

## Twenty-Five Years of India's Transformative Response to Maritime Piracy: 1999-2024

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In the backdrop of the spillover of the Houthis conflict to the sea (November 2023), drone attacks in the Arabian Sea (December 2023), and incidents of piracy in the Indian Ocean (December 2023), the Indian Navy enhanced its maritime security operations in the affected regions in mid-December 2023.<sup>1</sup> By early January 2024, the Indian Navy had deployed over 10 warships with elite Marine Commandos (MARCOS).<sup>2</sup> By March 2024 when naval operations completed 100 days under Operation SANKALP, naval units had responded to 18 incidents of piracy and drone attacks in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the Prime Minister hailed it as the 'heroic' freeing of MV Lila Norfolk on 05 January 2024 from pirates by the Indian Navy in the Northern Arabian Sea.<sup>4</sup> The operation optimally employed the latest of naval capabilities: warships, aircraft, helicopters, drones, and MARCOS. In another incident on 16 March 2024, after a 40-hour calibrated operation, 17 crew of MV Ruen, hijacked in December 2023, were rescued, and 35 pirates were apprehended.<sup>5</sup> The pirates were subsequently brought to India to face trial.<sup>6</sup> This rescue also involved the air drop of MARCOS along with boats from an Indian Air Force (IAF) C-17 Globemaster aircraft.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the scale of Indian naval engagements, Professor Christian Bueger highlighted that "...everything now is in the hands of the Indian navy, which currently copes with the situation, but will reach quickly capacity limits if the situation escalates."<sup>8</sup> By May 2024, the situation however had not escalated. Notably, at a press conference in March 2024—100 days after the commencement of operations—the then Chief of Naval Staff stated that the Indian Navy will continue to take "affirmative action" to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region.<sup>9</sup>

In the backdrop of the situation, it is worth noting that *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (IMSS), published seven years after the Indian Navy had first deployed to the region for anti-piracy operations—in October 2008—had foreseen, in the context of piracy threat, that "till the root causes [of piracy] ashore are addressed, the dangers of resurgence will remain, with potential for instability in the littoral."<sup>10</sup> This paper explores the transformation in India's response to piracy since the apprehension of the MV *Alondra Rainbow* in 1999, with a focus on the period 2008-2024 during which the Indian Navy was deployed in the Gulf of Aden, primarily from a maritime security governance perspective; essentially, the four pillars of the institutional framework, the legal framework, naval force employment, and international cooperation.

## Twenty-Five Years of Transformation: What has Changed?

**Overarching National Imperatives.** The deployment of the Indian Navy to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy patrols emerged from an interplay of domestic and international interest. In October 2008, concerned over the rise in incidents of piracy off the coast of Somalia which threatened international peace and security, the UN Security Council called on States to actively take part in the fight against piracy by the deployment of naval vessels and military aircraft.<sup>11</sup> At about the same time, the humanitarian crisis arising from the kidnapping of an Indian seafarer by Somali pirates is widely understood to have been one of the drivers for the deployment of the Indian Navy to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy patrols.<sup>12</sup> On 26 November 2008 ('26/11'), a little over a month after the Indian Navy was deployed to the Gulf of Aden, terrorists struck Mumbai, the financial capital of India. While in 2001 a Group of Ministers report on national security had made recommendations for strengthening security of 'maritime borders and island territories,' the unprecedented scale and complexity of the '26/11' attack brought into sharp focus issues related to maritime and coastal security. This led to a comprehensive revamp of India's coastal security construct, with increasing focus not just on operational issues, but deeper structural issues related to maritime security governance in India.<sup>13</sup> Human security and national security—key elements of the wider maritime and coastal security paradigm—thus became important drivers for national change. Over the years, rising geopolitical tensions, coupled with progressively enhanced presence of Chinese warships, submarines, research and fishing vessels in the Indian Ocean—starting with the Chinese anti-piracy deployments in the Gulf of Aden—was another major driver for enhanced focus on naval deployments and issues related to maritime security.<sup>14</sup>

Progressively, India has assumed a stewardship role in fostering international maritime security cooperation through policy pronouncements, such as 'net security provider' in 2011, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in 2015 and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) in 2018.<sup>15</sup> In 2021, India also steered the High-level Open Debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation' during India's rotating presidency of the UN Security Council. With the end of the Cold War and a realisation that the Indian Navy could play a stabilising role in the wider region, commencing in the 1990s, the Indian Navy gradually enhanced its international engagements.<sup>16</sup> Commencing in the early years of 2010s, in line with the wider vision for regional stewardship, the Indian Navy significantly expanded its operational footprint and foreign cooperative endeavours, particularly, in the second half of the 2010s.<sup>17</sup>

**Institution Building for Whole-of-Government Response.** Towards developing an institutional framework to respond to piracy, in the years following the deployment of the Indian Navy to the Gulf of Aden, an institutional framework was developed. This includes the constitution of the Committee of Secretaries on Anti-Piracy and Hijacking at Sea (COSAPH), chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, and the Inter-Ministerial Group of Officers (IMGO) under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways.<sup>18</sup> This has been complemented with a Contingency Plan to deal with piracy and hijacking of merchant ships for an integrated response by all stakeholders.<sup>19</sup> The COSAPH also provides advice to the Government on major policy and strategic decisions related to hijacking at sea.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the early years of India's anti-piracy efforts, where no specific institutional framework existed to deal with piracy, today, collectively, the triad of COSAPH, the IMGO, and Contingency Plan provide an empowered institutional mechanism to activate a whole-of-government approach—and a whole-of-nation—at short notice to respond to a piracy situation anywhere in the world.<sup>21</sup> These developments have addressed an institutional void, and now facilitate leveraging all instruments of national power to respond to a piracy situation. The quick response of the Indian Navy to the *MV Lila Norfolk* has been in part attributed to well oiled Standard Operating Procedures.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the COSAPH and the IMGO, the appointment of the National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) in 2022—a long overdue initiative based on the recommendations of the Group of Ministers in 2001—has been a significant step in strengthening the institutional framework for maritime security. The appointment of the NMSC has also been suitably complemented by designating State Maritime Security Coordinator (SMSC) at the state level.<sup>23</sup> The institution of the Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG), steered by the NMSC, also facilitates coordination amongst central and state agencies across the maritime security spectrum.<sup>24</sup> Collectively, the COSAPH-IMGO mechanism provides for an institutional framework for incident response, and the NMSC provides the necessary institutional framework focused on the larger issues related to India's anti-piracy response. With these significant institutional developments since the emergence of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, there does not seem to be any felt need for any additional domestic mechanisms, specifically for piracy, at least for now.

**Strengthening the Legal Framework.** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) recognising piracy as a crime against humanity, accorded universal jurisdiction to States against the crime of piracy.<sup>25</sup> The UN General Assembly Resolution 65/71 (Oceans and the Law of the Sea), adopted in 2009, called on States to adopt national legislations to combat piracy and armed robbery at sea.<sup>26</sup> By 2012, India had introduced a national legislation in Parliament, however, the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, was finally passed by the Parliament in December 2022, a decade after it was first introduced. The legislation was subsequently enacted on 31 January 2023, and notified on 22 February 2023 when it was brought into force.<sup>27</sup> The 35 pirates arrested from *MV Ruen* are likely to be the first to be tried under the new legislation.<sup>28</sup> The legislation criminalises maritime piracy in waters beyond the territorial seas of any State, and provides enforcement jurisdiction to Indian central and state agencies, such as the Indian Navy.<sup>29</sup> Prior to the enactment, Indian courts had successfully tried 120 Somali pirates who had been apprehended by the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard in four separate incidents in the Arabian Sea, off the coast of the Lakshadweep Islands, in 2011 through existing provisions of law.<sup>30</sup> However, this was inherently problematic and also a reason for the new legislation. Notably, in the *MV Alondra Rainbow* case (1999), the lack of an effective legislation is considered as one of the factors which led to the acquittal of pirates apprehended in a joint operation by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard.<sup>31</sup>

In the wake of the apprehension of 35 pirates from *MV Ruen*, Admiral R Hari Kumar, former Chief of the Naval Staff, described the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022 a “great

enabler.”<sup>32</sup> From an enforcement perspective, legal empowerment of the Indian maritime security agencies, and enforcement jurisdiction beyond India’s own maritime zones, are truly significant enablers for effective response by Indian maritime security agencies to incidents of piracy anywhere in the world. Further, from a criminal justice perspective, the Act provides for stringent punishments, and provisions for speedy trials, thereby strengthening the ‘legal finish’. In essence, the legal framework developed subsequent to the Indian Navy’s deployment in 2008, despite the long time it took to make, now provides a holistic and nationally customised mechanism to counter the scourge of piracy, both operationally, and from a criminal justice perspective.

**Enhanced Deployment.** Since the commencement of anti-piracy patrols in and off the Gulf of Aden in 2008, till the end of 2023, 107 Indian naval ships had been deployed for anti-piracy patrols.<sup>33</sup> This remains the longest standing continuous naval deployment of an Indian naval ship and reflects not only the ability of the Indian Navy to sustain an operation at a distance from the coast, but also, importantly, the steadfast commitment to international peace and security. After the initial deployment in October 2008, by January 2012, the Indian Navy was part of a convoy coordination mechanism with the navies of China and Japan (and later South Korea) all of whom were deployed independently [‘independent deployers’]. The navies provided convoy escort along the Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor (IRTC), a 490 nautical mile corridor in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>34</sup> In 2015, the year SAGAR as a maritime policy was enunciated, the IMMS envisaged that India’s counter piracy efforts would need to be undertaken in coordination with international efforts, and antipiracy cooperative mechanisms.<sup>35</sup> By 2017, the Indian Navy reoriented its deployment philosophy to the Mission-Based Deployment (MBD) philosophy marking a major shift in its operational deployment philosophy.<sup>36</sup> One of the seven areas for deployment under the MBD—which covered the entire Indian Ocean—included the Gulf of Aden to combat piracy [POGDPE: Patrol off the Gulf of Aden Deployment].<sup>37</sup> In 2018, a good decade after its deployment to the region, following a request from the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) anti-piracy mission, Operation ATALANTA, the Indian Navy also undertook its first escort of a UN World Food Programme (WFP) vessel in the region.<sup>38</sup>

Notwithstanding MBD, the deployment of the Indian Navy in recent months has been unprecedented, and surely reflects an operational surge, beyond what was initially envisaged in 2017. Overall, the MBD philosophy has consolidated the Indian Navy’s role in the Indian Ocean, and has contributed to enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), providing swift Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) such as during the COVID pandemic, as also improved security to the international maritime community, such as through the ongoing Operation SANKALP.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, in 2022 and 2023, the Indian Navy also expanded its anti-piracy missions beyond the Indian Ocean, to the Gulf of Guinea, another global piracy hotspot, and carried out anti-piracy patrols and exercises, including with the European Union naval forces.<sup>40</sup> However, as Christian Bueger points out in the context of the enhanced deployment by the Indian Navy, should the piracy situation escalate further, there could be challenges; further upscaling operations would be contingent on capacity constraints.<sup>41</sup> It goes without saying that capacities are not

infinite, and capacity—essentially the factor of force—will therefore continue to be a determining factor on the extent to which the Indian Navy can contribute to international efforts, independently, in coordination with other forces, or as part of any combined grouping.

Operationally, India commenced cooperation with the Bahrain-based multilateral partnership, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in July 2022 as an associate member, and subsequently, a year later in 2023, joined as a full member.<sup>42</sup> The CMF *inter alia* focuses on the suppression of piracy, and also has a dedicated Counter-Piracy Task Force: Combined Task Force (CTF) 151.<sup>43</sup> The membership of the CMF a major shift in policy, and this association should now be leveraged further, including by appointing officers to senior staff roles in the force.<sup>44</sup> However, the anti-piracy operations undertaken by the Indian Navy since December 2023 appear to be undertaken independently, and not as part of the CTF 151. While ‘independent’ operations provide greater flexibility to operate under a single national mandate, being a part of a multinational operational partnership provides avenues for developing greater interoperability with partners, and bringing to bear collective capabilities and competencies [‘Collective Maritime Competence’] across areas such as operations, intelligence, and information sharing in response to threats, or possible threats. Overall, the current mix of independent deployments, and those with the CTF, now provides the Indian Navy with a unique blend of complementary operational opportunities and experiences. One, however, wonders if a naval Task Force from the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)—a grouping of Indian Ocean resident navies—could also be deployed in the region in the future.

Closer home, robust actions by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard (Operation ISLAND WATCH) led to the reversal of the eastern movement of Somalia-based piracy, which had been facilitated by the use of hijacked ships as ‘motherships.’<sup>45</sup> Between January 2011 and -March 2011, in four different operations, Indian maritime security agencies arrested 120 Somali pirates from four pirate ‘motherships’ in the Arabian Sea, off the Lakshadweep Islands.<sup>46</sup> A year later, Indian agencies had sanitised the East Arabian Sea with the last piratical incident being reported in March 2012. This became the principal reason for the need to review the piracy High Risk Area (HRA) which had been extended by the shipping industry earlier to the west coast of India.<sup>47</sup>

The anti-piracy deployment of Indian maritime security agencies, domestically and internationally, is perhaps the single largest contribution by any Indian Ocean country to counter piracy in the Indian Ocean. Domestically, it upscaled from responding to a one-off piracy incident in 1999 in the Arabian Sea to reversing the spread of Somalia-based piracy in 2012 in the wider Arabian Sea. Internationally, a steady presence in the Gulf of Aden of the Indian Navy since 2008 was escalated exponentially in 2024, and furthermore, the Indian Navy has also expanded its operation to West Africa marking the Indian Navy’s presence in its secondary areas of interest also.

**Capacity-Building, Capability Augmentation, and Tactical Innovation.** The effective employment of long-range air assets operating from bases in India—the MQ-9B Sea Guardian High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) drones, the P-8I Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) surveillance aircraft, and the IAF’s C-17 Globemaster—for anti-

piracy operation at distances in excess of 2,500 km from the Indian coast (1,400 nm) reaffirms the extended capacity and capability of the Indian Navy to undertake sustained operations at great distances from the Indian coast.<sup>48</sup> Notably, the P-81 and the C-17s were inducted in 2013, and the MQ-9B in 2020. The operations also reflect the growing synergies between the armed forces as it moves, albeit gradually, toward integrated commands, with the Maritime Theatre Command being one of those under consideration.<sup>49</sup>

At a tactical level, reportedly, it was the first time that MARCOs, along with craft, had been airdropped from an IAF aircraft for an anti-piracy mission overseas, and also perhaps the first time ever that the Indian Navy resorted to disabling the steering system and navigation aids of a pirated ship.<sup>50</sup> Overall, it appears that innovative use of assets and resources have facilitated development of new Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) in responding to the challenge of piracy. Some analysts have acknowledged the professionalism in the Indian Navy's tactical actions in the release of the MV *Ruen*.<sup>51</sup>

Commencing in 2017, the Houthis used Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIEDs) to attack shipping.<sup>52</sup> However, with the spillover of the Israel-Hamas conflict into the maritime domain in 2023, hostile actions by the Houthis now include the use of missiles and drones to attack shipping. With increased availability of information, and technology, such as uncrewed vehicles, tactics employed by non-state actors in the maritime domain, including by pirates, are only likely to become more complex. Therefore, continued innovation in TTPs and training are continuing imperatives for naval forces.

While naval anti-piracy operations appear largely tactical, the fact is that conduct of operations require the application of Operational Art. Operational Art has been described by Milan Vego, one of the foremost exponents of Operational Art, as “*the theory and practice of planning, preparing, and conducting major operations and campaigns aimed at accomplishing operational or strategic objectives in a theatre.*”<sup>53</sup> The *Indian Maritime Doctrine* has described Operational Art as the art of conducting *warfare* at the operational level of war, but also at the same time highlights that Operational Art involves the orchestration of military activities at this operational level by linking military strategic objectives and the tactical employment of forces.<sup>54</sup> There can be little doubt that the scale of recent operations across vast stretches of the Arabian Sea and beyond, and encompassing an unprecedented number of naval ships and aircraft, would have involved employing several tenets of Operational Art in its planning and execution. According to Milan Vego, despite its primary focus on warfare, Operational Art can, and should, be applied across the entire spectrum of conflict, and not just be limited to high-intensity conventional conflict.<sup>55</sup> He, however, rues the lack of sound theory of Operational Art for operations short of war.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, there emerges a conceptual need to develop sound theories of leveraging the principles and tenets of Operational Art in situations other than classical conflict, to deal with a host of maritime security challenges. The next revision of the *Indian Maritime Doctrine* could consider *inter alia* greater granularity in this regard.

**Maritime Domain Awareness and Information Sharing.** From 1996, when the concept of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) was initially operationalised in the Indian Navy through inhouse innovation, the scope of MDA has progressively expanded to cover wider geographical areas using a multitude of tools.<sup>57</sup> The establishment of the

Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in 2014 as a national MDA hub, in the aftermath of ‘26/11,’ and the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), four years later in 2018, were two important milestones.<sup>58</sup> According to the Indian Navy, IFC-IOR—a principal hub for enabling information exchange in IOR—played a transformative role in Operation SANKALP. The Centre, located at Gurugram, has International Liaison Officers (ILOs) from 13 countries and organisations, as also linkages with 50 organisations from 25 countries.<sup>59</sup> In particular, the IFC-IOR had played a key role in coordinating between the owner of MV *Ruen* and the Indian Navy, once the ship was hijacked in early December 2023.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, on 29 January 2024, “*efficient operational coordination and information sharing through the Sri Lanka and Seychelles ILOs at IFC-IOR*” resulted in the interception of the hijacked Sri Lankan fishing trawler *Lorenzo Putha 04* which was hijacked about 955 nm east of Somalia by the Seychelles Coast Guard Ship (SCGS) *Topaz* in Seychelles Exclusive Economic Zone on 29 Jan 2024.<sup>61</sup> This classical example of operational information sharing exemplifies the benefits of an international centre with international ILOs in coordinating international efforts.

While the UK Maritime Trade Office (UKMTO) and the EUNAVFOR Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa (MSC HoA) are the principal piracy reporting centres, the establishment of the IFC-IOR in India in 2018 complements and augments the efforts by the UK MTO and the MSCHOA, as also other information sharing centres.<sup>62</sup> This includes India’s own Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) at Mumbai which is responsible for coordinating response in the Indian Search and Rescue Region (ISRR).<sup>63</sup> In addition to developing MDA and real-time information sharing, and operational coordination where necessary, regional security assessments, and issuance of warnings/advisories to seafarers, are some of the other key activities undertaken by the centre. A recent maritime security advisory, issued by the Directorate General of Shipping in response to the deteriorating security situation in the Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea, further reemphasises the key role of the IFC-IOR in coordinating international efforts to respond to threats to Indian shipping.<sup>64</sup> Twenty-five years of MDA development in India has been near concurrent with twenty-five years of India’s anti-piracy efforts. The intervening years witnessed a paradigm shift in India’s approach to both, and the developments have only complemented each other, and also underscored the importance of MDA and information sharing in international collaborative efforts for maritime security.

**International Cooperation.** Prior to the surge in piracy off the coast of Somalia, in Asia, the hijacking of the MV *Alondra Rainbow*—and subsequent apprehension of the vessel in the Arabian Sea in an operation involving the Indian Navy and Coast Guard in 1999—led to the creation of the ReCAAP [Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia].<sup>65</sup> ReCAAP is a regional government-to-government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery in Asia. ReCAAP was formalised in 2004, and in 2006, India ratified the ReCAAP agreement. Since ratifying the agreement the Coast Guard has hosted several workshops in India.<sup>66</sup> In 2022, Krishnaswamy Natarajan, a former Director General, Coast Guard, took over as the Executive Director of ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre.<sup>67</sup> Between 1999 and early 2000s, India’s international engagements to counter piracy were restricted

to Asia and in line with the 'Look East' policy, was focused largely in areas east of India. The Indian Navy's deployment to the Gulf of Aden not only expanded India's spatial engagements westward, but also brought with it a wider international engagement for counter-piracy.

With the rise of piracy in the Gulf of Aden in late 2000s, India has been an active participant in piracy-related international forums, like the erstwhile Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and the SHADE [Shared Awareness & De-confliction] forum, a forum for coordinating naval efforts between task forces and independent naval deployers in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>68</sup> The CGPCS was established in 2009 on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008) to facilitate international coordination across several lines of effort and included, uniquely, States, industry, and other stakeholders.<sup>69</sup> In 2017, India was nominated as Co-chair of Working Group I (Operations at Sea) along with Seychelles and UAE.<sup>70</sup> With the suppression of piracy, at the 24<sup>th</sup> CGPCS plenary meeting in 2022, the CGPCS transformed into the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities in the Western Indian Ocean (CGIMA).<sup>71</sup> It was envisaged that IFC-IOR could cooperate closely with CGIMA to provide MDA and assist in enhancing maritime security.<sup>72</sup> However, the CGIMA as per latest assessments has "effectively collapsed."<sup>73</sup> The collapse has been *inter alia* attributed to the shifting focus of the international community to other issues such as the Russia-Ukraine, regional fragmentation of interest through availability of alternative forums, such as SHADE, and a lack of leadership to steer the forum.<sup>74</sup> The present situation could perhaps lead to some interest in revitalisation a forum which in its earlier avatar had played an instrumental part in countering piracy off Somalia.

From an Indian perspective, the CGPCS played a crucial role in the 2015 revision of the piracy High Risk Area (HRA), the eastern limits of which had been moved to the west coast of India, including Indian territorial seas, by the shipping industry in 2011. Consequent to the extension of the piracy HRA to the west coast of India, after extensive internal discussions amongst concerned ministries and agencies, a case for revision of the piracy HRA was taken up by India with the CGPCS.<sup>75</sup> The case for revision of the piracy HRA is an outstanding example of how India's participation in international forums, can shape the discourse on maritime security issues, with long term implications. Notably, the HRA continued to be periodically revised in line with the prevailing piracy situation till it was finally removed with effect from 01 January 2023.<sup>76</sup> However, with the resurgence of piracy there is possibility that an HRA may again be established.<sup>77</sup> In case an HRA is established again, there would surely be lessons from the past which would need to be considered, particularly the need for empirical evidence and threat assessments in establishing any such area.

The IMMS-2015 had called for continued support to anti-piracy cooperative mechanisms and interactions, and indeed India has continued to support and expand these engagements.<sup>78</sup> In 2020, India joined the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCOC) as an observer.<sup>79</sup> The DCOC, established in January 2009, is aimed at repression of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Western Indian Ocean Region, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. The same year, India became a full-fledged member of G7 Group of Friends

of the Gulf of Guinea (G7++FoGG) to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>80</sup>

Over the past 25 years India has progressively expanded its engagements across Asia, into eastern Africa, and now even into western Africa through a mix of operational engagements and multilateral forums, including leadership roles. This exemplifies its commitment to strengthening the regional security architecture. This has also served India's interest, such as the in the case of revision of the HRA. Leadership roles in forums such as the CGIMA and SHADE provide opportunities to steer regional counter-piracy engagements, and should be leveraged.

**Gender Mainstreaming.** The more recent entry of women into all branches, cadres, and specialisations, appointment of women on board ships and ship-borne flights, and induction of women *Agniveers* as sailors have contributed towards gender mainstreaming in naval operations, including in anti-piracy missions. For example, Lieutenant Commander Prerana Deosthalee was the First Lieutenant on *INS Chennai*, which rescued the crew of the cargo ship *MV Lila Norfolk*.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Lt Cdr Mudita Goyal was aircrew on board the P-8I aircraft in the same operation.<sup>82</sup> With greater gender mainstreaming across all walks of life, such as in the shipping industry, gender mainstreaming within security agencies can provide greater sensitivity in handling operational situations at sea, especially those involving women.

## Conclusion

There is no denying that India's response to piracy has transformed over the past 25 years in many ways – a case of the whole being greater than the parts. This transformation has been possible by continuous efforts across the spectrum of maritime security governance, and operational activities. Institution-building, such as the NMSC, and the COSAPH-IMGO framework; the enactment of the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022; a persistent presence in the Gulf of Aden and other areas of the IOR; significant capacity-building and capability augmentation of the Indian Navy and the IAF by induction of force-multipliers; enhanced MDA and information sharing mechanisms; and, greater international engagements, have all contributed to this transformation. The evolved 'anti-piracy model' represents a fundamental framework to deal with specific threats, such as piracy, and perhaps also in some ways 'model answer' to issues of governance, international cooperation, and operational innovation. The transformation in the past 25 years deserves to be recognised and applauded, particularly as analysts have pointed out that the Indian Navy in recent times has done some heavy lifting to deal with the scourge of piracy. Notwithstanding, it is also a fact that there are several more complex maritime security challenges to be handled, both from non-traditional actors, and from States, including those in the 'grey-zone.' These challenges, despite requiring similar fundamentals, will however need a different set of responses.

In short, improved domestic governance (institutions, legal framework, and resources), capacity-building and capability augmentation of maritime security agencies, persistence presence, and strengthened international cooperation, supported and guided by a national

vision and political will, are at the heart of effective response to maritime security threats, be it piracy, or any other.

## Notes

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