

CONCEPT NOTE

PATHFINDER INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE – 2020

1. Background

The Indian Ocean Region is now at the centre of global geopolitics. Its strategic location, at the crossroads of global trade is significant in connecting the major drivers of the international economy in the West and Asia-Pacific. The Indian Ocean is now more significant than ever, being the main channel for international trade and energy, and its littoral comprises of some of the world's fastest growing economies. The Ocean also produces valuable fishing and mineral resources but non-state actors such as pirates, drug and human traffickers and terrorists constantly undermine security and governance in this region. Power play in the Indian Ocean due to its strategic location and resources has also become a threat to regional stability.

However, this densely populated region that is rich in natural resources is also vulnerable to natural or environmental disasters, which warrants cooperation of all nations to address this issue. This, together with other challenges such as ensuring the free passage of trade and energy, securing equitable distribution of fisheries and mineral resources and managing humanitarian operations in the ocean remains a daunting task.

1. Objective

Following up on several successful bilateral and trilateral regional dialogues and the broader Trincomalee Consultations on the Bay of Bengal, the Pathfinder Foundation considered it opportune to conduct a more comprehensive and wider forum focusing on the whole of the Indian Ocean Region. The *Indian Ocean Security Conference* will be conducted with a view to discuss and study/review the unfolding geo-strategic significance of and assess the regional security cooperation demands in the Indian Ocean Region. The main purpose of the conference is to address multifaceted security issues impacting on the Indian Ocean with the two main areas of focus being Maritime Security and Maritime Governance.

This track 1.5 event is expected to create a platform for all stakeholders i.e. policy makers, relevant government officials, researchers, scholars, subject matter experts, think-tank representatives etc. to engage in a constructive discussion, sharing expertise on relevant topics with a view to contribute to maintain the Indian Ocean free of power rivalry, and facilitate free and unimpeded navigation for all interested parties, without exception and exclusion.

The final objective of the conference will be to contribute to the discourse on the freedom of navigation and overfly in accordance with the International Public Law governing the oceans (UNCLOS) and reach an understanding on these principles and contribute to the collective

development of the countries in the Indian Ocean region. Agreeing upon a new Indian Ocean Order or establishing a Regional Maritime Security Network could also be discussed in this forum.

2. Benefits

The platform provided by the conference for an open and free discussion is expected to create a conducive environment to address existing mistrust and rivalry among the regional and extra-regional states; the impact on environmental security arising from climate change and global warming; and transnational maritime crime among others. It is the expectation of the Pathfinder Foundation that an open discussion on the above and other related issues would result in mutually beneficial win-win situation for the littorals as well as other users of the Indian Ocean, major and minor.

The space provided by the conference could also be used to enhance bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation and collaboration to address common threats in this global maritime common. It will also provide opportunities for networking and fellowship among participants and policy makers.

3. International Advisory Group (IAG)

An International Advisory Group (IAG) was established as a prelude to this conference which conducted its first meeting in March 2019 in Colombo. The aim of creating the IAG was to obtain expertise on substantive and organizational aspects of the proposed Indian Ocean Security Conference. Development of themes for discussion, identification of speakers and other participants will be done in consultation with the Advisory Committee. The IAG consists of following:

- i. **India:** Amb. Shivshankar Menon, Former Ambassador, Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor of India - Chairman of IAG;
- ii. **Australia:** Prof Rory Medcalf, Represented by Dr. Darren Lim, Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Relations, Australia National University;
- iii. **China:** Prof. Penghong Cai, Senior Fellow, Shanghai Institutes of International Studies;
- iv. **France:** Dr. Frederic Grare, Charge de mission Asie, Center d'Analyse de Prévision et de Stratégie;
- v. **Japan:** Prof. Eiichi Katahara, Director, International Exchange and Libraries, National Institute for Defense Studies;
- vi. **Norway:** Mr. Christian Holmboe Ruge, Programme Director, Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution (NOREF);
- vii. **Russian Federation:** Mr. Andrey Kortunov, Director General of Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), represented by Ms. Ksenia Kuzmina, Program Manager - South Asia and Asia Pacific,
- viii. **Sri Lanka:** Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage, Secretary, Ministry of foreign Affairs,

- viii. **Singapore:** Dr. Raja C. Mohan, Represented by Mr. Hernaikh Singh, Senior Associate Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore;
- ix. **The UK:** Dr Rahul Roy Chaudhury, Represented by Mr. Viraj Solanki, Research Analyst for South Asia, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).
- x. **The US:** Ms. Alyssa Ayres, Senior Fellow for India, Pakistan and South Asia, Council on Foreign Relations.

4. Date of the Conference

Considering the prevailing situation, the first round of the 'Pathfinder Indian Ocean Security Conference' is proposed to be conducted as a webinar at 1.30 pm (Indian Standard Time) on **10th, 11th and 12th November 2020**. Pre-registered participants will join the meeting virtually. There will be a 2-hour session each day comprising a brief introduction, three presentations and a discussion.

5. Participating Countries

Participants would comprise littoral and hinterland countries of the Indian Ocean including member countries of IORA and its Dialogue Partners, permanent members of the Security Council, regional and international organizations, partner organizations of the Pathfinder Foundation, Colombo based diplomatic missions of participating countries and local participants.

Representatives from the following countries will be invited for the conference: Australia, Bangladesh, China, Comoros, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Thailand, Tanzania, Turkey, UAE, USA, UK and Yemen.

Regional and International Organizations that would be invited will include SAARC, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, African Union, EU, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Western Pacific Naval Symposium, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Division of the Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS).

6. Participants

This being a 1.5 conference, participants, whether they represent government institutions, think-tanks, academic institutions etc., will be identified by the Conference Secretariat, and where necessary with the assistance of the International Advisory Group (IAG).

Nine senior resource persons will be identified by the Conference Secretariat and invited to present papers under specific themes. They will be requested to make presentations on the chosen themes at the conference, when those themes are taken up for discussion.

7. Main Themes

Three main themes will be discussed:

- I. Maritime Security & Freedom of Navigation.
- II. Enhancing Connectivity.
- III. Identifying and addressing major issues including 'mistrust' and 'trust deficiency'.

8. Report of Conference and Future Consultations

As a follow up to the Conference, the Pathfinder Foundation will prepare a report comprising papers submitted by Presenters, essence of discussion and conclusion/recommendations. Pathfinder Foundation will seek opinion of participants with regard to desirability of convening follow up conferences.