

# **ISLANDS AND CHOKE POINTS: COOPERATIVE MODEL FOR SECURITY**

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*The global economy is heavily reliant on maritime trade to achieve its millennium goals. Maritime trade, in the 21 century, presents a number of challenges to sea farers mostly from non-state actors. With global maritime trade slated to increase further, the threat to global economy is increasing proportionately.*

*The spectrum of the topic is large, if covered for a Global scenario , the essay has therefore, been restricted to Indian Ocean Region keeping in view, the aegis under which it is being written. The essay addresses the challenges to maritime security in the Indian Ocean region and proposes a cooperative model of security. The initial part of the essay deals with choke points and transit routes of the region and their importance for the region, both in historic and present day scenario. The second part deals with the emergence of global economy and the inter-dependence of the economies and the criticality of maritime trade. Finally, the essay highlights threats to maritime security and the necessity of a cooperative model. A framework of cooperative model for the IOR covering various aspects and challenges are also briefly discussed thereafter.*

## **Introduction**

1. Indian Ocean along-with the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal and its rim region has been the area of significant importance over centuries. The region provides a rich natural diversity in terms of culture, climate, trade, natural resources, habitat and human resources. History tells us that Indian Ocean has been the home ground for trade between Asian-African littoral states and also with Greeks and Romans for a long time.

2. Indian Ocean Region (IOR) contains about one-third of the world's population, 25% of its landmass, 40% of the world's oil and gas reserves. Indian Ocean region hosts some of the important International Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). Regions such as Straits of Hormuz, Straits of Malacca, Lombok and Sunda Straits are of significant importance in terms of international trade and security.

## **Islands and Transit Routes**

3. The Indian Ocean abounds in both, large islands and coral atolls. Major islands like Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Mauritius, Maldives, the Seychelles and the Comoros are sovereign independent nations with membership of the United Nations. The islands of Socotra near the Bad-el-Mandeb entrance to the Red Sea and that of Masirah off the coast of Oman near the Hormuz straits providing access to the Persian Gulf are part of the Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman respectively.<sup>1</sup>

4. As the Indian Ocean is surrounded by land-mass on three sides, there are only three major entry points in the Southeast, south-west and north-west:-

- (a) Straits of Malacca
- (b) Around the Cape of Good Hope
- (c) Suez canal.

5. Other routes are through the straits of Sunda, Lombok and Makaasar and other narrow Indonesian waters and around Australia – Cape York in the North-East and Base Strait in the south-east.

## **Historical Perspective**

6. In the past colonial powers – the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British vied for the control of transit routes and the “choke points” to IOR. The Indian Ocean region prior to 1970 was relatively quiet. During the later part of the last century, the colonial powers started losing grip over the colonies and new states started to emerge post independence. During the 70s, oil cost was less than two dollars a barrel. British military units were based in the Persian Gulf as they had been for over a century and half. The United States was pre-occupied with Vietnam and Soviet Union with Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Perspectives of security in Indian Ocean region, by Devendra Kaushik Chapter one, page 2-7

<sup>2</sup> The Indian Ocean : Perspective on a strategic arena by William Dowdy and Russel B Trodd

7. The 1970s brought a succession of developments that thrust the Indian Ocean region into mainstream international politics. A series of events like the Indo-Pak war and Bangladesh liberation, oil embargo of 1973-74 and the ensuing energy crisis, Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan shifted the focus of the international community towards this region. Throughout the 80s, continuation of instabilities ensured that the Indian Ocean region remained a major area of focus of international politics divided along the Soviet, American and NAM blocks.

8. Post cold war era, after the breakdown of Soviet Union and emergence of the United States as an unchallenged super power saw major realignment of forces. This period also saw liberalization of economies and integration of the world economies thereby leading to inter-dependence of economies. Even though the sole super power had more coercive capability - both economic and military- than any other nation, direct utilization of such powers by overt means was neither warranted nor feasible (except in Iraq and Afghanistan) due to inter-dependence of various issues in the region. Thus, post cold war era, the focus of nations shifted from overt strategic build up against each other to enabling and expanding trade with each other, while maintaining deterrent force levels to ensure individual national interests.

### **Importance of IOR**

9. The relatively closed nature of the Indian Ocean, with only few entry/ exit points, has played an important part in shaping the course of historical developments in the region. There is no doubt that the Indian Ocean is becoming a critical area in the scheme of things in the present day. The significance of the region is directly linked to the share of the world's energy and commerce that crosses it. About one third of the world's population resides in states that have a coast on the Indian Ocean. One fifth of the world's energy supplies travel across it, largely in a West (Persian Gulf) to East (India, China, Japan) direction. The secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India, highlighted (in her lecture at the National Maritime Foundation on 19 Nov 10) that global mercantile trade constituted 41 % of GDP. Of this 77 % trade and over 90 % by volume was carried by sea. About 70 % of crude and oil products are being carried through the Indian Ocean. In reverse direction, ships carry manufactured goods from Asia to Middle Eastern and European destinations.

10. The sea itself is an economic resource. Fisheries issues vary across the region: in some cases, overfishing in the sea has been replaced with inland fishing,

or, in the dramatic case of Somalia, displacement of fishermen to illicit activities, including piracy. In other cases, fisheries provide a small portion of national income, but a significant portion of the economy for coastal communities, and their interests sometimes conflict with national development plans and the larger scale fishing activity of outside powers. Environmental concerns include the degradation of coastal mangroves, erosion of coral reefs, and the disappearance of a startling 70% of biomass, across the entire Indian Ocean region.<sup>3</sup>

11. In recent years, this compelling economic and ecological story has been complicated by other trends from the dark side of globalization: human trafficking, piracy, smuggling of illicit goods and materials, movement of proliferated weapons and weapon components, and now a real threat of illegal nuclear weapon material trafficking. The prosperity of the Indian Ocean rim states and the economic value of the cargo that plies the seas have stimulated various forms of predatory and exploitative behavior that risk lives and livelihoods, and add cost and risk for those that use these vital trade and commercial sea lanes.

12. An asymmetry of interests and power also compounds the challenge. Great powers use the high seas for strategic objectives, including energy security. They are less sensitive to the impact that their economic and security-driven activities have on the sea itself, as compared to rim countries with developing economies and island states for which the sea is vital to survival. Priorities for preservation of natural habitats and for preventing maritime pollution are not shared among the Indian Ocean's users.

13. Unlike the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the IOR is enclosed on three sides by land masses. The IOR is crisscrossed by shipping lanes that run from east to west, through which over 100,000 ships transit each year, carrying two thirds of hydrocarbons, one thirds bulk cargo and half of the works container traffic. Seaborne access/exit to or from the ocean is through a number of vital choke points

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<sup>3</sup> The Indian Ocean: A Critical Arena for 21st Century Threats and Challenges Ellen Laipson available at [www.stimson.org](http://www.stimson.org)

through which all trade that transits the IOR perforce has to travel.<sup>4</sup> These choke points being easily accessible from adjoining land territories, shipping traffic is most vulnerable during such transit. Shipping is the only cost effective method of bulk transport and sheer economics predicate that the primacy of maritime transportation would remain notwithstanding any increase in fuel prices.<sup>5</sup> Since the maritime trade is the backbone of global trade and economies ensuring safe seas for uninterrupted maritime commerce is in the common interest of the global community.

14. As is evident from the above paragraphs, that there are a large number of issues at stake in the IOR which affect a very large populace and very many nations of the globe. As Ms. Nirupama Rao (ibid) said “while West is of the opinion that India assume a greater role in the region and India is seen as net security provider in the region, it cannot carry the burden of regional security on its shoulder alone”. Complexity and ambiguity are hallmarks of today’s maritime security environment. Countering the wide range of threats posed require a common understanding of the problem and a coordinated joint effort involving major stakeholders. A cooperative model of security is the only option and solution to the wide range of non – military nature of present day threats.

### **Maritime threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

15. Maritime trade forms the backbone of global economy. As brought out earlier, the trade through sea is the cheapest form of bulk cargo transportation and is unlikely to be replaced. Maritime trade faces a number of contemporary threats which need to be addressed in the best interest of the global economy. Conventional threats posed by rival maritime forces have been replaced by asymmetric / non-conventional threats by non-conventional and non-state actors either under the patronage of nations or acting independently. The non-state actors use the lawlessness and internal state of affairs of nation, to use the sea effectively in furthering their goals, piracy and terrorist activities. Activities by Somalian pirates are

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4. International Shipping and World Trade, Facts and figures October 2009

5 Maritime Trade and Transportation report 2007

a live example of such a kind of situation. 9/11 and 26/11 are grim reminders to the effect to which destruction could be wrecked by these entities in the security of nations and the global trade.

16. Some of the contemporary non-conventional maritime threats and other issues to the maritime security are as follows:-<sup>6</sup>

- (a) Maritime Terrorism
- (b) Piracy
- (c) Illegal Trafficking in Narcotics, Arms and Humans
- (d) Illegal Fishing and Poaching
- (e) Illegal migration
- (f) Degradation of Marine Environment
- (g) Natural Disasters

17. The consequences of these threats can have devastating effect on the global economy and trade. All nations, especially those in the IOR will get equally affected and hence it is imperative that the response to this challenge also needs to be application of joint/combined effort and resources. Piracy amongst all of them listed above is comparatively, in such a scale and form, is recent phenomenon which has wide implications for security and economy of the region.

### **Piracy in the Region- The Pressing Problem**

18. Pirates commit crimes against persons and property when they unlawfully board ships that are either underway on the high seas or at anchor. These crimes can be costly in terms of any resultant injuries, loss of life, theft of cargo, environmental damage, and increased vessel-operating costs. Over the 11-year period, 1998-2008, more than 3,600 acts of international piracy and armed robbery at sea have occurred. Piracy affects all corners of the globe—from the Caribbean, to the Mediterranean, to the South China Sea. Incidents of piracy and armed robbery have been rising in East African waters (e.g., Gulf of Aden and Red Sea) in recent

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<sup>6</sup> Challenges for Cooperative maritime security : An Indian ocean perspective, by Cmde Rajeev Sawhney Maritime affairs winter 2008

years while the numbers of incidents in other parts of the globe have generally stabilized.<sup>7</sup> In 2008, acts of piracy that occurred in East African waters were more than double the number from the prior year and comprised 44 percent of incidents worldwide. In the 11-year period from 1998 to 2008, yearly totals in these waters rose from 19 to 134—an increase of 605 percent. In contrast, in 2000, when global incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea peaked at 471, only 6 percent occurred in East African waters while acts of piracy in the South China Sea, Malacca Strait, and Indian Ocean accounted for 77 percent of incidents across the globe.<sup>8</sup>

19. Acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea have incensed the international community and brought about a sense of cooperation among nations, international law enforcement, and treaty organizations. In turn, this has led to information sharing and joint naval patrols. The International Maritime Bureau established the Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The PRC serves as a mechanism for coordinating response by local authorities and providing incident reports to mariners.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 15 nations in South East Asia have signed the *Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia*.<sup>10</sup>

20. Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was established on January 14, 2009 to facilitate discussion and coordination of actions among states and organizations to suppress piracy off the coast of Somalia. The CGPCS includes representatives from over 50 countries and international organizations and it acts as a point of contact on aspects of combating piracy and armed robbery at sea off Somalia's coast. The CGPCS reports to the United Nations Security Council on a

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7 International Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea -Hindering Maritime Trade and Water Transportation Around the World, April 2010 U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and • Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, available at

8. International Maritime Organization, Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships, Annual Report (annual issues), MSC.4/Circ.133, available at

9 International Chamber of Commerce, Commercial Crime Services, International Maritime Bureau , Piracy Reporting Centre, IMB Piracy Reporting Centre, available at <http://www.icc-ccs.org/> as of Jan. 5, 2010.

10 Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP); available at <http://www.recaap.org/> as of Jan. 14, 2010.

regular basis concerning the progress of its activities. A CGPCS working group has produced a best management practices document for owners, operators, managers, and masters of vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden and along the coast of Somalia.<sup>11</sup>

21. Twenty nations now participate in the Combined Maritime Force, which established Combined Task Force 151 to conduct antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea.<sup>12</sup> The goal of this coordinated reporting and response is to turn the tide on the growing number of East Africa incidents.

22. The rise of piracy in the IOR further underlines the need for regional nations to adopt a cooperative strategy or model.

### **Why a Cooperative Model**

23. Post the cold war era, navies are increasingly resorting to cooperative strategies to deal with security challenges. Initiatives such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and the more recent Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) have brought together regional navies to engage constructively and work towards tackling common problems. Theoretical proposition of a Global Maritime Partnership (GMP), originally termed as the 1000 Ship Navy, was put forth by the US Navy (USN) think tank which has generated considerable discussions and speculation across navies in the world. The proposition, originally expounded in 2005 and later reiterated by the then Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) of the USN, Admiral Michael Mullen, aims at building a GMP – a maze of smaller partnerships that unites maritime forces, port operators, commercial shippers and international, governmental and non-governmental agencies to address mutual concerns, such as piracy, gun-running, terrorist activity, illegal fishing, poaching, drug-trafficking, human smuggling, waste dumping and natural calamities.

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11 Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), *Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Coast of Somalia* (Version 2: August 2009), available at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/> as of Feb. 3, 2010.

12 United States Navy, *New Counter-Piracy Task Force Established* (01/08/09), at [http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=41687](http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=41687) as of Dec. 28, 2009.

“Membership in this ‘navy’ is purely voluntary and would have no legal or encumbering ties. It would be a free-form, self-organizing network of maritime partners — good neighbors interested in using the power of the sea to unite, rather than to divide. The barriers for entry are low. Respect for sovereignty is high.”<sup>13</sup>

24. However, it is opined that fructification of such a partnership, although desirable, is not a realistic proposition as it involves nations with divergent security and economic interest and aspirations. ***The practical solution achievable in the near future is a regional cooperation model which can get integrated to other regional models as and when required.*** This will ensure that the threats to the region are addressed and the system is in place to seamlessly integrate to the global partnership.

25. A cooperative model of shared goals needs to be chalked out between the various stakeholders focusing on opportunities – not threats; on optimism – not fear; and on confidence – not doubt. The cooperative model should recognize the challenges imposed by uncertain conditions in a rapidly changing global environment at the same time identifying the opportunities. The task cannot be accomplished by navies alone and needs diverse elements of the maritime community to come together to secure peace and prosperity across the region. Cooperative mechanism would ensure better use of scarce resources and finance. The initiative needs to be taken by advanced regional navies and major stake holders in the region. A model for regional cooperation is discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### **Navy of the IOR (NIOR) - Maritime Security Cooperation Model for IOR – A Suggested Model**

26. A brief look at the nations in the IOR indicates a very wide spectrum in terms of political structure, economic structure, economic policies, cultural and legal imperatives and overall security perceptions of these nations. Therefore, threat from sea, is more in perception of India than, say Seychelles. Similarly, piracy in Gulf of Aden will affect those nations which have extensive trade links through this region.

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13. The Thousand-Ship Navy, editorial by CHRISTOPHER P. CAVAS

27. The perception of the government of the day of a nation in IOR, therefore, is likely to differ on - the aspect of requirement of having a suitable cooperative model for IOR, its structure and the protocols governing such a model. Unlike the cold war era, when the nations of NATO had a clear, visible and potent reason for its formation, the nations of the IOR do not have a common, visible and compelling reason for formation of cooperative model. Nations, politically, will have to overcome their perceived differences and agree on creation of a suitable structure of the Navy of the IOR (NIOR) and have a stage / level-wise implementation as proposed in the succeeding paragraphs.

28. The essay brings out a model to create a maritime security cooperation regime named as Navy of the IOR (NIOR).

### **Geographical Scope**

29. A large number of organisations based on security, trade and political perceptions have been formed in the region. These include the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The successful cooperative engagement by these organisations in bilateral and multilateral issues is highly visible. Even India has gained by being a part of the outer ring of ASEAN. IONS and therefore NIOR is in synchronisation with the concept and can be construed as the beginning of a wider cooperation between the nations and the navies of the IOR.

30. The Navy of the IOR (NIOR), therefore, could include all the nations that form the IONS. The formation of the NIOR could be undertaken at one go assuming that political will on the issue is convergent for all the nations. The operative part of the initiative, however, could begin on a smaller scale, with initial involvement of major stake holders in the region such as India, South Africa, Australia etcetera and thereafter expand to include others. This is based on a similar concept proposed for maritime security of the gulf by Mustafa Alani.<sup>14</sup>

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14 The Indian Ocean Resource and Governance Challenges - Toward a Comprehensive Maritime Security Arrangement in the Gulf available at [www.stimson.org](http://www.stimson.org)

## **NIOR - Institutional Structure**

31. Although, the structure of marine security aspects of various countries are controlled by various agencies like Navy, Coast guard , marine police, customs and other departments, the formation of NIOR should include the agencies that have wider mandate in a nation's security i.e. the Navies of individual nations. Navies traditionally, have larger assets at disposal and trained manpower available to execute the functions beyond their immediate borders.

32. That said, in a state, there is a multitude of agencies that are indirectly or directly involved in maritime security activities. These activities include intelligence gathering, policing patrolling etc. A nation should have a integrated approach as regards to these agencies of maritime security and the navy may represent the nation at NIOR for disseminating and sharing intelligence and taking part in operations.

## **Governance Structure**

33. The governance of NIOR will pose some initial challenges. A model based on similar associations or organisation in the world, suitable tailored to meet the challenges and aspirations of the nations of the IOR, can be formulated. A governing body comprising members of all states could be formed to conduct regular interaction and plan the strategy for conceptualization, planning and execution of formation of NIOR. This body, positioned at a suitable place, will thereafter function as headquarter of NIOR. For ease of operation and better command and control, the IOR could be divided into four zones with one of the member nation taking the leadership on a rotational basis.

## **NIOR Concept - Different Levels of Operation**

34. The regional cooperation cannot be expected and is not practically feasible to be implemented at one go in a large scale with massive deployments by the navies. The proposed model comprises of a multi-level structure with staged implementation; the first two levels are linked to soft security aspects and deal primarily with humanitarian and environmental issues. The third level relates to the strategic dimension and would represent the desired level of regional cooperation. The

incremental approach to formation and implementation of NIOR would be a key to success.

### **First Stage of Implementation (Level 1)**

35. The first level or the foundational stage of cooperation should be based on soft security issues with wide social and economic impacts. This non-military level would cover a comprehensive range of issues that have the potential to attract all regional states to enter into a cooperative arrangement. The sovereignty of nations is to be borne in mind during operations. Some of the main areas of cooperation that could be covered in this stage are as follows: -

- (a) Search and rescue
- (b) Disaster management
- (c) Preventing illegal fishing; helping repatriate illegal fishers who are imprisoned
- (d) Managing environmental degradation from oil spills, waste disposal, and pollution by ships
- (e) Coastal zone management; dealing with threats to offshore assets.

36. Further, there would be a requirement for code of conduct for naval vessels and aircraft operating in IOR waters, particularly in disturbed waters. A key component of such a code should be an understanding of right and obligations of military vessels in other countries EEZ. The NIOR could focus initially on area beyond national jurisdiction and emphasise on issues discussed above. Such cooperation would entail integrated communication, information exchange, and intelligence sharing at the national and regional levels between the governments and thereby increase confidence and interoperability. The key starting point for any comprehensive maritime security arrangement in the region would be to take steps that establish trust and confidence among the regional partners. In most cases, maritime states in a regional or extended bloc will have conflicting interests and differences of opinion. To enhance the chances of success, preliminary steps need to focus on non-sensitive issues, and could be promoted by a non- or semi-official approach. The objective is to build confidence among the regional states so that trust, understanding, and cooperation form the basis of their interaction in individual

and interoperable activities. This would require an informed awareness of each state's strategic interests and concerns, and of individual and collective threat perceptions. Post establishment of a trustful atmosphere, the NIOR will have a greater chance of success. Such approach could be the spring board to jump to the next level.

### **Second stage of Implementation (Level 2)**

37. The second level of cooperation should involve a joint mechanism to combat criminal activities at sea, including narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, piracy, weapons smuggling, and smuggling of other goods. This stage could entail the establishment of a broader regional network that would extend from the Gulf to the Arabian Sea extending to the Indian Ocean and to the Bay of Bengal region, thereby forging links between the Indian Ocean states. As brought out earlier, zonal responsibilities of patrolling and other activities can be entrusted to further regional areas.

38. This is particularly important in view of the increased criminal activity in waters off the coast of Somalia and Yemen. Human trafficking, weapons smuggling, and trafficking of cocaine from South America and chemical drugs from Europe to Africa and then to the Gulf are regular occurrences. Identification of shared problems could encourage states to form an institutionalized system that can recognize threats and deal with them effectively.

### **Final Stage of Implementation (Level 3)**

39. The third and desired level should encompass strategic security, with special attention paid to preventing misunderstandings and communication lapses among naval forces that could lead to accidental military confrontations. This level should also include counterterrorism activities against non-state and asymmetric threats.

40. The IOR region is highly vulnerable to terrorist incidents and has seen its share of terrorist attacks on the seas. Similarly, offshore oil platforms, desalination plants, and merchant and commercial ships are all high-value targets for terrorists, who often resort to sophisticated methods for conducting their operations. The final

stage of the proposed security architecture would cover issues ranging from terrorism and prevention of incidents at sea to maintaining strategic communication links.

### **Challenges to Maritime Cooperation**

41. There is no doubt that Regional/International alliances are key to mitigating the threats posed from sea by non-state actors and rouge elements. However, realisation of a cooperative model (NIOR) itself poses a number of challenges in the region due to the various conflicting interest and no paper of maritime cooperation is complete without a discussion on the obstacles to Navy to Navy cooperation. The challenges and obstacles stem from the fact that each nation views the others as potential enemy and there are no permanent friends – only permanent interests. These obstacles stem from the deep rooted political sensitivities and some of these are as follows:-<sup>15</sup>

- Financial limitation and constraints on operating budgets.
- Lack of common doctrine and language.
- Interoperability constraints political, operational, technological and logistics.
- Training and regular exercise.<sup>16</sup>
- Wide technological gap and development of navies thereby leading to less developed navies reluctance to reveal their weakness
- The possibility of naval cooperation being used to gain intelligence about the capabilities of potential adversaries.
- The confined maritime geography of choke points and other areas and sensitivities of foreign naval vessels operating in area of overlapping EEZ.

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15. Stephen Walsh, "The interoperability issue ." available at [www.navyleague.org/seapower/interoperability\\_issue.htm](http://www.navyleague.org/seapower/interoperability_issue.htm)

16. Maritime Security Challenges in South Asia and the Indian Ocean: Response Strategies By: Cdr. P K Ghosh, 2004

42. Considering the above aspects and sovereignty of nations; as brought out earlier in the essay, the cooperative model should start with soft security issues before graduating to harder maritime security issues. It would be a mistake to conceive naval cooperation in the region in a big scale from the very beginning since there are divergent and multiple dynamics involved. The best way ahead for the region is a gradual methodical incremental approach thereby using bilateral and unilateral measures as steps towards multilateral confidence building.

### **Conclusion**

43. As the Indian Ocean witnesses more activity by commercial shipping and by navies of countries, large and small, it may be necessary to develop a clearer paradigm for the various security concerns and their interrelationships. The safety of IOR sea lanes plays a major role in the maritime trade and security of the region. The region accounts for major chunk of the maritime trade, feeding the major and growing economics of the region and the demand 'heartland' (India, China and Japan). The sea lanes are of vital importance for countries of the region since the energy security for the booming economies of the region are linked to trade. Cooperation among countries of the region is limited due to their diverse culture, strategic perceptions and internal issues. A shift in perception need to come in approach of each nation towards one another in the interest of their economies and the well being of about half the humanity residing in the region; plagued by developmental issues like poverty, health, malnutrition etc. There is a strong naval presence of extra-regional countries as well as littoral countries in the Indian Ocean. While there is littoral resistance to extra-regional power presence, there is also intra-regional competition and rivalry among littoral powers. Competition among states for access and influence is unavoidable; however, it has become extremely important to develop cooperative maritime strategies to face common threats from asymmetric non-state actors. Indian Ocean countries have so far not developed a comprehensive collective security system to meet the challenges of maritime security even though ad hoc arrangements exist for tackling maritime issues. The development of such a formal system in the near future is essential to meet the growing challenges.

44. The navies of the IOR need to spearhead a cooperative strategy to meet the immediate and emergent challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They need to realize the necessity and value of such an arrangement for their national interest and proactively contribute in formalizing a multi-lateral structure of the Navy of the IOR (NIOR). The major stakeholders and regional powers should play a pioneering role and take initiative to fill the gap in the capabilities of smaller participants of the region. Innovative ways need to be explored where in the prospective stakeholders need to be convinced to join the partnership by the major stakeholders of the region. Above all a suitable political environment is essential for implementation of such a cooperative model. A gradual methodical incremental step by step approach first by a series of confidence building measures which aims towards the goal will lead to a cooperative arrangement in the region.

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