

## **THE MARITIME SECURITY DIMENSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION-INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: REVIEW OF THE 2020-25 ROADMAP**

*Captain Himadri Das*

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*As underscored by the leaders of European Union (EU) and India, at their recent meeting in April 2022, India, and Europe, two large and vibrant democratic societies, share similar values and a commonality of perspectives on several global issues. The EU-India Strategic Partnership Roadmap 2020-25 is an action plan to strengthen the strategic partnership in multiple areas, including in maritime security cooperation. This article, about two years into the five-year plan, delves on the maritime security dimensions of the partnership and investigates the progress under the action plan. While the progress, especially in recent years, is encouraging, there still is a large potential for furtherance of the partnership.*

The EU and India are celebrating 60 years of their bilateral relationship this year. The EU and India, amongst the world's largest democracies are "unions of diversity," and share a commitment to a rules-based global order, effective multilateralism, sustainable development, and open trade.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, they have a mutual interest not only in each other's security and prosperity, but also in contributing to a safer, cleaner, and more stable world order.<sup>2</sup> In the maritime domain, the EU and India are specifically committed to a "free, open, inclusive and rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, democracy, rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, notably the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea."<sup>3</sup> The bilateral relationship has progressively evolved from trade and economic cooperation to political dialogue and ministerial meetings (1994), summit-level meetings (2000), and further onto a strategic partnership in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

Successive joint action plans have provided guidance for developing cooperation in a large number of areas, including in security. A security dialogue envisaged under the Joint Action Plan (2005)

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025," 15 July 2020. [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32828/IndiaEU\\_Strategic\\_Partnership\\_A\\_Roadmap\\_to\\_2025](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32828/IndiaEU_Strategic_Partnership_A_Roadmap_to_2025); European Union External Action Service, "EU-India Strategic Partnership," April 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/factsheet-eu-india-relations\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/factsheet-eu-india-relations_en), accessed 30 April 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025."

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "Second India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue," Press Release, 01 February 2022. <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34781/Second+IndiaEU+Maritime+Security+Dialogue>.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "India-EU Relations," March 2020, 1. [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_EU\\_Relation2020.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_EU_Relation2020.pdf).

was instituted in 2006; the dialogue which initially focused on counter-terrorism and counter-piracy has been progressively expanded.<sup>5</sup> Following the 2016 ‘India-EU Agenda for Action 2020,’ the EU and India gradually enhanced bilateral exchanges and cooperation in the field of defence and security, primarily through enhanced naval exchanges and cooperation in maritime security.<sup>6</sup>

At the 15<sup>th</sup> summit meeting on 15 July 2020, the leaders endorsed the ‘India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025’ as a roadmap to guide joint action and further strengthen the India-EU Strategic Partnership over a five-year period viz. 2020-2025.<sup>7</sup> At that meeting, the leaders also agreed to “launch a dialogue on maritime security and consultations on security and defence, and to enhance naval cooperation.”<sup>8</sup> The roadmap covers a host of issues, including amongst others, foreign policy and security cooperation, climate change and clean energy, environment, global governance and effective multilateralism, cooperation in the Indian Ocean and in the Pacific Ocean, and ocean governance.<sup>9</sup>

While an earlier article published in March 2022, provided insights into the [India-EU strategic partnership](#) and its potential to transform the Indo-Pacific into a zone of peace, prosperity, and development, this article focuses on the operational engagements of the EU and India in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and on the progress in maritime security cooperation under the India-EU strategic roadmap (2020-25).

### **Approaches to Maritime Security Cooperation**

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw increasing international cooperation for maritime security driven by the ‘9/11’ and then the growing threats to trade from piracy in the Gulf of Aden. In 2008, EU and India deployed the European Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) and the Indian Navy respectively to the Gulf of Aden to join the counter-piracy efforts in the region. Driven by the increasing understanding of the criticality of maritime security, the successful experience of cooperative efforts, such as in the Gulf of Aden, and emergence of China as major player in the maritime domain, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both the EU and India, articulated their maritime and regional policies and strategies. This section highlights some of them, with a bearing on maritime security and regional cooperation.

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “India-EU Relations,” July 2013, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-EU\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-EU_Relations.pdf); Ministry of External Affairs, “Inaugural India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue,” Press Release, 20 January 2022. [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33400/Inaugural\\_India\\_EU\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Dialogue](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33400/Inaugural_India_EU_Maritime_Security_Dialogue).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “India-EU Relations,” 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Statement of the 15th India-EU Summit (July 15, 2020),” Press Release, 15 July 2020. [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32827/Joint\\_Statement\\_of\\_the\\_15th\\_IndiaEU\\_Summit\\_July\\_15\\_2020](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32827/Joint_Statement_of_the_15th_IndiaEU_Summit_July_15_2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Statement of the 15th India-EU Summit (July 15, 2020).”

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025,” 15 July 2020. [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32828/IndiaEU\\_Strategic\\_Partnership\\_A\\_Roadmap\\_to\\_2025](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32828/IndiaEU_Strategic_Partnership_A_Roadmap_to_2025).

## European Union

The EU has articulated its regional approach to India, Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and overall approach to maritime security through several documents. These include, amongst others, the EU Maritime Security Strategy [EUMSS] (2014), Enhanced Security Cooperation in and with Asia (2018), a new strategy on India (2018) and the strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (2021).<sup>10</sup>

The EUMSS, acknowledging the strategic interest of the EU in the maritime domain, provides a comprehensive strategic framework encompassing both the internal and external aspects of the EU's maritime security.<sup>11</sup> The 2020 implementation report of the revised implementation plan of the EUMSS (2018) which *inter alia* focused on strengthening maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean and in the Indo-Pacific, highlights the deepening of maritime security cooperation of the EU with international and regional partners, across several functional areas of maritime security cooperation, such as in operations, information sharing, and capacity building.<sup>12</sup> The 2018 strategy on India, described India as an emerging global power that plays a key role in a multipolar world and a factor of stability in a complex region.<sup>13</sup> The strategy also called for greater India-EU cooperation in security and defence. In enhancing cooperating with Asian countries, such as India, maritime security, hybrid threats, and development of regional cooperative order(s) were identified as key areas for deeper security cooperation.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, the approach focused on making cooperation “more operational” and called for “tailor-made cooperation, grouping together EU security-related efforts with those of priority Asian partners.”<sup>15</sup> The 2021 EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific aims to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, through security of Secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), capacity building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, as well as greater engagements with partners, such as through joint exercises port calls, and multilateral exercises.<sup>16</sup> The implementation plan of the strategy, accordingly also includes strengthening ocean governance, enhanced naval deployments by EU Member States, and capacity building of partners.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Enhanced Security Cooperation In and With Asia Project [ESIWA] was subsequently launched in 2020 [Source: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/87412.html>].

<sup>11</sup> Council of the European Union, “European Union Maritime Security Strategy,” 24 June 2014, 2. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%2011205%202014%20INIT/EN/pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Council of the European Union, “EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan 2020 Implementation report,” Fact sheet, [https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/system/files/2021-03/eumss-factsheet-swd-2020-252\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/system/files/2021-03/eumss-factsheet-swd-2020-252_en.pdf), accessed 30 April 2022; Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions on the revision of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) Action Plan,” 26 June 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/system/files/2021-03/2018-06-26-eumss-revised-action-plan\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/system/files/2021-03/2018-06-26-eumss-revised-action-plan_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “India-EU Relations,” March 2020, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Council of the EU, “Deepening EU Security Cooperation with Asian Partners: Council Adopts Conclusions,” Press Release, 28 May 2018. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/28/deepening-eu-security-cooperation-with-asian-partners-council-adopts-conclusions/>.

<sup>15</sup> Council of the EU, “Deepening EU Security Cooperation with Asian Partners: Council Adopts Conclusions.”

<sup>16</sup> “Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA\\_21\\_4709](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709), accessed 30 April 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” European Commission.

Overall, while the EUs operational presence in the IOR, which still remains limited, has expanded over the years, the EU has developed a credible footprint in capacity building and capability enhancement, especially in the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR).<sup>18</sup> It has been argued that the latter is where the EUs' real strength is.<sup>19</sup> India also emerges as an important regional partner for the EU with significant opportunities enhancing cooperation. The overall importance of India to the EU was once again underscored by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, during her recent visit to India in April 2022, when she stated that “strengthening and energising its partnership with India is a priority in this upcoming decade.”<sup>20</sup>

## India

While in the past, India did not give much weight to ‘hard security’ in its foreign policy, over the past decade, the maritime dimensions of Indian foreign policy, including the security element, has gathered significant momentum, particularly with the articulation of SAGAR [Security and Growth for All in the Region] vision, in 2015, and the Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative (IPOI), in 2019.<sup>21</sup> India is also increasingly shaping the discourse in multilateral and plurilateral initiatives more than ever before, including in maritime security.<sup>22</sup> In August 2021, the Indian Prime Minister, at the UN Security Council open debate on “Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case for International Cooperation” called for international cooperation in maritime security and defined five principles to develop a roadmap for global maritime security. The five principles include removing barriers from legitimate maritime trade; encouraging responsible maritime connectivity; settling maritime disputes through peaceful means and based on international law; jointly facing natural disasters and maritime threats created by non-state actors; and, preserving the maritime environment and resources.<sup>23</sup>

The Indian Navy’s strategy—*Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (2015)—lists five lines of effort for shaping a positive and favourable maritime environment: (1) presence and response, such as through ‘mission-based deployments’ across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and being the first responder to crises; (2) maritime engagements, such as through port visits,

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<sup>18</sup> Manoj Buraga and Pradeep Chauhan, “The European Union, India, And The Indo-Pacific: Insights For Strategic, Privileged And Sustained Partnerships,” <https://maritimeindia.org/the-european-union-india-and-the-indo-pacific-insights-for-strategic-privileged-and-sustained-partnerships/>, accessed 30 April 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Manoj Buraga and Pradeep Chauhan, “The European Union, India, and the Indo-Pacific: Insights For Strategic, Privileged And Sustained Partnerships.”

<sup>20</sup> “Speech by President von Der Leyen at the Raisina Dialogue,” European Union External Action Service, 25 April 2022. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_22\\_2647](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_2647).

<sup>21</sup> Kadambini Sharma and Vishnu Som, “‘Can’t be Pale Imitation of ...’: S Jaishankar’s Firm Take on Ukraine Stand.” New Delhi Tele Vision (NDTV), 27 April 2022. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cant-be-pale-imitation-of-s-jaishankars-firm-take-on-ukraine-stand-2924549>.

<sup>22</sup> “Address by Foreign Secretary at the Times Network India Economic Conclave,” Ministry of External Affairs, 22 April 2022, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35232/Address by Foreign Secretary at the Times Network India Economic Conclave 2022](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35232/Address%20by%20Foreign%20Secretary%20at%20the%20Times%20Network%20India%20Economic%20Conclave%202022), accessed 27 April 2022.

<sup>23</sup> “English translation of Prime Minister’s remarks at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on “Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case for International Cooperation” (August 9, 2021), Ministry of External Affairs, 10 August 2021. [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34151/English translation of Prime Ministers remarks at the UNSC HighLevel Open Debate on Enhancing Maritime Security A Case For International Cooperation A](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34151/English%20translation%20of%20Prime%20Ministers%20remarks%20at%20the%20UNSC%20HighLevel%20Open%20Debate%20on%20Enhancing%20Maritime%20Security%20A%20Case%20For%20International%20Cooperation%20A).

delegation visits, staff talks, exercises, and other engagements, such as through the [Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue \(IPRD\)](#), the Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC), etc; (3) capacity building and capability engagement, such as through training, technical, and hydrographic assistance, as well as through provisioning of assets and resources, such as ships and aircraft, coastal radars, etc; (4) cooperative efforts at developing regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA); and, (5) conduct of maritime security operations, such as in anti-piracy operations, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrols, Coordinated patrols (CORPATs), etc.<sup>24</sup> Over the years, the strategy has been duly complemented by the articulation of key priorities by the naval leadership. Notable amongst those is that of developing ‘collective maritime competence’ by harnessing competencies and complementarities to tackle common challenges through participative, inclusive ecosystem.<sup>25</sup> It is this very approach which has the potential to strengthen EU-India cooperation in maritime security.

In short, the approaches of both the EU and India to maritime security—both regionally and thematically—like in other areas of cooperation, exhibit several commonalities in approach, and this commonality provides a strong foundation for taking the India-EU maritime security partnerships forward.

### **Areas of Maritime Interest: Presences and Partnerships**

In 2015, the Indian Navy redefined its ‘areas of maritime interest.’<sup>26</sup> The primary areas of maritime interest extend from the Indian coast to the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, south-west Indian Ocean, the Andaman Sea, and also includes all the choke points leading to, from, and across the Indian Ocean.<sup>27</sup> In February 2022, the EU launched the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the North Western Indian Ocean (NWIO) based on its successful implementation in the Gulf of Guinea, by establishing a ‘maritime area of interest’ covering the “Strait of Hormuz to the Southern Tropic and from the North of the Red Sea towards the centre of the Indian Ocean.”<sup>28</sup> The CMP in the NWIO is a ‘concrete action’ emerging from the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, aiming at increasing the EU’s capacity as a ‘reliable partner’ and ‘maritime security provider,’ by “offering a greater European engagement, ensuring continuous maritime presence and outreach in designated Maritime Areas of Interest,” as well as “promoting

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<sup>24</sup> Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2015), 78-103. [https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_Document\\_25Jan16.pdf](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> “Indian Navy Believes in ‘Collective Military Competency’: Admiral Karambir Singh,” Daily News and Analysis, video, <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/video-indian-navy-believes-in-collective-military-competency-admiral-karambir-singh-2797626>.

<sup>26</sup> Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 31-32.

<sup>28</sup> European Union, “Coordinated Maritime Presences: Council Extends Implementation in the Gulf of Guinea for Two Years and Establishes a New Maritime Area of Interest in the North-Western Indian Ocean,” Press Release, 21 February 2022. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/02/21/coordinated-maritime-presences-council-extends-implementation-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-for-2-years-and-establishes-a-new-concept-in-the-north-west-indian-ocean/>.

international cooperation and partnership at sea.”<sup>29</sup> The concept essentially entails leveraging Member States’ naval and air assets, present or deployed on a voluntary basis, and under national command, to further the aims of the CMP concept.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the CMP does not specifically envisage deployment of European navies under exclusive EU Command, but the integration of independent individual efforts into a greater whole.

Notwithstanding the formal establishment of the CMP in the NWIO in 2022, EU/ EU-led operations/ missions in the newly designated Maritime Area of Interest already included Operation (Op) ATALANTA in the Gulf of Aden (since 2008) and the European-led Maritime Surveillance Mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH)/ Op AGÉNOR (the military component of EMASOH) in the Persian Gulf (since 2020). Notably, the ‘Area of Operations’ of the Op ATALANTA, since 2008, already covered the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and a large part of the Indian Ocean and the island states of Seychelles, Mauritius and Comoros (including the Arabian Sea approximately up to 65° East longitude).<sup>31</sup> While implementation of EU’s operational projects are normally ‘incremental’ due to the complete dependence of the EU on Member States, in case of the CMP in the NWIO, the EU is already present in much of the area already; the concept therefore to some extent formally articulates an established reality.<sup>32</sup>

The progressive geographic creep further eastwards, beyond the erstwhile ‘areas of operations’ of Op ATALANTA, through CMP NWIO, reflects the intent of the EU to “ensure a European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific,” its desire to strengthen partnerships, such as with India, and perhaps a step to its ambitious intent of enhancing its role as a ‘global maritime security provider.’<sup>33</sup> Indian maritime security agencies have significant presence in the eastern Arabian Sea; the Coast Guard alone deploys about 50 ships/ craft and 12 aircraft on a daily basis in the Indian EEZ, majority of which can be assumed to be deployed in the western seaboard.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary history provides evidence of the need to coordinate and deconflict operational efforts for ensuring economy of effort in pursuance of common ends. For example, in addition to international naval deployments by naval task forces and independent deployers to counter piracy in the Gulf of Aden, complementary action undertaken exclusively by Indian maritime security agencies in the eastern Arabian Sea led to the reversal of the eastward spread of Somali

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<sup>29</sup> European Union, “Coordinated Maritime Presences: Council Extends Implementation in the Gulf of Guinea for Two Years and Establishes a New Maritime Area of Interest in the North-Western Indian Ocean,” Christophe Penot, “Don’t Share China’s Vision of Global Order,” interview by Sachin Parashar, *The Times of India*, 28 April 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/dont-share-chinas-vision-of-global-order/articleshow/91137601.cms>.

<sup>30</sup> European Union External Action Service, “Coordinated Maritime Presences,” Fact sheet, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2022-03-coordinated-maritime-presences-newlayout.pdf>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>31</sup> “Mission,” European Union Naval Force - Somalia Operation Atalanta, <https://eunavfor.eu/mission>, accessed 26 April 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Frédéric Grare and MéliSSa Levailant, “Getting Real about the Indo-Pacific Redefining European Approach to Maritime Security Guarding the Commons,” The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 3. <https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTC4-Levailant-Grare-HCSS-2022.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> European Union External Action Service, “Coordinated Maritime Presences.”

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Indian Coast Guard to Celebrate Its 46th Raising Day Tomorrow,” Press Information Bureau, 31 January 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1793845>.

piracy, and subsequently the revision of the industry-promulgated piracy High Risk Area (HRA) which had been extended to the Indian coast.

In June 2017, the Indian Navy implemented ‘Mission Based Deployments’ (MBD) with an aim to “safeguard national maritime interests and maintain continuous/near continuous presence in areas of significant maritime importance in the IOR.”<sup>35</sup> In accordance with the concept, Indian naval units are deployed in multiple areas of the IOR – its primary area of maritime interest. These deployments—undertaken in consonance with the wider SAGAR vision—have also contributed towards the aims of the Indian Navy to be the ‘first responder,’ a ‘preferred security partner,’ and a ‘net maritime security provider.’<sup>36</sup> In particular, MBD has facilitated enhanced MDA, swift Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations including during the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced maritime security, and increased operational engagements with partners through capacity building/ capability enhancement programmes.<sup>37</sup> As is obvious, the MBD concept also provides greater opportunities for naval interactions, including with ships deployed under Op ATALANTA/ Op AGÉNOR and CMP NWIO, to pursue common aims, such as those agreed upon under the India-EU Roadmap 2025, but not limited by it.

At the conceptual level, the approaches adopted by the EU to the NWIO, and by India to its wider areas of interest, reveals firstly, an overlap of areas of maritime interest; secondly, an inherent similarity between the between the EU CMP concept and the Indian Navy’s MBD concept; and finally, adoption of the ‘partnership model’ as the pathway to achieve the desired maritime ends. Together, these are reflective of another commonality, as well as the immense potential to do more together. However, commonalities in approach are no guarantee for successful collaborations; developing practical and operational synergies will undoubtedly call for significant effort from both sides.

### Furthering Naval Cooperation

In addition to the congruence at the conceptual level, there also appears to be a convergence in approaches at the operational level. The Indian Navy has deployed one ship in the Gulf of Aden on [anti-piracy mission](#) since October 2008.<sup>38</sup> In response to maritime security incidents in the Persian Gulf, the Indian Navy commenced Op SANKALP [Resolve] in June 2019, a maritime security operation, to ensure security of seaborne trade and safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels transiting the region.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, in late 2008, the EU launched Op ATALANTA to deter,

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<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Year End Review – 2018 Ministry of Defence.” Press Information Bureau, 31 December 2018. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1557937>.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Year End Review – 2021 of Ministry of Defence,” Press Information Bureau, 31 December 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1786640>; Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Year End Review – 2021 of Ministry of Defence,” Press Information Bureau, 31 December 2021.

<sup>38</sup> “Anti-Piracy Operations,” Indian Navy, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/anti-piracy-operations>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Press Brief on Operation Sankalp,” Press Information Bureau, 08 January 2020. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1598858>.

prevent, and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast.<sup>40</sup> Progressively, the mandate of the operation has expanded to include amongst others, protection of the World Food Programme (WFP) vessels and other vulnerable shipping, and more recently, also to include ‘secondary tasks’ to counter other forms of non-traditional threats, such as drug trafficking.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, the Indian Navy too has been involved in multiple [drug seizures](#) in recent times, and the expanded mandate of Op ATALANTA possibly provides opportunities for furthering cooperation beyond anti-piracy between the deployed forces. In 2019, in the backdrop of regional tensions arising from a number of maritime incidents in the Persian Gulf, a few European countries established the European-led Maritime Surveillance Mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH).<sup>42</sup> The presence of the EUNAVFOR and EU-led forces as well as the Indian Navy in the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and in the Persian Gulf since 2019-20, is emblematic of a shared understanding of risks, especially those entailing protection of shipping and trade.

Looking ahead, the action points for enhancing security cooperation under the strategic roadmap include the need for working towards tangible outcomes in maritime security; regular security consultations on exchange on strategic priorities and security issues; strengthening military-to-military relations and exchanges; furthering mutual understanding through seminars, visits, and training courses; establishing a maritime security dialogue and exploring opportunities for further maritime cooperation; and, deepening cooperation between the Indian Navy and Operation ATALANTA. Some of these are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

### **Maritime Security Dialogue**

Following the joint statement by the leaders, and the joint roadmap, the inaugural India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue was held in January 2021 and, the second dialogue, a year later, in February 2022. The institutionalisation of the dialogue reflects a movement forward from the counter-piracy dialogue in earlier years towards an institutionalised mechanism of engagement focused on wider maritime security, and not just counter-piracy.<sup>43</sup> While the inaugural meeting in 2021 explored opportunities for cooperation, the second dialogue in 2022, identified [MDA](#), capacity building, and joint naval activities as three specific areas for cooperation.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, this forum needs to be leveraged to pursue common objectives, and to harmonise the strategic roadmap with actions on the ground. The question that emerges is whether the dialogue forum needs to be complemented by other forums for security consultations, especially at the navy-to-navy level, as is the case for other bilateral navy-to-navy engagements of the Indian Navy. Notably,

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<sup>40</sup> “Mission,” European Union Naval Force - Somalia Operation Atalanta, <https://eunavfor.eu/mission>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>41</sup> “Mission,” European Union Naval Force - Somalia Operation Atalanta.

<sup>42</sup> “European-Led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH),” Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness Center, <https://www.mica-center.org/en/european-led-maritime-awareness-in-the-strait-of-hormuz-emasoh/>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “India-EU Relations,” July 2013, 1. [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-EU\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-EU_Relations.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, “Inaugural India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue;” Ministry of External Affairs, “Second India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue.”



the EU in the past has amongst its priorities, included expansion of military-to-military and staff talks with priority partners as an action point.<sup>45</sup>

### Strengthening Operational Engagements

Since June 21, operational engagements between the EUNAVFOR ATALANTA and the Indian Navy have progressively been strengthened. The first naval Passage Exercise (PASSEX—essentially an ‘opportune’ exercise that maximises opportunities, such as port visits or a proximate passage—between the two navies was held in October 2017, and subsequently, in December 2018, following a request from Op ATALANTA, the Indian Navy undertook its first escort of a WFP vessel in the region, a good decade after its deployment to the region.<sup>46</sup> Escorting of WFP vessels continues to be another pathway to enhance coordination between the navies. In June 2021, Indian Naval Ship (INS) *Trikand*, participated in the maiden two-day Indian Navy–EUNAVFOR naval exercise in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>47</sup> The EUNAVFOR was represented by Italian Navy Ship ITS *Carabiniere*, Spanish Navy Ship ESPS *Navarra*, and two French Navy Ships FS *Tonnerre* and FS *Surcouf*. The exercises included, amongst other evolutions, advanced Air Defence (AD) and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercises, cross deck helicopter operations, Underway Replenishment (UNREP), tactical manoeuvres, boarding operations, as well as Search and Rescue (SAR) and man overboard drills.<sup>48</sup> The exercise showcased “increased levels of synergy, coordination and inter-operability” and “the shared values as partner navies, in ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive and a rules-based international order.”<sup>49</sup> Considering the expansion of the naval engagement between 2017 and 2021 from a one-off PASSEX to a full-fledged advanced exercise with five frontline ships, there can be little doubt that the progress has been significant; however, there is indeed potential for further expansion (and institutionalisation), as has been the trend with other strategic partners. As such, the maiden EUNAVFOR-Indian Navy exercise took a long time to fructify despite the navies being deployed in the same region. Another natural corollary to strengthening linkages between Op ATALANTA and the Indian Navy, appears to be the consolidation of linkages between Op AGÉNOR and Op SANKALP.

In addition to INS *Trikand*'s maiden exercise in June 2021, in the same month, INS *Tabar*, a Talwar-class stealth frigate, was deployed for over three months to Africa, Europe, and Russia. During the deployment, she made 11 port calls in nine countries, including European countries. In addition to professional interactions during port calls, INS *Tabar* also undertook twelve maritime partnership exercises with foreign navies at sea, including with the French Navy, the

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<sup>45</sup> European Commission, “Enhanced Security Cooperation in and With Asia,” 28 May 2018. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35456/st09265-re01-en18.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “India & EU Militaries Hold Maiden Operational Dialogue in Backdrop of Strategy Paper,” *The Economic Times*, 25 January 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-eu-militaries-hold-maiden-operational-dialogue-in-backdrop-of-strategy-paper/articleshow/67686982.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Maiden Indian Navy - European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Exercise in Gulf of Aden,” Press Information Bureau, 18 June 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1728276>.

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Maiden Indian Navy - European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Exercise in Gulf of Aden.”

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Maiden Indian Navy - European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Exercise in Gulf of Aden.”

Hellenic Navy, the Italian Navy, and the Spanish Navy.<sup>50</sup> The deployment of INS *Tabar* strengthened the Indian Navy's engagements with individual European navies, and contributed to enhancing interoperability between the Indian Navy and navies of EU Member States.<sup>51</sup> With the announcement of the CMP-NWIO in 2022, there is increasing possibility of greater operational engagements between the navies of EU Member States with the Indian Navy in the foreseeable future; this opportunity could be seized by both sides.

In addition to enhancing engagement with the Indian Navy, greater presence of the EU in NWIO also necessitates greater engagement of the EU with the regional bodies, including at the operational-level the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which is the principal regional forum for navies in the IOR.<sup>52</sup> The conduct of the maiden IONS Maritime Exercise 2022 (IMEX-22) at Goa and in the Arabian Sea from 26–30 March 2022 marks a milestone for regional cooperation in HADR as the IONS HADR guidelines promulgated earlier was validated during the exercise.<sup>53</sup> Moving forward, it would be only fair to expect IONS to play an even greater role in other focused areas of cooperation viz. maritime security, information sharing, and interoperability. In addition to furthering regional engagements, there also exists the possibility of opening up existing bilateral/ plurilateral naval engagements—in the 'plus' formats—to further overall cooperation in the Indo-Pacific amongst like-minded partners. With the Indian Navy planning to undertake 'sea patrols,' either jointly or in coordination with the US Navy in the foreseeable future, the possibility of harmonising the Indian Navy's MBD, the EU's CMP and the bilateral Indian Navy-US Navy 'sea patrols,' appears a promising prospect.<sup>54</sup>

### **MDA and Information Sharing**

The Indian Navy has been an active member of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) forum, and Indian naval ships deployed in anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden also participate in Internet-based MERCURY Counter-Piracy Coordination Tool of the European Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) along with other Task Forces and independent deployers for tactical coordination of anti-piracy effort.<sup>55</sup> With the setting-up of the Information Fusion-Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in 2018, the interactions of the Indian Navy with European and European-supported information centres has progressively also witnessed an uptick, including with EU Critical Maritime Route Wider Indian Ocean ( CRIMARIO) Project, the Virtual Regional Maritime

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<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Defence, "Mission Deployed - INS TABAR," Press Information Bureau, 22 September 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1756993>.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Defence, "Mission Deployed - INS TABAR."

<sup>52</sup> Christophe Penot, "Don't Share China's Vision of Global Order."

<sup>53</sup> "IONS Maritime Exercise 2022 (IMEX 22)," Indian Navy, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/ions-maritime-exercise-2022-imex-22>, accessed 26 April 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Rajat Pandit, "Eye on China, India & US Plan Sea Patrols and Intel Sharing," *The Times of India*, 21 April 2022. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-india-us-plan-sea-patrols-and-intel-sharing/articleshow/90966961.cms>.

<sup>55</sup> Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 90*; "Mercury" is a tool for sharing information and the mechanism for responders to coordinate anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden/Horn of Africa (<https://on-shore.mschoa.org/mschoa-and-maritime-domain-awareness-how/>); "MSCHOA and Maritime Domain Awareness. How?," Maritime Security Centre Horn of Africa, <https://on-shore.mschoa.org/mschoa-and-maritime-domain-awareness-how/>, accessed 25 April 2022.

Traffic Centre and Trans Regional Maritime Network (V-RMTC), and EMASOH.<sup>56</sup> A virtual “Information sharing Exercise” was also held between IFC-IOR and MSCHOA in 2018 as a complementary exercise to the maiden Indian Navy-EUNAVOR exercise in 2018.

While the progress in information sharing has picked up over the past few years, there remains scope for further consolidation. In addition to White Shipping Information Exchange (WSIE) agreements that facilitate information sharing on merchant shipping, the Indian Navy also exchanges information bilaterally with friendly countries on military and naval assets (including those of ‘hostile/ adversarial’ countries), as well as assessments on ‘activities of mutual concern’ and on transnational maritime threats.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, upscaling information sharing appears to be an area of high potential. Collaborations on space-based technologies for developing MDA and supporting maritime security, such as with the EU COPERNICUS space programme also provides exciting opportunities which could be explored.<sup>58</sup> Notably, it has also been argued that considering the practical limits of EU naval presence, capacity building initiatives in MDA, could potentially have a strategic impact.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, furthering cooperation in MDA and information sharing, not only mutually, but also with littoral states in the IOR, could open up possibilities for cooperation; this despite the fact that the strategic roadmap does not specifically mention MDA and information as specific areas of cooperation.

### **Constructive Multitrack Engagements**

In addition to operational information sharing, IFC-IOR and EU CRIMARIO have also partnered in the conduct of a webinar on ‘Synergising MDA in the IOR: The Prevailing State of Play’ (with NMF in June 2021) and a ‘Joint India-EU Online Workshop’ on ‘MDA and Interoperability’ in December 2021. In addition to these MDA focused engagements, over the past year, there have been a host of other engagements at the Track 1.5/ Track 2 levels, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> ‘India-EU Maritime Security Workshop’ jointly conducted by the NMF and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in December 2021 and an India-EU Online Seminar on the theme ‘Maritime Security and UNCLOS’ jointly organised by the EU Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) Project, the Embassy of Greece in India and NMF in April 2022. Constructive multi-track engagements provide avenues not only for developing understanding and trust, but also for brainstorming ideas which may not be possible through Track 1 engagements. Therefore, there is little doubt that multitrack engagements need to be further consolidated in the coming years

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<sup>56</sup> Multiple sources.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Maritime Security,” Press Information Bureau, 29 November 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1776090>.

<sup>58</sup> Himadri Das, “Maritime Domain Awareness in India: Shifting Paradigms,” National Maritime Foundation, 30 September 2022, <https://maritimeindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Maritime-Domain-Awareness-in-India-Shifting-Paradigms-by-Captain-Himadri-Das.pdf>; The European Union’s (EU) COPERNICUS space programme provides a number of services, including those focused on blue economy, climate change, security and emergency response.

<sup>59</sup> Frédéric Grare and Mélissa Levallant, “Getting Real about the Indo-Pacific Redefining European Approach to Maritime Security Guarding the Commons,” 9.

## Conclusion

The EU-India partnership is characterised by common values, as well as shared interests and perspectives. Over the years, the India-EU partnership has assumed a strategic dimension, and evolved to include security cooperation, including in maritime security. This is also reflective of the fact that both India and EU, shedding their earlier inhibitions to ‘hard security,’ now envisage themselves as ‘security providers.’ In line with their respective national policies and strategies, over the past decade, the EU and India have expanded their respective maritime security engagements in the IOR, and more recently, their mutual engagements, particularly through naval exercises, MDA and information sharing, and other constructive engagements. The evidence clearly points towards progressive strengthening of maritime security cooperation agenda, especially over the past few years. However, as the 2020-25 roadmap nears its half-way mark, as is obvious, there is scope for further progress and consolidation, including beyond the roadmap. Being ‘natural partners’ and considering the critical importance of the seas to both, the potential for cooperation in maritime security is high, as it is in several other areas of cooperation.<sup>60</sup> In the context of the IOR, and the wider Indo-Pacific, while India has significant operational reach and capacity, it is the EU which has been a major player in maritime capacity building, especially in the WIOR. As partners, it is by harnessing individual strengths and competencies, and leveraging mutual complementarities, that partnerships can be taken to the next level. As has been argued in an earlier piece, the strategic partnership between the EU and India must indeed be leveraged for wider regional good.<sup>61</sup>

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### ***About the Author:***

*Captain Himadri Das is a serving Indian Naval Officer and is presently a Senior Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation (NMF). The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the Government of India or the Indian Navy. He can be reached at [csmda.nmf@gmail.com](mailto:csmda.nmf@gmail.com)*

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<sup>60</sup> “Speech by President von Der Leyen at the Raisina Dialogue,” European Union External Action Service.

<sup>61</sup> Manoj Buraga and Pradeep Chauhan, “The European Union, India, and the Indo-Pacific: Insights For Strategic, Privileged And Sustained Partnerships.”