

INDIA AND THE DJIBOUTI CODE OF CONDUCT — TOWARDS A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY (PART 2)

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Note: *This article is the second (and concluding) part of a two-part series that undertakes an in-depth institutional study of the Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendments (DCoC-JA). Part I examined the institutional evolution of the DCoC-JA and its transition towards a bottom-up approach to regional maritime security. Part II explores India's engagement with the framework and its contribution to strengthening regional maritime security governance.*

The previous article examined the institutional mechanisms through which the Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendments (DCoC-JA) operate. Building on that institutional analysis, this article begins by examining the role of the “Friends of the DCoC-JA” in supporting signatory States and strengthening their capacity to fulfil their responsibilities as coastal States. Maritime security practices worldwide have evolved in response to the changing and increasingly complex threats confronting the maritime domain. The “Friends of the DCoC-JA” seeks to bring relevant global expertise and experience to the region while helping bridge gaps in regional maritime security governance. India, which has significantly expanded its maritime security capabilities and built maritime capacity, has engaged with the DCoC-JA through this platform, particularly since 2020, when it became an “Observer”. This article, therefore, examines India's six-year association with the DCoC-JA, with particular emphasis on the evolution of its engagement and its contribution to the Code's broader objectives.

In April of 2019, following a “High-Level Meeting on the implementation of the Jeddah Amendments to the Djibouti Code of Conduct”, the “Friends of the DCoC-JA” was established to bring greater coherence to the growing number of maritime capability-enhancement and capacity-building initiatives being undertaken within the framework. The platform was intended to strengthen cooperation and information-sharing among Signatory States while ensuring that various initiatives complemented one another and contributed coherently to implementing the DCoC-JA.¹ For maritime security practitioners, its mandate can be understood through the principle of *support without substitution*: the “Friends of the DCoC-JA” assists Signatory States in implementing the Code and its associated initiatives without displacing national ownership or

¹ Djibouti Code of Conduct, “Terms of Reference: Friends of the DCoC,” accessed on 23 August 2026. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Terms-of-Reference-Friends-of-the-DCoC.pdf>.

undermining the principles of State sovereignty, sovereign rights, sovereign equality, jurisdiction, and territorial integrity.² This balance between external assistance and national ownership has become increasingly important as the DCoC-JA brings together States with varying levels of maritime security capacity, including those that are still developing effective law-enforcement mechanisms, to counter maritime transnational organised crime within their maritime zones.

The value of the “Friends of the DCoC-JA”, therefore, lies not simply in the expertise and resources it brings to the region, but in its ability to connect that external support with the priorities of the Signatory States. Through the platform, participating States and organisations have access to relevant experts, partners, and practitioners working across a range of maritime security initiatives.³ These engagements help strengthen monitoring and accountability while supporting the implementation of measures necessary to translate the DCoC-JA’s objectives into sustained regional outcomes. India’s association with the framework extends beyond its formal status as an Observer; it reflects a broader evolution in India’s approach to maritime security cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and eastern Africa. India’s approach to international maritime security has been characterised as one of “constructive engagement”,⁴ seeking to align its national interests with the maritime security needs of regional partners while promoting greater cohesion and parity in regional cooperation.

Within the WIO maritime security architecture, India is present in multiple capacities and engaged across almost all maritime security formats through bilateral and multilateral navy-to-navy cooperation, as well as navy-to-industry engagement.⁵ India currently chairs both, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).⁶ In addition to its engagement with the DCoC-JA, India also holds Observer status in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).⁷ On 11 February 2026, the Indian Navy assumed command of Combined Task Force 154 (CTF 154), marking the first time that India has led a task force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).⁸ Established in May 2023, CTF 154 is dedicated to strengthening maritime security through multinational training and capacity-building across West

² Djibouti Code of Conduct, “Terms of Reference: Friends of the DCoC.”

³ Djibouti Code of Conduct, “Terms of Reference: Friends of the DCoC.”

⁴ Pradeep Chauhan, “The Criticality of the IONS Maritime Security Construct”, *CIMSEC*, 25 May 2026. <https://cimsec.org/criticality-ions-maritime-security-construct/>.

⁵ Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, *Understanding Maritime Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 156-158.

⁶ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “India Assumes Chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium” *Press Information Bureau*, 20 February 2026.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2231000®=3&lang=2>.

Also See: Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs “Question No. 2941: Chairmanship of IORA,” *Rajya Sabha*, accessed on 14 September 2026. https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha?dtl/41673/QUESTION_NO_2941_CHAIRMANSHIP_OF_IORA.

⁷ Somen Banerjee, “Growing Salience of the Indian Ocean Commission: What Has Changed for India as an Observer”, *National Maritime Foundation*, 22 April 2020. <https://maritimeindia.org/growing-salience-of-the-indian-ocean-commissionwhat-has-changed-for-india-as-an-observer/>.

⁸ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “Indian Navy Assumes First-Ever Command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154”, *Press Information Bureau*, 12 February 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2226776®=3&lang=1>.

Asia and the wider region.⁹ The Indian Navy's leadership of the task force strengthens maritime cooperation and reinforces partnerships for regional peace, prosperity, and security. This expanding presence and enhanced operational role provide a strong basis for understanding India's position as a "preferred security partner" in the region.

An effective partnership begins with a clear understanding of regional security challenges and the institutional mechanisms available to States to address them. Just as the DCoC-JA's institutional evolution was shaped by the rise of piracy in 2008, India's maritime security engagement in the WIO was also significantly influenced by the need to contain this growing threat. Since 23 October 2008, the Indian Navy has escorted 3,804 merchant ships and thwarted 80 piracy attacks.¹⁰ In the financial years 2025–26 and 2026–27, the Government of India sanctioned US\$ 3.72 billion for anti-piracy operations off the east coast of Somalia and in other areas of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).¹¹ After the escalation of the Red Sea Crisis in October 2023, 45 Indian Navy warships have operated in the region, supported by helicopters and various types of fixed-wing aircraft, marine commandos, and specialised explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams.¹² These deployments have involved more than 1,000 boarding operations, thwarted 13 piracy incidents, led to the apprehension of 62 pirates, and ensured the safe transit of 418 merchant vessels carrying 19.2 million metric tonnes of cargo valued at more than US\$8.2 billion.¹³

To ensure a safe and secure maritime domain in the WIO, it is essential to have a maritime security architecture whose various layers all function as a coherent, interconnected system. The principal actors and mechanisms — including the US-led CMF, the EU's "Safe Seas Africa" programme, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP), and EU NAVFOR's Operation ATALANTA and its Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA) — constitute important layers of this architecture. Yet States themselves provide coherence to these overlapping mechanisms and translate them into meaningful maritime security outcomes. Moreover, States with cross-membership across these arrangements can address fragmented maritime security needs through multiple institutional channels, allowing regional responses to be tailored to their members' distinct requirements.

India's engagement with the DCoC-JA reflects this same need for institutional connectivity. After becoming an Observer, India has anchored its efforts around strengthening the three Working Groups on *Information Sharing*, *Capacity Building*, and *Operational Cooperation and*

⁹ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, "Indian Navy Assumes First-Ever Command of CTF 154." <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2226776®=3&lang=1>.

¹⁰ Government of India, "India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session," Mauritius, 24 July 2026. <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>

¹¹ Government of India, "India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session." <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>

¹² Government of India, "India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session." <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>

¹³ Government of India, "India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session." <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>

Coordination at Sea.¹⁴ It has also supported the development of national institutions in eastern African littoral States, on which the effective functioning of these Working Groups ultimately depends. India's contribution so far in these Working Groups is as follows:

1. **Working Group 1 (Information Sharing):** India has facilitated the formulation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Information Sharing Network (ISN). The Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram has played an important role in this foundational process, with the Indian Naval Officer-in-charge contributing to the development of the draft text, lexicon, and procedures that the Code has since adopted.¹⁵ This institutional effort was followed by a more practical engagement in 2023, when the IFC-IOR hosted the first three-day Maritime Information Sharing Workshop (MISW) for members of the IORA and DCoC-JA.¹⁶ The workshop gave participating States an opportunity to engage with Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) scenarios through syndicated maritime security exercises, discuss the emerging regional information-sharing architecture, and refine the newly developed SOPs for the DCoC-JA Information Sharing Network (ISN).¹⁷ The subsequent visit to the IFC-IOR thus helped move the ISN from a procedural framework towards a more practical information-sharing mechanism, allowing participating States to better understand how national maritime information can be collected, analysed, and shared within the wider regional architecture.¹⁸ The approach was reinforced through the 2025 edition of the MISW, held under the theme “*Enhancing Real-Time Coordination and Information Sharing Across the Indian Ocean Region*.”¹⁹ The emphasis on real-time coordination reflects the broader objective of building a cohesive, transparent, and resilient maritime information ecosystem—an approach that closely complements the DCoC-JA's own efforts to strengthen information sharing across the sub-region.²⁰

1.1 India's contribution to the DCoC-JA's information-sharing architecture, however, extends beyond developing procedures. The IFC-IOR has inducted the first-

¹⁴ Djibouti Code of Conduct Secretariat, *Report of the Eighth High-Level Meeting on the Implementation of the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct*, Mauritius, 12–14 November 2025 (Nairobi: Djibouti Code of Conduct Secretariat, 2025). <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-8th-DCoC-JA-High-Level-Meeting-Mauritius-12-14-November-2025-for-circulation.pdf>.

¹⁵ Nitin Parvataneni, “Session 7: Talking Points,” Remarks at the Eighth High-Level Meeting on Implementation of the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct, Mauritius, 12–14 November 2025. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Session-7-Talking-Points-IN-Commodore-Nitin-Parvataneni.pdf>

¹⁶ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “MARITIME INFORMATION SHARING WORKSHOP 2023: Advancing Maritime Security for a Sustainable Future Participation of 31 countries of the IORA and DCoC/JA, *Press Information Bureau*, 12 September 2023. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1956612®=48&lang=2>.

¹⁷ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “Maritime Information Sharing Workshop 2023.” <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1956612®=48&lang=2>.

¹⁸ Djibouti Code of Conduct, “India-DCoC/JA Fortify Collaboration, Talks to Address MDA Challenges in Region,” accessed 31 August 2026. <https://dcoc.org/media/news/india-dcocja-fortify-collaboration-talks-to-address-mda-challenges-in-region>.

¹⁹ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “MARITIME INFORMATION SHARING WORKSHOP 2025: Enhancing Real-Time Coordination and Information Sharing Across the Indian Ocean Region”, *Press Information Bureau*, 01 November 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2185243®=3&lang=2>.

²⁰ Ministry of Defence, Government of India, “Maritime Information Sharing Workshop 2025.” <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2185243®=3&lang=2>.

ever DCoC International Liaison Officer (ILO), representing the 22 Signatory States of the Code and creating a direct institutional link between the DCoC-JA and India's regional information-fusion mechanism.²¹ India has also offered assistance to Kenya in establishing a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre (NMISC), including through the provision of fit-for-purpose radar systems.²² In Kenya alone, India has proposed installing 15 radars as part of the planned NMISC.²³ These efforts are complemented by NISHAR — the Network for Information Sharing — developed by India as a cost-effective and easily deployable connectivity solution that uses terrestrial networks and INMARSAT to link shore-based centres with ships and aircraft.²⁴

1.2 The Indian Navy has also signed an MoU with the “Regional Centre for Operational Coordination” (RCOC) in Seychelles, further strengthening the institutional links between national and regional maritime information-sharing mechanisms.²⁵ The IFC-IOR plays a particularly important role within this architecture. By fusing, analysing, and maintaining maritime data at the national and regional levels, the Centre helps to identify patterns, trends, and anomalies associated with maritime security threats and make actionable information available to regional information-sharing centres and NMISCs. Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate that India's role extends beyond helping the DCoC-JA formulate information-sharing procedures; it also contributes to the national infrastructure, technological connectivity, and institutional linkages required to make those procedures operational. The eventual integration of national and regional centres would enable States to convert raw maritime data into actionable intelligence, facilitating more effective responses to illicit activities at sea and reducing “*catch-and-release*” practices through better-coordinated maritime enforcement. One such area is illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which remains a predominant maritime crime affecting DCoC-JA Signatory States. The IFC-IOR analyses IUU fishing patterns at the regional level and provides actionable intelligence, showing how information fusion can help States identify and respond to maritime crimes that may otherwise be difficult to detect and prosecute.²⁶

²¹ Sidhant Sibal, “Anti-Piracy Group DCOC to Send Officer to India's Maritime Information Hub, IFC-IOR”, *WTION*, 22 December 2023. <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/anti-piracy-group-dcoc-to-send-officer-to-indias-maritime-information-hub-ifc-ior-672644>.

²² International Maritime Organization, “National Maritime Information Sharing Centre, Project Road Map Workshop: Mission Report,” Mombasa, Kenya, 7-9 July 2025. <https://dcoc.org/storage/pages/2026/06/dhWpzssCgbMzjV2farhKjLjpe6K54YgcuYuuYOT.pdf>.

²³ Government of India, “India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session.” <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>

²⁴ KS Vikramaditya, “A Collaborative Indo-Pacific Architecture for the Protection of Critical Maritime Infrastructure”, *National Maritime Foundation*, 02 June 2026. https://maritimeindia.org/a-collaborative-indo-pacific-architecture-for-the-protection-of-critical-maritime-infrastructure/#_ftn46.

²⁵ Government of India, Ministry of Defence, “Maritime Security: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between The Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCoC), *Press Information Bureau*, 22 February 2026. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseFramePage.aspx?PRID=1901371®=48&lang=2>.

²⁶ Djibouti Code of Conduct, *Record of the Seventh High-Level Regional Meeting on Implementation of the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct*, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 28-30 November 2024, 4-7. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-DCoC-High-Level-Meeting-Dar-es-Salaam-28-to-30-November-2024.pdf>.

2. **Working Group 2 (*Capacity Building*):** The “Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation” (ITEC) programme has provided another avenue for India to extend capacity-building support to DCoC-JA Signatory States, allowing personnel from the region to undertake specialised training in India. Over the past two years, India has also supported the training of the East African Standby Force (EASF), contributing to the region’s broader institutional and operational capabilities.²⁷ Its support extends beyond training to an offer to assist in developing a regional maritime security strategy and risk register, recognising organisational development as an important component of sustainable maritime security capacity.²⁸ India’s assistance has also extended to providing physical assets. 30 ships and 10 aircraft have been provided to four DCoC-JA Signatory States in the region to strengthen their ability to monitor and survey their maritime spaces and, where required, connect with regional information-fusion centres of their choice.²⁹ This augmentation of capability-enhancement (training and technical assistance) by capacity-building (the provision of physical operational assets) is significant, as it gives States the means to strengthen their maritime surveillance capabilities and participate more effectively in the wider regional security architecture.

2.1 India has also proposed the “Navigator Clearing House” model for the DCoC-JA’s “Assistance Matrix”.³⁰ The model seeks to address a persistent challenge in capacity building and capability-enhancement: matching the requirements identified by States with the resources available to meet them. The “Assistance Matrix” also clarifies terms that are often used loosely and interchangeably in policy discourse. In particular, the interchangeable use of ‘*capacity-building*’ and ‘*capability-enhancement*’ has contributed to considerable confusion at both, the conceptual and the downstream (executive) levels. Capacity-building typically refers to the material wherewithal required by States, including infrastructure, platforms, equipment, ships, aircraft, submarines, dockyards, workshops, and other facilities. It is often incorrectly conflated with the development of human skills, organisational structures, legal frameworks, and training, all of which are more appropriately understood as components of “*capability enhancement*”. Taking this distinction into account, and at India’s behest, the DCoC-JA has adopted more neutral terminology by renaming its “*Capacity-Building Matrix*” as the “*Assistance Matrix*”.³¹ By mapping national requirements and connecting them with appropriate sources of assistance, the model could make capacity-building efforts more targeted, coordinated, and responsive to the priorities of Signatory States. Its significance lies in translating the principle of nationally identified needs into the practical functioning of the DCoC-JA’s assistance architecture.

²⁷ Nelson Alusala, “African Standby Force: East Africa Moves On,” *African Security Review* 13, no. 4 (2004): 113–121, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233182765_AFRICAN_STANDBY_FORCE_East_Africa_moves_on/citation/download.

²⁸ Parvataneni, “Session 7: Talking Points.”

²⁹ Government of India, “India Statement—3rd CGIMA Plenary Session.” <file:///Users/AnumKhan/Downloads/India.pdf>.

³⁰ Djibouti Code of Conduct, *Record of the Seventh High-Level Regional Meeting*, 4–7. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-DCoC-High-Level-Meeting-Dar-es-Salaam-28-to-30-November-2024.pdf>.

³¹ Parvataneni, “Session 7: Talking Points.”

3. **Working Group 3** (*Operational Cooperation and Coordination at Sea*): The main agenda of this working group is to achieve practical cooperation and coordination at sea and adopt SOPs for joint patrols, biennial threat assessments, regional vessel-databases, coordinated search and rescue, evidence handling, and information routing across the Information Sharing Network (ISN).³² DCoC-JA's own goal has been to establish and operationalise eight National Maritime Information Sharing Centres (NMISCs) by 2027 and to conduct two multinational exercises annually.³³ In 2025, India launched the inaugural edition of 'Africa-India Key Maritime Exercise' (AIKEYME) with nine countries on the eastern African coast.³⁴ This has been conceptualised as a biennial exercise and will be co-hosted by a partner eastern African coastal State. Tanzania co-hosted the inaugural edition, and Kenya is expected to co-host the next edition. The significance of this initiative lies in its approach: the "Indian Ocean Ship, *Sagar*", an offshore patrol vessel (OPV) of the Indian Navy, was converted into a regional ship and took 44 people onboard from nine countries as crew.³⁵ This is an excellent example of tangible collaboration, integration and inclusivity. India's support for operational cooperation also extends to the institutional and legal foundations required for effective maritime enforcement. India has offered to assist DCoC-JA Signatory States in developing national maritime security strategies and strengthening the legal mechanisms required to bring maritime offenders to justice.³⁶ India's own experience, including the enactment of the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act and the subsequent apprehension and prosecution of pirates involved in the *MV Ruen* incident, provides a useful reference point for States seeking to strengthen the "legal finish" to maritime security operations.³⁷ In this respect, operational cooperation is not limited to deploying assets or conducting exercises; it also requires States to possess the institutional and legal capacity to convert maritime surveillance and interdiction into effective enforcement outcomes.³⁸

While the institutional changes introduced by the DCoC-JA may, at first glance, appear complex, their underlying purpose is to actually to *simplify* the management of an increasingly complex maritime security environment. If implemented as intended, these structures can help distribute

³² Djibouti Code of Conduct, "Working Group 3," accessed 14 September 2026. <https://dcoc.org/governance-framework/work-group-3>.

³³ Djibouti Code of Conduct, *Record of the Seventh High-Level Regional Meeting*, 4–7. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-DCoC-High-Level-Meeting-Dar-es-Salaam-28-to-30-November-2024.pdf>.

³⁴ Anum Khan, "India's Maritime Capacity-Building and Capability-Enhancement in the Western Indian Ocean", *National Maritime Foundation*, 23 July 2025. <https://maritimeindia.org/indias-maritime-capacity-building-and-capability-enhancement-in-the-western-indian-ocean/>.

³⁵ Khan, "India's Maritime Capacity-Building and Capability-Enhancement in the Western Indian Ocean." <https://maritimeindia.org/indias-maritime-capacity-building-and-capability-enhancement-in-the-western-indian-ocean/>.

³⁶ Parvataneni, "Session 7: Talking Points."

³⁷ Guardian Staff and Agencies, "Indian Navy recaptures Somali Pirate Ship and Frees Crew", *The Guardian*, 17 March 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/17/india-recaptures-somali-pirate-ship-and-frees-crew>.

³⁸ Djibouti Code of Conduct, *Record of the Seventh High-Level Regional Meeting*, 4–7. <https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-DCoC-High-Level-Meeting-Dar-es-Salaam-28-to-30-November-2024.pdf>.

responsibilities across clearly defined areas of cooperation, reduce duplication among existing initiatives, and strengthen linkages between national and regional mechanisms. The “Assistance Matrix”, for instance, provides the “Friends of the DCoC-JA” with a practical tool to match the specific needs of Signatory States with the assistance programmes and resources available from external partners. Similarly, the proposed development of “National Maritime Security Communities” (NMSCs) and “National Maritime Information Sharing Centres” (NMISCs) would bring relevant national agencies together, allowing training, technical assistance, information-sharing, and capability enhancement provided by partner States to be coordinated rather than pursued in isolation.³⁹ In this manner, the emerging institutional architecture can help turn a potentially fragmented collection of initiatives into a more coherent system of maritime security management. Moreover, DCoC is a non-binding agreement, and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) does not have a mandate to coordinate operations at sea; Member States retain their sovereignty and may create the necessary space for operational cooperation, including through bilateral arrangements under WG3.

Despite this institutional flexibility, the emerging architecture faces challenges. The first of these is sustainability. Establishing institutions such as NMISCs across all Signatory States will require not only initial investment in infrastructure and technology but also sustained financial and technical support to keep them operational. Without a long-term commitment to their maintenance, staffing, connectivity, and technological upgrading, the centres risk becoming institutions that exist on paper but remain limited in their operational utility. A second challenge lies in aligning regional and national maritime security strategies. While the DCoC-JA seeks to develop a regional maritime security strategy, individual Signatory States are also working to strengthen or develop their own national strategies. This process becomes even more complicated because Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are pursuing similar objectives. SADC already has a draft maritime security strategy, while IGAD and the EAC are also developing their own frameworks. The challenge, therefore, is not necessarily the absence of strategies, but the possibility of having multiple strategies addressing the same maritime security concerns without a clear hierarchy of responsibilities or mechanism for coordination.

If each of these frameworks prescribes separate actions for the same security challenge, States may face competing priorities, duplicated efforts, and limited resources spread across multiple institutional channels. The result could be precisely the opposite of what the DCoC-JA’s institutional reforms seek to achieve: instead of reducing fragmentation, they could add another layer to it. The success of the DCoC-JA’s evolving architecture will therefore depend not only on creating new mechanisms, but on ensuring these mechanisms align with existing national, regional, and sub-regional structures. The real test is whether the Code can provide a coordinating space in which these different strategies and initiatives reinforce rather than compete with one another.

³⁹ Djibouti Code of Conduct, *Record of the Seventh High-Level Regional Meeting*, 4–7.
<https://dcoc.org/storage/uploads/Report-of-the-DCoC-High-Level-Meeting-Dar-es-Salaam-28-to-30-November-2024.pdf>.

Another emerging challenge for the DCoC-JA is its ability to keep pace with a threat environment that is not only persistent but also constantly evolving. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden has resurfaced since 2023, with the IMO reporting a renewed series of incidents in 2026. In response, the Signatory States have agreed to establish a **Combined DCoC Task Force** to protect shipping from the resurgence of piracy in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden.⁴⁰ The proposed task force is intended to provide a practical regional mechanism through which willing Signatory States can undertake coordinated maritime operations in support of existing international maritime security efforts. It may also facilitate the embarkation of officers, or ‘sea-riders’, from relevant coastal States aboard participating naval vessels. While such a mechanism is a timely response to the resurgence of piracy, its operational role will need to be carefully calibrated against the existing responsibilities of international naval forces and dedicated operations such as the European Union’s Operation Atalanta. More importantly, a renewed maritime response risks treating the symptom without adequately addressing the conditions that enable piracy to re-emerge. Piracy is ultimately a land-sea phenomenon. Its maritime manifestation cannot be fully understood without examining the political, economic, and security conditions on shore from which pirate networks draw their personnel, resources, and operating space.

This points to another area where the DCoC-JA could better use its regional character: developing a more integrated understanding of the conditions that produce maritime insecurity. The concentration of piracy incidents along the Somali coast, including Puntland and Somaliland, warrants closer land-based analysis alongside conventional maritime threat assessments. The apparent seasonal pattern of attacks, including the possibility of increased activity during periods of reduced fishing activity, also suggests that maritime threat analysis needs to be connected to the socioeconomic realities of coastal communities. Rather than relying primarily on incident-based maritime data, the DCoC-JA could use its network of Signatory States to combine maritime intelligence with land-based assessments and develop a more granular understanding of where, why, and under what conditions piracy is likely to resurface.

The need for such an approach becomes more pressing as the region’s security environment grows increasingly interconnected. Maritime insecurity is no longer generated by a single category of actor or confined to a single form of criminal activity. The emergence of linkages among violent non-State actors, organised criminal networks, and pirate groups adds another layer of complexity to the regional threat environment. This requires the DCoC-JA to move beyond responding to individual incidents and towards identifying the networks, enabling conditions, and relationships that allow maritime threats to persist and evolve. Its institutional mechanisms will be most effective when supported by such analytical assessments and able to anticipate emerging risks rather than simply respond to their maritime manifestations.

⁴⁰ Robban Assafina, “Signatories Agree to Establish Combined DCoC Task Force to Counter Piracy in Western Indian Ocean,” *Assafina.Com*, 18 August 2026. <https://www.assafinaonline.com/en/article/signatories-agree-to-establish-combined-dcoc-task-force-to-counter-piracy-in-western-indian-ocean>.

The region's changing political geography presents an additional challenge. Somaliland's evolving international status raises difficult questions for regional maritime security mechanisms such as the DCoC-JA, particularly regarding sovereignty, representation, and engagement with authorities that do not identify themselves as part of the Somali State. For a framework whose effectiveness depends on cooperation among coastal States, such developments test not only its operational preparedness but also its institutional flexibility. The DCoC-JA will increasingly have to operate in a regional environment in which political boundaries, security relationships, and maritime threats do not always align neatly. Its ability to navigate these realities while maintaining the ownership of its Signatory States will be critical to preserving its relevance. The evolution of the DCoC-JA demonstrates that regional maritime security cannot be strengthened simply by creating more mechanisms. Its institutional development from the three Working Groups and the Friends of the DCoC-JA to the Information Sharing Network, Assistance Matrix, and emerging operational mechanisms shows an effort to bring greater structure to an increasingly fragmented maritime security environment. The challenge now is to ensure that these mechanisms function as parts of a connected system rather than as parallel initiatives. India's engagement provides an important example of how an external partner can contribute to this process without displacing Signatory States' ownership. Its contribution has extended from information-sharing procedures and maritime domain awareness to training, technological assistance, national information centres, operational assets, and support for legal and institutional capacity. More importantly, these initiatives demonstrate that external assistance is most valuable when it strengthens the ability of regional States to generate, share, and act upon maritime security information themselves.

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