

**INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW (IFR) SERIES****Multilateral Maritime Cooperation in the European Union: Can IOR Borrow the Template?**

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The Indian Navy will be organizing an International Fleet Review (IFR) in February 2016 off Vishakhapatnam. Traditionally, fleet reviews are held by countries to showcase their naval power and foster maritime cooperation with other countries.<sup>1</sup> IFR-2016 may be seen in context of India's new maritime security strategy titled 'Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy' (IMSS-2015). The IMSS-2015 expands India's primary as well as the secondary areas of maritime interest beyond the traditional Indian Ocean limits. The areas now stretch from the western African littorals to the Western Pacific; thereby, affirming a tack to the 'Indo-Pacific' construct. Among the key national objectives stated in the IMSS-2015 is to shape a benign security environment in India's neighbourhood through engagement with the countries of the region.<sup>2</sup> The IFR-2016 is being conducted in consonance with this aim.

Among the key countries that India seeks to engage with across the oceans are those constituting the European Union (EU). The EU has lately emerged as an important stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific region, as evidenced by the anti-piracy mission of EUNAVFOR *Atalanta*. In June 2014, the EU promulgated the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS),

which has become another milestone in the EU's endeavours towards maritime multilateralism.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to analyse the maritime cooperative framework developed by the EU, and 'whether' and 'to what extent' it can be replicated in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

## **Evolution of EUMSS**

The maritime dimension of the EU may be better understood by examining the EU as a political entity. After the Second World War, six European countries came together and formed European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. Eventually, it became European Community; and by the end of the Cold War, the European Community transformed itself to create a closer union, which came to be known as the European Union (EU).<sup>3</sup>

With its policy of enlargement, the EU has enlarged its borders since its inception. Though Europe has always had a maritime element, but since 1999, the EU enlargement, the changing security arrangements and the emergence of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – later known as Common Security and Defence Policy – imparted greater momentum to its maritime dimension. It was in 2003, that the EU emerged as a security actor with the launch of European Security Strategy (ESS). Later, in 2007, the commission adopted a new Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) for the European Union. Highlighting the importance of the oceans for the EU, this policy articulate an all-round approach to the EU maritime issues but it was observed to be inadequate for the multifaceted maritime challenges. In 2008, the EU launched its first joint naval operation, the EUNAVFOR Somalia- Operation *Atalanta* against piracy, which brought home lessons of an international cooperation and a comprehensive multilateral response to maritime security.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Joint Communication released by the EU in March 2014, there are multifaceted maritime security challenges including maritime-territorial disputes, proliferation of weapon of mass destruction (WMD), piracy and other maritime crimes, terrorism, marine pollution and natural disasters in the maritime domain.<sup>5</sup> These security imperatives

compelled the member states to come together and formulate the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). The strategy does not create new frameworks but strives to strengthen existing structures, policies and achievements in the maritime domain.<sup>6</sup> The aim of this strategy is to bring together both internal and external aspects of the EU maritime security for building a coordinated approach, promote effective and credible partnerships in the global maritime domain, cost efficient maritime security initiative, and enhance synergy among member states.<sup>7</sup> It is based on four guiding principles, which are:

- a. Cross-Sectoral Approach that includes cooperation from all authorities, both civilian and military, and EU agencies.
- b. Functional Integrity in that entails the Strategy will advance the maritime response competence of the union and its member states.
- c. Respect for Rules and Principles where compliance to the international laws like the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and applicable bilateral treaties is emphasised.
- d. Maritime Multilateralism, which includes cooperation with relevant international partners and organisations especially the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The EU is a unique example of cooperative multilateralism and the adoption of the EUMSS reiterates this fact. The EUMSS is an appropriate example of cooperation and coordination of internal and external, private and public, besides intergovernmental and supranational entities through a comprehensive security approach.<sup>8</sup> In December 2014, the EU adopted an action plan, which set out 130 actions, which will translate the objectives of the Strategy into practice.<sup>9</sup> The Action Plan highlights the following facets that are essential for the effectiveness of the Strategy:

- a. A coordinated approach on maritime security issues in international fora such as Group of 8 (G-8), International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and NATO;

- b. A well-integrated and interconnected maritime awareness, surveillance and information sharing system;
- c. Cost effective capability development and capacity building through enhanced cooperation by public and private actors including research and industry;
- d. A better preparation, anticipation and responsiveness on the part of the member states to prevent criminal activities and protect critical maritime infrastructure.
- e. EUMSS provides a platform for the EU and the member states to bring together the innovative technologies for improved efficiency, sustainability and effectiveness of maritime operations.

The successful coordination achieved during Operation *Atalanta* and the subsequent launch of the EUMSS have facilitated the EU's second combined naval operation EUNAVFOR Med in response to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean Sea.

## **The IOR Context**

It may be worth examining whether the EU model can be replicated in the IOR. According to an analysis, “the circumstances of the IOR are in many respects quite different from those of the Atlantic or Pacific. The concept of regionalism is not well developed.”<sup>10</sup> Geographically, the region is diverse, disparate and disaggregated, and lacks common historical identity. It is also the locus of many fragile states, leading to the phrases - ‘arc of crisis’ and ‘arc of instability’.<sup>11</sup> Further, the maritime response, capabilities, capacities and strategic quotient vary significantly across the region.<sup>12</sup> The other issues relate to the growing naval footprints of China and extensive involvement of non-resident actors in the Indian Ocean, which make the whole equation even more complex.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the existing economic, environmental and human security challenges in the IOR mandate an exigent need for maritime cooperation. The region faces some common non-traditional maritime security issues such as the vulnerability of International Shipping Lanes (ISL), piracy, maritime terrorism and natural disasters.<sup>14</sup> It is argued that for stability

and security within the IOR, efforts to devise a regional cooperative framework are a foregone proposition. Among the existing regional forums, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) have some potential to foster maritime security cooperation. However, the aspect of maritime safety and security is relatively nascent in the IORA. Besides, the IONS itself is a new forum, and is likely to address only naval cooperation at the functional-level. It is well known that “the common maritime security strategy (such as the EUMSS) requires active engagement at the highest political levels...”<sup>15</sup> IORA and IONS will take time to develop and set norms of conduct akin to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).<sup>16</sup>

The existing sub-regional fora such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) do not emphasise on maritime safety and security; and thus, are unlikely to contribute towards the evolution of a IOR-wide maritime security cooperative architecture. Nonetheless, “...the visionary leaders of these sub-regional groupings could play critical role in devising a region-wide way ahead”.<sup>17</sup> However, considering the diverse strategic outlook of countries, forming a common view would be a major challenge.

One of the key constraints for a common maritime response in the IOR is that most of the countries prefer bilateral rather than multilateral solutions. Nonetheless, cooperation could be established through small groupings and ultimately “they may form a connecting chain and hence capable of being integrated in a larger body in the years to come”.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, a ‘Bay of Bengal Maritime Cooperative Framework’ (BoBMCF), where smaller groupings can work to address non-traditional maritime security threats, would be a viable alternative. With the recent resolution of the maritime disputes between India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, aspirations for smaller trilateral cooperative initiatives similar to the India-Maldives-Sri Lanka ‘trilateral’ have increased. Such initiatives could be expanded beyond the trilateral level to address sub-regional issues, such as through coordinated patrols and cooperative surveillance in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>19</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

Each region has their characteristic maritime threats and challenges. Europe too, has had a troubled past with major conflicts and clashes of interests. The post Second World War Europe had to address two immediate challenges: first to rebuild devastated economies; and second, to bring stability and security to the region. These common concerns paved the way for the creation of the EU. Currently, the EU is facing internal challenges such as the Euro crisis, migrant influx from West Asia and North Africa, as well as the possibility of Britain's exit from the Union. Britain has played a significant role in the EUNAVFOR operations as the UK is one most advanced military power in the EU and hence its exit will affect the effectiveness of the operation<sup>20</sup>. Further, as some member states have reduced their defence expenditures,<sup>21</sup> it remains to be seen how they will balance the use of military capacities in civilian-led maritime security activities and respective national, CSDP or NATO initiatives. However, the common interests led the EU to launch a comprehensive response in the form of EUMSS. The EUMSS is an important step towards a pan-regional maritime security cooperative framework.

Unlike the EU, IOR is a disparate and diverse, and it may take much long to create a pan-IOR framework. Nonetheless, the IOR could move towards greater interdependence, and forge cooperative ties at the sub-regional levels against common non-traditional maritime threats.

The Bay of Bengal – given its rising strategic salience and the resolution of maritime disputes – is an area with a high potential for maritime security multilateralism. With the IMSS-2015 having charted its maritime strategy to provide 'net security' in the Indo-Pacific region,<sup>22</sup> India could facilitate establishing such a structure in the Bay of Bengal sub-region. In this regard, the Indian Navy has proposed an initiative called the "Partnership for Prosperity in the Bay of Bengal".<sup>23</sup> Further, India could examine the case of EU's maritime cooperative arrangements, including those for enhancing maritime domain awareness (MDA), and multi-agency and multi-sectoral coordination to replicate the same in India's sub-regional neighbourhood.

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<sup>16</sup>Lee Cordner, 'Progressing Maritime Security', N. 10, p. 80.

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<sup>23</sup>Discussion with Captain Gurpreet S. Khurana, 23 December 2015.