



INDIAN OCEAN REGION GREEN WATERS WORKSHOP
Final Report/Executive Summary
26 August 2020

Introduction:

From 16 to 20 August, the Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies conducted the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Green Waters Workshop. Focusing on littoral security challenges throughout the IOR, the program brought over 70 participants together who represented a substantial portion of the Indian Ocean littoral. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the workshop was held in a digital format.

The program was the fourth IOR-focused event conducted by the NESA Center. This event also served as a capstone for a series of digital conversations conducted over the course of the summer months on maritime security-related topics. The degree of participation is a clear signal of the interest the IOR has for maritime-security related programming. The program's success is the result of other organization's efforts to support NESA, including NESA's sister center DKI APCSS.

Issues discussed in the workshop included the challenges resulting from the ever-changing methods of illicit networks operating in the IOR, the importance of maritime domain awareness, the necessity of understanding the wealth multiplier effect of the sea, and the impact of geopolitical competition on littoral spaces, among others.

Themes:

There is progress being made to conceptualize the IOR as one cohesive unit. Some of this work has been done at a conceptual level through publications, public statements, and various academic products. Certain institutions operate with a specific mandate to focus on the Indian Ocean littorals while making the argument that the challenges faced in one portion of the IOR likely exist in other portions. Despite progress towards a shared concept, the IOR is still largely defined by its component parts. Thus, the first theme of the workshop is:

- The IOR needs to be understood as a region in and of itself. Not only is the region already geopolitically vital, its importance is only to grow in coming decades. The region can and should be defined by the Indian Ocean, as it is that ocean that not only determines much of the wealth in the region but also its future development. Challenges emerging from the maritime domain are diverse and widespread and can only effectively be addressed through concerted action. The Indian Ocean is essential.

For IOR littoral states, maritime challenges are numerous and test not only the capabilities of regional states, but the institutions that sustain collective action in response to these threats. While maritime

challenges can be defined in a myriad of ways, this workshop centered on four types of challenges: illicit actions, environmental conditions, state actions, and geostrategic.

Illicit actions are those undertaken by either individuals or organizations operating purely outside international norms and national laws or violations of rules and/or norms by actors that usually operate within legitimate means. Maritime criminality is primarily undertaken by those who exist outside rules and norms. Trafficking operations, whether focused on narcotics, human beings, antiquities, or arms, is a persistent challenge for IOR littoral states. Violent extremist organizations also are often affiliated with smuggling operations or maintain their own smuggling operations to finance their political agenda. Such criminality is universally recognized as a threat, but what is far harder to identify are those who engage in criminal acts within legitimate business operations. This can include business endeavors that smuggle legal products like charcoal, medical goods (particularly relevant amidst the Covid-19 era), and illegally caught seafood.

Another challenge emphasized during the event were the challenges associated with environmental degradation throughout the IOR. Beyond the systemic challenge of climate change, there are the problems associated with overfishing, illegal dumping, other forms of pollution, and environmental contamination as the result of a maritime accident. In some cases, the challenges posed to the maritime environment can be addressed using traditional forms of naval and maritime law enforcement operations. Yet, most environmental challenges require new methodologies, the compiling of new data sets, and an improved understanding of the fragility of the sea.

A third type of challenge discussed were those that are related to state actions in the maritime domain. This category includes everything from interstate tensions that play out in the maritime domain to a lack of political will focused on the wealth dividends created by the sea. There is a need in the IOR to recognize that maritime challenges do not fit a mold corresponding to state boundaries. Likewise, regional institutions that have been created have a notably mixed record of efficacy, despite the proliferation of organizations that have at least some focus on the maritime space in the IOR.

The final category that emerged from conversations were the challenges posed by geostrategy. The IOR is a region on the rise, with numerous littoral states becoming more substantial economic actors. The region is also a critical pathway for the global economy. Major powers in the region and outside it will be interested in the goings on of the IOR. The added complication is that the world has entered a period of major power competition. This global environment will impact the IOR in numerous ways. Some of these impacts are being felt already, but others are to come.

- The security elements relating to addressing maritime threats is of immediate importance for IOR littoral states, but each category of challenge discussed also spoke to the region's politics. The Indian Ocean is economically critical to all IOR littoral states (and many states outside the region) and what changes conditions at sea will inevitably make an impact on shore. Thus, addressing threats is not merely the responsibility of navies, coast guards, or maritime law enforcement. Addressing maritime challenges requires the focus of state leaders and a response by many components of government. It remains all too common for maritime challenges to be viewed as niche security concerns.

The workshop also paid attention to economic factors as they relate to the maritime domain. Economic concerns in the IOR are connected to the challenges in littoral spaces, but both speakers and participants made mention of the economic forces shaping the IOR littorals. In the most traditional sense, littoral states can determine their economic health by looking to the vibrancy of their coastal communities. It is in such communities where maritime commerce constitutes the economic backbone. Whether fishing, commercial transport, or tourism, those who live near the sea will make their living from the sea.

Looking at the IOR, such coastal communities are amidst a transformative period. In some cases, coastal communities are struggling due to environmental changes or a collapse in fishing stocks. Others are seeing new economic pathways open due to coastal development and increased industrialization. Coastal communities throughout the IOR are changing and that process of change needs to be understood more comprehensively.

In parts of the IOR there is a developmental boom taking place. New port development projects are underway in South Asia, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Accompanying port projects are coastal development investment zones that are also flourishing. The development increase in parts of the IOR is certainly a reflection of the increased economic importance of the region, but also alludes to the region's geopolitical importance. More and more global investors are fixating on IOR littoral states. Such development inside a state certainly provides for new jobs and the possibility of new industry. However, such investment often arrives in the company of new actors who can complicate governance, bring geopolitical attention, displace existing economic sectors, and even complicate relations with neighboring states.

A final economic force discussed was how IOR littoral states will develop blue economy processes. The components of the blue economy – the sustainable use of ocean resources to achieve long-term economic growth – are attractive around the world. The IOR is no different. Yet, achieving results in the blue economy are more difficult. How can developing states in the IOR finance the up-front costs of such endeavors? How does a littoral state make the blue economy an economic cornerstone and not a niche economic activity? As with the rest of the world, the IOR is struggling to develop widespread elements tied to the blue economy.

- As with addressing littoral security challenges, addressing economic factors requires a multifaceted approach. The IOR is already a focus point for major economic investment and once the world exits the current pandemic environment, that trend will likely continue throughout the IOR. Yet, IOR littoral states need an accurate assessment of all the economic resources within their littoral zone. Those resources are defined by major infrastructural projects, but also the enterprises of coastal communities and potential gains from the blue economy.

A final theme from the workshop was that of littoral security methodologies. How should IOR littoral states address maritime security challenges? Challenges emerging from the maritime domain do not correspond to national boundaries, but every littoral state must individually arrive at an understanding of how they will protect their national sovereignty before they pursue a methodology for addressing challenges. Thereafter, each littoral state must decide if they will address challenges on their own or coordinate/cooperate with other nation states (and to what degree that coordination/cooperation would occur). Among speakers and participants, there was uniformity that all IOR littoral states must cooperate with each other and willing outside powers to adequately address challenges in the littoral spaces. How then should IOR littoral state cooperate? Should cooperation be focused on the sharing of information and data regarding the maritime domain? Should joint training or exercises be stood up? Do they work with nation states with a longer history of maritime operations to advance their own maritime capacity? Should states focus on strategic thinking and education to build trust and develop coordination? There are many questions to ask when thinking about methodologies and each actor must prioritize how they will pursue coordination with other nation states.

- Cooperation remains and should remain the primary methodology by which to address maritime security challenges. Institutions and relationships premised upon cooperation among equals should be sustained against challenges by both non-state and state actors seeking to gain advantage by dividing regional states.

Perspectives:

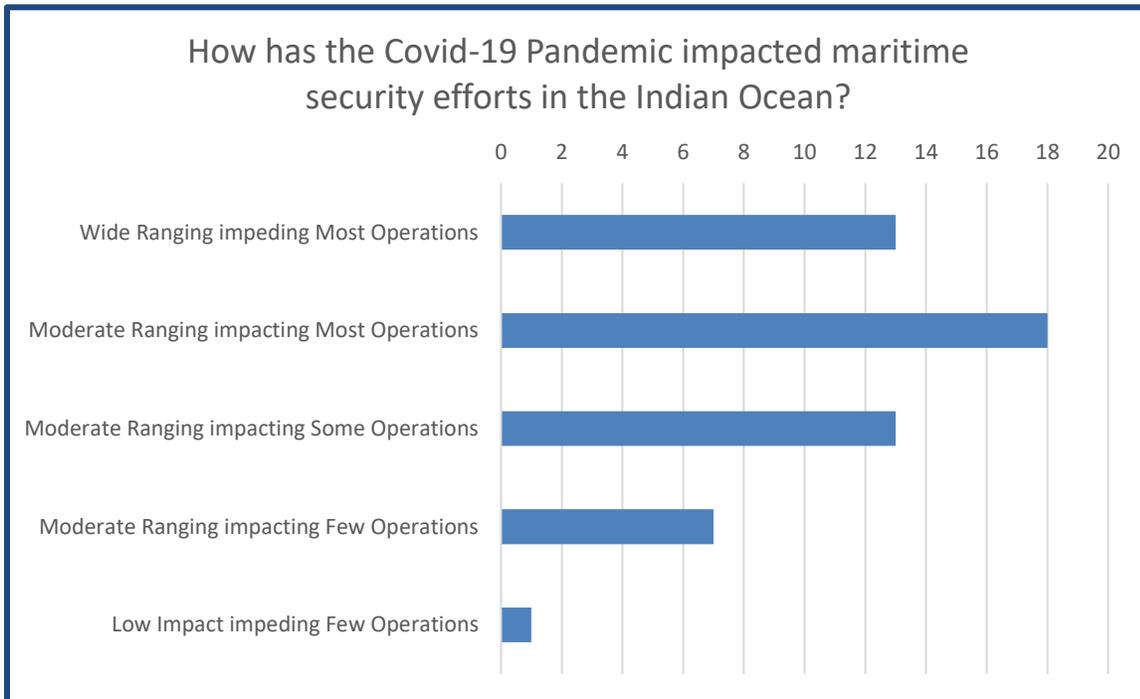
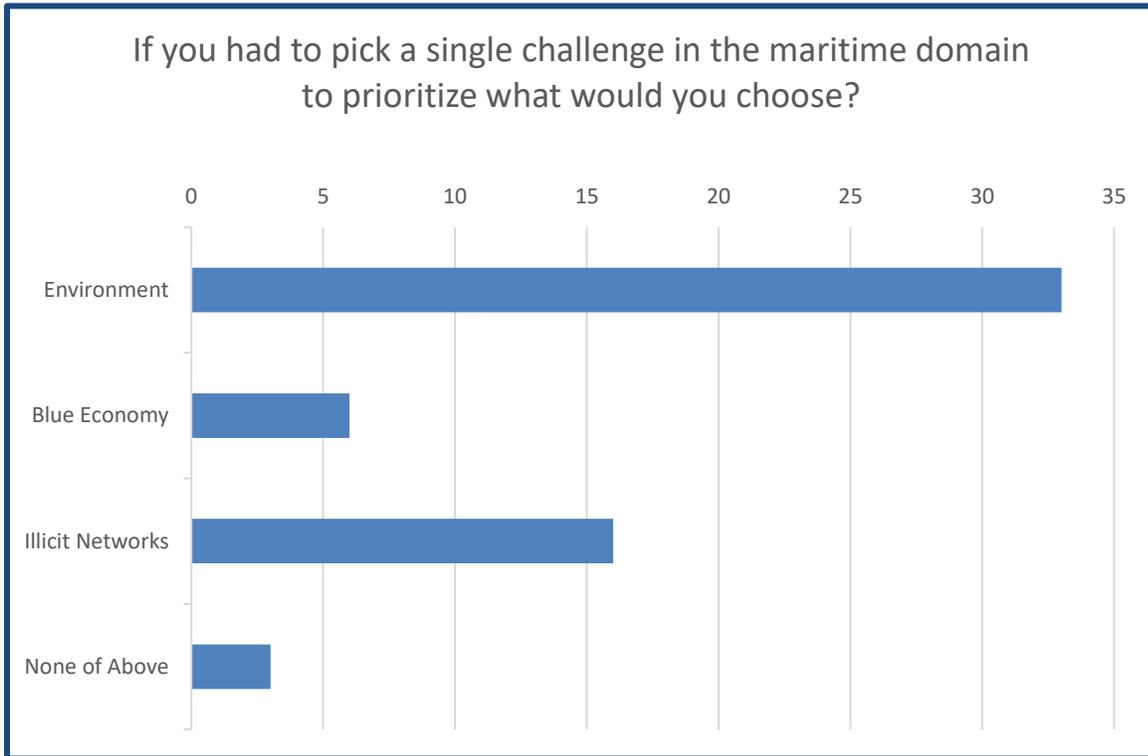
During the workshop, various perspectives were introduced, discussed, and debated. Such perspectives address concerns among IOR littoral states, arguments regarding trend lines, and necessary elements to secure littoral security in the IOR. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but represents the main perspectives brought forward that are worth noting.

- **The Question of China's Intent:** China's ambitions in the IOR are no secret. There is likely no region more critical for China's long-term national ambitions than the IOR, for it holds the markets and resource wealth that shall fuel China. There is ample speculation about China's interests among IOR littoral states and many littoral states are uneasy about Chinese action. At the same time, China's Belt and Road Initiative is primarily the only system capable of providing the investment needed for the development of many regional states.
- **The Future of American Leadership:** The United States remains the world's most powerful maritime actor and it has led institutions in the IOR devoted to enhancing maritime security along with supporting regional-led efforts of a similar nature. The region still relies on American security assistance. The region also needs far more from the United States than security provision. There are questions about the United States' political will to remain the dominant non-regional actor in the IOR and its ability to reform its own internal institutions to adapt to changing circumstances in the region. The United States' Indo-Pacific concept may hit the right notes, but the region is awaiting what actions follow.
- **What Europe's capabilities are in the IOR:** Europe remains a partner for IOR littoral states to address maritime security challenges and several European powers also are IOR regional states. Europe has routinely partnered in regional efforts designed to counter piracy, eliminate illegal fishing, protect undersea environments, and facilitate regional integration. The open question is what most of Europe is willing and able to do in the IOR. Few European powers have an expressed strategy towards the Indo Pacific, the IOR, or any subsection of the region.
- **Overcoming Sea Blindness:** far too many IOR littoral states do not integrate the importance of the sea into public policy decision-making, despite the sea providing the current and future wealth of many of these states. For instance, tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz are often discussed in a context removed from the maritime domain, even though the source of these tensions and the stakes of potential conflict most directly involve littoral spaces.
- **Making Progress in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** a solution for sea blindness is for a state to advance its efforts towards greater maritime domain awareness, or an understanding of the component parts that make up the sea and how those components shape life on land. MDA is not merely a security issue. It is a political, social, economic, and even cultural issue. MDA has strategic implications for a nation state, as well as highlighting the distinction between a country's capacity and capability. Without MDA becoming an effort many regional states actively pursue, there may be limited advancement in maritime security.
- **How India's Maritime Vision Impacts the IOR:** India possesses the most maritime capabilities of any regional state and India's actions in the maritime domain will have regional implications. Will India intensify its regional engagement on maritime topics? India actively engages with its regional neighbors on a variety of maritime issues (HA/DR, etc.) and is active in many regional institutions focused on the Indian Ocean. There is an assumption that India's regional engagement will follow this existing track into the future but rising geopolitical tensions between

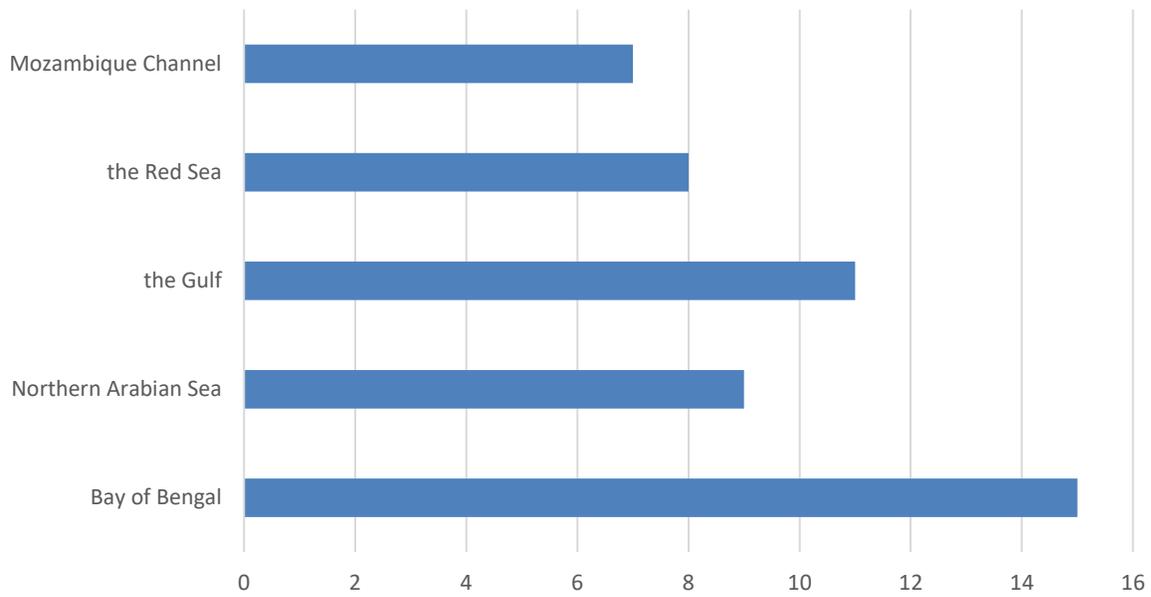
India and China introduce the prospect that geopolitics may become a more overt focus of India's maritime policy.

- **How Tensions on Land Spill into Littoral Zones:** there are positive trend lines regarding greater cooperation among IOR littoral states in the maritime domain. States in the Red Sea are increasing conversations on maritime security, as are Indian Ocean island states. Yet, there are security challenges on land that can spill into the maritime domain and undermine cooperative efforts. Ongoing regional competition in the Gulf, best highlighted by the ongoing Yemen civil conflict, is one such example. Competition this summer over the LAC between India and China is another example brought up.
- **How does the IOR Learn from Itself:** there was a debate among participants regarding the most effective way to gain insight from both regional and non-regional partners in the maritime domain. Should the focus be on building a state's capacity in the maritime domain? Should the emphasis be on information sharing? Traditionally, cooperative efforts in the maritime domain center on the tactical and operational realms, but geopolitics is creeping into the region and has in turn created greater interest in the strategic spaces as well. There remains a gap in strategic conversations on the maritime domain specifically.
- **The Direction of International Governance:** those cynical of regional governance often describe the collection of international organizations operating in the region as an alphabet soup of organizations that do not provide much benefit. Both speakers and participants largely reject that cynicism. Organizations like the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, EU Crimario, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the IOR International Fusion Center were highlighted as examples where international cooperation led to positive benefits for the region. There remain many challenges that are not focused on by international organizations, which leads to a debate between adding more organizations to the roster or to expand the focus of existing organizations.
- **The Efficacy of Technology to Advance Maritime Security:** technological advancements have been proven to alleviate the personnel challenge in the maritime domain. Greater access to satellite imaging and unmanned vehicles allow for a nation state to monitor littoral spaces more adequately. These technological applications make operations such as search and rescue more efficient. Yet, technology is not a solution to maritime challenges. Technological adoption is also a great example of an idea that seems wonderful on paper but becomes more complicated once initiated. The costs of adopting technologies is high at adoption and the maintenance of technological tools is complex.
- **To Reach for a Holistic Vision of Maritime Security:** the final day of the workshop featured a discussion on holistic approaches to maritime security. Holistic approaches pertain to a vision of the maritime domain, not what vessels or state resources are directed towards the sea. Such a vision factors in both traditional and non-traditional security threats, the economic and political issues connected to the sea, and the importance of relationships. IOR littoral states need to develop comprehensive visions for the maritime domain and possibly rethink their structures to define themselves as maritime powers.

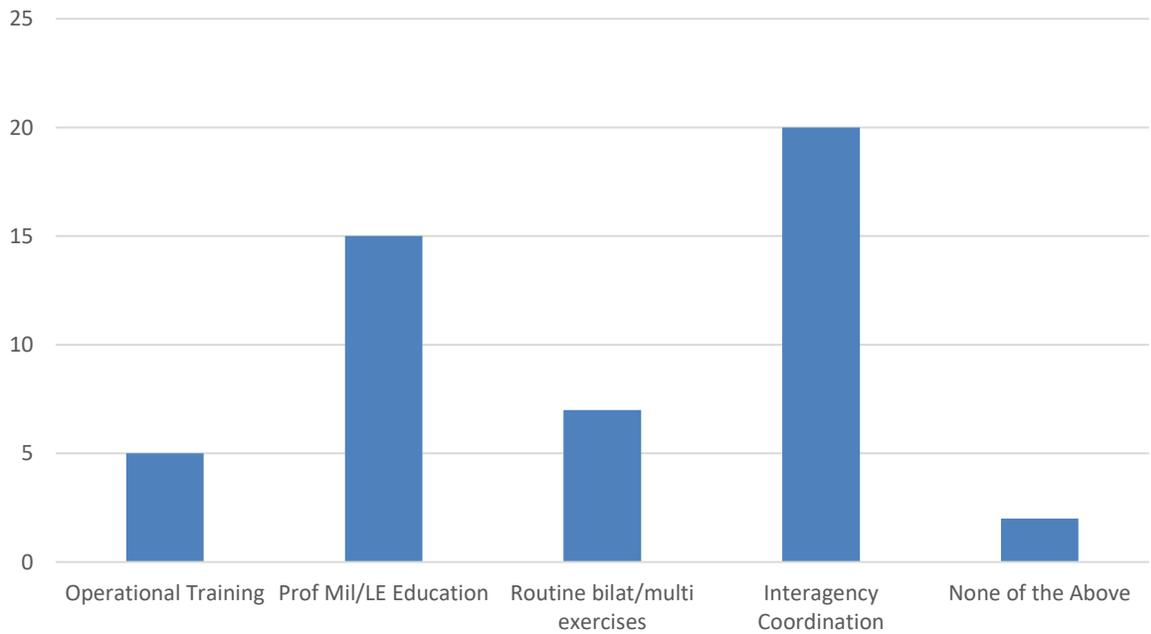
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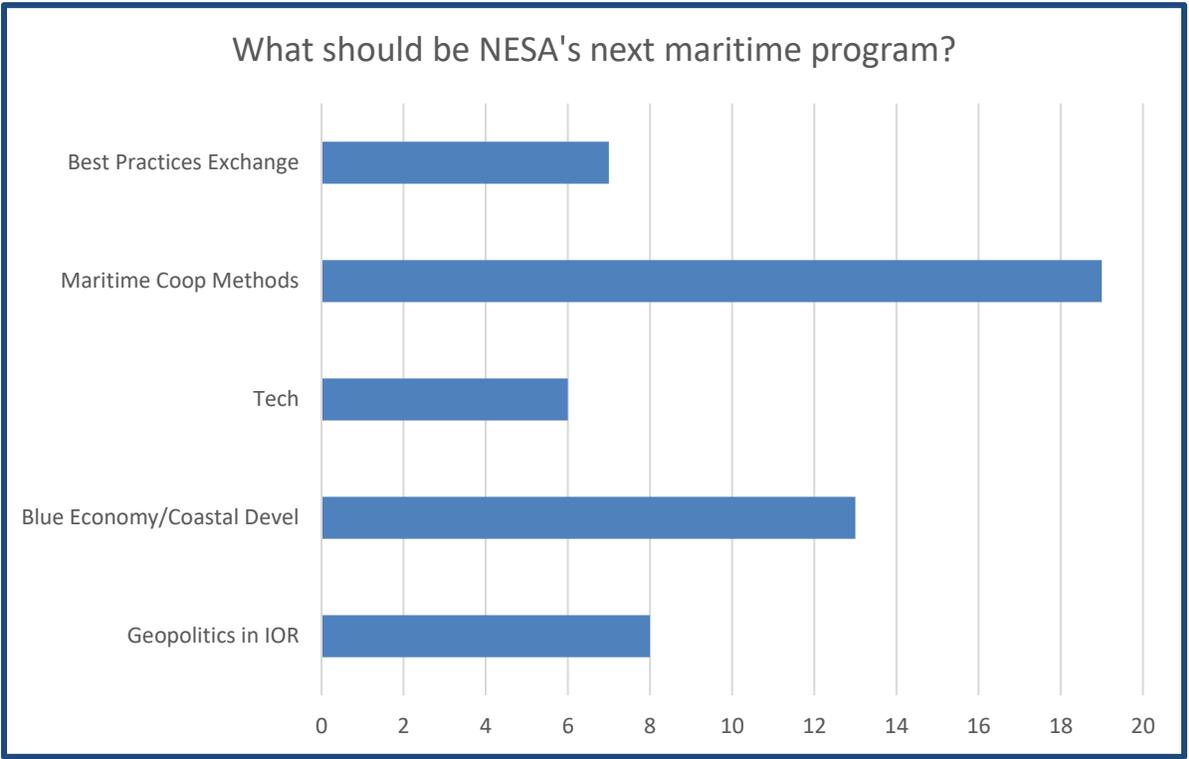
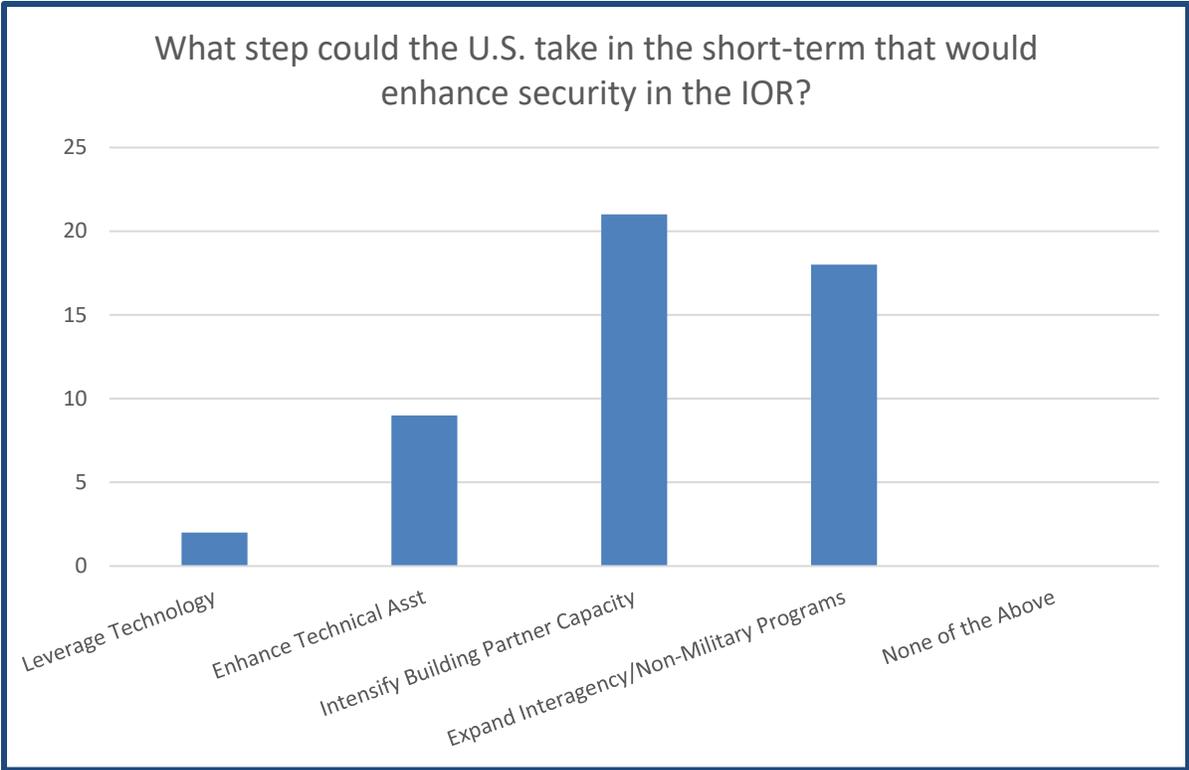


What area within the IOR would you recommend for MARSEC professionals to pay closer attention?



What aspect of capacity building do you think is of the highest importance?





Recommendations:

Based on the presentations, discussions, and debates from the workshop, there were certain recommendations that emerged. These recommendations are presented in a policy format and are specific to regional states, non-state organizations operating in the IOR, and non-regional states with a stake in the IOR.

- The maritime community needs to enhance their outreach to political leaders to communicate the economic costs associated with maritime challenges. Millions (if not billions) of dollars are being lost from illegal activity and environmental degradation. Many political communities are not aware of the scale of wealth available due to the sea.
- Lessons learned do not have to come from local experience. Local knowledge matters, but it is not the only source for finding new ideas for addressing maritime challenges. Madagascar could learn possibly as much from Sri Lanka as it could from Mozambique. Oman could gain as much from Indonesia as it could from the UAE. Looking further afield inside the IOR not only can provide these new ideas but will also help to build better awareness of the Indian Ocean as a region.
- The first step towards maritime cooperation starts at home with the interagency. Addressing littoral security challenges needs more than naval, coast guard, or maritime law enforcement attention. Littoral states need to integrate government functions together to focus on the sea.
- Cooperate to the degree possible within political realities. It takes time for trust to exist between nation states. Time is not a resource that usually exists when addressing littoral challenges. Thus, if politics keeps formal partnerships and cooperation from being possible, then maritime security efforts should work towards any type of collaboration possible. It may be as simple as increasing the frequency in which maritime security personnel encounter each other on patrol. The IOR has many examples of low-level cooperation and these should be used as models.
- Maritime Domain Awareness is not a buzzword. It matters a great deal towards developing both political understanding of the importance of the sea, but also gaining recognition of the sea's importance to society at large. Such efforts are low-cost and should be a priority for all littoral states.
- All actors need to communicate more effectively. Non-regional actors need to better communicate to the IOR what programs, opportunities, and support is available to regional states. Regional states need to more actively reach out to more experienced maritime actors to discuss what options are available for capability development. Organizations need to share information more openly with each other (including private enterprises). Research on maritime issues needs to be more openly shared.
 - In fact, the IOR needs an institutional device through which to communicate data. An organization like a fusion center but focused on administrative, academic, technical, and assistance data.
- IOR littoral states will have to navigate geopolitics in the region. This means gaining understanding that major actors will prioritize their operations (making some areas of the IOR seemingly more important than others). It also means evaluating short-term benefits versus long-term costs when it comes to engaging with major actors.
- Finally, all IOR regional actors focused on the maritime domain need to be evangelists for the importance of the sea. Such individuals should possess both maritime and political/policymaking knowledge. Such evangelists can make a better case for the economic value of the sea, the challenges associated with the maritime domain, and offer up both practical and innovative solutions to challenges.