IONS Ver. 2.0 — A Time For Rejuvenation

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Abstract

With one complete rotation of its chairmanship having been completed, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) security-construct needs to re-invent itself, move on from the baby-steps of confidence-building that have characterised the first decade of its existence, and demonstrate its readiness to actually walk-the-talk and respond in concrete terms to the several challenges that confront nation-States of the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Since response is always attendant upon information, information-sharing is an excellent way for IONS Version 2.0 to begin this process of rejuvenation.

In February of 2008, driven by the need to address regional vulnerabilities by capitalising upon regional strengths, the Indian Navy made a stupendous effort to assemble in New Delhi the Chiefs-of-Navy (which term encompasses not just the heads of formally constituted 'navies', but also, where no such formally constituted armed force exists, the head of the principal agency responsible for maritime security) of very nearly all littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Sitting and discussing together — for the first time ever — both in 'assembly' and in 'conclave', the chiefs launched the 21st Century's first significant international maritime-security initiative — namely, the **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium** ('IONS'). That the launch of so important a regional initiative was able to meet with such wide acceptance across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean was in itself a unique phenomenon — and one clearly representative of a region that is beginning to come into its own and seems ready to evolve a broad consensus in facing the myriad security challenges within the maritime domain.

The acronym 'IONS' is an appropriate one, since the etymology of the English word *ions* is drawn from the Greek word *ienai* meaning *go*, and implying movement. The fundamental concept of IONS, too, remains one of 'moving' together — as a region. Under the IONS construct, the 38 littoral/island States of the IOR with legitimate

territory lying either within Indian Ocean Region or upon its rim are geographically grouped into four sub-regions, as depicted in Figure 1 (the UK was added subsequently as the 38th littoral State):-

West Asian Littoral		East African Littoral		South Asian Littoral		South-East Asian & Australian Littoral	
1	Bahrain	1	Comoros	1	Bangladesh	1	Australia
2	Iran	2	Djibouti	2	India	2	East Timor
3	Iraq	3	Egypt	3	Maldives	3	Indonesia
4	Israel	4	Eritrea	4	Pakistan	4	Malaysia
5	Jordan	5	France	5	Seychelles	5	Myanmar
6	Kuwait	6	Kenya	6	Sri Lanka	6	Singapore
7	Oman	7	Madagascar	7	UK	7	Thailand
8	Qatar	8	Mauritius				
9	Saudi Arabia	9	Mozambique				
10	UAE	10	Somalia				
11	Yemen	11	South Africa				
		12	Sudan				
		13	Tanzania				
Figure 1							

The apex-level mechanism of the IONS initiative is the 'Conclave-of-Chiefs.' This conclave is held once every two years, with a new chairperson at the helm. Each conclave is supplemented by an IONS Seminar, which the Chiefs also attend, along with a galaxy of luminaries in various disciplines relevant to security within the maritime domain. However, as had been the intention from the start, it is at this 'Conclave-of-Chiefs,' removed from the glare of the media, that the most meaningful progress occurs in accordance with a formalised 'Charter of Business.' At this juncture, it is important for readers to comprehend the whole business of 'membership' and 'observers' of the IONS, since this is somewhat different from other security-architectures. This is best done by first understanding the concept of 'observers' and only thereafter shifting one's attention to the concept of 'members'. Each one of the principal maritime-security agencies of the afore-tabulated States of the IOR is *automatically* — solely by virtue of its legitimate existence — an 'Observer'. As an 'Observer', the navy/maritime-security-agency concerned is invited to all IONS meetings, activities, and projects, but it does not have voting rights at these fora. Every 'Observer' is expected to support and encourage the purpose, aim and objectives of the 'IONS', and to demonstrate a willingness to contribute constructively by engaging other 'Member' and 'Observer' countries. This right to vote is the only real difference between an observer and a member of the IONS construct. The enabling mechanism that confers the right to vote is the act of signing the IONS Charter of Business. Thus, each 'Observer' who signs the IONS Charter of Business becomes a 'Member', and now

has the additional right to vote. There is one other category of 'Observer'. A navy/maritime-security-agency of a State that does not have legitimate territory within the IOR may apply to become an observer within the IONS construct. Its application will then be reviewed at the forthcoming Conclave-of-Chiefs and must receive a unanimous vote of acceptance.

Insofar as the Charter of Business is concerned, it is a matter of very great satisfaction that just a decade down the line the IONS Charter has already been signed by the navies of as many as 23 States of the IOR. This is by no means an excessive duration for an organisation comprising the navies/maritime-security-agencies of 38 sovereign States with widely varying security concerns and imperatives. Some perspective may be obtained when one sees that the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), which is the structure that most closely corresponds to the IONS, took 12 years (from 1988 to 2000) to receive formal approval from its far fewer (21) constituent members.[1]

Figure 2 tabulates the 23 IOR States whose navies/maritime-security-agencies are currently 'members' of the IONS construct.

West Asian Littoral		East African Littoral		South Asian Littoral		South-East Asian & Australian Littoral	
1	Bahrain	1	Comoros	1	Bangladesh	1	Australia
2	Iran	2	Djibouti	2	India	2	East Timor
3	Iraq	3	Egypt	3	Maldives	3	Indonesia
4	Israel	4	Eritrea	4	Pakistan	4	Malaysia
5	Jordan	5	France	5	Seychelles	5	Myanmar
6	Kuwait	6	Kenya	6	Sri Lanka	6	Singapore
7	Oman	7	Madagascar	7	UK	7	Thailand
8	Qatar	8	Mauritius				
9	Saudi Arabia	9	Mozambique	**EXTRA-REGIONAL OBSERVERS**			
10	UAE	10	Somalia		China		Russia
11	Yemen	11	South Africa		Germany		Spain
		12	Sudan		Japan		
		13	Tanzania				
Colour Key:							
Member							
Observer		No Shading					

Figure 2

In keeping with the original design, the chairmanship of IONS rotates sequentially through each of the four sub-regions. This ensures that the somewhat different priorities given even to common challenges, and, of course, such maritime-security challenges as are unique to a given sub-region, are all given the emphasis and

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[1] **WPNS Members:** Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, People's Republic of China, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, United States of America and Vietnam. **WPNS Observers:**

attention that they deserve. The first rotation through all sub-regions has already been completed with the Chiefs of Navy of India (2008-2010), the UAE (2010-2012), South Africa (2012-2014), Australia (2014-2016) all having sequentially chaired the IONS. The chairmanship is currently held by the Chief of the Navy of Bangladesh (2016-2018).

Given the diversity of the region as a whole, the need to *make haste slowly* in the initial years was recognised to be important. Successive Conclaves-of-Chiefs have, therefore, very deliberately spent time and great effort in building the foundation of the construct through an incremental series of small but crucial confidence-building steps. However, with a decade having passed and one full rotation having been completed, the era of 'making haste slowly' is now over and it is time to address holistic security in a far more granular and proactive fashion. Quite clearly, the first order of business is to reinvigorate efforts to move the 15 remaining navies/maritime-security-agencies from their existing status of 'Observers' to one of 'Members'. A powerful incentive for the States concerned to sign the IONS Charter of Business would be for the IONS to be perceived as doing much that is useful in terms of actually addressing the several common challenges to regional maritime security within the IOR. This needs some robust initiatives and, as the founder of the construct, it behoves the Indian Navy to proactively enlist the support of other influential powers to briskly move this process along. Since this will require the approval of the governments of the sovereign States concerned, a major determinant of the success of this effort will be the ability of the Indian Navy and India's Ministry of External Affairs to act in concert.

Given that the geopolitical balance of power in the Indian Ocean is in a state of flux, with new Asian powers jostling with established Grotian powers for maritime space and championing the cause of a Blue economy rather than the old 'Brown' one, and given that the challenges of human security are common across the several disparate littoral States of this maritime expanse, *Constructive Engagement* is the only viable maritime strategy that can ensure that all boats rise with the tide. For India, too, it is this very strategic concept that shapes much of New Delhi's geopolitics. While considering India's geopolitics, it is a major conceptual error to place geopolitics, geoeconomics and geostrategy and the same hierarchical level. Figure 3 offers a cogent depiction of the wrong and the right formulation of these.

Figure 3

Moving along from the traditional view of security being limited to military security alone, the IOR States have adopted a far more holistic approach to maritime security, which is now defined as freedom from threats arising in- or –from- or –through the sea. These threats could arise from natural causes or from manmade ones, or from the interplay of one with the other, as in the case of environmental degradation or global warming. Insofar as the *targets* of such threats (arising from a lack of maritime security) are concerned, these could be individuals themselves — or 'groupings' of individuals, such as societies and/or nation-states. When these threats address the regional fabric itself, nation-states find themselves increasingly enmeshed in a complex web of security interdependence, which tends to be regionally focused and a robust regional initiative ought to be a logical outcome of this regional focus. While *military* maritime security does, of course, continue to enjoy primacy, it is now firmly established within a new construct that incorporates military, political, economic societal and environmental dimensions of security, with all their many linkages. Thus, threats to human-security, such as religious extremism; international terrorism; drug and arms smuggling; demographic shifts — whether caused by migration or by other factors; human trafficking; environmental degradation; energy, food and water shortages; all now figure prominently as threats that are inseparable from military ones.

At a regional level, these issues of human security constitute common interests that regional security-structures such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the IONS must constantly endeavour to address. For the first decade-and-a-half of its existence, IORA, which was founded in 1997 as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), confined itself purely to economic cooperation and specifically abjured security issues. It must, of course, be admitted that in 1997, the notion of security within the collective minds of the countries of the Indian Ocean was still very strongly biased towards military security alone.

The year 2013 was a watershed for the organisation, for in that year, the IOR-ARC was renamed '**I**ndian **O**cean **R**im **A**ssociation' (IORA) and identified for itself six priority areas to promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the region, of which 'maritime safety and security' is now the first priority. The IORA also spelt out its intent to have its own work on maritime security and safety and disaster management aligned-with and made to complement the similar initiatives taken or envisaged by the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). In November 2017, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) of experts on maritime safety and security held their second meeting to wrestle with the issue of how best to establish and sustain an institutional link with IONS.

However, a serious infirmity of IORA is that its membership excludes many of the nation-States of the Persian Gulf. This is a shortcoming that finds its reflection in the reluctance of these very States to have their navies/maritime-security-agencies sign the IONS Charter. Towards this end, it may be useful to tabulate and compare

countries that constitute the IORA with those whose navies/maritime-security-agencies constitute the IONS. This is depicted in Figure 4. Quite clearly, it is a matter of urgent necessity for India to spearhead a proactive effort to bring the 'missing-members' of the IOR into the fold of the newly-resurgent IORA. It will then become much easier to induct their navies/maritime-security-agencies into the IONS.

West Asian Littoral				East African Littoral				South Asian Littoral				South-East Asian & Australian Littoral			
		IONS	IORA			IONS	IORA			IONS	IORA			IONS	IORA
1	Bahrain	O		1	Comoros	O	M	1	Bangladesh	M	M	1	Australia	M	M
2	Iran	M	M	2	Djibouti	O		2	India	M	M	2	East Timor	M	
3	Iraq	O		3	Egypt	O		3	Maldives	M		3	Indonesia	M	M
4	Israel	O		4	Eritrea	O		4	Pakistan	M		4	Malaysia	O	M
5	Jordan	O		5	France	M		5	Seychelles	M	M	5	Myanmar	M	
6	Kuwait	O		6	Kenya	M	M	6	Sri Lanka	M	M	6	Singapore	M	M
7	Oman	M	M	7	Madagascar	O	M	7	UK	M		7	Thailand	M	M
8	Qatar	O		8	Mauritius	M	M								
9	S. Arabia	M		9	Mozambique	M	M	**EXTRA-REGIONAL OBSERVERS**							
10	UAE	M	M	10	Somalia	O	M			IONS	IORA			IONS	IORA
11	Yemen	O	M	11	S Africa	M	M	1	China	O		4	Madagascar		
				12	Sudan	O		2	Germany	O		5	Russia		
				13	Tanzania	M	M	3	Japan	O		6	Spain		
Key:															
M	Member														
O	Observer														

Figure 4

Accurate knowledge of maritime activities is vital for maritime security and the development of the blue economy. Consequently, the need to have and to share the best possible situational awareness of matters maritime certainly ranks amongst the most pressing of contemporary issues. The question is how best to obtain a higher degree of visibility in the regional maritime space of the IOR. Within the IOR, 'Maritime Domain Awareness' (MDA), is the effective understanding of anything associated with the global maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of the sovereign nations that constitute the IOR. This overarching objective forms a superset within which lie a number of very important subsets. These include the need to increase transparency, information-sharing (not just between governments but also between industry and government), the adoption of international norms and standards, and the enhancement of response mechanisms. 'Response' is always a follow-though of 'awareness'. As such, the IONS construct is ideally suited to facilitate this common objective of sharing unclassified information relevant to the maritime environment between sovereign nations so as to enable its constituents to predict, detect and defeat illegal activities that threaten the safety and wellbeing of the regional maritime common. This is especially important for littoral

states located in the western segment of the Indian Ocean, because of the lack of reliable MDA organisational and functional structures at the regional level. Therefore, IONS must urgently endeavour to establish structures, procedures and processes that will meaningfully supplement ongoing capacity-building and capability-enhancement efforts. Prominent amongst these is the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC) process. The DCoC is a regional agreement for training and information-sharing that has been initiated and is supported by the International Maritime Organisation [IMO]) along with the EU's project on 'Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean' (CRIMARIO), which commenced in 2009 and has led to the establishment of three Information-Sharing Centres (ISCs) — in Sana'a (Yemen), Mombasa (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), with Sana'a being the overarching regional centre. Another structure that IONS could interface with, to mutual benefit, is the EU's 'Programme to Promote Regional Maritime Security' [MaSe], established in 2013, which is expected to shortly launch two additional centres for information-sharing (in Madagascar) and operational coordination (in Seychelles) under the leadership of the 'Indian Ocean Commission'.

In the maritime context, the sharing of unclassified information with regard to merchant vessels is often known as sharing 'White Shipping' data and this is a well-established first-step to the enhancement of collective visibility. There are several bilateral agreements between nation-states for the sharing of White Shipping data. India, for example, has already signed such agreements with the USA, the UK, Australia, France, Spain, Singapore, Myanmar, Israel, and Vietnam; and is looking to extend this activity to many more countries and multinational groupings as well. Although quasi-formal arrangements for the sharing of such data also exists between India and IONS members such as Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka, it is timely and appropriate for similar technical agreements to be formally signed between the constituent navies of IONS. As things presently stand, at the multilateral level, the EU's Maritime Security Centre: Horn of Africa (MSCHoA) is the backbone of the MDA system in the sub-region of north-east Africa. Although piracy off Somalia does still occur, it is no longer quite as alarming an issue as it was around 2008-2009. Consequently, IONS has a great opportunity to support and supplement the transition from MDA-sharing structures created by extra-regional powers such as the EU. The Djibouti Code of Conduct has already been mentioned and is probably a good point at which to focus the immediate endeavours of IONS.

Due to the heterogeneous mix of platforms and sensor technologies in use today, 'data-fusion' is a major requirement of MDA. Data obtained from different

sources may, for example, show the same vessel as two or more vessels that are slightly separated in space. The reverse, too, can occur. This is due to the inherent errors in bearings, ranges and reference geoids that are simultaneously in use by different contributors of the data. There is a clear need for powerful sensor data fusion architectures — and this has nothing whatsoever to do with nationally-sensitive information regarding military entities. Safety and security are constant concerns of maritime navigation, especially when considering the continuous growth of maritime traffic and the persistent decrease in the number of persons deployed aboard modern merchant ships. For instance, preventing ship accidents by monitoring vessel activity represents substantial savings in financial cost for shipping companies (e.g., oil spill clean-up) and averts irrevocable damages to maritime ecosystems (e.g., the closure of fisheries). One of the main sources of White Shipping data is the Automatic Information System (AIS). However, it is far from adequate as a means of comprehensive MDA. AIS messages are vulnerable to manipulation and, due to the unsecured channel of transmission, are subject to hacking. AIS data can — and often does — contain deliberate falsifications and spoofing, such as identity fraud, obscured destinations, and GPS manipulations. It is believed that some 5% of AIS static data transmissions have errors of one or another kind. Quite often, fishing vessels deliberately avoid transmitting their information, either because they are involved in illicit activities such as illegal fishing, or simply in order to keep their fishing areas secret from competitors. Quite apart from the formidable challenges posed by the sheer volume, velocity and variety of information on White Shipping that is being shared (or is sought to be shared), it is essential to establish the veracity of all this maritime data. Thus, to overcome the problem of incompleteness of data, the correlated exploitation of additional and heterogeneous sources is unavoidable.

Obviously, enhanced visibility in the form of Maritime Domain Awareness is not achieved simply by the sharing of electronic or digital data. It also requires the process of trying to understand events — something that Americans call 'sense-making' (also often written as 'SenseMaking'), which is an active process where the human entity within an MDA chain builds and refines questions and recovers situational awareness. While hardware and software for MDA are subjects of much informed debate, inadequate concentration has been laid upon the 'skinware', i.e., the human being. Many human-interaction facets, ranging from cultural differences to language barriers, can affect the maximising of MDA. For instance, human social networking that enhances cooperation and mutual trust is a crucial element in any meaningful collaborative mechanism across national boundaries. In this regard, the numerous Multi-National Experiments (MNE) of Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA [=MDA]) conducted between participating teams from Sweden, Finland,

Singapore and NATO in the first decade of the present century offer an excellent model for IONS to adapt and adopt.

Indeed, given the heterogeneous nature of the region (a recognition that has shaped the internal structure of the IONS construct), solutions that rely solely upon high-tech approaches are unlikely to succeed in the IOR. There is a clear need to identify opportunities not only through high-tech means and processes, but equally, through low-tech solutions, human resources and regional collaboration for the improvement of maritime domain awareness. While a basic understanding of MDA technology is important, and while training towards this end is certainly required, 'IONS' clearly needs to lay a far greater emphasis on collating public sources and working with coastal populations so that national and regional capacities are developed simultaneously. For example, the promotion of MDA should be intrinsic to coastal and port-led development ventures (such as India's ambitious SAGARMALA project). If coastal communities and environmental agencies are sensitised to the benefits of collaborating with MDA centres, MDA would become that much more people-centric rather than remaining only technology-centric. Fisheries offers a useful illustration of this concept. If MDA can be seen to benefit fishing communities by informing them of the presence of desired schools of fish, and simultaneously warning off poachers from the community's fishing grounds, the fishing community will become a valuable source of MDA, transforming itself into the eyes and ears of the awareness-project and supplementing the technical measures in place.

IONS would also do well to avoid an undue obsession with providing a real-time picture of the regional maritime domain. In this regard, it would be extremely useful for IONS to draw both, inspiration and lessons, from the excellent work done by ReCAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia) and the IFC (Information Fusion Centre). ReCAAP, for example, has gained high visibility and credibility more through its analytical reports and guidelines, rather than by providing a real-time picture of the maritime domain. Likewise, although the IFC capitalises upon Singapore's high technological-base and its generous resources, it's most substantial contribution to regional MDA are its weekly summary of events and incidents, which rely entirely on open sources. IONS should adopt this model for increased visibility and should accordingly create a structure that would provide reliable weekly reports on activities in regional waters, using the already-available network of national focal points to verify and disseminate media reports, thereby becoming reliable sources of information and knowledge providers. Yet another structure with which IONS should urgently develop strong institutional linkages is the 'Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime' (IOFMC). This is an informal technical collaboration mechanism organised and implemented by the 'Global Maritime Crime Programme' of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Its objective is to enhance the collaboration between law enforcement officials in the region and to 'promote a shared understanding of the maritime crimes' in the region.

Perhaps most important of need of all is to quickly establish robust and proactive linkages between the principal regional-political structure of the Indian Ocean — namely, IORA — and its functional instrument, IONS, and then to extend these structural and functional linkages to ASEAN — and its corresponding functional instrument — namely, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). Such a progression would consolidate the Indo-Pacific into a 'Maritime Regional Security Complex', which the eminent strategic analyst and prolific writer of the 1980s, Barry Buzan, had described as "...*a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.*"

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