



Maritime Security Cooperation The Next Port of Call

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Although it has gone largely unnoticed, both the 10-year anniversary of the EU-India Strategic Partnership and the adoption of the EU Maritime Security Strategy this year are momentous occasions to reflect on a topic of increased priority on the global political agenda: maritime developments in chartered and unchartered waters. Maritime surveillance and collaborative maritime security research can catalyse the effective and efficient use of maritime assets.

Addressing Shared Maritime Security Challenges

India and European countries meet in the Western Indian Ocean on a regular basis through EU and NATO missions. Shared security concerns have mainly revolved around securing global trade against Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the broader Indian Ocean. Although cooperation in counter-piracy was pinpointed at the EU-India Summit in Delhi in 2012 as one of the three areas in which the EU and India can intensify cooperation – next to terrorism and cyber security – this potential has largely remained unfulfilled. Moreover, the two have a wide range of shared maritime security

challenges. The EU maritime policy paper of March 2014 outlines several of these: international organised crime, restrictions on freedom of navigation, piracy, armed robbery, proliferation of weapons, terrorist acts against ships, cargo, passengers, ports and other critical maritime infrastructure, cyber-attacks on maritime or navigational information systems, and environmental risks.

The absence of further intensification of the security relationship between the two actors is surprising for several reasons. First, India is a natural ally for the EU in the Indian Ocean Region because of its geographical location as well as shared values of rule of law and multilateralism. Second, several

EU-India Summits and Declarations have time and again stated that cooperation in the security sphere is in the interest of both actors and should be strengthened. Thirdly, cooperation in counter-piracy missions and other counter-piracy initiatives in the region is one of the most promising, easy-to-reach and reasonably low-profile cooperation that currently glimmers on the EU-India horizon. It is very much a domain in which both actors can potentially converge and lead to a win-win situation. However, concrete actions are needed to strengthen ties and live up to the potential. Cooperation in maritime surveillance can serve as a catalyst herein. According to the EU policy paper and the recently released EU Maritime Security

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Strategy, this sector is“(…) still largely organised along sectoral and national lines. This may result in a suboptimal use of available surveillance capabilities”.¹ This may especially be so for both the Indian and the EU-navies. Both are short on assets in an increasingly unstable and insecure maritime environment. Although the Indian navy is developing and expanding as it experiences maritime insecurity close to home, the navies of EU-member states are reducing their naval assets for budgetary reasons, despite the rise in maritime security challenges worldwide.

Intensifying the Relationship At All Levels

The EU has a substantial naval presence in the north-western part of the Indian Ocean. It has set up the International Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) and Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings, in which India is an active participant. India has taken up a regional leadership role with the establishment of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), bringing together many littoral countries in the region. Safeguarding maritime security as well as preventing maritime tensions and rivalry to spill over to the waters that stretch out between India and Europe, is in the interest of both actors. Maritime cooperation, military-to-military contact and collective maritime surveillance are, therefore, paramount. Counter-piracy operations, joint-combined maritime security surveillance, common training and military exercises and multinational research programmes are potential avenues for bringing shared agendas forward. Unfortunately, only limited activities have been organised between the two. Despite various plans and good intentions, not much has actually been executed at the operational and tactical levels. Multinational research programmes have the potential to advance and deepen the relationship between the EU (maritime) countries and India. Sharing knowledge, developing new and improved weapon systems based on fundamental and applied research will provide a strong concrete foundation on which the two actors will be able to intensify their relationship at all levels: from the political to the tactical level.

This kind of cooperation will potentially lead to collaboration in other security fields and security issues as well, which is beneficial for India as well as Europe. However, the gap needs to be addressed in perceived performance and visibility of the EU in India. Moreover, there is a capacity gap on the EU-side related to austerity as well as political prioritisation. The crises in the Ukraine and Levant have reminded the

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EU that there are not only troubled waters, but also troubles on nearby lands. The EU Maritime Security Strategy (EMSS) is aimed at closing both gaps. The EMSS is not clear on the international partners and naval actors with which it seeks to engage with. This is a missed opportunity since European and Asian economies are more and more connected and interdependent, and there is a lack of synergy with EU Strategic Partnerships, in which maritime security is often a focal point. The Action Plan that will follow the EMSS under the Italian presidency later this year will hopefully set this right.

‘Focus on India’

Even though the vast majority of maritime cooperation takes place in a multilateral context mostly through NATO or EU missions, bilateral contacts have also emanated. The Netherlands sees India as a promising country to engage with in the maritime industry sector. The multiannual maritime project ‘Focus on India’ has sought to increase the chances for Dutch companies to enter the Indian market. Maritime knowledge exchange has added value to bilateral relations owing to Dutch know-how in the shipping industry, water management and maritime logistics on one hand, and the maritime growth potential and ambitions on the Indian side, on the other.

Individual EU member states with large interests in maritime affairs play a leading role in coming up with concrete ideas for cooperation and collaboration. Maritime cooperation, research collaboration, knowledge exchange and maritime surveillance are to be included in the rolling Action Plan of the EMSS. There are technological, administrative and bureaucratic challenges and hurdles to overcome and opportunities to be created by *all* participants in joint and combined programmes. However, in order to further cooperation and collaboration, the programmes need to be operationalised and materialised in the short term to make the advantages more evident to the political actors involved. Joint and combined research by leading technological institutes and universities, for instance, the Indian Defence

Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the Institutes of Technology from India and the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research TNO and Delft University, would be a concrete way of taking cooperation forward. This includes fundamental research, education, training and the establishment of academic, business or track-II platforms that will both discuss and meet up with maritime (security) challenges of the 21st century. This would be an illustration of the potential spin off from knowledge exchange and joint research programmes.

Both 2014 and 2015 offer momentum in bringing forward a shared agenda on maritime security. This is important for the EU not only because of the EMSS and Action Plan, but also because it currently chairs the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). For India, the new Modi government has acknowledged the need for maritime security and is seeking reliable partners to meet growing maritime (security) challenges. Relatively impartial players but maritime high flyers like the Netherlands should make use of the opportunities by boosting initiatives in exchanging maritime know-how, investing in joint research and innovation and jointly improving maritime surveillance. India should take the opportunity to answer its maritime needs. A combined approach, a common agenda and a concrete action plan of India and the EU should, therefore, be the next port of call.

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References

¹ *European Commission (2014) Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, ‘For an open and secure maritime domain: elements for a European Union maritime security strategy’, Brussels, 6 March. The EU Maritime Security Strategy of June 2014 can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security/index_en.htm*