Collaborative Competence Building for a Better India–Africa Maritime Order

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Contemporary international politics is defined by constant and competing pressures of varying risks, along with threats of a multi-dimensional nature and magnitude. Despite the Indian government's otherwise proactive foreign policy, Africa has remained a relatively subaltern factor in the national strategic outlook. Therefore, there is a need to articulate a more robust narrative and an effective common language to achieve a better understanding, awareness, and greater interest in the maritime domain, locally, regionally, and globally. Additionally, great opportunities are to be found in the shared ocean spaces, and attention must also be given to the mitigation of anticipated threats to the world order. India must look into harnessing the significance of the maritime domain on the basis of major geopolitical and naval interactions across the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR). The global share of maritime trade passing through the area, including the world's crude oil supplies, call out for good order and peace.

Amidst this canvas, India–Africa relations have no doubt seen an unprecedented renaissance, founded on shared economic interests and long-standing historical ties. However, a crucial case can be made for the

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further enhancement of India–Africa Maritime cooperation, in tune with the vision of 'SAGAR' in IOR despite the prominence of the Indo-Pacific construct in recent times. Growing Non-Conventional threats, the criticality of the blue economy, and sea-based food and energy security require an immediate strategic review.

This article gives an historical overview for the contemporary context, and provides the imperatives for a collaborative maritime competence-based partnership between India and Africa.

Keywords: *India, Africa, Maritime Cooperation, SAGAR, Indian Ocean Region*

INTRODUCTION

The relations between India and African countries have seen an unprecedented renaissance, based on shared economic interests and long-standing historical ties. The Indian Ocean region is of particular importance to both sides. However, India's maritime strategy and its ambitions to secure its geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the Indian Ocean are comparatively higher than those of African countries. This is because the Indian Ocean is strategically important for India, as it is the lifeline for its economy and national security. The Indian Navy has a significant presence in the Indian Ocean, and is constantly patrolling the region to ensure its security. India is also involved in a number of bilateral and multilateral maritime security agreements with African countries. The Western Indian Ocean serves as an important gateway to littoral countries located in the region. India's interests in the region require it to expand its security profile with East Africa, as 50 per cent of maritime trade passes through various chokepoints around the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR).[1] This region offers an unparalleled opportunity to India, as it can serve both the strategic and economic interests of all the stakeholders converging in the region.[2]

Despite sharing cultural, economic, and historical ties, India has faced challenges in forging friendly maritime relations with some of the African states in the past. However, India has recognised the crucial importance of creating a situation that would foster maritime cooperation, and advance its strategic objectives in the area.[3] To achieve this, India has started engaging with African states by hosting naval exercises and frequent naval deployments across the WIOR. The inclusive maritime security framework is one that takes into account the interests and concerns of all stakeholders in the maritime domain, including coastal states, shipping companies and

civil society organisations. It is a framework that is based on cooperation and collaboration, rather than on competition and conflict. It has been set up with the participation of littoral countries in the IOR for constant operational level interaction.[4] It is a maritime strategy for using naval power to achieve political, economic or military objectives. It is a comprehensive document that takes into account the full range of factors that affect the maritime domain, including geography, economics, politics and technology. Developing this maritime strategy with African states is primarily intended to promote increased wealth generation from Africa's oceans and seas through the successful implementation of a blue economy that is environmentally friendly and safe.[5]

In the contemporary world order, the maritime domain has emerged as a critical component of global security, economic prosperity, and sustainability. This article explores the significance of collaborative competence building for a better India–Africa maritime order. It analyses the current state of affairs in the maritime domain between India and Africa, amidst a diverse range of conventional and non-conventional threats, including piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing and environmental degradation.[6] The article also highlights the importance of the WIOR amidst a global focus on the Indo-Pacific, and the potential of the blue economy in the India–Africa context. Finally, the article provides a policy framework for enhancing India–Africa maritime cooperation through collaborative competence building, identifying the challenges and opportunities for collaboration, and highlighting best practices that can be replicated in other areas.

Significance of the Maritime Domain in the Contemporary World Order

The maritime domain is an essential component of the contemporary world order, with its economic, strategic and security significance becoming increasingly evident. Maritime transport accounts for more than 80 per cent of the world's trade by volume, and over 70 per cent by value.[7] The growth of global trade has led to a significant increase in maritime traffic, making maritime security and safety essential to ensure the free flow of goods and services.

The maritime domain is essential for the global energy sector, and is also of strategic importance for many countries around the world. The world's major oil-producing countries are located in the Middle East, and a significant portion of the world's oil is transported by sea.[8] Any disruption

to the maritime traffic in this region can have significant implications for the global energy market, leading to price fluctuations and supply disruptions. Moreover, the seas can also be used to project power and influence, making it a critical tool in the geopolitical competition between major powers.

The importance of the maritime domain is particularly evident in the case of the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific has become a critical arena for geopolitical competition between major powers, including the USA, China, Japan and India. The Indo-Pacific is a vast region that encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which are home to some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, including the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. The region is also home to significant energy resources, including oil and natural gas.

Maritime security has emerged as a key priority for many countries, particularly those with significant maritime interests. Maritime security is not only about protecting ships and ports from piracy, terrorism and other security threats, but also about safeguarding the marine environment, and preserving the fragile balance of the ocean ecosystem. The threats to maritime security have become increasingly diverse and complex, including maritime terrorism, cyber-attacks, illegal fishing, smuggling, and human trafficking. These threats have implications beyond the maritime domain, including on human security, economic stability, and geo-political stability.[9]

THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGION (WIOR): DIVERSE MARITIME THREATS

The Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) is a critical region between India and African countries, with significant economic, strategic and security importance. The region spans the Horn of Africa to the South African coast, covering more than 6 million square kilometres. The region is a vital trade route connecting India, African countries, the Middle East and Asia, with more than 50 per cent of global seaborne oil trade passing through the region.[10] Additionally, the region is home to significant fishing grounds and mineral resources, making it a key driver of economic growth and development for India and African countries.[11]

Despite its economic importance, the WIOR is faced with diverse conventional and non-conventional maritime threats, which have significant security implications for the region and beyond. These threats include piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, human trafficking, drug trafficking and environmental degradation.[12]

Piracy has been a significant maritime security threat in the region, with the Somali piracy crisis gaining significant international attention in the last decade. While the international community has made significant progress in reducing piracy off the coast of Somalia, the threat remains, with pirates adapting to changing circumstances and finding new ways to operate.[13]

Terrorism is another significant threat to maritime security in the WIOR, with extremist groups, like Al-Shabaab, operating in Somalia, and the Islamic State and Al Qaeda gaining a foothold in the region.[14] These groups pose a significant security threat to maritime trade, as well as to the stability of the region.

Illegal fishing is another significant threat to maritime security in the WIOR. The region is home to some of the world's most valuable fishing grounds. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a major challenge for the region's economic and environmental sustainability.[15]

Human trafficking is also a significant threat to maritime security in the WIOR, with the region being a major transit point for human trafficking and smuggling. The smuggling of migrants and refugees has also increased in recent years, with thousands of people risking their lives to cross the Indian Ocean in search of a better life.[16]

Drug trafficking is a growing concern in the WIOR, with the region being a transit point for drug trafficking from South Asia to East Africa and Europe. The region's porous borders and weak law enforcement structures make it an attractive transit point for drug traffickers, who use various methods to smuggle drugs, including through the sea routes.[17]

Environmental degradation is also a significant threat to maritime security in the WIOR, with the region's marine environment facing significant challenges, including pollution, overfishing, and climate change.[18] The marine ecosystem is critical for the region's economy and livelihood, and any damage to the environment can have significant implications for the region's sustainability and security.[19]

Given the diverse range of conventional and non-conventional maritime threats facing the WIOR, there is an urgent need for India–Africa defence cooperation. Conventional threats are a real and present danger to the maritime security of the WIOR. For example, piracy is a major threat to maritime commerce, and can have a significant impact on the global economy. The WIOR is a particularly vulnerable region to piracy due to its strategic location and the abundance of shipping traffic. Secondly, armed robbery against ships is a less serious threat than piracy, however, it can still have a significant impact on shipping companies and the global economy.

The WIOR is also vulnerable to armed robbery against ships. Thirdly, illegal fishing is a major threat to the sustainability of fish stocks, and can have a negative impact on the livelihoods of coastal communities. The WIOR is particularly vulnerable to illegal fishing due to the abundance of fish stocks and the lack of effective law enforcement.

Lastly, terrorism is a problem which can pose a serious threat to maritime security as terrorists can use ships and the maritime domain to transport weapons, personnel and supplies. The WIOR is a potential target for terrorism due to its strategic location, and the presence of important shipping lanes.[20]

India has been working towards enhancing its maritime presence in the region, including through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). India has also been working closely with African countries to enhance their maritime capabilities, through capacity-building and training initiatives in combating both conventional and non-conventional threats in the region.

Threat Mitigation in WIOR and the Development of the Blue Economy

Maritime threats are a significant impediment to the development of the blue economy in the WIOR. Effective threat mitigation strategies require a holistic approach that focuses on enhancing maritime capabilities, strengthening law enforcement and promoting sustainable maritime practices.[21] Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities have negative impact on fish stocks, which can lead to a decline in fisheries production, and ultimately hamper the growth of the blue economy. Effective monitoring and surveillance systems, coupled with strengthened law enforcement and prosecution mechanisms, can help mitigate IUU fishing activities and promote sustainable fishing practices.[22] Drug trafficking activities often occur through sea routes, which pose significant risks to maritime security. A collaborative approach between India and Africa to promote sustainable maritime practices, including the promotion of eco-tourism and marine conservation, can help mitigate environmental degradation. It can also address drug trafficking activities, thus promoting secure and stable maritime routes which will facilitate the growth of the blue economy.[23] Pollution, overfishing and climate change have significant impact on marine ecosystems, which can undermine the sustainability of the blue economy. India and Africa need to work together and take a lead in developing a comprehensive approach to

mitigate maritime threats, which will facilitate the development of the blue economy in the region.

COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCE BUILDING THROUGH DEFENCE COOPERATION

India and Africa share a long history of maritime cooperation. This cooperation has been based on shared economic interests and longstanding historical ties. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for even closer cooperation between India and Africa in the maritime domain. This is due to the increasing number of maritime threats facing the region, as well as the potential for the blue economy to drive economic growth and development. One of the key pillars of India–Africa maritime cooperation is collaborative competence building. This involves enhancing the capabilities of both India and Africa to address the diverse range of maritime threats, and promote the growth of the blue economy in the WIOR.

Elements of Collaboration

Competence-building can take many forms, including knowledge sharing, capacity-building, technology transfer and institutional collaboration.[24] Knowledge sharing is an essential aspect of collaborative competence-building. It involves sharing information, best practices and expertise between India and Africa to enhance their understanding of the maritime domain. Capacity-building is another critical aspect of collaborative competence-building, which involves enhancing the skills, knowledge and capabilities of maritime professionals in India and Africa.

Technology transfer is another critical aspect of collaborative competence-building. The transfer of technology between India and Africa can help promote the development of the blue economy, and enhance maritime security in the region.[25] For instance, India has been providing maritime technology and equipment to several African countries, including patrol boats, radar systems and communication equipment.

Some recent examples of India providing maritime technology and equipment to African countries include the donation of two Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs) to the Seychelles Coast Guard (2021). The FPVs are equipped with state-of-the-art radar and communication systems, and they will help to strengthen the Seychelles Coast Guard's ability to patrol its waters and protect its maritime interests. In 2022, India signed an agreement with Mauritius to

provide the country with a Coastal Surveillance Radar System. The radar system will help to improve Mauritius's maritime domain awareness, and its ability to detect and respond to maritime threats. In 2023, India is scheduled to deliver two Dornier maritime patrol aircraft to Mozambique. The aircraft will be used to conduct maritime surveillance as well as search and rescue operations.

Institutional collaboration is also essential for collaborative competence-building. The establishment of institutional mechanisms for collaboration can help facilitate cooperation between India and Africa, and promote joint initiatives in the maritime domain. For instance, the IORA and the IONS have been established as platforms for cooperation between littoral states in the region.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Collaborative competence building in the India–Africa maritime domain faces several challenges and opportunities. One significant challenge is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources in many African countries, which can hinder their ability to develop their maritime capabilities.[26] Another challenge is the lack of coordination and cooperation among various stakeholders in the region.

To combat these emerging challenges, the shared economic and security interests of India and Africa in the region will provide a strong foundation for collaboration. Additionally, there is a growing recognition among the international community of the strategic importance of the WIOR, which provides opportunities for increased engagement and cooperation.

SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

In recent times, India has undertaken successful collaborative initiatives with Africa in the maritime domain. For instance, India has been conducting joint naval exercises with several African countries, including South Africa, Mauritius and Seychelles. These joint exercises have helped enhance the interoperability of naval forces and promote regional maritime security.

Another successful initiative is the development of the Coastal Surveillance Radar System (CSRS) in Mauritius, which was established with the assistance of India.[27] The CSRS has significantly enhanced Mauritius' ability to monitor its maritime domain, counter illegal fishing activities and promote maritime security in the region.

Factors to Enhance Collaboration

Collaborative competence building in the India–Africa maritime domain is influenced by several political, economic and cultural factors. Political factors—such as differences in foreign policy priorities, political instability, and the lack of political will—can hinder collaboration. Economic factors—such as differences in trade relations and economic interests—can also impact collaboration. Finally, cultural factors—such as differences in language, social norms, and values—can pose challenges to collaboration.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to develop a shared vision and agenda for collaboration. This requires a deep understanding of each other's priorities, interests and capabilities. Governments, the private sectors, and civil society organisations can play a critical role in facilitating collaboration by promoting dialogue, building trust and promoting joint initiatives. Cultural exchange programmes, student exchange programmes and other people-to-people initiatives can also help promote understanding, and build relationships between India and Africa.

Two Examples in Collaborative Competency Building

Two specific case studies of India's expertise in capacity building mechanisms may be cited here. Firstly, Hydrographic Assistance, and secondly, Port-Led Development are twin workable options for the development of the blue economy in the region.

India has a long history of hydrographic expertise. A report published by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) has noted that 'India has been providing hydrographic assistance to African countries for over three decades, and this has helped build trust and cooperation between India and African countries in the maritime domain.'[28] This hydrographic assistance can help facilitate maritime trade and development. The report states that 'accurate and up-to-date hydrographic charts are crucial for safe and efficient navigation, as well as the development of ports and maritime infrastructure, which is essential for economic growth and development in Africa.'[29] India's National Hydrographic Office (NHO) has been at the forefront of providing hydrographic assistance to African countries through the deployment of Indian Naval hydrographic ships, and the provision of training and capacity building programmes to African hydrographic agencies.[30] This collaborative effort will have a framework for regular consultations and information-sharing between India and African countries on hydrographic matters, and thus facilitate collaboration and cooperation in the maritime domain.

The concept of port-led development refers to the development of maritime infrastructure such as ports and related facilities. It acts as a catalyst for economic growth and development. India's Sagarmala Project is a prime example of port-led development, which aims to develop a string of ports along India's coastline to boost maritime trade and connectivity. In a report published by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), it was noted that 'India's experience with port-led development can be a valuable model for African countries, which have significant maritime potential but lack adequate infrastructure and connectivity.'[31] The report also highlights the need for greater collaboration between India and African countries in the development of maritime infrastructure, stating that 'India can provide technical expertise and financial support for the development of ports and related facilities in Africa, which can in turn enhance trade and connectivity between the two regions.'[32]

To promote port-led development in Africa, it is recommended that India provide technical expertise and financial support for the development of ports and related infrastructure in African countries. This can be done through the establishment of partnerships between Indian and African ports, which can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and best practices in port management and operations.[33] In addition, there is a need to develop inland waterways and coastal shipping routes in Africa, which can enhance connectivity and reduce logistics costs for trade. This can be achieved through the development of joint projects between India and African countries, which can leverage India's experience with the Sagarmala Project and other port-led development initiatives.

Overall, the promotion of collaborative competence building between India and Africa in the maritime domain through hydrographic assistance and port-led development can contribute to the development of a better India–Africa maritime order.[34] This collaborative approach between both the countries will help in addressing a diverse range of maritime threats and sustainable maritime practices, which will result in the enhancement of economic growth, create employment opportunities and promote sustainable development in the region.

POLICY APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

In order to establish a comprehensive and effective policy framework for enhancing India–Africa maritime cooperation, it is essential to focus on strategic components that address the needs and aspirations of both littoral

countries within the WIOR and major powers with stakes in the region. This framework will not only promote collaborative competence building but also contribute to the development of a better India–Africa maritime order.

Some recommendations with specific analytical inputs are mentioned below.

Enhance Capacity Building Efforts

To reinforce capacity-building efforts in the region, littoral countries in the WIOR need to continue to collaborate on joint training programmes and technology transfers. Countries like Kenya and Tanzania have shown interest in enhancing their maritime capabilities, which could be achieved through cooperative initiatives. For instance, India could provide advanced training to naval personnel, and share technology related to hydrography, maritime surveillance and disaster response. This would help these nations develop the expertise needed for safe navigation, effective disaster management, and resource exploration in their maritime zones.

Moreover, major powers such as the US and China also have strategic interests in the region. India has the required technological and policy leadership to contribute by providing alternative technological solutions, and share expertise in satellite-based surveillance, maritime domain awareness, and search and rescue operations. This would be aligning with the capacity-building needs of littoral countries.

Comprehensive Maritime Security Strategy

Developing a comprehensive maritime security strategy for the WIOR is crucial to ensure stability and protect maritime interests. Littoral countries like Seychelles and Madagascar face challenges such as piracy, illegal fishing and environmental threats. Collaborative efforts between these countries could involve joint patrols, intelligence sharing and coordinated responses to maritime threats. India's expertise in maritime surveillance and its maritime security partnership with countries like Mauritius and Mozambique could provide guidance on crafting effective strategies.

A secure maritime environment in the region is pivotal for global trade and security interests. Towards this, India has the potential to offer training and technical assistance to enhance maritime enforcement capabilities of coastal states, aligning with its historical ties and commitments to maritime security.

Promotion of the Blue Economy

The promotion of the blue economy in the region requires joint initiatives to ensure sustainable exploitation of maritime resources. Countries like South Africa and Mozambique possess rich marine biodiversity, and potential for fisheries and tourism. Collaborative efforts could involve knowledge-sharing in fisheries management, eco-tourism development and marine conservation. India's experience in sustainable fisheries management and eco-tourism along its coastline could provide valuable insights.

Major powers like Japan and the European Union have interests in sustainable resource management and environmental conservation. India could facilitate initiatives for the development of eco-friendly fishing practices, marine protected areas, and sustainable tourism ventures in the WIOR.

Institutional Collaboration

Enhancing institutional collaboration involves strengthening partnerships between governmental agencies and organisations involved in maritime affairs. Littoral countries such as Somalia and Comoros could establish regional maritime centres that facilitate information sharing, joint exercises and coordination of maritime operations. India's established naval cooperation with Mauritius and Seychelles could serve as a model for creating mechanisms for multilateral cooperation.

Engaging in institutional collaboration through existing frameworks like Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Western Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (WIONS) can foster dialogue, build trust, and encourage joint capacity-building initiatives among littoral states.

The Role of Governmental and Other Institutions

Governmental agencies, private sector organisations, and civil society organisations can play a critical role in facilitating collaboration between India and Africa in the maritime domain. Governmental agencies can provide support for joint initiatives, facilitate dialogue and provide resources for capacity-building. Private sector organisations can contribute by providing technical expertise, funding, and other resources for joint initiatives. Civil society organisations can play a role in promoting awareness, building relationships, and facilitating dialogue between different stakeholders in the region. Additionally, if all these institutions work together, it can promote dialogue and develop joint initiatives that align with the shared interests of both India and Africa.

Conclusion

This article has explored the importance of collaborative competence building for a better India–Africa maritime order. The maritime domain plays a critical role in the contemporary world order, with significant economic, strategic and security implications. India and Africa have shared economic and historical ties, and collaborative competence building in the maritime domain can enhance their capabilities to address maritime threats as well as promote the growth of the blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean Region.

Political, economic and cultural factors can pose challenges to collaboration, but these challenges can be overcome through dialogue, capacity-building and joint initiatives. Governments, private sector organisations, and civil society organisations can all play a role in facilitating collaboration. Institutional mechanisms for collaboration should be developed to involve all stakeholders in the region. By working together, India and Africa can enhance their maritime capabilities, promote sustainable maritime practices, and drive economic growth and development in the WIOR.

Future research can explore the role of emerging technologies in enhancing maritime security in the region. Additionally, further research can explore the potential of public–private partnerships in promoting the growth of the blue economy in the region. One needs to continue to explore the impact of climate change on the maritime domain, and the implications for collaborative competence building between India and Africa.

Notes

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