

Law Enforcement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR): Role of Public and Private International Maritime Security Organizations for Effective Ocean Governance

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has emerged as a geostrategic and geopolitical entity which is the hub of global flows; particularly trade, commerce, regional connectivity, communication, and interplay of states and non-state actors in the region and still marked by strategic decisions made in accordance with state goals and interests. The involvement of non-state actors has made the region quite complex and widens the challenges of ocean governance in the region. Moreover, its choke points, Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and natural resources make it attractive for all rational actors. The objectives of undertaken research are; to demonstrate the role of public and private organizations in ocean governance and to analyse the efficacy of public and private maritime security organizations in the IOR. The international institutions which are involved in maritime law enforcement are INTERPOL, IMO, Europol, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which endeavours to ensure law under their mandates. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the guide for law enforcement in the IOR and responsible for ensuring ocean governance. The undertaken research is descriptive and analytical in nature based on qualitative research methodology. Secondary data has been used in the undertaken research including research articles, books and reports besides blogs as a tertiary source. Furthermore, research has been analysed in the context of neo-liberal institutionalism.

Keywords: *Maritime Security, IOR, International Maritime Security Organizations, Law Enforcement, Ocean Governance*

1. Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has emerged as a geostrategic and geopolitical entity which is the hub of global flows; particularly trade, commerce, regional connectivity, communication, and interplay of states and non-state actors. It is surrounded by three continents, i.e. Asia, Africa and Australia; and Antarctica in closer proximity. Furthermore, its choke points, Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), and natural resources make it attractive for all rational actors of the globe. There is a presence of world's major powers to achieve their distinctive objectives and goals. There is immense technological development in the region. Emerging states including India and China have been modernizing its ports and oceanic activities (Ali

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& Khan, 2024). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) added into its economic and communication infrastructure. However, the involvement of non-state actors has made the region quite complex and widens both the security challenges and hurdles in ocean governance in the IOR.

Multiple regional and international organizations which includes coast guard agencies, naval forces, customs and border control agencies, maritime police, marine and fisheries enforcement agencies, anti-narcotics units, anti-piracy tasks forces, regional organizations such as Indian Ocean Commission, and international maritime organizations including INTERPOL have been playing their role to regulate maritime affairs smoothly in the IOR, however, private agencies are also active as security providers in the region and their role has been enhancing since WW2. The prominent private agencies providing security to the vessels, ships, and ports in the region, etc. include ESPADA, MAST Security, and SF Group. Public agencies include navies, coast guards, and other security agencies framed by the governments of nation-states. The objectives of undertaken research are to demonstrate the role of public and private organizations in ocean governance, and to analyse the efficacy of public and private maritime security organizations in the IOR.

The undertaken research is descriptive and analytical in nature based on qualitative research methods. Research articles, books and reports; and blogs are the sources used by the researcher for secondary and tertiary data collection. Furthermore, research has been analysed in context of neo-liberal institutionalism. The core argument of the research is the following: Private security organizations in the IOR offering services to the vessels, ships, and ports include safeguarding of crew and ship, tracking of ships, recovering of hijacked ships and hostage recovery through negotiations, but there is a consequential increase in the challenges which raises security concerns for all stakeholders and challenging ocean governance; therefore, there is a need to understand law enforcement mechanism to ensure maritime security of the region and hurdles in the smooth ocean governance.

The IOR is laced with conflict and cooperation and different patterns of convergence and divergence giving space to challenges besides opportunities. The nature of challenges is both traditional and non-traditional and it includes drones, satellite attacks, maritime terrorism, technological advancements, attacks on ships, naval blockade, and piracy which disturbs maritime activities and creates hurdles in ocean governance. Although various regional and international organizations have been active in the region to regulate the affairs of the region and make the activities safer and smooth to ensure and sustain ocean governance in the IOR (Bueger, 2024).

The research paper is divided into five sections which includes: i) Neo-liberal institutionalism as a theoretical framework, ii) Role of public organizations in Ocean Governance in the IOR, iii) Role of public organizations in Ocean Governance in the IOR, iv) Effective Ocean Governance in the IOR, and v) Conclusion.

1.1 Neo-Liberal Institutionalism as a Theoretical Framework

Joseph S. Nye and Robert O. Keohane formulated the neo-liberal institutionalism theory in 1970s (Mingst & Mckibben, 2021). The theory provides a

prism through which to view and maximise institutional frameworks and cooperation processes in order to attain robust ocean governance and efficient law enforcement in the IOR. It has roots in liberalism, which is the advocate of cooperation, interdependence, and the role of institutions and non-state actors on the globe. In international politics nation states are rational actors which cooperate not only because of relative gains but absolute gains and where their interests converge including security. The interplay of public and private organizations in the IOR helps to address the challenges of maritime security and ocean governance. These public and private institutions playing their role in ensuring ocean governance and complementary to each other. Public organizations are responsible for making laws and have an ability to foster maritime laws and conventions. On the other hand, private agencies are providing services such as security of vessels, crew, and ports. In the contemporary scenario, sea lanes of communication, trade and commerce, and advance means of communication are interconnected with both state and non-state actors and regulated by the agencies and organizations for smooth sea, ship, and port operations. For sustainable maritime security, there is a need of sustainable ocean governance and this comes as a result of neo-liberal institutionalism (facilitated by both public and private agencies). Both public and private organizations and agencies endeavour to ensure ocean governance by countering and preventing NTMS. Moreover, the organizations have been facilitating in ensuring international standards, threat minimization, and cooperation for smooth and effective ocean governance. Both operate under the framework of international law (UNCLOS) to enhance ocean governance in the region.

1.2 Role of Public Organizations in Ocean Governance in the IOR

Ocean Governance in the seas is defined as the rules and regulations, policies, and actions for the protection of SLOC, trade and commerce activities through all traditional and non-traditional security threats. Ocean governance was commenced in the 1970s. Before the existence of this phenomenon, the world was busy in exploring Arctic Ocean routes in frozen sea. The governance routed in plurality narratives (Partelow et al., 2023, p. 2). The public and private organizations are an extended form of ocean governance. The public organizations including navies, coast guards, and state-owned security agencies are formulated to provide security against all traditional and non-traditional challenges, ensure safe navigation, law governing activities, protecting marine resources and safeguarding environmental standards on high seas and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) (Cardiff University, 2023). Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the guide for ocean governance in the IOR.

Regional state actors and their law enforcement agencies have been doing cooperation with the extra-regional actors including USA and EU for effective ocean governance. Such as the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (USNAVCENT), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF), and U.S. Naval Facilities have been presented in the region for providing security from non-traditional security elements and launched Maritime Security Initiative, Operation

Junction Rain by US and Seychelles Coast Guards, and African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP). Furthermore, European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) launch operations including EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta, EUCAP Somalia in 2012, and COMESA Maritime Security (MASE) programme by EU to eradicate the maritime security challenges which directly or indirectly supports the ocean governance in the IOR (*CTF 151 Operation Mare Liberum IV*, 2024).

The coastal states have launched operations and taken initiatives to counter common challenges in the region and facilitate collective action against evil sentiments and entities. The main regional players of the IOR are China, India, UK, Pakistan, and Japan. Pakistan Navy has launched Regional Maritime Security Patrols, Indian Navy launched India-Africa Defence Ministers Conclave (IADMC), and Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region. Moreover, the People's Liberation Army Navy has participated in Maritime Combined Task Forces. And Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) initiated Operation Enduring Freedom-Maritime Interdiction Operation in the IOR (Bueger, 2024).

States and non-state actors have been facing security challenges in the IOR since inception and make economic and security agreements to counter challenges and govern the affairs of the ocean smoothly. Regional organizations are basically regional policies and action plan to counter the hurdles in the way of law enforcement and ocean governance. Regional initiatives and security and regulatory frameworks have been shaped and reshaped by the public organizations of the region to advance the action plan against evil actors and entities. Bilateral and trilateral cooperation among states having a unified approach resulted in the regional organizations to ensure smooth operations in the IOR to govern affairs (Llewellyn et al., 2016). There are multiple public organizations active in the region including IORA, IONS, Indian Ocean Commission, Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission, and Combine Task Forces.

One of the objectives of IORA is to deal with NTMS. The primary emphasis of IONS is placed on the aspect of security. Collaboration with naval and top marine authorities about operational and technical issues. Indian Ocean Commission mission is to ensure peace and stability, maritime security, food security, environmental conservation, fisheries, climate change adaptation. Southwest Ocean Fisheries Commission purpose is to promote the sustainable utilization of the living marine resources, CGPCS to combat piracy, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) objective is to counter piracy, maintain maritime security, and counter terrorism, RMIFC goal is to enhance Maritime Security in the Eastern and Southern regions of Africa, as well as the IOR, efforts are being made. IMO responsibility is to promote safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation, and International Maritime Bureau is formulated to fight against all piracy and armed robbery at sea (IAS GYAN, 2024).

Public organizations still have a lot of work to do in ocean governance, notwithstanding their contributions. While smaller governments in the area lack the means and expertise to fully participate in governance initiatives, geopolitical rivalry

among big powers sometimes impedes collective action. Furthermore, the efficacy of governance systems is restricted by insufficient enforcement measures and fragmented coordination among regional entities. To this end, the necessary operational and legal frameworks for good governance are provided by public institutions. This is where regional navies share best practices to address common security challenges such as disaster management and piracy through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) attempts to advance marine safety and security, as well as economic cooperation through enhanced collaboration. Environmental deterioration and illicit fishing are of concern to the Indian Ocean Commission, but it has been urged to focus more on conservation and sustainable development initiatives (Environment, 2020).

The Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission is responsible for the oversight and maintenance of the fisheries of the region in a way that is consistent with the objectives of conservation. The above mentioned regions are also vital trade routes and waterways that need to be safeguarded and enhanced for marine safety, which is why the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) works to bring about cooperation among governments to facilitate multilateral cooperation in the fight against piracy (Mukami & Convention, 2023). These organizations have a strong focus on information sharing, capacity building, and regional integration with the aim of maintaining stability and sustainability in Indian Ocean.

Table 1: Major Public Security Organizations in the IOR

Organization	Year	Status	Members
Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)	2008	Active	25
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	1997	Active	23 members and 11 dialogue partners
Indian Ocean Commission	1982	Active	5
Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission	2004	Active	12
Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS)	2009	Active	80
Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)	2001	Active	46
Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC)	2016	Active	43
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	1958	Active	176
International Maritime Bureau Piracy	1981	Active	2 Organizations

1.3 Role of Private Organizations in Ocean Governance in the IOR

In political science and international relations, the emergence of private power in global environmental regulation has drawn a lot of scholarly attention (Cutler et al.

1999; Green 2014). In addition to solving collective action issues, organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have been demonstrated to create environmental regulations that appear to have distributive effects (Büthe & Mattli, 2011; Clapp 1998). Notably, industrial interests may readily influence these agencies' decision-making processes, and the public and private interests are not always interchangeable.

Private companies frequently collaborate with government agencies to provide supplementary services that fill governance shortages. Private companies help with situational awareness and real-time data sharing by linking their operations with regional organizations such as the Regional Marine Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC). This allows for a better coordinated response to marine threats (Laipson & Pandya, 2009). Private companies such as Maritime & Underwater Security Consultants (MUSC), Hart Maritime and Neptune P2P Group play a significant role in enhancing marine security to guard commercial routes against piracy and armed robbery through services such as armed guards, vessel escorting and risk assessments (Laipson & Pandya, 2009). The waters off the coast of Somalia, which is characterized by high risk and limited state naval capability, have particularly benefited from these efforts of private security companies (Saxena, 2021). They ensure the safe transportation of people and goods through the use of experienced security personnel and advanced surveillance equipment.

With the introduction of technologies like automated vessel tracking, satellite-based monitoring systems, and AI-driven analytics, private enterprises are at the forefront of technical innovation in ocean governance. By improving marine situational awareness, these developments aid in the detection of illicit operations like smuggling and unreported fishing. Furthermore, private companies frequently work with government organizations to enhance regional capacities for efficient governance and train staff. For the benefit of marine operators, private organizations such as Hudson Analytix and Solace Global offer risk management and advising services. Shipping firms and other stakeholders benefit from their ability to map high-risk zones, detect dangers, and provide strategic advice as they traverse the region's intricacies (Iqbal, 2023). Smaller nations and commercial operators who lack internal capacity to handle changing marine threats may find these services especially helpful.

Private entities encounter difficulties in ocean governance notwithstanding their contributions. Smaller operators may not be able to access their services due to their high cost, and operational challenges are brought about by inconsistent regulations throughout the IOR. Furthermore, inefficiencies and effort duplication may result from the absence of established frameworks for incorporating private organizations into public governance initiatives.

Table 2: Private Agencies as Security Providers in the IOR

Private Maritime Security Providers	Maritime Security Services	Year	Company Status
Maritime & Underwater Security Consultants (MUSC)		1974	Dissolved
Hudson Analytix		1986	Dissolved
Hart Maritime		1999	Dissolved
ESPADA (<i>Company Profile</i> , 2016)	Cyber Security and secure networks, systems, applications, and network devices before hackers are able to discover and exploit them. Penetration test Vulnerability assessment Manual and Automated Testing	2004	Active
MAST (<i>MAST Security Physical Security Brochure</i> , 2025)	Counter piracy Ship Arrests & Disputes Crisis-Response Superyacht Transits Risk Consultancy Super Yacht Security Systems	2007	Active
SF Group (<i>Maritime Security & Anti-Piracy Operations</i> , 2024)	Anti-Piracy Maritime Security Services	2008	Active
Neptune P2P Group Maritime Security (<i>Private Security Company Security Risk Management Neptune P2P Group</i> , 2024)	Maritime Security Services Security Risk Management Intelligence Protective Security	2009	Active
Solace Global (<i>Travel Risk Management Traveler Tracking Crisis Response</i> , 2025)	Cyber Risk Assessment and Consultancy Access to Cyber Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) Activation of Real-time Risk Management Platform Cyber Security Recommendations and Remediation Managed Detection & Response (MDR) Cloud Extended Detection &	2010	Active

		Response (XDR) Remote Working & Secure Edge Technology Ransomware Protect & Recover Compliance and Cyber Security Best Practice		
Seagull Security (2025)	Maritime (<i>Home</i> ,	Protective Services Risk management Fisheries Protection Intelligence Insurance Crisis Response Seagull Digital Vessel Fleet	2012	Active
SINO GUARDS Marine Limited (<i>SINO GUARDS Marine Security</i> , 2021)	Security <i>Private</i>	Complete Anti-piracy solutions Assessments & Voyage Risk Analysis Consultancy & Crew Training Port & Facility Protection Optional team composition 17 dis/embarkation (operation) points More than 10 legal weapon storages Always available teams in permanent locations (Suez, Galle, Fujairah, Red Sea)	2013	Inactive
Securewest International (<i>Welcome Securewest International Securewest</i> , 2022)	<i>to</i> <i>/</i>	Travel risk management Ship security alert system Maritime security Global response centre Training Police support	2021	Active
The Security Indian Security (2023)	ASA Maritime Company Maritime Service,	Consulting and Risk Management Travel and protective services Maritime services Corporate security Corporate Investigation VIP Safety Consulting Event Safety Consulting	1999	Active

Source: Compiled by author.

Imperative choke points and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are guarantors of smooth flow of trade and travel and seek the attention of all state and non-state actors all across the world towards the IOR. In addition to that, geo-economic, geo-political, and geo-strategic importance, the region attracts security challenges along with gains and disturbs order at sea. To cope up with these emerging security challenges states came up with the initiation of private and public

organizations. Bilateral and multilateral agreements were also signed as a result of security issues. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is one such example of multilateral agreement (*India- Kenya Joint Vision Statement on Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region – BAHARI, 2023*). The purpose was to regulate the environment of the IOR smoothly and peacefully.

Environmental degradation, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illicit fishing, and piracy are the prevailing threats in the IOR call for a more comprehensive approach to ocean governance and creates spaces for various public and private maritime security organizations. They also necessitate coordinated responses across countries, transnational threats like terrorism and the use of marine channels for contraband make security measures much more difficult. Furthermore, coastal populations and marine ecosystems climate change and its effects on have emerged as crucial elements of maritime security. This increasing amount of scope shows how government agencies, private organizations and international businesses are working to address the intricate problems of the marine sector (Cardiff University, 2023). Although all these entities are working in their own respective domains, their core agenda is better governance of the IOR.

Companies, especially those with interests in Indian Ocean in areas such as shipping and energy are also involved in governance. They help in maintaining environmental safety by resolving and reducing the impacts of oil spills from ships through their oil spill management systems, including Oil Spill CSR and PSO. They use advanced technology for oil containment and cleaning, have quick reaction measures, and work with their regional and global partners to manage the spills effectively (Team, 2017). These firms also support Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs to ensure that their operations are environmentally friendly and that they meet the global standards (Environment, 2020).

1.4 Effective Ocean Governance in the IOR

The public organizations develop the broad regulatory frameworks and promote cooperation among governments and the commercial organizations provide specific knowledge and operational efficiency. The goal of preserving the ecological and economic viability of Indian Ocean is also advanced by the support of these projects by MNCs through investments in sustainability and environmental preservation. These groups work together to address critical problems of piracy, illegal fishing, marine pollution and climate change in a bid to preserve a safe and balanced maritime environment. This multi-stakeholder approach is necessary in order to preserve Indian Ocean's vital role in global trade and regional development (Environment, 2021). These stakeholders' interactions frequently highlight inclusion, enforcement, and coordination shortcomings, despite their contributions. Public organizations have a hard time harmonizing laws and policies across countries, and commercial organizations and multinational corporations may put economic incentives before long-term sustainability. To overcome these obstacles and ensure the proper administration of Indian Ocean, various entities are needed to strengthen their partnerships and promote cooperation.

Through risk management, technology-driven solutions, and specialist security services, private enterprises make a contribution. To safeguard marine assets, companies such as Hudson Analytix, Hart Maritime, and Maritime & Underwater Security Consultants (MUSC) provide operational and consulting assistance. By offering specialist security solutions, groups like ESPADA, MAST Security, SF Group, and Neptune P2P Group are essential in defending ships from piracy and other marine dangers. To protect vessels operating in high-risk locations, especially in the IOR, these private security companies use a combination of highly skilled armed men and cutting-edge surveillance systems (Benkenstein, 2023). Furthermore, one of the main components of their services is the usage of surveillance technology, which allows for early threat identification and real-time monitoring. Technologies including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), thermal imaging cameras, radar systems, and automated identification systems (AIS) are used to follow suspicious boats and keep an eye on locations where piracy is likely to occur. By taking a proactive stance, shipping firms can foresee and steer clear of hazardous circumstances, improving worker and cargo safety (Amoss, 2024).

Ships are safeguarded regardless of their route or cargo thanks to organizations like ESPADA and Neptune P2P Group, who specialize in customizing security services to meet the unique demands of their clients. In order to provide complete risk management packages, MAST Security and SF Group concentrate on combining technology advancements with employee training. These services provide maritime operators, insurers, and other stakeholders confidence in addition to protecting vessels. Businesses that specialize in providing customized solutions that guarantee the safety of ships and their crews while transiting high-risk zones include Sinoguards Marine Security Limited, Seagull Maritime Security, and Solace Global. As part of their services, advanced anti-piracy systems such as automatic alarms, long range acoustic devices and armed onboard security officers are, however, frequently deployed (Iqbal, 2023). In addition, these businesses perform thorough route risk assessments to identify and eliminate any hazards, thus enabling ships to navigate through hazardous areas and piracy prone waterways without incident.

There is a high priority placed by companies such as Secure West International and the ASA Group on the safety of workers and cargo in providing complete risk management services for maritime trade. These companies offer complete security solutions, which include supply chain surveillance, port risk assessments, and escort services. They prevent theft, sabotage, and smuggling by helping to fix the flaws in the transportation process, thus ensuring safe and continuous commerce flows and thereby strengthening the region's economic stability, which depends greatly on safe shipping lanes (Iqbal, 2023). The dependence of the situational awareness in the Indian Ocean on the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) is enhancing. This is because this to public-private help joint stakeholders project track vessel collects movement, and look disseminates out real for time dangers data and respond intelligence to marine accidents. The RMIFC facilitates resource deployment and informed decision-making by combining data

from several sources, including radar systems, satellite data, and vessel tracking technology (Amoss, 2024). This skill is especially helpful when dealing with transboundary crimes like smuggling, illicit fishing, and piracy, when prompt and well-coordinated actions are crucial.

Conclusion

There are multiple public and private international maritime organizations working in the IOR, but still there are numerous challenges in the region regarding law enforcement and maritime security. As of now, there are a number of law enforcement agencies operational in the IOR to maintain maritime security and order at sea, however, security challenges including IUUF, smuggling, and trafficking still escalate with time in maritime domain. The complex maritime security challenges have been a grave concern in the IOR, infringing the traditional approaches to maintain security and drag law enforcement agencies and navies towards the adoption of cooperative mechanisms in light of UNCLOS to maintain order at sea in the IOR. That is the main reason that various public and private maritime security providers have gained prominence due to increase in blue crime in past few years in the security affairs from all over the world in the IOR which includes regional and extra-regional navies, law enforcement entities and bodies, security agencies, and regional organizations which all contribute in order at sea.

For the IOR to remain stable, secure important trade routes, and ensure sustainable use of marine resources, effective ocean governance is essential. Even if MNCs supply resources and worldwide clout, private organizations offer operational ability and knowledge, and public organizations offer the frameworks for partnership, there are still several obstacles such as resource exploitation, fragmented collaboration, geopolitical rivalry, and environmental degradation in the area. Governance initiatives are however often limited by this lack of cooperation among these parties. A multi-stakeholder strategy which sees the different actors play to their respective strengths and which runs across the different state, private sector and civil society stakeholders is thus needed to advance environmental preservation, maritime security and sustainable development in the IOR. That's why regional organizations should enable governance frameworks enabling public organizations such as IORA and IONS to work with other regional authorities to address transboundary issues such as piracy, IUU fishing and marine pollution. Establishing a centralized regional body to oversee operations and share resources could drive efficiency and reduce duplication of work. With private organizations' expertise of risk assessment, security, and surveillance, public institutions should set up formal partnerships with private entities. A structured framework for cooperation will foster the inclusion of private security services as part of big regional initiatives, furthering better governance.

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