



**PATHFINDER INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE 2022
FOLLOW-UP**

AND PRECURSOR TO PFIOSC-PHASE III

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Proposal for follow-up activity

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THE PROPOSAL

Description

This is a proposal by the Pathfinder Foundation to conduct further research on issues pertaining to the three conference themes highlighted in the conference presentations and discussions at the Pathfinder Indian Ocean Security Conference 2022 to support research work for the Phase III of PFIOSC.

The Pathfinder Foundation proposes the following activities as a precursor to the Phase III of the Pathfinder Indian Ocean Security Conference. These follow-up activities are built upon the recommendations of phase II of the project, aimed at the continuity of the Indian Ocean security discourse.

Activity 1: Examine the existing security structures to ascertain if they are adequate and if the multilateral arrangements have succeeded in achieving their objectives. Subsequently, explore the possibility of strengthening the existing structures and mechanisms and making changes where necessary within the current framework.

Activity 2: Monitor the developments involving modern technology, law enforcement platforms and arrangements among states in the region in support of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', bearing in mind that maritime domain awareness is not limited to surveillance activities covering the ocean surface alone, as it includes situations involving underwater activities (undersea mapping, safety of undersea communication cables, exploitation of seabed minerals etc.) and air space.

Activity 3: Conduct a comprehensive historical study of the 38 states in the Indian Ocean Region to formulate custom confidence-building measures based on the interests and circumstances of different states to enhance information sharing and partnership arrangements leading to improvements in maritime domain awareness.

Output

A brief report based on the three activities mentioned above.

ACTIVITY 1 – A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

There is a growing need for an effective regional security architecture to address the diverse challenges faced by the IOR states. Regional multilateral organizations, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), facilitate the exchange of information to enhance communication and transparency across the region's naval forces. However, there has been no progress toward forming a strong grouping involving the Indian Ocean states for a collective security framework or strengthening regional cooperation. This is attributed mainly to the Indian Ocean's large geographical area, which creates a divide between its sub-regions and a lack of a unified or convergent narrative or perspective on political and security issues across the region. The latter is due to extreme diversity, complex sub-regional security threats and challenges, mistrust of key regional and extra-regional powers, preference of certain countries for bilateral rather than multilateral engagements, and major power competition for regional influence.

Existing Multilateral Arrangements

In the Indian Ocean Region, there is a lack of a regional organization that includes all stakeholder nations. The eight-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the seven-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are currently inactive due to political differences among their members; the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is active but experiences political differences; the seven-member Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the 15-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) are operational despite political differences.

Regional Groupings focusing on security

Presently, in the Indian Ocean, only the IORA and the IONS may be called near region-wide entities. With 23 members and 10 dialogue partners, IORA is the only permanent intergovernmental organization.

Meanwhile, IONS is a voluntary venture designed to bring navies and naval leaders together to improve maritime cooperation. Every two years, a leadership gathering of navy chiefs and vessels is hosted by a different country. However, because it lacks a formal Secretariat, it is heavily impacted by its Chair's limited capabilities and is subject to impromptu choices. It had 35 members when it was founded. Still, with the withdrawal of 11 countries, including Madagascar and Malaysia, who choose to be Observers, it presently has 25 member states and 8 Observer countries (the latter including China, Germany, Japan and Russia).

Although the navies of IORA Members and Observer countries participate in the IONS, their organizational composition differs in substantive ways. Key Members of the IONS, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the Maldives and Myanmar, are not Members of the IORA; and Members of the

IORA, such as the Comoros and Somalia, are not Members of the IONS. Notably, France became a full member of IORA in December 2020; the UK., China and Japan are observer countries in the IONS and dialogue partners in the IORA, and the US is a dialogue partner of the IORA only.

The Quad formally referred to as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is another alliance that has emerged as a key actor in the region. Consisting of the USA, Australia, India, and Japan, its current mandate is to respond to China's increasingly assertive behaviour in the region. The grouping is more willing to define a constructive agenda of cooperation amongst themselves and with like-minded nations to bolster confidence in the democracies' ability to counter China's assertion of regional influence. Although it is not a formal alliance, as long as tensions with China remain, the Quad's agenda is likely to expand as the democracies of the Indo-Pacific seek to balance China's growing power.

Prevailing Issues within IONS and IORA

IORA and IONS play underwhelmed roles in strengthening maritime safety and security. It has been underscored that the lack of coordination and cooperation between the two on priority issues are the reasons for their ineffectiveness in security-related matters. There appears to be no practical cooperation or coordination between IORA and IONS and the sub-regional groupings such as the IOC and BIMSTEC, both of which are now developing a strong interest in maritime security. The IOC is increasingly concerned about maritime terrorism in the Indian Ocean.

Available security structures within the region are ineffective in addressing prevailing security-related issues and providing lasting solutions. Thus, it is crucial to examine them further to ascertain the viability of strengthening the existing structures and mechanisms and making changes where necessary within the ever-changing security landscape.

ACTIVITY 2 – MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS (MDA)

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is an all-encompassing term that involves being cognisant of the position and intentions of all actors, whether own, hostile, or neutral, in all dimensions of a dynamic maritime environment, across the areas of interest. The Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015) highlights that MDA is central to the Information–Decision–Action (IDA) cycle and is also a key enabler for maritime security across the conflict spectrum. Amplifying further, the Strategy highlights that the development of MDA relies upon multiple sources of information, including space, air, surface, underwater, cyber, human, their correlation and constant assessment.

Broadly, MDA entails collecting, fusion, analyzing, displaying and disseminating actionable information and intelligence. Dissemination of information supports domestic inter-agency and international coordination and the development of MDA itself. A networked architecture is a prerequisite for effective MDA and information sharing.

Although achieving total MDA is considered impossible, various collaborative steps can be taken in the Indian Ocean Region to benefit both powerful players and smaller states. MDA is an effective tool to combat a range of traditional and non-traditional threats. Such steps would enhance the MDA abilities of Indian Ocean states, thereby furthering national security and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept.

To achieve this, the nation states in the Indian Ocean Region will benefit by broadening their understanding of MDA to include activities in underwater and airspace in addition to the ocean surface, which stakeholders have already discussed at considerable length. This will include examining areas such as Blue Economy, Maritime Environment, Disaster Management and Science and Technology concerning MDA.

However, it has been made evident that MDA should be examined beyond the military requirements of littoral States. Geophysical activity in the waters is of critical importance to humanity, and monitoring such activity can provide important clues to minimizing the effects of catastrophic natural disasters. Moreover, subsea commercial activities require accurate resource availability inputs for successful exploration for economic benefit, and regulators need to study mechanisms used for exploitation to develop sustainable plans.

In addition, many commercial and military activities have a significant impact on the environment, and conservation initiatives need to accurately assess habitat degradation and species vulnerability caused by these activities. Examining Blue Economy entities, for instance, would be advantageous for a nation, given that oceans are a vast reserve for living and non-living resources that can substantially contribute to the nation's economic well-being. Precise exploration and exploitation will require effective Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) for efficiently planning their extraction. Shipping, fishing, deep sea mining and many other offshore industries can contribute substantially to the region's economic growth.

Air Domain Awareness (ADA) is another vital area that nation states could focus on as it is essential for a wide range of security and defence activities, especially prevention of and responses to potential incursions and other illegal activities at various points of entry into the country. Improving ADA capabilities to monitor the maritime environment in the Indian Ocean Region would be beneficial toward combatting several persisting issues such as piracy, trafficking and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. To that end, improving the capabilities of ADA technologies such as radar systems, cameras, radio frequency detection systems, acoustic devices, and other selected electronic capture equipment is vital to determining the maritime environment in the Indian Ocean region.

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as a major naval theatre of operations, including submarine and naval ship deployments and varied 'Over the Horizon' operations. In addition to supranational powers, regional powers have also acquired strategic naval vessels and are well aware of the importance of Maritime Domain Awareness. Thus, there is a growing need to enhance and broaden the understanding of the subject to include various aspects, including UDA and ADA, to achieve strategic security objectives.

ACTIVITY 3 – CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

The Indian Ocean Region has historically been a conflict-affected region, with a range of conflicts within and between states over a range of issues, including ethnicity, religion, economy, autonomy and border disputes. Multiple sources of insecurity afflicting various nations that rim the Indian Ocean region, including terrorism in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and India; simmering conflicts between the Persian Gulf states; high volume trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan; insurgency in Iraq and Yemen; and piracy in the horn of Africa. The region's primary and principal maritime security challenges include maritime borders/disputes, asymmetric threats, organized crimes, and energy & mineral resources security.

Given the very complex political landscape that countries in the region operate within, Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) were identified as a likely mechanism to bridge the trust deficit and resolve conflicts between adversarial nations. Western literature on the subject considers CBMs an ideal means to foster trust by producing credible evidence of 'the absence of feared threats' and enabling the diffusion of norms for responsible State behaviour.

Among many security concerns and disputes in the IOR, the India-China dispute has remained a source of concern for decades. China has expanded its footprint in the IOR, heightening India's concern. While China asserts that its presence in the region is commercially motivated to protect its interest and its nationals abroad, there is clear evidence of its military activity gradually increasing over the years. The situation surrounding the bilateral dispute is much bigger than the two nations, as the power rivalry involves the USA, Russia, and Pakistan, among others.

It has been noted that the key drivers of Beijing's policies concerning the Indo-China border are internal, and actions of the Chinese military on the ground have been inconsistent. Therefore, the diplomatic measures taken to resolve the dispute could be supplemented by developing CBMs that acknowledge changing realities along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The 'norm of territorial integrity' has been implemented through references to three key agreements signed between the two countries between 1993 and 2005. These agreements also contained provisions to enforce this norm through several CBMs that have been largely complied with, notwithstanding recent border confrontations. Despite hostility on the border following the Galwan valley clashes in 2020, both countries have reportedly upheld communication CBMs through diplomatic and military talks.

Moreover, the increasing militarization of the Indo-Pacific has forced the great powers to join new alliances similar to the Quad. In contrast, the small States have been forced to choose sides or attempt to balance the interests of great powers. Considering these factors, the Indian Ocean States must invest in confidence-building measures to achieve their development and security goals.