa, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran have so far exhibited little desire or



determination to shape their regional destiny'.²⁰² In this paper, the potential roles of only the Indian Navy and the Royal Australian Navy in promoting and sustaining IONS are being examined.

India. India demonstrated an exceptional vision for Indian Ocean's maritime security in being the founding member of IONS. Although some experts see India as the driver for IONS and IORA,²⁰³ others believe that India sometimes has difficulties in multilateral cooperation and is therefore tentative about it.²⁰⁴ India's participation in IONS, especially its leadership in subsequent years, has been quite tepid. Cordner writes that at the second IONS meeting in Abu Dhabi, 'there appeared to be reluctance in the fledgling IONS to move too quickly. Notably, India, the originator of IONS, appeared to adopt a conservative and low-key approach to the future agenda.'²⁰⁵ As Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan puts it:²⁰⁶

'As the midwife of the IONS construct and its permanent secretariat, India must take its fair share of blame for allowing the movement to drift. Indeed, it has appeared — on more than one occasion — that the Indian Navy, having created such a fine instrument, has demonstrated a certain lack of initiative and dexterity in wielding it.'

However, in a manner that perhaps signals a renewed focus by the IN on maritime cooperation, the Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh spoke last year about building comprehensive military capability to address the maritime security challenges in the IOR as a group and the IN's willingness to provide leadership in that role.²⁰⁷ In the context of Exercise MILAN 2020, he added that such exercises aimed to enhance interoperability among like-minded navies and correlated this with one of the reasons that IONS was founded in 2008.²⁰⁸ The IN is prepared to do more for IONS although Vice Admiral Ray Griggs cautions that whatever India does, it should not give the impression that IONS is an 'Indian thing'.²⁰⁹ Rear Admiral Shrikhande, echoing similar views, feels that in the inaugural years of IONS, the IN could have de-emphasised its role in leading the IONS initiative. He adds that it might not have gone down well with the other member navies and also perhaps made internal support for IONS from other departments of the Indian government a bit less forthcoming.²¹⁰

India's role in strengthening IONS and making it more effective could include the following:²¹¹

- (a) Funding for maintenance of patrol boats (for Indian Ocean island nations) under IONS.
- (b) Offering training programmes under IONS rebranded as ITEC-IONS.
- (c) Provide the bulk of secretarial support, including administering the website and publication of IONS newsletter and *Ionsphere*.
- (d) Leverage bilateral relations and goodwill to encourage non-member navies to join IONS.



- (e) Host, or provide major support for, IONS-led exercises.
- (f) Invest in branding to give IONS greater visibility.

Australia : Australia has provided dynamic leadership to IONS while the chair for the period 2014-2015, during which significant developments occurred such as participation by Iran at the Perth symposium, Pakistan joining as a member, composition of IONS Working Groups, and steering IONS' convergence with IORA. However, Australia will need to continue pulling its weight in IONS and it could do so in ways similar to the IN, as described above. Additionally, the RAN could also consider the following measures:-

- (a) Although Australia has the most advanced national MDA system in the Indian Ocean, its regional cooperation arrangements are thin. It needs to think about how it might develop regional cooperation arrangements to the advantage of the region and itself.²¹²
- (b) Actively engage with both IONS and WPNS and, if possible, act as the bridge between the two to share best practices.

France: France's core national interests extend to the Indo-Pacific and includes 93 per cent of her EEZ, 1.5 million of her citizens, a strong military presence and transaction of over 70 per cent of her trade.²¹³ It is a strong maritime power that has the greater capability as well as greater acceptability in the IOR and is known for not taking sides in regional disputes. Its growing relationships with India and Australia provide an excellent opportunity for trilateral cooperation which could eventually reinforce IOR's maritime security.²¹⁴ Since France faces similar challenges as other littoral states in the IOR,²¹⁵ it would be more willing to commit resources for cooperative maritime security than other great powers which might have peripheral interests in the region.



Conclusion

*'IONS is not only a ray of hope for the Indian Ocean Region but also a forum of immense importance for the Asia Pacific and the adjoining oceans.'*²¹⁶

Mr Md Abdul Hamid, President of Bangladesh

As IONS enters its second decade, it faces a more complex geostrategic landscape where the significance of the IOR itself is now being subsumed within a larger geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific and competition between two significant powers in the region increasingly manifests in regional issues. At the same time, the number of transnational maritime threats that existed ten years ago continues to challenge the ability of nations to maintain good order at sea. It is also ironic that even in the face of evolving security scenario in the region, the IOR nations have preferred to maintain the status quo as far as a regional response to maritime security is concerned. In a large measure this inertia is due to more urgent and important problems – most of them concerning internal security, human development and bilateral relations – which absorb almost all their resources and time. In sum, the reality remains that, as pointed out by Cordner, 'IOR states have yet to comprehensively embrace regional maritime security challenges'.²¹⁷

There is a wide chasm between the kind of security architecture that might be desirable in the IOR and what might be possible. It is also clear that, given the present capabilities of IOR nations and a reasonable assessment of their future capacities, there would perhaps never be enough resources to devote to regional maritime security. Therefore, the best bet for IOR littorals would be to incrementally improvise – with imagination and practical solutions - how they conduct the business of cooperative maritime security. Would such a collective and cooperative track of maritime security be charted by IONS is in itself a matter of debate? Many experts opine that IONS should not be expected to deliver what it wasn't designed to do. At the same time, others readily point out the absence of any other forum (excepting IORA) that could serve this purpose.

Therefore perhaps, is a need to deliberate upon the role of IONS and in what ways can it contribute to maritime security in the IOR? This should include focussing on small, flexible groups of willing partners to deliver 'public goods' of maritime security and yet continue to reinforce the notion of IONS-led activities. Perhaps an IONS quad – Australia, India, Indonesia and South Africa – could do the trick. Much of IONS success would also depend on the connections which it can make with other organisations in the region and beyond, such as the IORA and WPNS.

Nothing that has been said above can be achieved without the support of respective governments. Some experts believe that 'governments of the region must provide the maximum possible traction to the IONS construct as this is the only one likely to yield regional coherence on issues of maritime security'²¹⁸ and also that IONS navies must extract this political top cover from their respective governments.²¹⁹



In this paper, a cursory examination of the various non-traditional security challenges in the IOR was carried out; existing sub-regional organisations have been enumerated and it has been highlighted that the IOR is characteristically devoid of habits of cooperation. The various issues that adversely impact the promotion of cooperation among the IOR states have also been studied. Specifically, in the foregoing context that has been outlined thus far, the effectiveness of IONS as a regional cooperative maritime security forum has been examined. The paper concludes that in its relatively short history, IONS has tracked well in the uncharted waters of maritime cooperation in the IOR and has made some credible achievements, including many 'firsts' in the region. At the same time, however, academic experts and even practitioners of maritime security and safety had assigned to IONS a role that perhaps its founders had not envisioned. This was because the idea of pan-IOR maritime security cooperation, which had remained elusive for several decades, appeared alluringly within grasp through the IONS. Expectedly, while IONS did what it could, the broader aspect of maritime security cooperation in the IOR has continued to languish.

This paper has presented a set of recommendations that could enhance the effectiveness of IONS in promoting regional maritime security. However, the future roadmap for IOR maritime security must also allow a more significant role for other maritime agencies like the coast guards. Above all, at least soon, much of what IONS can achieve will depend on how Australia, France and India can steer this unique and useful forum towards greater effectiveness.



Endnotes

¹ *Naval Cooperation in a Sea of Anarchy*, Protecting the ability to trade in the Indian Ocean maritime economy, Sea Power Series 3, Sea Power Centre, Australia, 2014, p. 115.

² Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Russell Trood, *New Challenges for Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: An Australian Perspective*.

³ James Stavridis, *Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*, New York: Penguin Press, 2017, p. 120.

⁴ Lee Cordner, Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region, *Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs*, 2010 Vol 2(1), p. 16.

⁵ Colomban Lebas, *New Stakes in the Indian Ocean and French Policy*, Ionsphere July 2013, p. 68.

⁶ David Michel and Russell Sticklor, *Indian Ocean Rising: Maritime and Security Policy Challenges*, Indian Ocean Rising, Stimson Center, Washington DC, 2012, p. 11.

⁷ Australian Government, Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, pp. 61-62.

⁸ See Government of India, Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 2015, pp. 24-32.

⁹ Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 2015, pp. 24-32,

¹⁰ (inserted n.d.)

¹¹ Mohan Malik ed., *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China, India and the United States*, Rowman and Littlefield, Maryland: 2014.

¹² Yogendra Kumar and Probal K Ghosh, *The 'Indo' in the 'Indo-Pacific'—An Indian View*, Naval War College Review: Vol. 73: No. 2, Article 7, pp. 60-86.

¹³ Kumar and Ghosh, *the 'Indo' in the 'Indo-Pacific'—an Indian View*, p. 64.

¹⁴ National Maritime Foundation, *Indo-Pacific Report 2019; Indo-Pacific Partnership: Realising the Benefits of Economic and Maritime Cooperation*.

¹⁵ Gurpreet Khurana, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualisations and the Way Ahead', *Indo-Pacific Report 2019*, National Maritime Foundation, p. 19.

¹⁶ Sanjay Pulipaka and Paras Ratna, 'The Indo-Pacific and Non-Traditional Security Issues', *Indo-Pacific Report 2019*, National Maritime Foundation, p. 162.

¹⁷ See Chapters 2 and 4 in Shishir Updhyaya, *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region: Assessment of India's Maritime Strategy to be the Regional 'Net Security Provider'*, Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security, University of Wollongong, 2018.

¹⁸ Lee Cordner, *Progressing Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean*, Naval War College Review, Autumn 2011, Vol. 64, No. 4, p. 80.

¹⁹ Lee Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Risk-based International Policy Development*, Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Adelaide, 2015, p. 176.



-
- ²⁰ Gurpreet Khurana, *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS): Where From ... Whither Bound?* Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, February 22, 2008.
- ²¹ AK Anthony, Indian Defence Minister, in his address at the inaugural session of IONS, quoted in *IONS: Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International maritime Connectivities*, eds Ravi Vohra, PK Ghosh, D Chakraborty, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, p. 204.
- ²² Sam Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – Will the Navies of the Indian Ocean Region unite?*, Rajaratnam School of International Studies commentary, March 17, 2008.
- ²³ Lee Cordner, 'Progressing Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean', *US Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2011, Vol. 64, No. 4, p. 71.
- ²⁴ *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, p. 60.
- ²⁵ Anthony H Cordesman and Abdullah Toukan, *The Indian Ocean Region: A Strategic Net Assessment*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, August 2014, pp. 6-7.
- ²⁶ David Brewster, *The Australia-India Framework for Security Cooperation: Another Step Towards an Indo-Pacific Partnership*, p. 47.
- ²⁷ See: Sam Bateman, 'Solving the 'Wicked Problems' of Maritime Security: Are Regional Forums up to the Task', *Contemporary South East Asia*, Vol 33 Issue 1, April 2011, pp. 1-28. Bateman argues that several of the seemingly minor problems of maritime security – such as interpretation of the Law of the Sea, maritime zones and maritime jurisdictions, good order at sea - defy solution and hence calls them the 'Wicked Problems' of maritime security.
- ²⁸ Admiral Dr Marsetio, 'Troubled Waters : Maritime Challenges in the Asia-Pacific', *Ionsphere*, Second Edition, July 2013, pp. 7-9.
- ²⁹ Address during the Seapower Conference 2019 by the Royal Australian Navy at Sydney, Session II, October 08, 2019, Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Conference 2019 Session 2, www.youtube.com
- ³⁰ Interview with Admiral Karambir Singh, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy on the eve of Navy Day on December 04, 2019.
- ³¹ Address by Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, Chief of Navy, Royal Australian Navy at the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in Tehran on April 19, 2018. Also see Chief of Navy's Address 'Responding to Transnational Maritime Security Threats' at the Fifth International Maritime Security Conference in Singapore on May 16, 2017.
- ³² Bateman, 'Solving the 'Wicked Problems' of Maritime Security', Op Cit.
- ³³ Kumar and Ghosh, Op Cit, p. 57.
- ³⁴ Kumar and Ghosh, Op Cit, pp. 58-61.
- ³⁵ Sangram Singh Byce, *Maritime Strategy for India*, Maritime India, ed. by KK Nayyar, New Delhi: Rupa & Co, pp. 185-192.
- ³⁶ *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, p. 60.
- ³⁷ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2019: Executive Summary*, pp. 16-17, accessed https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2019/prelaunch/WDR19_Booklet_1_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf on March 21, 2020.
- ³⁸ Sanjay Pulipaka and Paras Ratna, 'The Indo-Pacific and Non-Traditional Security Issues', *The Indo-Pacific Report 2019*, p. 155.
- ³⁹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁰ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p. 44.
- ⁴¹ World Vision, Policy Brief *Human Trafficking in Asia*.



⁴² Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO, *Summary of the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019*, July 02, 2019, p.4.

⁴³ Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), *Natural Disasters 2018*.

⁴⁴ Cyclone references: www.worldvision.org.

⁴⁵ Cyclone references : www.reliefweb.int

⁴⁶ Earthquake references : www.worldvision.org

⁴⁷ Cyclone Ockhi struck southern India and Srilanka in late November and early December 2017. It killed more than 300 people and caused damage estimated more than 500 million US Dollars.

⁴⁸ According to the website of the EUNAVFOR www.eunavfor.eu , only two merchant ships have been pirated in the last seven years and none in the last two years. Also see, Pulipaka and Ratna, *Op Cit*, pp. 152-3.

⁴⁹ Multinational effort towards suppression of piracy continues in the IOR. EUNAVFOR (Op ATALANTA), the Combined Task Force 151 (which is a part of the US-led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)) and some other navies such as China and India continue to deploy their ships and aircraft for counter-piracy operations.

⁵⁰ Zhongming Xiao, Zhongzhou Fan and Liangkun Xu, 'A Study on Global Piracy Attacks' Trends and Characteristics Based on Data Analysis', *International Journal of Security and Its Application*, Vol.11, No.1 (2017), pp.233-244.

⁵¹ See the monthly reports at www.ifc.org.sg and www.indiannavy.nic.in.

⁵² UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2018*, p.3.

⁵³ UNHCR, *Global Trends*: p.17.

⁵⁴ UNHCR, *Global Trends*: p. 37.

⁵⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Government of USA, *Global Implications of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing*, September 19, 2016, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Russell Trood, *New Challenges for Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean – An Australian Perspective*, p. 6

⁵⁷ Macfadyen, G., Hosch, G., Kaysser, N. and Tagziria, L., 2019. The IUU Fishing Index, 2019. Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management Limited and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

⁵⁸ IFC Monthly Map: March 2020, accessed April 21, 2020: www.ifc.org.sg.

⁵⁹ See: *Houthi terrorist attack in Saudi warship Al Madinah*, February 06, 2017, accessed October 16, 2018: www.arabnews.com and *Yemen's Houthis hit Saudi oil tanker causing slight damage: Saudi T.V.*, July 25, 2018.

⁶⁰ Lee Cordner, 'Progressing Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean', *US Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2011, Vol. 64, No. 4, p. 70.

⁶¹ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, former Chief of RAN, *The Navy's Role in the Maritime Century*, Address to the Lowy Institute, August 17, 2012.

⁶² Although the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) is a regional government-to-government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia, the greater burden of combating piracy has been shared by the Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151) [see <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>], NATO under Operation OCEAN SHIELD and the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) under Operation ATALANTA.

⁶³ *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, p. 59.

⁶⁴ Lee Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Risk-based International Policy Development*, p. 198.



⁶⁵ Lee Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Risk-based International Policy Development*, p. 200.

⁶⁶ Mac Dougall, *The Naval View, Australia's Maritime Bridge into Asia*, eds Sam Bateman and Dick Sherwood, Allen and Unwin 1995, p. 209

⁶⁷ C Uday Bhaskar, 'The Effectiveness of Cooperative Mechanisms', in Mohan Malik (ed.), *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China India and the United States*, Rowmann & Littlefield, London, 2014, p. 239.

⁶⁸ C Uday Bhaskar, 'The Effectiveness of Cooperative Mechanisms', p. 239.

⁶⁹ For a more detailed analysis, see Kwa Chong Guan, 'Prospects for Indian Ocean Regionalism', *ASEAN and the Indian Ocean: The Key Maritime Links*, Sam Bateman, Rajni Gamage and Jane Chan (eds), RSIS Monograph No 33, July 2017.

⁷⁰ Bateman, *Solving the 'Wicked Problems' of Maritime Security*.

⁷¹ For a more detailed explanation of the term 'collaboration' see Upadhyaya, *Op Cit*, p. 114.

⁷² Upadhyay, pp.115-118.

⁷³ Cordesman and Toukan, *Op Cit*, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Cordesman and Toukan, p.1.

⁷⁵ Sam Bateman, 'The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – Will the Navies of the Indian Ocean Unite?', p. 3

⁷⁶ Cordner, 'Progressing Maritime Security in the IOR', p. 76

⁷⁷ Michael L'Estrange, 'An Overview of Indian Ocean Security Architecture', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy, Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Seminar 2014*, ed. Andrew Forbes, Sea Power Series No. 3, Sea Power Centre - Australia, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Bernard H Teuteberg, 'Operationalising Regional Maritime Cooperation Towards Ensuring Collective Maritime Security for the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation', *IONS: Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International Maritime Connectivities*, eds Ravi Vohra, PK Ghosh, D Chakraborty, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, pp149-150.

⁷⁹ Bernard H Teuteberg, 'Operationalising Regional Maritime Cooperation Towards Ensuring Collective Maritime Security for the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation', *IONS: Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International Maritime Connectivities*, eds Ravi Vohra, PK Ghosh, D Chakraborty, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, pp149-150.

Also see Sam Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – Will the Navies of the Indian Ocean Unite?*

⁸⁰ L'Estrange, *loc cit*.

⁸¹ Rory Medcalf, 'Mapping the Indo Pacific: China, India and the United States', in Mohan Malik (ed.), *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China India and the United States*, Rowmann & Littlefield, London, 2014, p. 55.

⁸² Lee Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Risk-based International Policy Development*, p. 199.

⁸³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Indices and Indicators, 2018*, accessed at <http://hdr.undp.org>

⁸⁴ Lee Cordner, 'Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Compelling and Convergent Agendas', *Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs*, (2010) Vol 2(1), p. 16.

⁸⁵ Cordner, *Progressing Maritime Security in the IOR*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Cordner, *Progressing Maritime Security in the IOR*, p. 26.



-
- ⁸⁷ Jane Chan, 'Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean', ed Andrew Forbes, *Sea Power Series 3 Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Seminar 2014*, Sea Power Centre, Australia, p. 109.
- ⁸⁸ Andrew C Winner, 'The United States and Maritime Security Challenges', Mohan Malik (ed.), *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China India and the United States*, Rowmann & Littlefield, London, 2014, p. 183.
- ⁸⁹ Arun Prakash in 'Commonality of Maritime Challenges and Options for a Cooperative IOR Maritime Security Structure' in *IONS: Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International maritime Connectivities*, ed. Ravi Vohra, PK Ghosh, D Chakraborty, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, p. 190.
- ⁹⁰ Rory Medcalf and C Raja Mohan, *Responding to Indo-Pacific Rivalry: Australia, India and Middle Power Coalitions*.
- ⁹¹ Columban Lebas, 'New Stakes in the Indian Ocean and French Policy', *IONSPHERE*, Second Edition, July 2013 p.70.
- ⁹² See Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Risk-based International Policy Development*, pp. 172-180 and Upadhyaya, *Op Cit*, pp. 37-40.
- ⁹³ Sam Bateman et al, RSIS Monograph No 33, July 2017, pp. 93-95.
- ⁹⁴ United Nations Secretary-General's speech on 'New Multilateralism in East Asia : Building on Common Interests, Expanding on Common Ground' on August 13, 2009.
- ⁹⁵ Article 1.0 of IONS Charter of Business, Version 2.0 dated January 13, 2016
- ⁹⁶ Article 3.0 of IONS Charter of Business.
- ⁹⁷ IONS Charter, Articles 6.0 and 6.1.
- ⁹⁸ The details of the current chair and members of each WORKING GROUP can be accessed at: <http://www.ions.global/ions-working-groups>.
- ⁹⁹ <http://www.ions.global/ions-working-groups>
- ¹⁰⁰ IONS Charter of Business, Article 8.
- ¹⁰¹ The table has been compiled by the author from information available on the IONS website as well as information available on other websites.
- ¹⁰² Sultanate of Oman holds IONS Preparatory Workshop, October 14, 2019 accessed March 02, 2020: https://www.ionsirannavy.ir/news_1600_Sultanate+of+Oman+holds+IONS+Preparatory+Workshop.html
- ¹⁰³ Tarek Mahmud, 'IMMSAREX to start in Cox's Bazar from November 27', Dhaka Tribune.
- ¹⁰⁴ Tarek Mehmud, 'Navy to the Rescue'.
- ¹⁰⁵ Views of serving officers who are engaged with IONS activities have been obtained by the author through personal interaction.
- ¹⁰⁶ See IONS Guidelines for HADR (Version 3.1, December 2017).
- ¹⁰⁷ See IONS Guidelines for HADR (Version 3.1, December 2017) p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁸ See IONS Guidelines for HADR (Version 3.1, December 2017) p 17.
- ¹⁰⁹ See IONS Guidelines for HADR (Version 3.1, December 2017) p. 19.
- ¹¹⁰ <http://www.ions.global/resources>
- ¹¹¹ These are the navies from Australia, France, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.
- ¹¹² The copy of these editions of *Ionsphere* are available at <http://www.ions.global/ionsphere>.



¹¹³ This new section has been apparently added recently to share information pertaining to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has spread over several nations since December 2019.

¹¹⁴ The author has personally interacted with officers who have been or are currently participating or engaged in coordinating IONS activities. These interactions have taken place through personal interviews, telephone conversations and correspondence through email.

¹¹⁵ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs (Retired), RAN, former Chief of Navy, interview on April 01, 2020.

¹¹⁶ Vice Admiral Tim Barrett (Retired), RAN, former Chief of Navy, telephone conversation on March 24, 2020.

¹¹⁷ David Brewster, telephone conversation on March 20, 2020.

¹¹⁸ Bateman, correspondence through email.

¹¹⁹ See IMMSAREX 2017: International Multilateral Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise held in Bangladesh, November 27, 2017 and *Iranian Navy Participating in International Maritime Drills in Bangladesh*.

¹²⁰ The Doklam crisis refers to a military stand-off between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army of China over alleged intrusion and infrastructure building by Chinese troops in the Doklam plateau area at the trijunction of international borders between India, China and Bhutan. The crisis flared up in June 2017 and lasted for two months. See Prabhash K Dutta, *70 days of Doklam standoff: What it signifies for India, China and neighbourhood*.

¹²¹ Udayan Das, *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium: Advancing India's Interests in the IOR*, November 15, 2018.

¹²² Pervaiz Asghar, 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium : Towards Regional Maritime Cooperation', *Defence Journal*, Vol 21, Issue 1, August 2017, p. 32.

¹²³ Pervaiz Asghar, 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium : Towards Regional Maritime Cooperation', *Defence Journal*, p.32..

¹²⁴ Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retired), Indian Navy, *The Criticality of the IONS Maritime Security Construct*.

¹²⁵ Rory Medcalf, 'The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?', *The American Interest*, Volume 09, Number 2, October 10, 2013.

¹²⁶ See Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – Will the Navies of Indian Ocean Region Unite?*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Michael L'Estrange, 'An Overview of Indian Ocean Security Architecture', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy, Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Seminar 2014*, ed. Andrew Forbes, Sea Power Series No. 3, Sea Power Centre - Australia, p. 12.

Also see, Yogendra Kumar, *Indo-Pacific As An Evolving Geopolitical Construct And Maritime Safety And Security In IOR*, *Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies*, October-December 2019, Special Issue on Indo Pacific , p. 98.

¹²⁸ Upadhyaya, Op Cit, p. 246.

¹²⁹ Most serving and retired naval officers from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Indian Navy (IN) with whom the author interacted were of the opinion that there was no need for involving ministers or bureaucrats in the forum.

¹³⁰ Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium: Will the Navies of the Indian Ocean Region Unite?*, p. 3.

¹³¹ Roy-Chaudhury, *Strengthening Maritime Cooperation and Security in the Indian Ocean*, September 06, 2018.

¹³² Interview with Vice Admiral Ray Griggs.

¹³³ Roy-Chaudhury, *Ibid*.

¹³⁴ Interaction with Vice Admiral Ray Griggs and other officers who are currently engaged with IONS.

¹³⁵ Data sourced from: www.iora.int and www.ions.global.



¹³⁶ IONS Charter, Article 4.2.

¹³⁷ In their interactions with the author, Vice Admiral Ray Griggs and Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, who have been engaged with IONS in the past, identified the need for consensus in decision making as one of the problems of IONS. According to Rear Admiral Monty Khanna, former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Cooperation and Intelligence) in the Indian Navy, consensus building among the members is a significant challenge.

¹³⁸ These are estimated figures only and have been calculated based on data sourced from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) *World Economic Outlook Database 2017*.

¹³⁹ Based on data sourced from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Indices and Indicators, 2018*.

¹⁴⁰ Bateman, *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium: Will the Navies of the Indian Ocean Region Unite?*, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Upadhyaya, Op Cit, p. 228.

¹⁴² Rear Admiral James R Goldrick (Retired), RAN, interview on March 12, 2020.

¹⁴³ These inputs are based on the author's interactions with various current and past persons who have been associated with IONS and have participated in IONS seminars and workshops.

¹⁴⁴ Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium: Will the Navies of Indian Ocean region Unite?*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy, RAN, Speech on *Maritime Confidence Building Measures in the Indo-Pacific*.

¹⁴⁶ 'Western Pacific Naval Symposium', *Semaphore*, Issue 14, July 2006, Sea Power Centre, Australia.

¹⁴⁷ Bateman, Op Cit.

¹⁴⁸ 'Western Pacific Naval Symposium', *Semaphore*.

¹⁴⁹ Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, Indian Navy (Retired), correspondence through email.

¹⁵⁰ 'Western Pacific Naval Symposium', *Semaphore*.

¹⁵¹ Author's interaction with staff officers in the RAN.

¹⁵² Bateman, *The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium: Will the Navies of Indian Ocean region Unite?*, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy, RAN, interview on April 01, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, Government of India, speech on *Preparing for a Different Era*, October 01, 2019 at Washington DC.

¹⁵⁵ S Jaishankar, *Preparing for a Different Era*.

¹⁵⁶ Rory Medcalf, 'Mapping the Indo Pacific: China, India and the United States', in Mohan Malik (ed.), *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China India and the United States*, Rowmann & Littlefield, London, 2014, p. 55.

¹⁵⁷ Cordner, 'Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Compelling and Convergent Agendas', *Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs* (2010) Vol 2(1), p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ Columban Lebas, 'New Stakes in the Indian Ocean and French Policy', *Ionsphere*, July 2013, p.72.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Mead, 'Naval Cooperation in a Sea of Anarchy', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy, Sea Power Series 3*, Sea Power Centre, Australia, 2014, p. 119.

¹⁶⁰ Rory Medcalf and C Raja Mohan, *Responding to Indo-Pacific Rivalry: Australia, India and Middle Power Coalitions*, 08 August 2014.



-
- ¹⁶¹ James Goldrick, 'The Indo-Pacific: The Maritime Domain and the Exercise of National Power', *Navy Outlook*, 2019, p. 19.
- ¹⁶² Gurpreet S Khurana, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and the Way Ahead', *Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies*, October-December 2019, Vol 2, Issue 2 (Special Issue on Indo Pacific), pp. 67-68.
- ¹⁶³ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and the Way Ahead', pp. 67-68.
- ¹⁶⁴ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and the Way Ahead', pp 69-71.
- ¹⁶⁵ Gurpreet S Khurana, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and the Way Ahead', p. 68.
- ¹⁶⁶ Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, Indian Navy (Retired), email correspondence with the author.
- ¹⁶⁷ Bateman, correspondence through email.
- ¹⁶⁸ Roy-Chaudhury, Op Cit.
- ¹⁶⁹ 13th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Perth Communiqué, November 01, 2013.
- ¹⁷⁰ Final Communiqué 14th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Perth Communiqué 9 October 2014.
- ¹⁷¹ The 19th Indian Ocean Rim Association Meeting of the Council of Ministers, Abu Dhabi Communiqué, November 07, 2019.
- ¹⁷² Author's interaction with academia and naval officers from the IN and RAN.
- ¹⁷³ IONS and IORA have only 18 common members (out of the 22 members of IORA and 24 of IONS), while 10 countries are only the members of either group.
- ¹⁷⁴ Joseph S Nye, *The Kindleberger Trap*, January 09, 2017, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, www.belfercenter.org.
- ¹⁷⁵ For a brief summary, see Forty Seventh report of the Standing Committee on Defence, Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2018-19), Paragraphs 42 to 44. Also see, Gurpreet Khurana, *India's Evolving Coastal Security Architecture: A Case for a New Central Force*, May 23, 2019, Abhijit Singh, *India's Coastal Security: An Assessment*, November 23, 2018, and Pushpita Das, *Coastal Security: The Indian Experience*, IDSA Monograph Series No. 22, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi: 2013, pp. 66-80.
- ¹⁷⁶ Bateman, 'At Sea Safety is Just as Important as Security', *The Interpreter*, September 10, 2019.
- ¹⁷⁷ David Brewster, 'It's time for a 'Quad' of coast guards', *The Interpreter*, August 12, 2019.
- ¹⁷⁸ Official website of the Sri Lanka Coast Guard: <http://www.coastguard.gov.lk>
- ¹⁷⁹ Sureesh Mehta, 'The Centrality of the Indian Ocean to Global Maritime Security', *Indian Ocean Challenges: A Quest for Cooperative Solutions*, ed. Pradeep Kaushiva and Abhijit Singh, Knowledge World, New Delhi: 2013, p. 6.
- ¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Mead, 'Naval Cooperation in a Sea of Anarchy', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy*, *Sea Power Series 3*, Sea Power Centre, Australia, 2014, p. 118.
- ¹⁸¹ MDA is an important aspect for both the IORA and IONS. This could be enhanced through coordination and cooperation with the Indian Ocean IOC. Since 2015, Madagascar hosts a regional fusion centre for open source information on behalf of the IOC. The Seychelles will also shortly open a Regional Operation Coordination Centre feeding information to the Madagascar unit. The Seychelles also hosts a regional information fusion centre, See Roy-Chaudhury, Op Cit.
- ¹⁸² Bateman *et al*, ASEAN and the Indian Ocean: The Key Maritime Links, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore: 2017, pp. 94-95.



¹⁸³ These are: Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Madagascar, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

¹⁸⁴ Based on the author's interaction with academic experts and naval professionals engaged with IONS.

¹⁸⁵ As an example, Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande has suggested that the professional courses being offered by the IN under the Indian Technological and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, could be re-badged as ITEC-IONS.

¹⁸⁶ See Raja Menon, 'Maritime Developments and Opportunities in South Asia', p. 42; and Mac Dougall, 'The Naval View', p. 209 in *Australia's Maritime Bridge into Asia*, eds Sam Bateman and Dick Sherwood, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards (NSW), 1995.

¹⁸⁷ David Brewster, telephone conversation with the author.

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Bergin *et al*, *Environmental Security in the Eastern Indian Ocean, Antarctica and the Southern Ocean: A Risk Mapping Approach*, National Security College, Australian National University, Canberra, May 2019.

¹⁸⁹ See the full report at Indian Navy's IFC-IOR website www.indiannavy.nic.in

¹⁹⁰ Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Russell Trood, *New Challenges for Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean – An Australian Perspective*, p. 11

¹⁹¹ See Arun Prakash, 'Commonality of Maritime Challenges and Options for a Cooperative IOR Maritime Security Structure', *IONS: Contemporary Transnational Challenges: International Maritime Connectivities*, ed. Ravi Vohra, PK Ghosh, D Chakraborty, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, p. 190.

Michael L'Estrange, 'An Overview of Indian Ocean Security Architecture', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy, Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Seminar 2014*, ed. Andrew Forbes, Sea Power Series No. 3, Sea Power Centre - Australia, p. 11; and, Lee Cordner, 'Managing Maritime Security Risks in the Indian Ocean', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy*, pp. 17-32.

¹⁹² Cordner, *Progressing Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean*, Op Cit, p. 82.

¹⁹³ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, former Chief of Navy, RAN, in his speech on 'Maritime Confidence Building Measures in the South China Sea' at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, August 12, 2013.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Mead, 'Naval Cooperation in a Sea of Anarchy', *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy, Sea Power Series 3*, Sea Power Centre, Australia, 2014, p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ Upadhyaya, Op Cit, pp. 254-280.

¹⁹⁶ David Brewster, *The Australia-India Framework for Security Cooperation: Another Step Towards an Indo-Pacific Partnership*, p. 47.

¹⁹⁷ For details see the full text of the Agreement: www.saarc-sec.org

¹⁹⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *Disaster Response in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁹ Government of France, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, *Australia – New Zealand – 25th anniversary of the FRANZ agreement (Dec. 22)*.

²⁰⁰ Leighton G Luke, *FRANZ Disaster Relief Co-ordination a Model for the Indian Ocean Region*, October 30, 2013: www.futuredirections.org.au

²⁰¹ Mead, *Naval Cooperation in a Sea of Anarchy*, p. 122.

²⁰² Cordner, 'Indian Ocean Maritime Security', p. 188.

²⁰³ Upadhyaya, Op Cit., p. 246.



²⁰⁴ David Brewster, telephone conversation with the author.

²⁰⁵ Cordner, *Progressing Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean region*, p. 80.

²⁰⁶ Chauhan, *The Criticality of the IONS Maritime Security Construct*, Op Cit.

²⁰⁷ Interview with the Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy on the eve of Navy Day on December 04, 2019.

²⁰⁸ Press Conference by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy on the Occasion of Navy Day on December 04, 2019

²⁰⁹ Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, interview with the author on April 01, 2020.

²¹⁰ Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, IN (Retired), correspondence through email.

²¹¹ With inputs from Rear Admiral Monty Khanna, IN (Retired), Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, IN (Retired) and Rear Admiral James Goldrick, RAN (Retired).

²¹² David Brewster, 'Taming of the West', April 30, 2018.

²¹³ Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Government of France, *The Indo-Pacific Region: A Priority for France*.

²¹⁴ Rory Medcalf, telephone conversation with the author.

²¹⁵ Admiral Christopher Prazuck, Chief of French Navy, speaking at the RAN Sea Power Conference 2019 at Sydney on October 08, 2019, stated that France security concerns in the Indo-Pacific were 'challenges to international order and international law, illegal fishing and environmental security'.

²¹⁶ The President of Bangladesh was addressing during the inaugural ceremony of IMMSAREX-17 on November 27, 2017, *Indian Ocean Regional Cooperation Needed for Naval Security: President*: www.banglanews24.com

²¹⁷ Cordner, *Indian Ocean Maritime Security*, p. 205.

²¹⁸ Chauhan, Op Cit.

²¹⁹ Rear Admiral SY Shrikhande, IN (Retired), correspondence through email.