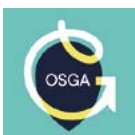




A MATURING MARITIME ORDER: the Regional Maritime Security Architecture of the Western Indian Ocean



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Indian Ocean,

where the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indo-Pacific converge, is a strategic web of critical maritime routes across which nearly 12% of global trade transits each year - including a substantial share of oil exports. Amid geopolitical tensions, recent conflicts and persistent threats such as piracy, IUU fishing, maritime terrorism, trafficking and marine pollution incidents, safeguarding these waters is critical for regional stability and global commerce.



Established in 2018,

the Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA) is central to this effort - serving as the foundation for a coordinated, African-led maritime security capability through its two operational centres, the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar for the exchange and fusion of information, and the Regional Coordination of Operations Centre (RCOC) in Seychelles for operational coordination at sea, together with the national centres of the signatory states, and other regional and international partners.

The RMSA, ultimately, aims to achieve a minimum level of regional maritime capability which would act as a deterrent to illicit maritime activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO).

Progress since the Architecture's inception is tangible.

As of January 2026, the region has committed **43 surface and air assets** and undertaken **45 operations at sea**. Partnerships extend to international actors such as the EU Naval Force (Operation Atalanta), India, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Significant operational gaps remain:

1. incomplete real-time monitoring of vessel movements, limited intelligence and vessel tracking capabilities, shortages in available assets and adequately trained personnel, underdeveloped legal enforcement frameworks, and dependence on external funding.
2. national information and operations centres in each country are still not fully operational or adequately equipped.

The RMSA is central to addressing these gaps. Through the RMIFC's intelligence-led monitoring control and surveillance and the RCOC's coordinated operations, the RMSA is the regional anchor for the minimum credible operational maritime capability that the region needs as a deterrent to illicit maritime activities. The Architecture was conceptualised and established by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). The latter has ensured its operationalisation with the financial support of the European Union. The IOC serves as a hub for maritime security stakeholders and is a driving force for regional cooperation beyond its membership. Yet the RMSA is governed by its seven signatory States. The RMSA has an inclusive approach and is open to neighbouring states and partners beyond. It serves the wider region, not just its signatories. The RMSA allows the WIO states to act collectively, protecting their sovereignty, safeguarding the blue economy, and reinforcing their voice in global maritime governance. Thus, the RMSA shifts the WIO's role in global trade and maritime security dynamics from a zone of vulnerability to a zone of growing and enduring maritime security capability.

Given the global nature and intertwined nature of most maritime security challenges, the **RMSA is a maturing, credible maritime security provider**, that contributes to the global response to these challenges.

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SNAPSHOTS

THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN: A CORE REGION FOR GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS AND TRADE

The WIO is a critical geostrategic space that connects major global shipping lanes, fisheries, and natural resource zones. The stakes are high:

- **REGIONALLY**, maritime security is essential to protecting livelihoods, securing the blue economy, and deterring transnational crimes including piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing.
- **GLOBALLY**, stability in this maritime space safeguards international trade, energy routes, and strategic maritime chokepoints.



US\$20.8 billion¹

is the estimated annual "gross marine product" for the WIO. The total estimated value of the region's ocean asset base stands at USD 333.8 billion.



29 foreign military facilities²

are operational in the northwest Indian Ocean.



12%³ of global trade

including 40% of container ship traffic passes through the Suez Canal each year.



80% of oil exports⁴

transit across the Indian Ocean. The WIO connects the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the broader Indo-Pacific, making it a key artery for global energy and trade.

MARITIME SECURITY AND GLOBAL IMPACT

• **Houthi Attacks⁵** in the Red Sea: Between late 2023 and early 2025, Houthi-aligned forces in Yemen attacked over 100 commercial ships in the Bab el-Mandeb and the southern Red Sea, sinking 4 vessels, seizing 1, and killing 8 sailors.

• **2026 Gulf War⁶** Conflict in the Gulf has heightened risks to the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting energy flows and driving up shipping and insurance costs.

• **Impact on Global Shipping⁷** The Red Sea crisis and the Gulf War have put maritime chokepoints under pressure and forced ships to bypass the Suez Canal on a 4,000-mile detour around the Cape of Good Hope, Southern Africa – increasing transit times by 30% and reducing global shipping capacity. Naval resources from the Indian Ocean have been diverted, including for convoy operations, creating conditions for the resurgence of piracy⁸ off Somalia.

• **Geopolitical Rivalries⁹** Since 2008, the WIO has been increasingly shaped by multipolar naval deployments, including those by major powers and the Gulf States, all pursuing influence, port access, and maritime partnerships – often overlapping or competing.

MARITIME SECURITY AND REGIONAL IMPACT

• Maritime Threats¹⁰

including IUU fishing, trafficking, piracy, migration, and pollution cost the WIO an estimated **USD 1.14 billion annually (5.7% of gross marine product)**.

• Drug Trafficking¹¹

An estimated 40 tonnes of heroin transit the WIO to East Africa annually, in addition to cocaine, banned/controlled pharmaceutical and other drugs.

• Climate Change¹²

With **69 million** people in coastal areas, the WIO is highly climate-exposed. Ocean warming threatens **5.6% of global coral reefs**, undermining fisheries, food security, and livelihoods. A projected **18-25 cm sea-level rise by 2050¹³** risks infrastructure damage, displacement, and potential disputes over maritime zones.

• Marine Pollution¹⁴

Rising traffic increases pollution risks. Major spills (e.g., *MV Wakashio in Mauritius*), tanker near-misses, recurring discharge events, and container losses linked to extreme weather threaten fragile marine ecosystems.

• IUU Fishing¹⁵

The WIO ranks among the weakest regions globally in combating IUU fishing. Persistent illegal fishing undermines economies and security, with proven links to piracy and livelihood loss.

• Safety of Navigation

Red Sea instability is diverting shipping around the Cape¹⁶, increasing pressure on WIO routes. Reported GPS jamming in 2025 further raises navigational, environmental, and trade security risks.

NEXUS BETWEEN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL

The WIO sits at the convergence of regional and global maritime threats. Challenges in the WIO such as piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing increasingly intersect with global disruptions, impacting on commercial shipping and the militarization of sea lanes, creating a direct link between regional insecurity and global instability.

Regional threats

undermine local economies and supply chains, highlighting the need for regionally coordinated maritime legal finish.

Global disruptions,

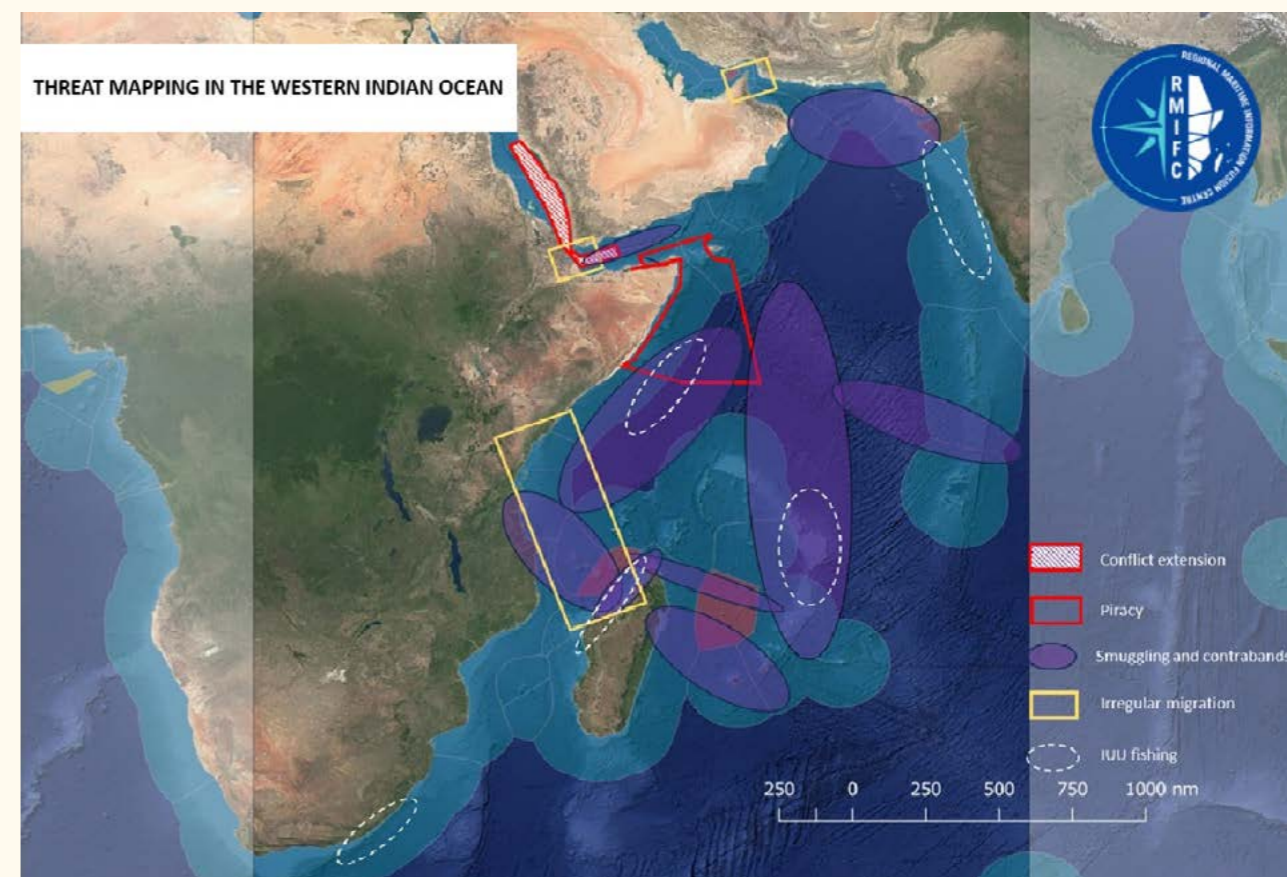
exemplified by Houthi attacks¹⁷ in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the 2026 Gulf War that closed the Strait of Hormuz, have forced ships to detour around the Cape of Good Hope, increasing transit times by 30% and reducing shipping capacity.

Geopolitical rivalries¹⁸

further heighten risks, with major powers and the Gulf States among others, competing for naval influence and port access.

2025 Western Indian Ocean Threat Mapping

Source: RMIFC



¹Obura, D. et al. 2017. "Reviving the Western Indian Ocean Economy: Actions for a Sustainable Future." WWF International. <https://shorturl.at/bc35z> - ²Melvin, N. 2019. "The New External Security Politics of the Horn of Africa Region." SIPRI. <https://shorturl.at/qOZ17> - ³Ahmad, A. et al. 2025. "The Houthi's Red Sea attacks explained." Crisis Group Research, ACLED, UNCTAD. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/visual-explainers/red-sea/> - ⁴Dunn, C. and Barden, J. 2025. "Amid regional conflict, the Strait of Hormuz remains a critical oil chokepoint." US Energy Information Administration. <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=65504> - ⁵Saul, J., Maltezu, R. and Tyson, L. 2025. "Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea." Reuters. <https://shorturl.at/PPvh4> - ⁶The Guardian. (2026, March 2). Maritime insurers cancel war risk cover in Gulf as Iran conflict disrupts shipping. <https://shorturl.at/nMuUn> - ⁷Sainz, V. 2025. "The Red Sea Shipping Crisis (2024 - 2025): Houthi attacks and Global trade disruption." Atlas Institute for International Affairs. <https://shorturl.at/ATkeb> - ⁸European Union Naval Force Somalia. 2025. "Key facts and figures". <https://eunavfor.eu/key-facts-and-figures> - ⁹Shahmohammadi, P. 2023 "Sea Power Rivalry in Western Indian Ocean: Argumentations and Rationalization." IPIS. <https://tinyurl.com/yc4bwfvb> - ¹⁰United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. 2025. Western Indian Ocean faces \$1.14 billion maritime security threat. <https://bit.ly/4c28C51> - ¹¹Blaine, M. 2025. Direct and indirect maritime security threats in the Western Indian Ocean. Center for International Maritime Security. <https://cimsec.org/direct-and-indirect-maritime-security-threats-in-the-western-indian-ocean/> - ¹²Souter, D. et al. 2020. "Status of coral reefs of the world: 2020 report". <https://tinyurl.com/2zdr6ju> - ¹³Gemenne, F. et al. 2020. "Climate Security in the Western Indian Ocean." <https://tinyurl.com/4ak4u9ts> - ¹⁴International Maritime Organization. n.d. "Responding to MV Wakashio oil spill." <https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/hottopics/pages/wakashio-faq.aspx> - ¹⁵Macfayden, G. and Hosch, G. 2023. "The IUU Fishing Risk Index: 2023 Update." <https://tinyurl.com/y8528nn7> - ¹⁶Shipco Transport. 2025. "Cape of Good Hope Rerouting Linked to 35% of Container Losses in 2024." 30 June. <https://rb.gy/64lwd> - ¹⁷Saul, J., Maltezu, R. and Tyson, L. 2025. "Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea." Reuters. <https://shorturl.at/PPvh4> - ¹⁸Sainz, V. 2025. "The Red Sea Shipping Crisis (2024 - 2025): Houthi attacks and Global trade disruption." Atlas Institute for International Affairs. <https://shorturl.at/ATkeb>.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RMSA

The Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA), established in 2018 by 7 Western Indian Ocean states (Comoros, Djibouti, France/La Réunion, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles) under the auspices of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is a bold, regionally owned framework designed to strengthen maritime security governance. It has been supported by the European Union through the former Maritime Security Programme (MASE) and the current Safe Seas Africa (SSA) programme. Developed in response to escalating maritime challenges such as piracy, illegal fishing, illicit trafficking, transboundary maritime crimes and environmental risks and threats, the Architecture **promotes sustainable cooperation, regional ownership and resilience in maritime governance.**

Built on two key agreements signed in 2018 – one for maritime information sharing and another for coordinating joint operations at sea – the RMSA aims to provide a permanent framework that translates dire need into tangible operational maritime capability. Grounded in the principle of collective responsibility, it coordinates and amplifies the maritime security efforts of member states of the WIO, aiming to minimise duplication and enhance the regional capability to respond to shared maritime threats.

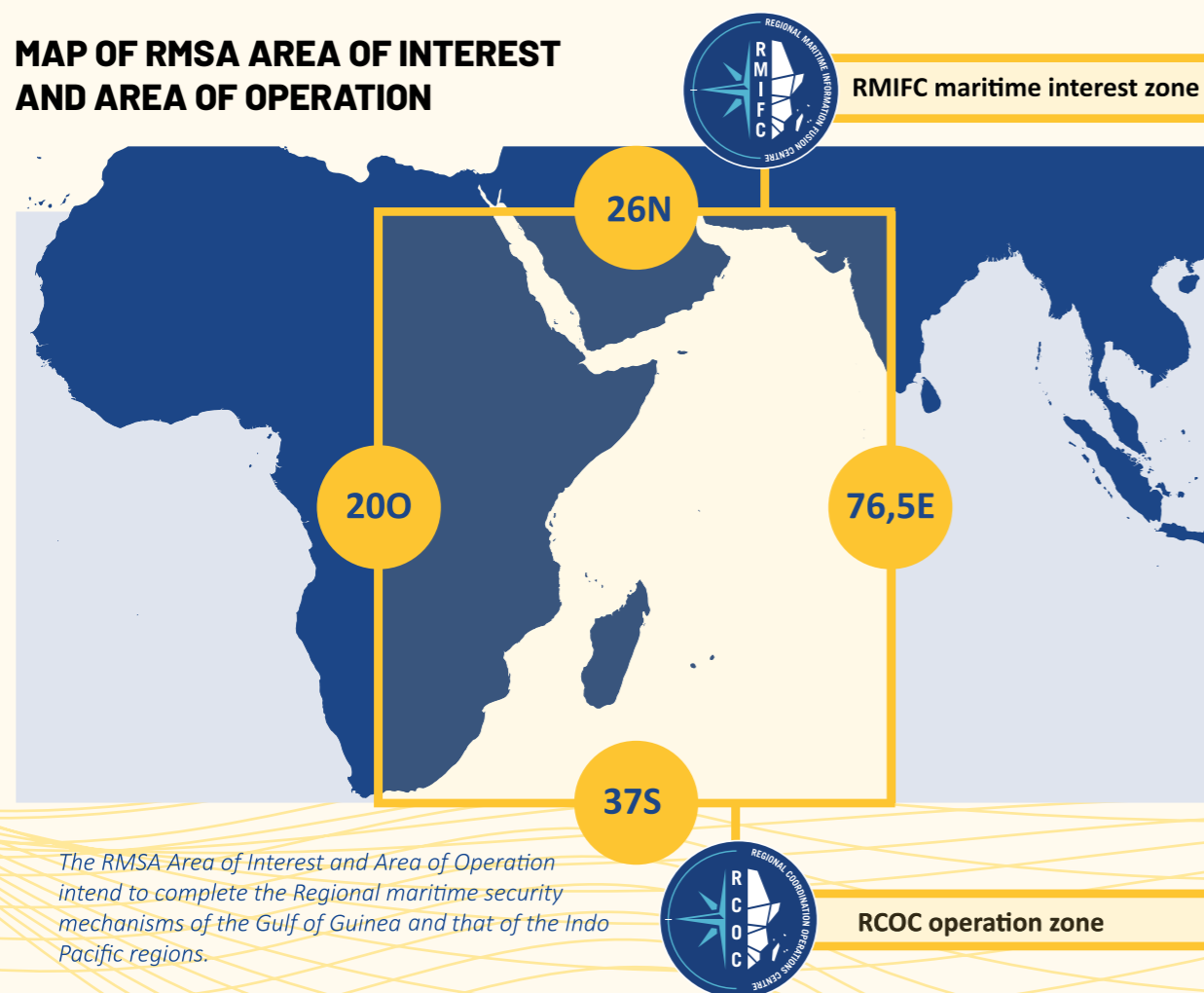
At the core of the RMSA's mission is the building of the minimum operational maritime capability required to safeguard national waters and the wider region. The RMSA improves real-time vessel monitoring to detect vessels of interest, shares intelligence and facilitates coordinated joint operations. It contributes to addressing critical gaps including limited control and surveillance, insufficient enforcement capacity, and weak legal frameworks.

UNDER THE TWO AGREEMENTS,

the Centres are mandated to address a broad spectrum of maritime security and safety challenges, including:

- (i) counter-piracy;
- (ii) combating organised crime and other illicit acts at sea;
- (iii) support to States in exercising jurisdiction over flagged and stateless vessels;
- (iv) search and rescue;
- (v) marine environmental protection;
- (vi) restoration of navigational safety;
- (vii) protection of underwater cultural heritage;
- (viii) and natural and environmental disaster response.

MAP OF RMSA AREA OF INTEREST AND AREA OF OPERATION



The RMSA Area of Interest and Area of Operation intend to complete the Regional maritime security mechanisms of the Gulf of Guinea and that of the Indo Pacific regions.

HOW IS THE RMSA GOVERNED?

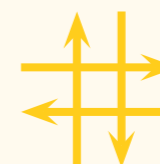
The RMSA is governed through a Steering Committee of members from the regional signatory States, who meet twice yearly to take stock of the progress of the Architecture, approve reports submitted by the two regional centres, approve the programme of activities for the coming 6 months, and any proposed regional or international partnerships and support. Each Regional Centre has a Technical Committee composed of International Liaison Officers (ILOs) of the signatory States who govern the day-to-day running of the centres, and coordinate their shared responsibility for different areas of maritime security.



The RMSA is structured around two specialised centres, each with distinct yet complementary mandates.



THE REGIONAL MARITIME INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE, based in Madagascar, is tasked with enhancing maritime domain awareness (MDA) by collecting, analysing, and sharing real-time data across the region. It aims to produce a complete maritime picture and an early-warning arm of the architecture.



THE REGIONAL COORDINATION OPERATIONS CENTRE, based in Seychelles, functions as the operational hub responsible for ensuring a rapid and effective response to threats at sea by coordinating regional maritime operations, supporting law enforcement actions.



These two regional centres, together with the national centres of the signatory States, CREATE A FUNCTIONAL AND RESPONSIVE NETWORK BRIDGING INTELLIGENCE AND ACTION.

AS OF JANUARY 2026¹:

- 43² air and surface assets deployed/mobilised by signatory states
- 45 operations at sea
- 12 ILOs present at regional centres
- 3 Partner ILOs present at regional centres

¹Since 2019 - ²Gontier, S (2025). Strengthening maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean (presentation). Djibouti Code of Conduct. <https://dcoc.org/wp-content/uploads/Capt-Sam-Gontier-RCOC-success-DCOC.pdf>

UNDERSTANDING THE REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

7

SIGNATORY STATES



Steering Committee governs the centres



2

REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY AGREEMENTS

on information exchange and joint operations at sea

AGREEMENTS PROVIDE FOR OTHER NEIGHBOURING STATES TO JOIN

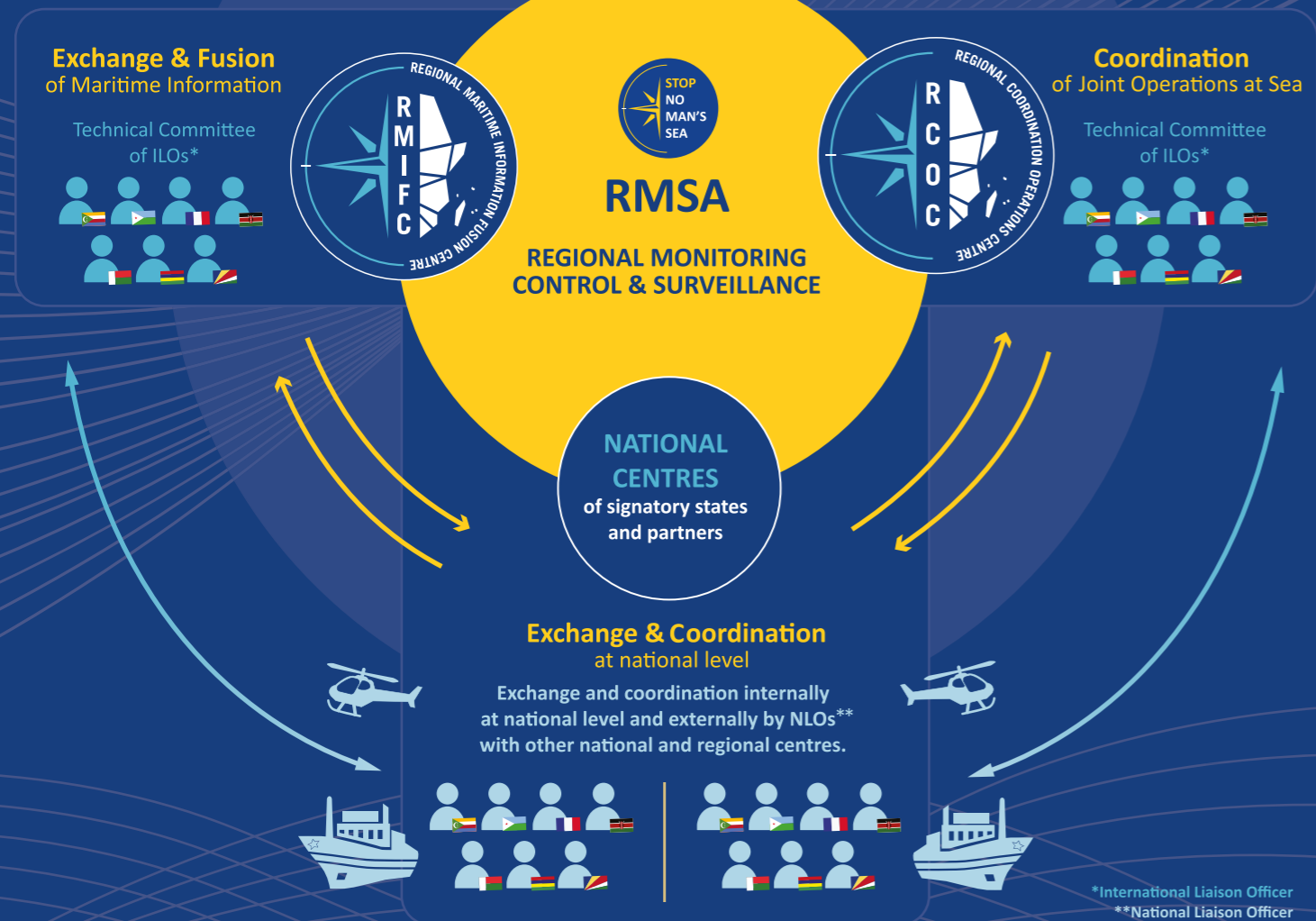
THE RMSA OPERATES THROUGH AN INTERLOCKING FRAMEWORK - A NATIONAL <=> TO REGIONAL NETWORK OF COORDINATION, WHERE NATIONAL CENTRES ACT AS CONDUITS FOR STRATEGIC INPUT AND TACTICAL DEPLOYMENT.

At the national level:

Inter-agency collaboration links navies, coast guards, customs, fisheries authorities, and intelligence agencies into a comprehensive response chain.

At the regional level:

The RMIFC and RCOC coordinate real-time maritime information exchange for monitoring, control, surveillance and regional operations. They serve as platforms for engagement with external partners and observers.



ROLE OF LIAISON OFFICERS

Each member state designates four liaison officers: an **International Liaison Officer (ILO)** based at each regional centre (RMIFC and RCOC), and a **National Liaison Officer (NLO)** to correspond to each centre, based in-country.

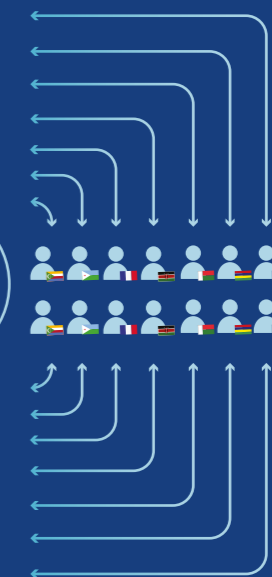
THE ILO

- represents the state at the centre, coordinates exchange and sharing of information or regional operations
- shares with the national NLO and ensures full involvement of his/her country in information exchange or operations at sea
- supports SOPs (standard operating procedures) and capacity building
- and manages reporting and partner collaboration.



THE NLO

- ensures national coordination by liaising with all concerned key stakeholders as well as private sector.



*International Liaison Officer
**National Liaison Officer

THEMATIC REGIONAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS WITHIN THE RMSA

Maritime security challenges are inherently interconnected at regional and global levels.

Maritime routes form a continuous system linking territorial seas, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and the high seas, with threats in one maritime zone quickly impacting the region. In developing a Comprehensive Maritime Picture for the WIO, monitoring vessels of interest and organising regional actions at sea, the RMSA aims to structure its action into a set of priority maritime security challenges as in the table below. Responses to each of the maritime threats and risks require formulation of a RMSA specific regional cooperation framework.

	 IUU FISHING	 SEARCH AND RESCUE	 PORTS SECURITY and Safety of Navigation	 MARINE POLLUTION	 TRAFFICKING				 CYBERSECURITY and cables safety
				 DRUG	 HUMAN MIGRATION	 WILDLIFE	 ARMS		
 PROBLEM SPECIFICATION	IUU fishing costs the WIO billions annually, threatens food security, undermines the blue economy, and weakens sovereign rights in regional states' EEZs ¹ .	Insufficient search and rescue capacity, relatively high mortality at sea, cross-border tensions, and threats to the blue economy.	Low port security, high traffic volumes, and substandard vessels threaten safe navigation in the WIO.	The WIO faces increasing risk of major marine pollution from shipping, oil exploration, and transport, beyond any single country's response capacity.	WIO increasingly used as market and transit for drug trafficking, threatening regional security, stability and socio economic well-being.	The WIO serves as a corridor for irregular migration flows and human trafficking.	WIO constitutes a lucrative hotspot for illegal wildlife trade endangering protected species and negatively impacting the rich biodiversity.	Proliferation of light arms in countries, fueling insecurity and reinforcing gang networks.	Vital dependence of WIO States on submarine cables in broadband connectivity and all spheres of socio-economic development Dual vulnerability: physical and cyber.
 HOW DOES RMSA CONTRIBUTE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors all vessel movements, including fishing vessels, identifies IUU fishers and coordinates the inspections and their eventual prosecution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a process to enhance national capabilities, strengthen regional coordination, and expand collaboration with key partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equips States to establish national Vessel Traffic Management Systems for monitoring all maritime vessels. Promotes compliance with regional and international conventions through a regional policy on port security and navigation safety. Strengthens law enforcement capacity to detect and prosecute illegal port traffic. Strengthens law enforcement capacity to detect and prosecute illegal port traffic. Promotes network of ports for information sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts regular regional field exercises since 2019 to build maritime pollution prevention and response capacity. Mobilises regional and international partners, including Nairobi Convention states, IMO⁷, ITOFF⁸, OSRL⁹, JNCC¹⁰ and others. Agreed on the definition and finalisation of the Regional Contingency Plan (RCP) as a framework for coordinated action against oil spills and pollution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners for identification of drug traffickers at sea. Coordinates regional operations targeting vessels suspected of drug trafficking, for prosecution. Facilitates organisation of regional/ international conferences on combating drug trafficking and consumption. Formulated a Regional Drug Strategy. Works for the establishment of a Regional Drug Observatory and a network of National Control Drug Agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperates with IOM⁴ and UNHCR⁵ alongside RMSA member States. Enhances understanding of irregular migration corridors to identify modus operandi and improve detection of migration and human trafficking patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables the networking of law enforcement and CITES⁶ management authorities in partnership with TRAFFIC. Regional Strategic Plan to combat wildlife trafficking adopted and is being implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts maritime surveillance and monitors vessel movements to identify and disrupt arms trafficking as part of a broader nexus of transnational maritime crimes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinates operations via RCOG to mobilise air and surface assets to ensure a rapid and effective response to threats or incidents at sea.
 FUTURE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully operationalise member States' National Vessel Monitoring Systems. Establish a Regional VMS² within the RMSA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement existing frameworks to prevent loss of life at sea, strengthen rescue operations, and improve cross-border coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully operationalise national VTMIS³ on the base of which establish a regional passenger and cargo data-sharing mechanism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a robust, pragmatic, operational mechanism for regional and international cooperation on Tier II/III marine pollution. Support the RCP through a cooperation platform with regional, international, and industry partners including oil and maritime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disrupt maritime drug trade and supply chains. Operationalise the Regional Drug Strategy. Operationalise and sustain the Regional Drug Observatory. Engage the network of National Drug Control Agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen regional intelligence capabilities to track population movements, assess vulnerabilities, and flag early warning signs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disrupt illegal wildlife trade and supply chains. Develop a sustained regional strategy with key partners. Maintain a regional network of law enforcement and CITES authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve real-time vessel monitoring and intelligence-sharing to counter arms trafficking and associated maritime crimes. Develop coordinated regional response mechanisms to identify and intercept high-risk maritime movements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an operational regional/international Framework for real-time monitoring of vessel movements to detect VOI in the proximity of cable zones in WIO.

¹EEZ - Exclusive Economic Zone - ²VMS - Vessel Monitoring System - ³VTMIS - Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information Systems - ⁴IOM : International Organisation for Migration - ⁵UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - ⁶CITES : Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - ⁷IMO - International Maritime Organisation - ⁸ITOPF - International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Limited - ⁹OSRL - Oil Spill Response Ltd - ¹⁰JNCC - Joint Nature Conservation Committee

ROLE OF IOC & ITS DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH

SNAPSHOT OF AN ISLAND COMMUNITY

The IOC was established by Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles in 1982, and institutionalised through the Victoria Agreement in 1984. Comoros and France, through Réunion, its overseas department, joined in 1986.

IOC members are politically, economically and socially diverse but share interconnected histories and common challenges as islands and archipelagos located off the East African coast.

Vulnerable in the contemporary era to external shocks, whether economic, environmental, or insular (in particular in relation to the island challenges of importing food and energy), IOC members also face significant challenges in the domain of maritime security.

The IOC pursues cooperation projects to address these challenges, broadly covering all of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. It draws on the active support of around 10 international partners.

The IOC focuses on regional value addition actions based on the principle of subsidiarity and hence does not restrict its actions on maritime security to its geographical perimeter but beyond.

THE IOC – A DIPLOMATIC VOICE FOR THE RMSA

The IOC has emerged as a **central diplomatic and operational actor** in the WIO, with a role extending beyond political cooperation to include **coordination, implementation, and institutional development**. As an intergovernmental and diplomatic organisation, its General Secretariat implements member States' decisions, ensures institutional continuity, and engages with funding partners.

As the secretariat and executive hub of the Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA), the IOC serves as its **diplomatic voice and reference point**, acting as contracting partner and facilitator of cooperation. It also serves as the secretariat of the **Steering Committee of the two regional centres**, providing strategic guidance, administrative support, and continuity in decision-making.

The IOC is the **designated and trusted beneficiary and implementer** of major maritime security programmes, notably EU-funded MASE (2013-2023) and SSA (2024-2029) Programmes, coordinating donor-funded initiatives and ensuring alignment with regional priorities. It further acts as a key coordinating body linking states, regional centres, national agencies, regional and international organisations, and international partners, enhancing information sharing and collective responses to maritime threats.

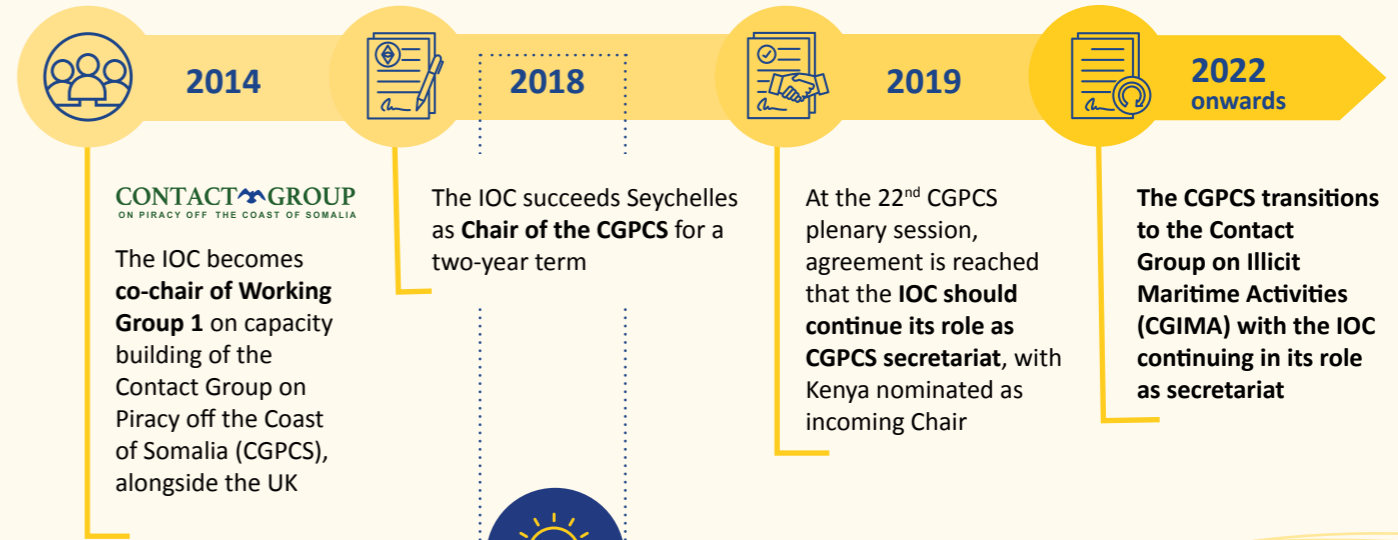
In addition, the IOC **facilitates the development and integration** of national maritime security centres, strengthening regional capacity and coherence and networking.

OBSERVERS TO THE IOC

China, European Union, Organisation de la Francophonie, Ordre de Malte, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Nations.



THE IOC'S EVOLVING ROLE IN COUNTER PIRACY AND ADDRESSING ILLICIT MARITIME ACTIVITIES



DID YOU KNOW?

The 1st Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety in the WIO held in Balaclava, Mauritius (26 - 29 April 2018), saw the signature of two regional agreements for regional maritime security. More than 180 delegates attended, including home and defence ministers from over thirty states and regional and international organisations.

OUTCOMES:

Foundational agreements for the RMSA

The two regional maritime security agreements signed by Comoros, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles concerning the exchange and sharing of maritime information and the coordination of joint actions at sea. Kenya and Réunion-France signed later the same year.

Cooperation with international institutions

The same year, a memorandum of understanding signed by the IOC and the United Nations and its several agencies.

Regional convergence

A Ministerial Declaration and Action Plan from the WIO states were adopted, reaffirming the will to act collectively.

CONVENING REGIONAL STATES AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

To date, the IOC has convened three ministerial conferences on maritime security and safety—in 2018, 2019, 2023 and one on Drugs in 2024 — in partnership with the Government of Mauritius, with support from the European Union. Building on existing global and regional frameworks, these important milestones for the region serve to:

- provide a platform for **high-level policy dialogue** among governments and international institutions
- facilitate convergence on a **shared regional definition** of maritime security challenges
- foster a **collective, coherent and coordinated approach** to the improvement of maritime governance mechanisms
- **identify gaps and omissions** in maritime security initiatives
- avoid the **duplication of regional efforts**

& BLUE ECONOMY

Environmental protection and education

Security and Safety

Fisheries

Pollution

Sustainable Management of natural resources



PARTNERSHIPS

THE FOUNDATION OF MARITIME SECURITY COORDINATION

Effective maritime security in the WIO depends on strong, well-coordinated partnerships. The IOC and RMSA are committed to fostering a networked, collective response to the region's maritime challenges - one that aligns with national needs and priorities, avoids duplication of efforts and resourcing, and maximises impact.

Through close collaboration with partner states, regional bodies, international organisations and operational partners, the IOC and RMSA are building a comprehensive network of support. This includes the deployment of liaison officers, the provision of satellite data, joint exercises and operations, capacity building, and strategic alignment with global maritime frameworks.

WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN (WIO) STATES

Signatory States of MASE Agreements



Comoros, Djibouti, France (Réunion), Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles



Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania

NON WIO STATES



Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, United States of America, United Kingdom

MARITIME INDUSTRY

- MAERSK
- MSC
- CMA-CGM
- V.SHIP
- BIC
- IHS MARKIT
- Lloyds List
- Danish Shipping
- OCIMF
- InterCargo
- Intertanko

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, AND PARTNERS

- Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)
- Africa Development Community Fisheries
- African Standby Force (ASF)
- African Union (AU)
- Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)
- CRIMARIO (EU-funded programme)
- CROSS RÉUNION
- Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
- European Union Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR)
- Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE)
- Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)
- Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)
- Information Fusion Centre (IFC) Singapore
- Institute for Security studies (ISS)
- International Maritime Organisation (IMO)
- International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
- INTERPOL
- Maritime Information Cooperation & Awareness Center (MICA Center)
- National Maritime Foundation (NMF- India)
- Port Management Association for Eastern & Southern Africa (PMAESA)
- South African Development Community - Monitoring
- Control and Surveillance Centre (SADC MCDSCC)
- Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce (TRAFFIC)
- UK Maritime Trade Organisation (UKMTO)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
- US Africa Command (AFRICOM)



PARTNER ORGANISATION MILESTONES

Nairobi Convention

Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region

1985

the Nairobi Convention is signed, aimed at increasing the capacity of Western Indian Ocean nations to protect, sustainably manage, and develop their coastal and marine environment.

- Administered by UNEP, the Nairobi Convention area extends from Somalia in the north to South Africa in the south, covering 10 African States
- The two regional centres of the RMSA feature in the draft Regional Contingency Plan, forming a central part of any regional marine pollution response

IORA

Indian Ocean Rim Association

23 February 2022

the IOC and IORA sign an MoU centred on cooperation in their respective areas of intervention, including maritime safety and security

EU

European Union

Mid-1980s

the EU becomes a primary supporter of the IOC

2013-2023

the MASE programme is funded to a total of EUR 42 m, advancing a regional plan to promote maritime security and supporting the establishment and development of the two regional centres

2024-to date

the EU-funded Safe Seas Africa programme supports the consolidation and expansion of the RMSA with funding of EUR 15.3 m

DCoC-JA

Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendment

2023

the DCoC-JA adopts the two Regional Centres (RMIFC and RCO) into its Information Sharing Network

CGIMA

Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities

2022

as the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia transitions to the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities; the IOC continues in its role as secretariat, a role it has held for the Contact Group since 2018



COLLABORATION WITH AFRICAN UNION

Strengthened collaboration with the African Union is expected to coordinate, mainstream, and champion maritime security initiatives, including support to the RMSA.

AVENUES FOR COOPERATION AND NEXT FRONTIERS FOR THE RMSA

Future efforts aim to expand real-time identification and tracking of Vessels of Interest (VOI) across the wider Indian Ocean. While operating strictly within the legal framework of the two 2018 regional maritime security agreements and without encroaching on other regional mandates, the RMSA seeks to enhance seamless cross-regional information sharing and operational coordination with partners across the broader Indian Ocean and beyond—recognising that maritime routes and vessel movements transcend geographic boundaries and require continuity of monitoring.

1. EXPANDING REGIONAL COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS



The Regional Agreements on Maritime Information Sharing, Fusion and Joint Operations provide a flexible legal basis for broader cooperation.

• **Accession**

In accordance with Article 2, other States from Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean may become Parties.

• **Partnerships**

Eligible parties include:

- States committed to promoting maritime security;
- International maritime organisations;
- Internationally recognised funding institutions.

This framework allows the RMSA to progressively widen its cooperative network while maintaining legal clarity and regional ownership.



2. STRENGTHENING OPERATIONAL PILLARS



REGIONAL MARITIME INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE (RMIFC)

Core Functions

- Real-time Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and monitoring of vessel movements;
- Multi-source information exchange and analysis to produce a Comprehensive Maritime Picture (CMP);
- Identification and tracking of Vessels of Interest (VOI).

Way Forward

- Improve access to multi-source land-based and satellite data, including SAR imagery;
- Deepen collaboration with Information Fusion Centres, shipping industry actors, and partner States;
- Maintain and regularly update the VOI database.



REGIONAL COORDINATION OF OPERATIONS CENTRE (RCOC)

Core Functions

- Pools national and partner assets to support coordinated actions at sea;
- Strengthens institutional frameworks for joint maritime operations;
- Contributes to effective legal follow-up (“legal finish”) of maritime interdictions.

Way Forward

- Build confidence and reinforce networks among national coast guards and navies;
- Promote rapid, coordinated regional responses to maritime threats.





FOR MORE INFORMATION



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