
RUSSIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

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Russia is located far from the Indian Ocean, but the region has always played an important role in the countrys strategy. During the Soviet times, Moscow maintained steady presence in the Indian Ocean, including naval presence. After the collapse of the Soviet union, its attention to the region decreased due to internal reasons, but in the latest decade Moscow is coming back to the Indian Ocean, which manifests for example in Russian naval ships conducting anti-piracy operations near the coasts of Africa. At the same time, having limited trade and security relations in the region, Russia is often seen as playing only marginal role or no part at all in the Indian Oceans affairs. However, Russia as a global power has vital economic and strategic interests tied to the region. As part of its Pivot to the East strategy, Russia regards developing stronger diversified ties with regional players in all areas ranging from strategic to trade or scientific as one of its foreign policy priorities.

At the official level, one strategic document □ Russias Maritime Doctrine till 2020 □ specifically deals with the countrys interests in the region. Russias Maritime Doctrine till 2020 views the Indian Ocean as one of regional priorities and formulates three long-term objectives of the Russian policy in the region: a) developing shipping and fisheries navigation as well as joint anti-piracy activities with other states; b) conducting marine scientific research in Antarctica as the main policy direction aimed at maintaining and strengthening Russias positions in the region; c) promoting the transformation of the region into a zone of peace, stability and good neighborly relations as well as periodically ensuring naval presence of the Russian Federation in the Indian Ocean.

Moscows main interests and concerns in the Indian Ocean are connected both to traditional phenomena characteristic to the region and altering regional dynamics.

From the strategic point of view, the Indian Ocean is increasingly seen as an arena of a great game, an area of competition between great powers. Those competing are China and the US, or China and India. In this context, conceptualization and instutionalization of the Indo-Pacific as well as India □ Japan initiative of Asia □ Africa Growth Corridor are often viewed as manifestations of this power game, coming after Chinas attempts to involve regional players into the Belt and Road Initiative that is often seen as not an economic initiative but rather a geostrategic plan. Importantly, smaller regional states, including Sri Lanka, might be increasingly used as playing fields or even bargaining chips in this great powers game.

Transformation of the Indian Ocean in an arena of confrontation is surely against Moscows interests. First, any conflict or severe tensions of such a scale in the area as important as Indian

Ocean will have long-lasting repercussions not only for the regions security and prosperity but for the whole world and would eventually affect Russia. Second, Moscow maintains close relations with both Delhi and Beijing, and being forced to choose between these two strategic partners is a worst-case scenario for Russia. In light of this, Moscow could to a certain extent use regular meetings in Russia – India – China strategic triangle format to somewhat ease the tensions and contribute to bridging the gap between Delhi and Beijing.

Traditional security threats coming from non-state actors – piracy, terrorism, drug-trafficking etc. – continue to give reason for Moscows concern. They are now exacerbated by the emergence of new means of communication or attack linked to the technological revolution – for example, artificial intelligence and robotics technologies. Ensuring digital security in the Indian Ocean is no less important now, with regional states being increasingly susceptible for cyber attacks. In this context the need for security and safety of deep-water cables is also worth mentioning. At the same time, recent technological developments create new opportunities for cooperation and new instruments allowing to tackle existing challenges more efficiently.

Another set of issues worth Moscows attention deal with the fact that a lot of regional countries have quickly growing population that may have a significant effect on global migration flows and potentially give rise to food and water security challenges. This could at the same time both give to Moscow new of opportunities for cooperation with regional players and provoke unrest.

Last but not least, Indian Ocean is faced with a number of environmental challenges that affect all other development factors and challenges and will significantly alter the geostrategic and geoeconomic map of the region and the world as a whole in the years to come.

Altering regional dynamics and growing instability call for closer cooperation between regional states; it should also involve non-regional actors. Regional situation determines the need for developing common approaches and joint actions in order to develop a multilateral, inclusive, non-confrontational order based on mutual respect and international law. Smaller states strategic autonomy is to be ensured.

For Moscow, role of fundamental principles of international law (including United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and non-exclusive multilateral institutions, both global and regional (first and foremost, the United Nations), is intrinsic in this context.

A certain lack of institutional framework is characteristic for the region, there is no regional security architecture as such. While rigid and binding collaboration mechanisms are unlikely to be formed in the Indian Ocean in short- to mid-term, it is vital to develop and reinforce dialogue platforms and collaborative frameworks, stimulate transparent and inclusive dialogue and strengthen confidence-building measures. Russia with its long history of multilateral diplomacy could provide great support to regional multilateral dialogue frameworks. In the longer term, developing and promoting such initiatives would also contribute to Russias Greater Eurasia initiative.

As to more practical issues, given its ample defense capacities, Russia could also serve as a security provider in the region with regard to anti-piracy, anti-terrorism and anti-trafficking and assist regional states in developing their own capacities in these areas. Russian navy could also contribute to disaster-relief operations in the Indian Ocean. Moscows great technical and scientific potential could also make it a contributor to regional digital security and safety of critical

infrastructure.

It is also interesting to look at a potential Shanghai Cooperation Organisations role in the region. Its scope has been traditionally limited to Central Asia, but with India and Pakistan joining as full members and Sri Lanka as a dialogue partner, the Indian Ocean has now also entered its scope. Of course, it is too early to argue that the SCO can become an important player in the region, but it could serve as one of a dialogue platforms and, given its anti-terrorist component, share expertise on fighting non-state security challenges.

These ambitious strategic and practical tasks cannot be achieved by cooperation at the official level alone, without contribution by civil societies, businesses, expert communities, and think tanks of regional and non-regional countries. Invested 1.5 and 2-track dialogue also serves to promote mutual understanding in interests of peaceful development.

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