

NON-TRADITIONAL MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES IN IOR AND PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY INITIATIVES: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The non-traditional maritime security (NTMS) has become the most concerning factor for the states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to distinctive and multifaceted challenges, which are getting more complex with advancements of technology and increasing presence of non-state actors in the region. The threats are deep and wide, and no maritime nation alone can combat them. Therefore, regional security initiatives prove more effective. Pakistan is effectively dealing with NTMS threats and challenges in its maritime zones and areas of responsibility. The study aims to evaluate Pakistan's contribution to addressing NTMS concerns as an individual state and being a member of different regional maritime security measures in IOR, and to identify the hurdles coming in the way of Pakistan in addressing escalating NTMS threats more effectively and maintaining regional stability. The study has been conducted using descriptive analytical research design, using Pakistan's role in regional maritime security as a case study. Primary, secondary and tertiary sources are used to collect and analyse data. Pakistan's response and regional collaboration to address NTMS concerns in IOR are explained using a theoretical framework of regionalism; Hence, making it a relevant research with the contemporary regional and global environment.

Key Words: IOR, Non-Traditional Maritime Security (NTMS), Regional Cooperation, Pakistan Navy, PMSA, PCG, Regionalism

Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has evolved as a theater of multiple non-traditional maritime security (NTMS) challenges because of state and non-state actors' divergent goals and hidden motives. Somalia Basin, Strait of Malacca, Red Sea, Bay of Bengal, Celebes Sea, and Sulu Sea are one of the highly affected areas of IOR due to NTMS and leading towards political instability, economic inequality, social inequity and humanitarian crises in IOR. The concept of security is linked generally with traditional threats.

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Still, the maritime domain is more vulnerable to NTMS threats and challenges, which directly relate to states' economy, trade and commerce. These challenges are causing threats to politics, social dynamics, the environment, economic activities, and maritime law enforcement with extended impact on regional security. There is a standing need to counter threats and deal with challenges in maritime zones of the states; however, the transnational nature of NTMS threats and challenges calls for cooperative security measures at the regional level, giving it a purview of regional security. Regional states' cooperation, collaboration, and coordination within oceanic spaces to defend against common threats in maritime zones refer to the definition of regional maritime security. Therefore, the research's core proposition is as follows: Pakistan's geostrategic location, vast maritime zones, mechanisms and operational capabilities to counter NTMS challenges make it a prominent candidate for enhancing regional approaches to marine security of IOR.

Regional maritime security in IOR has become a profound proclivity in the contemporary era due to increased NTMS challenges, which are potential threats to the volume of trade and commercial activities and states' reliance on maritime resources, connectivity, and communication. These threats and challenges are becoming complex with the advancement of technologies and metastasise across the maritime boundaries of regional states with vigor. According to Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, regional clusters are based on security since threats and dangers propagate faster in closer proximity (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).¹ Permeating NTMS challenges into other countries' maritime boundaries make it a case of regional response besides individual state response. For regional security, multiple organisations have been formulated occasionally to combat common security challenges in the region. Few of them are South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). However, regional mechanisms are still not effective enough to deal with the continuously complicating nature of these challenges, making regional security more precarious.

The research has used a descriptive analytical method to appraise regional maritime security of IOR and Pakistan's role within regional maritime security arrangements as the case study. The argument has been based and accentuated by primary data as a fundamental source for the NTMS issues being faced by Pakistan. Primary data is comprised of numerical references of NTMS incidents and law enforcement operations, which have been collected from open archives sources present in the Headquarters-Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (HQ-PMSA) and discussions with officials of relevant agencies. In contrast, secondary and tertiary data sources are used for analysis.

The research endeavors to study Pakistan's role in addressing non-traditional maritime security (NTMS) threats and challenges in its maritime zones and analyse the roles of key maritime institutions, including the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MOMA) of Pakistan, the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA), the Pakistan Navy (PN), and the Pakistan Coast Guards (PCG). The core aim of this study is to explore the efficacy of Pakistan's response within regional mechanisms to maritime security.

This paper has been organised into seven parts, as given: i. Regionalism as Theoretical Underpinning, ii. NTMS in Maritime Zones of Pakistan, iii. Institutions and Agencies of Pakistan to Deal with NTMS Challenges, iv. Pakistan's Response to NTMS Threats and Challenges, v. Pakistan's Role in Regional Maritime Security against NTMS Challenges, vi. Hurdles in Further Enhancement of Pakistan's Role, and vii. Conclusion.

Regionalism as Theoretical Underpinning

Since indigenous problems require indigenous solutions, NTMS challenges faced by the states of IOR need regional approaches to find solutions. Nonetheless, regionalism provides a practical framework for conducting the research. Regionalism is a political philosophy developed to give a distinct identity to regions apart from greater land masses or overall continents. The fundamental elements of regional identity could encompass specific geographical boundaries, ideologies, linguistic connection, cultures, economic interests, resources, and security (Rosecrance, 1991).² The core of regionalism was to promote and develop on common grounds as a part of a specific identity. As an inclusive ideology, regionalism encouraged all actors in any regional system to cooperate and develop regional organisations and institutions to achieve a shared understanding and find solutions.

Regional disconnectivity is one of the key causes of mistrust, ambiguity, and chaos, and it has become a challenge to maintain regional order in IOR. It is a geographical and geopolitical entity with a distinct identity driven by its specific features, activities, patterns of convergence and divergence, and security concerns. Among these security concerns of IOR, the most culminating one is intensifying NTMS challenges the regional states face. Since NTMS can infiltrate through maritime boundaries, regional response is considered an appropriate approach, giving reason to regionalism as the theoretical underpinning of this study. Following the regionalism approach, regional actors could help overcome alienation and expand maritime security for regional and extra-regional actors.

Moreover, through information and technology sharing, regional law enforcement agencies and instruments could keep check and balance over all problematic elements in the way of regional connectivity, economic growth and development.

Regionalism seeks solutions to regional problems through cooperation and combined efforts against common security challenges. For NTMS, it has also proven to be worth it. Piracy has been a challenge for maritime nations throughout history. IOR has been prone to piracy for ages. The highly infected nation is Somalia; however, their collective efforts have eliminated piracy off the coast of Somalia. Moreover, the success of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery in Asia (ReCAAP) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement (ReCAAP-ISC) serves as a noteworthy example of a fruitful maritime partnership, aimed at enhancing maritime security through a holistic approach. Regionalism is more effective and thorough at addressing regional risks.

NTMS in Maritime Zones of Pakistan

Pakistan is a significant state of IOR which rims the Arabian Sea adjacent to the Persian Gulf. This oceanic space houses important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) carrying large hydrocarbons and dry cargo to and from other regions. It also provides a gateway to Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics and China. NTMS has emerged as a challenge not only for international trade and commerce but also for all IOR coastal or littoral states' sovereignty, socio-economic growth and development, and marine health, besides the law and order. The complete maritime economic base of IOR, either offshore or onshore, is affected by NTMS challenges, particularly by causing issues for SLOCs and maritime resources. Pakistan becomes paramount due to its maritime boundaries and geo-strategic location. Khan and Sadiq have identified NTMS which Pakistan is facing in its maritime zones as piracy, blue crimes like gun running, arms smuggling, abductions, theft of marine resources, maritime terrorism, environment related issues, contraband economic activities, transnational organised crimes, and cyber threats. The number of NTMS challenges including Illegal, Unregulated, Unreported Fishing (IUUF), smuggling, theft and poaching with which Pakistan is dealing effectively is remarkable. Pakistan performs search and rescue (SAR) operations within 840 nm of the Area of Responsibility as assigned by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to enhance maritime security in the region(PMSA, 'Area of Responsibility').³

In addition, marine environmental security challenges have been affecting Pakistan's development and economy more than traditional security threats due to marine pollution due to oil or chemical spillage, ship emissions, ship ballast and untreated solid waste discharge from land, climate change, environmental

deterioration, coastal erosion, rise of sea level, resource depletion, and tropical cyclones. Environmental challenges hinder socio-economic development, endanger life at sea and land, and raise concerns regarding national security of Pakistan besides becoming an apprehension at regional level. Pakistan has taken initiatives to deal with all sectors identified by Buzan and Waever, i.e. military, political, economic, environmental and societal (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde 1998 Security),⁴ to sustain socio-economic growth and development and to protect national security of the state comprehensively.

Institutions and Agencies of Pakistan to Deal with NTMS Challenges

Pakistan has established a systematic national response to NTMS threats and challenges supported by the constitution, laws, and regulations according to international criteria. Institutions and agencies are working to make policies, laws, rules, regulations, and enforce them to maintain 'order at sea' through cooperation and collaboration in their maritime zones and areas of responsibility. Following is an overview of these institutions and agencies:

MOMA-Pakistan and its sub-organs performing specific duties in maritime domain including Pakistan Marine Academy, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, Port Qasim Authority, Karachi Port Trust, Gwadar Port Authority, DG Port and Shipping Wing, Merchant Marine Department, Korangi Fisheries Harbour Authority, and Marine Fisheries Department protect the marine environment through sustainable ports, controls marine pollution, ensures safety and security, promotes deep sea fishing, improves harbour environments, and endeavours to boost the economy via maritime business, maintains seafarer quality, competitive shipping growth, promotes safe navigation, protects fisheries, maximises protein, improve and modernise port and ship conditions, and boosts exports (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Maritime Affairs 2017).⁵

MOMA, Pakistan, aims to enhance the state's prosperity by strengthening its growth and development. The MOMA (Ministry of Maritime Affairs) is responsible for providing security to ports, developing ports, boosting seaborne trade, harnessing and utilising fishing resources, licensing ports, controlling vessel traffic, and providing security to coastal infrastructure.⁶

PN's responsibility is to protect and safeguard Pakistan's maritime interests. For this, they have a right to thwart maritime aggression, assist coastal communities in development, provide disaster relief, and contribute to international efforts to maintain order at sea (Pakistan Navy Official Website).

Furthermore, the law enforcement agency PMSA protects maritime interests in Pakistan's maritime zones. Their main concern is to ensure sovereignty and national jurisdiction.

For PCG, as outlined in the 1973 Act, the responsibility of this agency is to avert smuggling, unauthorised immigration, illegal migration, prevent the agents and spies which infiltrate coastal borders, and enhance defenses during times of conflict in Pakistan (Pakistan Coast Guard).⁷

Pakistan's Response to NTMS Threats and Challenges

Pakistan secures a vast area of the Western Indian Ocean as its primary responsibility to ensure 'order at sea' for safe navigation, uninterrupted global flows and other activities of national interests. Intrinsically, it is carried out by maritime law enforcement agencies of Pakistan onshore and offshore with the help of other institutions as and when required. The processes of law enforcement and sea policing are adhered firmly to national and international laws and regulations, and legal and constitutional binding support institutions and agencies of Pakistan to perform their duties despite the complex nature of NTMS in its maritime zones.

Pakistan has adopted IMO Regulations and Marpol 1073/1978 (Ministry of Port and Shipping), UNCLOS 1982 (adopted by PMSA), Customs Act 1969 (Federal Board of Revenue) and Exclusive Fishery Zone Act 1997 (MOMA, Pakistan). Furthermore, Pakistan has established disaster response plans to address NTMS issues in its jurisdiction (PMSA: Operations)⁸ Narcotics Substances Act 1997 (Ministry of Narcotics Control), National Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan (NMDCP), National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018, National Marine Disaster Contingency Plan 2019. Pakistan is signatory to several international conventions regarding NTMS, i.e. London Convention on Prevention of Polluting the Ocean (1972), United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, and IMO conventions including International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, and International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers reflecting its resolve towards its national as well as regional maritime security.

Pakistan Navy and law enforcement agencies support each other in their endeavors, and with other maritime-related institutions in times of crisis. All these agencies and institutions cooperate to provide disaster relief assistance. For example, in the flood-affected coastal regions of Balochistan, PN conducted a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operation in July 2022.

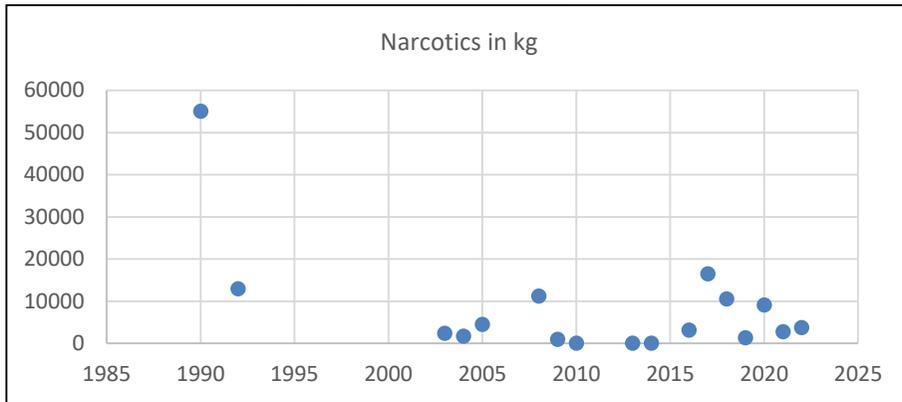
The afflicted population was given access to free medical clinics, de-flooded residential areas, and supplies like ration bags and drinking water by PN (Pakistan Navy Press Release).⁹ Similarly, PN has been a frontline support to help coastal communities of Sindh and Balochistan for immediate humanitarian assistance and relief operations caused by tropical cyclone BIPARJOY in June 2023. Navy personnel rescued 64 fishermen from the sea while evacuating 700 people from several Shah Bandar Goths (Radio Pakistan, "Pakistan Navy on High Alert").¹⁰

PMSA is the paramount agency that enforces the law in the maritime zones of Pakistan, in addition to other responsibilities in the line of duty. Despite limited resources and other challenges, it has been performing its assigned tasks and duties diligently with higher standards of professional expertise. Khan and Sadiq have evaluated PMSA data from 1987-2021 according to which PMSA has been successful in 241 search and rescue operations, 24 narcotics prevention operations, 30 minor/child labor operations; moreover, the rate of piracy and human trafficking is zero in Pakistan maritime zones (Khan and Sadiq, "Non-Traditional Security Threats").¹¹ Furthermore, between 1990 and July 2021, the PMSA seized over 137 tonnes of various substances, including heroin and crystal meth, valued at about PKR 83 billion. The Compendium of Drug Seizures at Sea, a joint publication of the Combined Maritime Forces and the UN Office on Drugs & Crime also recognised PMSA's anti-drug operations. During the last ten years, smuggling of commodities and trafficking of people, including illegal migrations, have drawn a lot of attention. PMSA has successfully carried out 228 anti-smuggling operations including 24 narco-smuggling cases, and seized various types of illicit goods including alcohol and illegal gasoline with a street value of more than PKR 15 billion (Khan and Sadiq, "Non-Traditional Security Threats").¹²

One of the primary responsibilities of PMSA is to protect Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from IUUF and unlawful economic activities, as well as protect living and non-living resources. PMSA performs anti-poaching operations, commonly against fishermen from India in Pakistan's abundantly resourced Indus Delta region. According to Pattern of Life (POL) data of the past five years (July 2016-2021), there were on average 1150 boats reported each year within Pakistan's EEZ, of which 55-60 were intercepted by PMSA surface units and 8841 fishermen were detained in the eastern part of EEZ. Other boats were repelled outside EEZ before they could begin fishing in Pakistan's maritime zones. A total of about PKR 427 million has been deposited in the Government of Pakistan's treasury due to the efforts of PMSA. The actual number could be significantly higher because these estimations are based on the agency's discovery. In 2021, PMSA seized over 5000 prohibited nets to protect Pakistan's fish resources.

Prior to the creation of PMSA, it would be pretty tricky to calculate the net value of the exploitation of fish resources by unauthorised fishing trawlers and boats, which has significantly been controlled (Khan and Sadiq, "Non-Traditional Security Threats").¹³

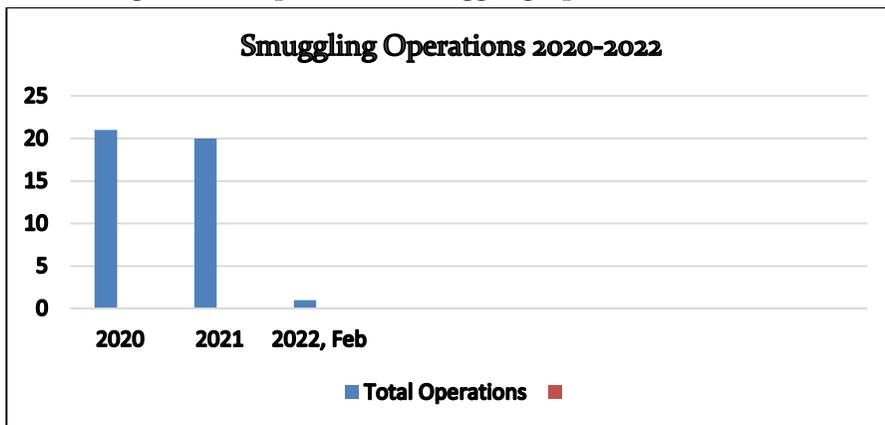
Figure 01: Graph of Anti-Narcotics Operations by PMSA



Source: Authors have compiled the graph after collecting and analysing primary data from HQ-PMSA.

The above graph offers a chronological overview of narcotics seizures, shedding light on the challenges and successes in combating the illegal drug trade over the years. Tons of data worth billions of rupees were recovered during these operations. The fluctuations in quantities emphasise the continuous efforts required to address this complex issue and the importance of effective anti-narcotics strategies.

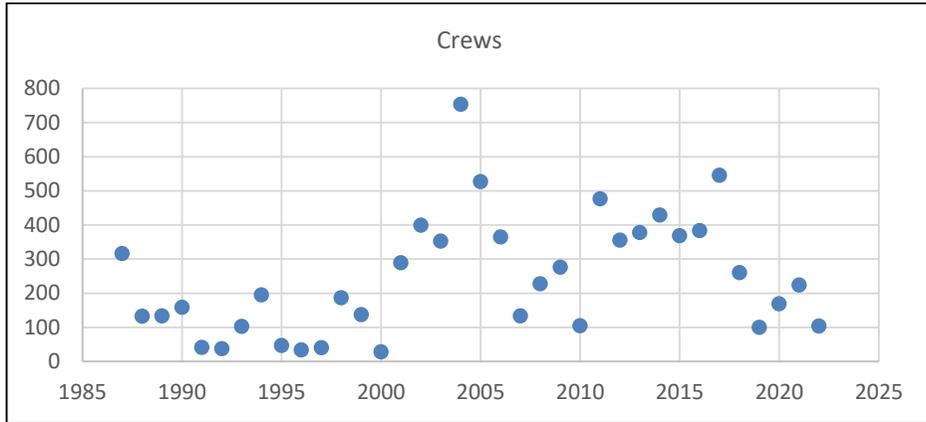
Figure 02: Graph of Anti- Smuggling Operations 2020-2022



Source: Compiled by authors

Figure 02 reflects an example of achievement in the realm of anti-smuggling operations. According to the available data, 21 operations were executed in 2020, followed by 20 in 2021 and one in February 2022.

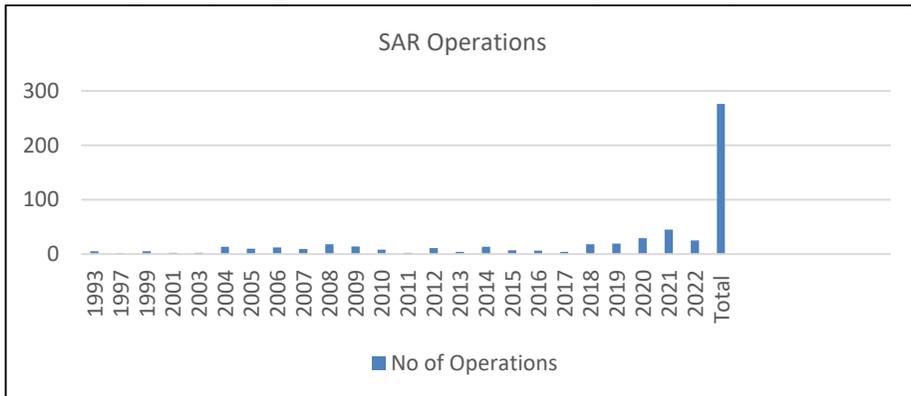
Figure 03: Graph of IUUF 1987-2022 (Indian Fishing Boats)



Source: Authors' compilation.

Figure 03 above offers a comprehensive overview of IUUF activities involving Indian fishing boats spanning several decades. Conducting operations involving Indian fishing boats holds paramount significance. From 1987 to 2022, PMSA has undertaken numerous such operations, accounting for a recorded crew 14,765. The fluctuating crew numbers from year to year emphasise the ongoing challenges in combating IUUF and the importance of sustained efforts to ensure sustainable and responsible fishing practices.

Figure 04: Graph of Search and Rescue Operations by PMSA



Source: Authors' compilation.

The above graph demonstrates PMSA's endeavors to address security challenges domestically and internationally. From 1993 to 2022, PMSA conducted 276 successful operations.

Pakistan Coast Guards (PCG) have been performing their operations efficiently against smuggling networks, weapons, and illegal migrants throughout the coast. PCG's efforts to counter smuggling across the coastal belt of Pakistan have been successful in failing the evil ambitions of supplies of 22104.156 kgs. of hashish, 218.75 kgs. of heroin, 3225 kgs of opium, and 82955 bottles of beer ("Pakistan Coast Guards").¹⁴ Moreover, their endeavors to prevent illegal migrations have been quite successful. PCG officials have detained thousands of illegal migrants in recent years, and have been successful in stopping 1259 Afghans, 10 Bengalis, 50 Iranians, 2 Yamani, and 3 Uzbeks ("Pakistan Coast Guards"). Along with illegal migration, 26000 gallons of Iranian fuel were recently seized, which was being smuggled into Pakistan. Besides, PCG has recovered 1000 kgs. of hashish worth \$1.1287 million from Pashni ("Pakistan Coast Guards").¹⁵

The above data shows genuine efforts and the efficient role of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies in preventing NTMS challenges within its maritime zones in Western IOR. It shows the degree of operational preparedness of these agencies, which has been reflecting its commitment to the security and peace of the region. Furthermore, Pakistan's maritime-related institutions and agencies work under a legal framework and show their veritable concerns for regional security.

Pakistan's Role in Regional Maritime Security against NTMS Challenges

A cooperative regional maritime security approach prioritising dialogue, prevention, and interoperability in IOR is always preferred by Pakistan and its institutions and agencies including MOMA, PN, PMSA, and PCG over unilateralism. Pakistan has established solid maritime ties with East African countries rimming Indian Ocean, Gulf states, West Asian states, South Asian States, Arabian Peninsula states and neighbours to foster cooperation and collaboration within the region.

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MOMA), Pakistan, is the relevant institution that fosters cooperation and collaboration in the maritime sector within the region. Since its inception, it has extended its support to policy decision-making processes and connected with all relevant institutions, agencies, and officials looking for cooperation. It places a high value on its ties with its neighbouring countries, with areas of shared interest in the maritime domain.

In September 2019, MOMA declared its intention to launch a ferry service that would link ports of Karachi and Gwadar with Dubai, Oman, and Bandar Abbas which was intended to make it easier for people to travel to these places by giving them additional routes that might also be used for religious tourism. In January 2020, Pakistan hosted the Pak-Africa Trade Development Conference in Kenya and explored new potentials and ways for Pakistan's engagement with African states to enhance trade. MOMA was an active participant in considering new avenues. MOMA deliberates with other countries regarding deals of ships, submarines, and other hardware related to maritime requirements, technical support, and training. In March 2022, Marine Shipyard Turkey and MOMA signed a contract to supply and manufacture Tug Boats (MG, "Port Qasim, Med Marine Turkey").¹⁶

The development of the maritime industry for a sustainable blue economy is the core responsibility of MOMA. It established a strong commitment with the UAE in June 2022 to improve intergovernmental collaboration and shared development in the maritime sector (Ministry for Maritime Affairs, "H.E. Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi").¹⁷ In February 2023, PIMEC was also held as a joint effort of PN and MOMA of Pakistan to enhance economic cooperation at regional level.

The Pakistan Navy has significantly enhanced regional cooperation and collaboration through effective naval diplomacy to deal with maritime security challenges. PN employs cooperation over conflict, prevention over retribution, and multilateralism over unilateralism. Pakistan has been participating in every regional forum which welcomes Pakistan's participation in regional initiatives to promote peace and cooperation and address NTMS challenges. PN is part of Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) under Operation Enduring Freedom to eradicate NTMS under one operational authority. Pakistan remained part of Japan-led OEF-MIO from 2001 to 2010 to combat terrorism in IOR and completed this tenure successfully in January 2010. Pakistan joined Combined Task Force-151 in January 2009 to fight piracy in the Indian Ocean, mainly in Somalia. PN has led CTF-151 eight times on a rotational basis since its inception [38] and has been an active participant of CTF-152. Pakistan launched autonomous Regional Maritime Security Patrol (RMSP) in 2018 to address classic and novel Afro-Asian Ocean threats.

PN is a regular participant in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), International Maritime Organization (IMO), West Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) as an observer, Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), ASEAN-ARF, SAARC, South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), and South Asia Seas Programme (SASP). In addition, PN has engaged with African states under its "Engage Africa Policy" to explore new collaboration and development opportunities.

For enhancement of cooperation in IOR, Pakistan is providing training to twenty one regional states including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Gambia, Ghana, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkmenistan, UAE, and Yemen which is facilitated by Pakistan Naval Academy("117th Midshipmen & 25th SSC Course Commissioning Parade, 2022").¹⁸ PN has provided naval training to these states under advisory, operations, and technical support. Pakistan has trained Qatari naval officers intending to enhance combat efficiency and readiness. Pakistan also deputes its officers in UAE to provide training to local security forces and naval forces. Joint naval exercises have also occurred between them ("Pak-Gulf Defense and Security Cooperation").¹⁹

Table- 1: Pakistan's Engagement in Joint Naval Exercises

Pakistan Joint Naval Exercises	Nature of Exercise	Period / Year	Participants
Sea Guardians-2020	Bilateral	2020 inward (series of joint exercises)	Pakistan and China
PASSEX	Bilateral	2020	South Korea and Pakistan
Aman	Multilateral	2007 onward Every two years except 2015	Pakistan, Australia, China, Indonesia, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the UK, and the USA
Mavi Balina (Exercise Blue Whale)	Multilateral for cooperation	2016	Turkey, Pakistan, Bulgaria, Canada, Romania, Spain, US
Turgutreis (I-V)	Bilateral	2020	Turkey and Pakistan
Doğu Akdeniz	Multilateral	Every Two Years	US, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, South Africa, Ukraine
MALPAK-II	Bilateral	2018	Malaysia and Pakistan
BARRACUDA	Multilateral	Since 2007 (Series)	Pakistan, USA, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bahrain, China, France, Indonesia, Iran, IMO, Japan, KSA, Maldives, Oman, Russia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Tanzania, Turkey

Source: Authors' compilation of data.

Pakistan Navy endeavours to support countering NTMS challenges as and when required by maritime law enforcement agencies to ensure safe navigation for all and to maintain maritime safety and security in the region. PN has traditionally adopted an outreach-focused strategy that reduces hostilities and fosters international trust. Moreover, PN's continuous ship deployments and participation in various bilateral and multilateral drills show its resolve to counter NTMS challenges in the region and its commitment to ensure maritime peace and order (Khan Saddique, "Hilal English").²⁰ Furthermore, Pakistan's outreach-focused regional connections in joint, collective or collaborative exercises are accurate depictions of regionalism to seek indigenous solutions of indigenous problems.

The intentions behind all the conducted exercises organised by PN and/ or PMSA, including Sea Guardians-2020, PASSEX, Aman, Mavi Balina, BARRACUDA, and MALPAK, are aimed at fostering cooperation, coordination, and communication within the region through friendship, mutual understanding, and trust. Furthermore, these maritime exercises enhance a cordial environment by eliminating alienation toward each other within IOR to secure the ships while voyaging through critical zones and to enhance capabilities against maritime crimes. States utilise the opportunity of maritime and naval exercises to increase interoperability and to learn from each other about securing marine environment by adopting advanced techniques against serious NTMS like piracy and theft, sea mine diffusing, maritime terrorism, anti-smuggling and trafficking operations, illegal fishing practices at commercial level like trawling, dredging of sand and gravel, and oil or chemical spills. Such cooperation helps states combat NTMS challenges, improve efficiency in handling disasters and emergencies in waters, joint maneuvering, and commercial interests, and enhance capacities for SAR operations in IOR.

Pakistan's only law enforcement agency, PMSA plays a significant role in regional maritime security. Since it is mandated to perform sea policing and SAR operations, it extends help and assistance in rescuing trapped fishermen, onboard crew, and passengers, besides vessels in distress, without any prejudice of religion or nationality on humanitarian grounds. It also helps fishing boats avoid entering neighbouring waters and guides them about weather conditions, even in other countries, to promote 'order at sea', harmony, and regional cooperation. PMSA monitors local and international fishing trawlers using surface platforms and employs airborne surveillance to ensure the deep-sea fishing policy, consequently securing IOR against NTMS challenges.

Hurdles in Further Enhancement of Pakistan's Role in Regional Maritime Security

As mentioned earlier, Pakistan has been active in IOR in its capacity to counter NTMS threats and is trying hard to mitigate elements causing hurdles for safe navigation, further affecting socioeconomic growth and development of the regional states. Its status of being a robust partner to international commitments like IMO, and the US-led Combined Task Force, CTF-150, CTF-151, and CTF-152 toward countering piracy, terrorism and other NTMS challenges reflects its seriousness in securing oceanic spaces for the broader interest of the international community and shared responsibility. At regional level, multiple organisations are working in IOR and its sub-regions having particular motives and objectives including IORA, South Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement, South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission, Regional Commissioner for Fisheries, Western Indian Ocean Tuna Organization, Commission for Conservation of BlueFin Tuna, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), Indian Ocean Data Rescue Initiative, and Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission. Many regional organisations and initiatives indicate an understanding of regional actors of IOR about regional maritime security and the importance of its different aspects. It supports the baseline argument of the undertaken research that solutions of regional challenges rooted in NTMS need to be sought in regional wisdom and cooperation, further strengthening regionalism's approach.

Pakistan is situated at the threshold of critical SLOCs and gateway to significant sub-regions. It takes part in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), ASEAN-ARF, SAARC, South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, and South Asia Seas Programme as a member. At the same time, it is an observer state in the West Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS). Therefore, besides its agencies' resolve, capabilities, and operational preparedness against NTMS threats and challenges, it has the natural capacity to perform an enhanced role in IOR's regional maritime security initiatives. In contrast, Pakistan's level of regional engagement against NTMS challenges in IOR gets limited. IORA is a prominent regional initiative through which Pakistan can participate in different activities important for regional maritime security with cooperation of other regional maritime nations, but despite its willingness shown several times to become a part of IORA, Pakistan's request is declined due to regional politics. As India dominates these regional arrangements, Pakistan finds limited turf to perform to be a part of regional responsibility.

It leaves several questions behind based on geopolitical realities. Such regional organisations are meant to promote cooperation for common goals and collective security, and the regime established through these organisations not only provides a common ground for growth and development but also international harmony and trust which is deficient in the case of Pakistan. Similarly, there are initiatives which are dormant in IOR. If revived, enhanced possibilities of better regional maritime security and 'order at sea' can be enhanced. The member states' regional organisations and initiatives, like maritime cooperation or naval exercises, can potentially create enough deterrence toward non-state actors and elements causing challenges to NTMS collectively. Nevertheless, the geopolitics of IOR leaves less space to work in cooperation and collaboration, failing regionalism in IOR and creating hurdles for Pakistan in the way of enhancing its regional role for collective regional activities and endeavours, aiming to disconnect Pakistan from regional forums. Pakistan's potential, concrete efforts, and substantial role could benefit the entire IOR region.

Conclusion

Since NTMS challenges in IOR continuously intensify and disturb 'order at sea' for safe navigation and economic activities. Pakistan has been proving its worth by dealing with these challenges in its maritime zones. It has been open to work with governments of regional states and welcomes cooperative measures to counter NTMS challenges in IOR. Its significant regional contributions and efforts to counter NTMS challenges cannot be ignored. For this purpose, Pakistan is continuously working on capacity building for itself and other regional and sub-regional actors through different initiatives like joint patrolling and maritime or naval exercises to enhance interoperability and promote trust, understanding, and harmony among the participants. However, NTMS challenges are still present in the region due to different overt and covert factors restricting Pakistan's role in the region.

Multiple organisations work in IOR, but a regional disconnect is still caused by lack of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination in regional maritime security efforts. This disconnect is decreasing the efficacy of regional arrangements and initiatives in IOR against NTMS challenges. Instead, NTMS threats and challenges are escalated further as non-state actors have strong mutual connectivity and hands-on technological expertise. In contrast, current regional maritime security arrangements and techniques are not as effective and deterring to non-state actors, giving space to further initiatives under regionalism besides activation and reviving current organisations.

Pakistan has been extending its goodwill and support to regional maritime security resolve, and believes in comprehensive security through multilateral cooperation and collaboration. Its inclination toward regionalism as the right approach is commendable and has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of regional measures in mitigating the severity of NTMS challenges. Nonetheless, there is a need for a legal regional framework under which Pakistan could play an enhanced role for comprehensive maritime security as the transnational nature of NTMS threats demands it.

Endnotes

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