

## **Brics and Maritime Security in the Western Indo-Pacific Region**

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### **Background**

The Western Indo Pacific biogeographic region spans across the Western and Central part of the Indian Ocean towards the Pacific Ocean. It is a regional strategic hotspot for trade, global geopolitics, environmental concerns and maritime security for numerous countries across Eastern Africa, the Arabian Gulf, East and South Asia and Australia. China and India have been key players in the geopolitics of the region, each aiming to make known their dominance and hinting at geostrategic power play. In recent years there has been an observable commercial shift and focus on the Western Indo Pacific as a global economic epicentre (Saon, 2021) which has equally contributed to other rising concerns in the region, among them territorial disputes and maritime security.

China, India and Japan; some of the world's largest economies boast of strategic geographical positioning along the Western Indo Pacific's lucrative sea routes and are dependent on it for their energy supply and global trade. Primarily, China's oil imports from the Persian Gulf passthrough this route. In Maritime transport, it is estimated that developing regions grew the most with Asia recording a 3% increase to remain the global leader in maritime cargo handling (UNCTAD, 2022). Examining the Western Indo Pacific from the context of the influence that BRICS countries have in its maritime security therefore provides a unique viewpoint through which to conceptualize the region's security challenges and interventions, some of which are extensively explored in this paper.

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides insights into the theoretical literature on the status quo of maritime security in the Indo Pacific region and a keener focus on the Western Indo Pacific region. While exploring highlights from the interests, efforts and resultant influence that various nations have had on the geopolitical, economic and security situation in the region. Attention is also paid to the BRICS countries and their role in shaping the region's maritime security dynamics. While looking into the challenges encountered in harmonising their collective endeavour as a significant global player in Maritime security along the Western Indo Pacific Region.

The larger Indo-pacific region geopolitically covers all nations and islands surrounding the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This encompasses the mainland African and Asian nations that border these oceans like India, South Africa, Indian Ocean territories and Islands such as Kerguelen Islands and Seychelles, Australia, Japan, Russia and other Far East nations as well as the Pacific nations of the Americas such as Canada and Mexico (Kuo, 2018; Choong, 2019; Fabricius, 2022).

Geostrategically, the Western Indo Pacific is the hub for global trade, given that 60 percent of maritime trade passes through Asia, with an approximated one-third of global shipping being carried through the South China Sea (Cordesman, Burke, & Molot, 2019). There are also crucial maritime chokepoints lined across this ocean scape with the major one being the Strait of Malacca, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean at the Andaman Sea and the South China Sea respectively. Cordesman, Burke, & Molot, (2019) note that China being the second-largest economy in the world, has more than 60 percent of its trade in value travelling by sea. Its economic security is therefore highly dependent on the South China Sea.

The Western Indo Pacific region's economic prosperity is largely anchored on the enforcement of security within this maritime space. Some of the traditional and non-traditional issues surrounding maritime security in this region include the threat of great power competition, primarily between the United States and China. The latter is gradually increasing its coastal footprint across strategic points in the Indian Ocean (Chatterjee and

Dhanabalan, 2022) particularly through the establishment of its naval bases and port infrastructure. This power play influences regional dynamics and can exacerbate security challenges that could evolve further to territorial disputes, geostrategic significance and trade route dominance (Fabricius, 2022; Brown, 2018). China's rapid growth is causing tensions with India and the USA, which has raised concerns over the possible trade and economic implications and the bilateral investment models it is employing largely through loans to respective nations. This equally deepens the Sino-US rivalry and heightens the competition in their relations with India.

Case in point, USA has the Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti military base which is the primary base of operations for the U.S. Africa Command in the Horn of Africa. It contributes to maritime security in the Western Indo Pacific region through support of combat readiness and security of ships as well as personnel for regional and combatant command requirements (US Navy n.d.). Subsequently they put in efforts in enforcing operations in the Horn of Africa aimed at fostering positive U.S.-African Nation relations (US Navy n.d.). Beijing on the other hand established its first overseas military base, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Support base in Djibouti, which offers a strategic checkpoint in proximity to crucial shipping sea lanes (Saxena et. al. 2021) with the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait linking the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea.

### **BRICS and Western Indo Pacific Geopolitics, Maritime Security, and Trade**

The region is host to lucrative sea routes, some strategically placed along the sea territories of specific countries, which means they possess some element of control over the dynamics of use and subsequent trade. China, India and Japan have been making efforts and investments, each seeking to be a significant sea power with subsequent global influence. The potential of BRICS to widen their influence cannot be undermined especially as the direction to turn to for development partners (Bhargav, 2023). This is particularly so for countries in the Global South that are on the lookout for more equitable terms of engagement in development aside the hegemonic Western powers.

The Eastern Africa region also falls strategically within the Western Indo Pacific and presents situational complexities that are credited to socio-economic and political factors; among them terrorism and maritime insecurity (Brendon, 2021). This makes it a geographical point of interest with the positioning of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, between the Arabian Peninsula and off the shores of Eritrea and Djibouti; one of the two main chokepoints in the Western Indo Pacific. The ports in the region are also crucial infrastructure in economic and political security, being a key link for global trade from the Asian and Arabian markets to the Red Sea (Brendon, 2021).

Important to note, is the focus China has directed towards growing its maritime presence and power while maintaining its position of self-reliance. It has sought to expand its transit routes through cooperation with littoral states along the Indian Ocean, especially through development of port infrastructure and naval bases (Len, 2017). The multipurpose Port of Doraleh in Djibouti is one such investment and is situated close to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Adjacent to it is the Chinese People's Liberation Army naval base. This being part of China's quest to establish ideal trade links between Africa and parts of Asia as a portion of the Maritime Silk Road.

China has continued to prioritise Africa, making deliberate financial investment in the region through the set out Africa Policy plans. Making it the largest financier of African infrastructure with a total of \$23 billion invested between 2007 and 2020, as opposed to the United States of America's \$9.1 billion over the same period (Shalal, 2022). The 8th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China - Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024) has sections that echo China's interests and commitment in economic and maritime development to Africa by expanding their cooperation through the Belt and Road initiative. This constitutes the Maritime Silk Road to boost Maritime trade traffic by setting up three 'blue economic passageways' meant to link Beijing to other global economic hubs (Green et al., 2018). The sea route links China's coast to other South and South-East Asian countries through the Strait of Malacca, the Arabian Sea and Djibouti's Port of Doraleh in Eastern Africa to connect to the Red Sea and subsequently onwards to the Mediterranean Sea.

Green et al., (2018) argue that India is equally playing the ball game of infrastructure investment through their efforts to develop Chabahar Port in Iran. A move that is indicative of their larger geostrategic vision to expand New Delhi's control beyond South Asia and strengthen their ties with Iran and Afghanistan. In essence, this may limit China-Pakistan cooperation given the Chabahar Port project could be viewed as a counter to China's Maritime Silk Road (Green et al., 2018). The first phase saw the extension of the Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, expanding its capacity from 8 MT per annum to an expected 20 million MT per annum during the final phase of the project (Green et al., 2018). As part of the incentives to India, an elaborate free trade and industrial zone (FTZ) was also set up within the port.

When focusing on BRICS countries' Maritime interests in the Indo Pacific Region, attention should also be paid to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which was established in September 2002

by Russia, India and Iran. Currently, a significant capacity of trade between India and Russia is carried out through Iran, with the Chabahar Port as a key dispatch point particularly for Russia-Iran trade relations.

### **Structure of BRICS**

BRICS is an acronym coined by former Goldman Sachs analyst Jim O'Neill to represent the countries he projected as having the potential to grow at faster rates and be a considerable safe haven for investors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these were Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa later joined the countries in 2011 to form what is currently viewed as a fast rising geopolitical group with more countries expressing their interest to join.

As a geopolitical grouping, BRICS is gaining traction but is also frowned upon in equal measure, each perception based on the interests and conceptualization of the defining party. Its pioneer countries as well as those portraying interest in joining seemed to have found a point of convergence as Mielniczuk (2013) puts it, in very strong sentiment against the injustice of global capitalism. In the quest for an ultimate shift in global governance the BRICS also created the New Development Bank as an alternative from the West, for actors to exchange goods in the field of development finance (Duggan et al., 2021).

The BRICS held their first summit in 2009 in Russia. They have a rotational annual chairmanship structure and the current chair, South Africa hosted their 15<sup>th</sup> Summit under the theme 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism'. The rise in importance of the BRICS as a geopolitical group is differently perceived and argued by various authors. However, what may be factual is that with 43% of the world's population, 18% of global trade and 20% of the world's GDP, BRICS is turning into a political reality that warrants keen exploration especially within the academic community (Mielniczuk, 2013).

The group's relations are founded on three comprehensive pillars of cooperation that include; Political and Security Cooperation, Financial and Economic Cooperation and Cultural and People-to-People Cooperation (BRICS South Africa, 2023). The countries are also notable members of other regional strategic organizations that include Southern African Development Community (SADC), Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

In the context of Maritime Security, some of the other regional organizations that the BRICS are members of have frameworks to promote security in the maritime space. Case in point, the Association of South East Asian Nations have an ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint that has a section dedicated to promoting maritime cooperation. Therein, they seek to foster cooperation in advancing maritime security and navigation safety through approaches such as information sharing and technological cooperation (ASEAN, 2023). The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) whose BRICS members include, India and South Africa has a Maritime safety and security focal area. It speaks on the Association "serving as the 'first line of defence' to build upon existing national, regional and international measures, thereby enhancing coordination and supporting harmonised international Maritime Safety and Security (MSS) collaboration." (Maritime Safety and Security, 2023).

Collectively, it can be observed that the BRICS have little documented on their joint efforts to advance and safeguard maritime security. However, at individual level some of the members like China and India continue to make geostrategic moves aimed at protecting their maritime security and economic interests, given the lucrative routes lining the Western Indo Pacific region. Some of which are the lifeline of their economies particularly for energy supply. Naval safety is also at the core of national and maritime security, with security threats rife across the region. Subsequently, nations have established naval military bases as a means to combatting piracy and maritime terrorism among other threats as well as reinforcing their maritime defence.

### **How BRICS Views Maritime Security**

#### **China's geopolitical influence on Maritime Security in the Western Indo Pacific Region**

This section delves further into the insecurity issues threatening the region, and the efforts and frameworks put in place by BRICS member countries to enforce maritime security in the Western Indo Pacific region. Additionally, it will try to expound further on some of these nations' activities using 'The theory of sea power' by Alfred Thayer.

In the present day, maritime security is an important component of national and regional security given the significant amount of commerce being carried out through shipment by sea. To enhance the efficiency of efforts, international cooperation is a crucial inclusion in developing comprehensive maritime security systems. Partnership at this level involves information exchange, capacity building through personnel training, and joint patrols (Leorochoa et al., 2023). The situation is further compounded by the complex nature of threats from transnational criminal activities at sea hence collaboration is significant in the development of fortified maritime defence systems (Leorochoa et al., 2023).

Some of the symmetrical challenges common in the region include arms race, unresolved border disputes and issues surrounding limitations in sea movement and use (Marsetio, 2014) predominately in the South China Sea.

Looking into the theory of sea power Mahan himself put it as “*the history of sea power, while embracing in its broad sweep all that tends to make a people great upon the sea or by the sea, is largely a military history*”. He lay emphasis on naval power as a crucial aspect of maritime defence, further adding that sea commerce had an extensive influence upon the wealth and strength of countries (Mahan, 1890). The Navy is a vital component of marine power and has universally had three important functions: the military role, the role of ensuring stability, and the role of diplomacy (Marsetio, 2014). The military function of the Navy was the principal one and majored on the use of power to secure victory in armed conflicts. This role ensures a country’s ‘Command of the sea’ making sure that no opposing maritime forces will disrupt its security and national interests (Marsetio, 2014).

China’s model of asserting dominance and increasing their sea presence along littoral states in the Indian Ocean can be viewed from Mahan’s theory. With majority of their trade and energy supply taking place across the Indian Ocean routes it is in their best interest to strategically secure the region to their advantage. With the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as other strategic investments in overseas port facilities and a naval base, China appears to be playing a calculated geopolitical ball game.

It established its first overseas naval base in Djibouti and invested in the construction of the multipurpose Port of Doraleh, which is strategically positioned by the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait linking the Red sea to the Gulf of Aden. Contrary to China’s claim of merely providing peace keeping operations for overseas citizens in the region, the West are particularly suspicious of its true intentions. Jochheim and Lobo (2023) note that this provides China with an increased military presence in the Indian Ocean. China’s increasing footprint in this region and the assertiveness of its land reclamation and territorial claims in disputed areas in the South and East China Seas has revitalized conversation among the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) over its ‘predatory’ lending approaches.

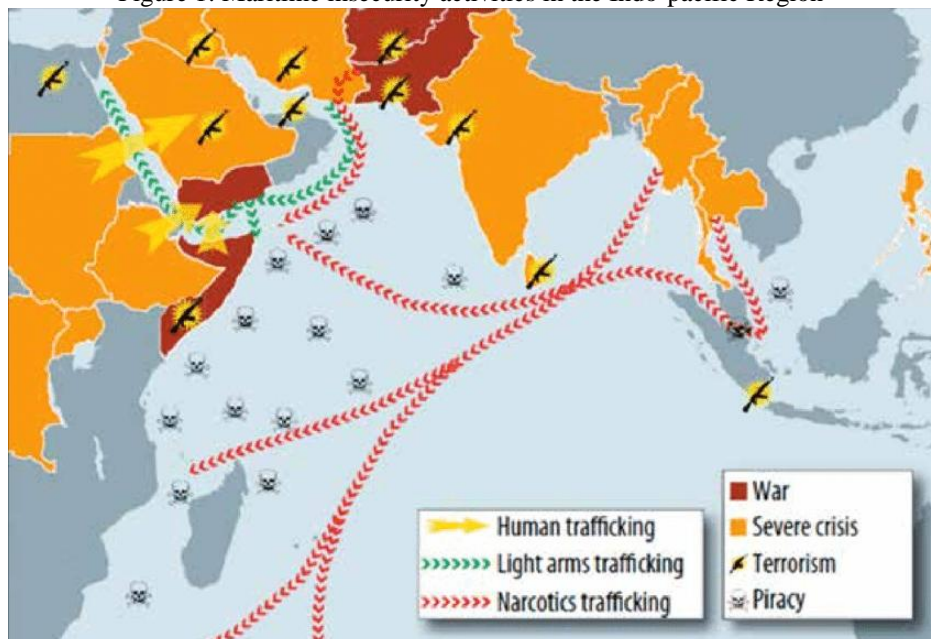
China’s BRI is also perceived as a geostrategic move to secure some trade routes in the Indian Ocean and provide an alternative in trade that circumvents the contentious Strait of Malacca that is more geostrategically aligned with India to the disadvantage of China. Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port and Pakistan’s Gwadar Port are among China’s strongpoints overseas. Hambantota Port can harbour China’s People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships (Jochheim and Lobo, 2023). A Chinese military survey vessel docked in the port in August, 2022 despite the Sri Lankan government’s statement that China is restricted from using the port for military purposes (Jayasinghe, 2023). The port offers prospects that allow China greater control of the sea lane from the Gulf of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca and could provide its navy with a steady hold in the Bay of Bengal (Jochheim and Lobo, 2023). In the quest to promote maritime security, sea power is thus an essential element of a nation’s total power. Iskandar, Febri, & Samiaji, (2020) add that, sea power is distinguished by three factors: geographical strength, moral strength and material strength, all of which China possesses.

### **Security Issues in the Western Indo Pacific Region**

Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region is a critical and complex issue due to its vast expanse, strategic importance, and a range of security challenges (Kuo, 2018). Brown (2018) argues that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ is a regional reconceptualization utilised by Japan, Australia, India and the USA to address deficiencies in Asia’s maritime security and institutional architecture, which are being simultaneously influenced by a more assertive Chinese posture and waning U.S. influence. The Indo-Pacific concept has developed in tandem with a transformation in the regional security architecture (Brown, 2018). Zimmerman (2018) further argues that non-traditional security issues have been important catalysts for the strengthening, expansion and development of new modes of security cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

The Western Indo Pacific region notably faces security risks from threats like maritime terrorism, piracy and transnational crime, human trafficking, illicit drugs trafficking and environmental issues resulting from climate change, and other human related activities (*see Fig. 1*). Active targets being civilians, ships, energy infrastructure, and port infrastructure among others. To further understand the maritime security issues in the Indo Pacific region (Lukaszuk, 2021) applies the four variables from Bueger’s matrix which include: national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security. These highlight other arising maritime security challenges around shaping sea power, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and arms proliferation that impact the region’s security and stability.

Figure 1: Maritime insecurity activities in the Indo-pacific Region



Source: Sea Change: Evolving Maritime Geopolitics in the Indo Pacific Region by David Michel

### Piracy and Maritime Terrorism

Threats of piracy and maritime terrorism were rife in the Indo Pacific region, but incidents of the former have significantly reduced over the years. Both criminal acts have a common interest meant to ensure that a state stay corrupt and vulnerable, the aims for attacks however are different. Piracy is driven by a need for economic gain, while maritime terrorism is more politically driven (Long, Hiep, & Binh, 2022).

The Strait of Malacca was a hotspot for armed robbery and piracy, being a major shipment point for oil transport and a link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. In 2018, the Indo Pacific region recorded 57 and 25 piracy and armed robbery incidents respectively (Long, Hiep, & Binh, 2022). Terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Southern Philippines have wreaked havoc in the region perpetrating acts of maritime terrorism, kidnappings for ransom and extortion. The latter concentrating its attacks around Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (NCTC, 2022). In 2004, the *MV Super Ferry 14* in Manila bay, Philippines was attacked by a suicide bomber affiliated with ASG, sinking it and killing 116 people (NCTC, 2022) to date that is still considered the world's deadliest terrorist attack at sea.

Multilateral agreements in the region have played a key role in the significant reduction of these security threats, factoring in the evolving and complex nature of crime today. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) was launched in 2006 under the guidance of Japan though excluding Indonesia and Malaysia (Poonawatt, 2023), they are however still de facto participants in the agreement. The ReCAAP was more inclusive and encouraged inter-governmental engagement and a comprehensive information-sharing platform, thus facilitating capacity building through technology exchange, training, and forums (Poonawatt, 2023).

### Environmental Challenges

#### Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing

The Indo-Pacific region is easily the world's most biodiverse area. Hosting about one-third of the world's shallow marine fish, the region boasts of about 3,000 species which is more than other regions that have about 1200 species (Helfman et al., 2009). The region's fish stocks are depleting especially in the South China Sea and the marine ecosystems are threatened due to the high rate of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The Western Indo Pacific now faces ecological collapse of its fishing grounds given the increasing demand for sea food globally, leading to unsustainable and extreme fishing and harvesting methods (Crowell & Turvold, 2020).

Fishing is a main source of livelihood for coastal communities in Southeast Asia. Resource strain and competition is however being driven by over-exploitation through illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by fleets from Distant Water Fishing Nations (DFNW) like China and India and artisanal fishermen (Crowell & Turvold, 2020). With the rising demand and diminishing fish stocks individuals, and communities are further exposed to vulnerabilities from the pressure of survival. In a bid to find alternative sources of livelihood,

individuals are faced with the option to engage in illegal activities like piracy to adequately support their families.

Regardless of the Indian government's efforts to cut down on illegal fishing activities through the enactment of a fishing ban during the monsoon every year in respective maritime states; the "absence of a uniform ban period throughout the coastline led to fishing trawlers of several States using this legal technicality to fish where fishing ban exists and land in an adjacent State where there is no ban" (Pramod, 2010). Climate change additionally aggravates the vulnerabilities of Western Indo Pacific coastal communities from pollution, rising sea levels and increased sea-surface temperature, which may result in displacement and destruction of infrastructure as well as frequent and intensified cyclonic activity and associated storm surges (Pendleton, Thieler, & Jeffress Williams, 2010). Collectively, adverse human activities at sea interfere with the environment leading to the loss of environmental habitats and natural resources, which then contribute to economic and food security issues within coastal zones, which in turn can catalyse maritime crime and piracy.

### **Maritime Territorial Disputes**

Maritime territorial disputes particularly in the South China Sea have seen wrangles between contesting countries intensify over the years. China has come out more resoundingly to lay claim over parcels of land and their adjacent waters, further stirring tensions with other claimants in the Southeast Asian region like Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei (BBC, 2023). The South China Sea plays a vital role in the global shipping routes, and in China's economic lifeline, given that in 2016 USD3.37 trillion trade values passed through it (CSIS, 2017). It is also host to rich fishing grounds that are a key source of livelihood for communities in that region thus the contentions in its claim, which have escalated over the years.

These have seen numerous interstate maritime standoffs among China and some Southeast Asian nations, like in early 2023, the Philippines said Chinese vessels have been shining lasers at Filipino boats to temporarily blind their crew. They also accuse the Chinese of dangerous manoeuvres by sailing too close or blocking the Filipinos' path (BBC, 2023). In peaceful times, the likelihood for a full war may not be predominant. However, the risk for conflict in the region is intensifying with existing tensions escalating. China is primarily seeking to safeguard its welfare by island-building and naval patrols, while the US though claiming to stay out of territorial disputes have responded by sending military ships and planes near disputed islands in what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations (BBC, 2023).

In the case of India, Lukaszuk (2021) looks at its cooperation with Australia in enforcing maritime security, arguing that the push factors for collaboration weren't only limited to China's rise but also included global processes in maritime affairs. The latter factoring in the growing number of state and non-state actors, as well as the interdependent nature of human activities at sea (Lukaszuk, 2021). Taking all these into consideration, it was vital that the two littoral states find a point of convergence in security perceptions and interests in the various aspects of modern maritime security.

### **Research Methodology**

Navigating the uncharted waters of BRICS cooperation and its implications for maritime security in the Western Indo-Pacific region necessitates a methodological approach that adapts to the fluidity of international relations. Attention was paid to the triangulation of data sources and purposive sampling, with a focus on China and India as case studies as they provide a comprehensive spectrum from which to explore and understand the maritime security environment of the Western Indo Pacific region.

Comprehensive literature review will map the existing knowledge landscape, pinpointing gaps and areas of contention. Following the qualitative exploration of policy documents, interviews, and diplomatic discourse, quantitative data on economic interdependencies among BRICS countries will also be highlighted. This will help in understanding the past and present dynamics but also anticipate potential scenarios in the ever-evolving landscape of maritime security in the Western Indo-Pacific within the BRICS context.

### **Findings**

The BRICS has immeasurable potential for growth, with the International Monetary Fund estimating the bloc's collective GDP for 2023 at 32.1 percent of the global GDP. This surpasses the predominantly West's, G7 GDP share accounting for 29.9 percent. The group extended admission invites to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Argentine Republic, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; which are arguably relevant emerging and thriving economies globally. With membership to take effect from 1 January 2024 (BRICS, 2023).

The group's commitment to shifting the world's economic and governance balance to promote South-South cooperation for development and prosperity is very much evident in the working documents and themes developed following their summit convening. However, regardless of all that captured on paper, their

commitment to action in actualizing the same is hindered by a myriad of factors, among them the inability to reach consensual agreements on matters surrounding territorial disputes. In-house geopolitical competition is rife with India and China's contentious relations deepening over geostrategic moves in the Western Indo Pacific region and alliances formed with other countries like Pakistan, Iran and Sri Lanka. Both China and India are making calculated moves to increase their foothold across the Indian Ocean through port infrastructural investments and offshore naval base developments which in turn means increased sea control for either of the countries.

Notably, in the 2022 summit in China the BRICS convened under the theme '*Foster High-quality BRICS Partnership, Usher in a New Era for Global Development*'. This was with the intent to 'First consolidate the three-wheel-driven cooperation to broaden the prospects for BRICS cooperation. Secondly, to enhance political mutual trust and intensify communication and coordination on major international and regional issues to jointly meet common challenges' (BRICS China, 2022). However, promising these points of action are, the unresolved intra-BRICS maritime tensions are counter-progressive to the group's collective prosperity in the Western Indo Pacific region. The inability to consolidate their maritime security action plans, each prioritizing their interests and maximum sovereignty at the expense of the BRICS's collective advantage may be detrimental to its geopolitical advancement, particularly as a counterweight to the Western dominated G7.

### **Conclusion**

The intricate interplay between the BRICS nations and maritime security in the Western Indo-Pacific region highlights the evolving dynamics of global geopolitics and economic interests. As alluded, BRICS member states have a diverse range of perspectives and strategic priorities concerning maritime security in this region resulting in differing stance on every facet of maritime security. It is only through their collective engagement as a Bloc, that significant progress on stability, cooperation, and competition in the Western Indo-Pacific can be achieved.

It is evident that the BRICS nations have a major stake in global trade and security making them have a shared responsibility to the greater peace, stability, and sustainable development in the Western Indo-Pacific region. These nations should therefore shoulder their individual interests and engage in constructive dialogues and cooperation among themselves to foster a more secure and prosperous maritime environment in the Western Indo-Pacific. These efforts could include confidence-building measures, joint exercises, information-sharing mechanisms, and the promotion of multilateral frameworks that encourage transparency and respect for international law.

As maritime security becomes increasingly faceted with economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and regional stability, the BRICS nations should seek common ground through meaningful engagements that would create partnerships with regional and global actors. This will ensure that they contribute positively to the evolving discourse on maritime security, fostering a climate of trust, cooperation, and responsible stewardship of the seas in the Western Indo-Pacific and beyond. Only through such efforts can the BRICS nations effectively contribute to solving the evolving challenges that maritime security brings out and thus ensure a prosperous, secure, and stable future in the Western Indo-Pacific and the world at large.

### **Recommendations**

Through discussions the authors recommend various practical measures which may present the opportunity for BRICS nations to adopt a proactive and cooperative approach to tackling the ever-changing maritime security challenges in the Western Indo-Pacific. This is through playing a pivotal role in engaging regional and global stakeholders and actors and ensuring peace, stability and prosperity in Western Indo Pacific region. Some of these recommendations include:

- a. The use of the various existing multilateral mechanisms, such as ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC), to promote dialogue and cooperation between the BRICS nations and regional actors. Through this a unity of purpose may be achieved and solutions to existing maritime challenges determined in a collective manner.
- b. Common understanding of the various maritime security challenges that affect the Western Indo Pacific region is not only critical to the regional actors but also the BRICS nations. Continued expansion of the BRICS nations provides more avenue for comprehensive understanding of maritime threats in the critical region. Through guidance of the existing international legal frameworks these engagements would provide solutions to not only traditional security threats but also non-traditional security challenges such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), marine environmental protection, maritime law enforcement, maritime safety and navigation.

- c. BRICS nations can engage regional actors in the WIP region to implement some of confidence-building measures (CBMs) to reduce mistrust and prevent escalation of conflicts at sea. Some examples of CBMs include sharing information or intelligence at sea to prevent transnational crime; conducting joint patrols or exercises to improve their coordination and build trust, confidence and working relations among the regional Navies and Coastguards and ensuring the respect and adherence to international maritime laws as well as regional and nations laws within the WIP region. Finally, BRICS and regional actors as a gesture of good will can observe agreed upon codes of conduct or rules of engagement within the Strategically significant WIP region.
- d. Due to their huge financial influence, the BRICS nations within the WIP region can strengthen regional actor's capacity and capability to address maritime security challenges through technical assistance, training programs, equipment transfers or donations. This would enable regional actors benefit as well as safeguard the region thereby tackling maritime threats as well as build relations with the BRICS nations.

BRICS nations have the capacity to foster cooperation and provide a balanced regional order within the WIP region. This would provide a collective and comprehensive solutions to the existing and ever-changing maritime security threats within the Western Indo Pacific region.

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